

City of Alexandria, Virginia

Planning Commission Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2025

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BACKGROUND:

The Planning Commission is appointed by City Council and performs its duties under Chapter 9 of the City Charter, Title 7 of the City Code, and Section 11-500 of the Zoning Ordinance. It is charged with adopting, reviewing, and amending the City's Master Plan, making final decisions on Subdivision and Site Plan regulatory cases, and making recommendations to City Council on other regulatory cases such as Zoning Text Amendments, Special Use Permits, Development Special Use Permits, Encroachments and Vacation proposals.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Planning Commission held 11 Public Hearings. All Public Hearings, and all the other meetings of the Planning Commission are open to the public and may be accessed by the public through live broadcast on AlexTV (Comcast Channel 70) and streamed on the City's website. Public comments are received at Public Hearings, via Zoom and in writing. The video and audio recordings are posted on the City's website following Public Hearings.

WORK SESSIONS:

The Planning Commission held one Work Session during FY 2025 on May 6, 2025 on the proposed 2025 Green Building Policy Update. As part of the 2025 process, the Planning Commission submitted a [Green Building Comment Letter](#) to the City Manager's Office of Climate Action on July 23, 2025. The letter was drafted by Planning Commission Chair Melissa McMahon and Planning Commissioner Holly Lennihan and unanimously approved by the Planning Commission July 23, 2025 after Planning Commission discussion and input.

SUMMARY OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

Regulatory Cases	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Public Hearing Special Use Permits (SUP)	37	27	20
Encroachments, Subdivisions and Vacations	8	7	18
Development Projects (DSP/DSUP)	18	17	17
Master Plan Amendments and Re-zonings	12	13	13
Zoning Text Amendments	9	7	7
Consolidated Development District (CDD) Conceptual Design Plans	2	2	2
City Charter Section 9.06	2	1	1
Transportation Management Plan Special Use Permits	10	1	0
Total	98	75	78
<i>Administrative Approvals</i>			
Administrative Special Use Permits (SUP)	40	33	42

Seventy-eight (78) regulatory cases were considered by the Planning Commission in FY 2025, with the Planning Commission holding 11 Public Hearings. The number of cases for FYs 2023, 2024 and are included in the table above for comparison.

All regulatory cases were either recommended to City Council for approval or approved by the Planning Commission. Subdivisions, Site Plans and City Charter cases are approved by the Planning Commission and do not require approval by the City Council, but they are placed on City Council Dockets for informational purposes.

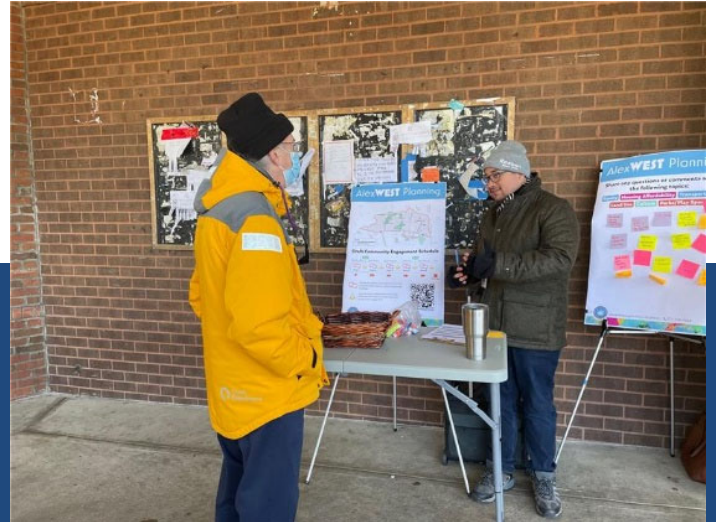
Public Hearing case types stayed steady for the most part consistent with FY 2024. Exceptions were Public Hearing Special Use Permit case types which saw a decline of about 25 percent for the second year primarily due to the City's continual efforts to streamline Special Use Permits by converting several Public Hearing Special Use Permit case types to administrative review. This lowers costs and time for applicants, but, maintains oversight through compliance inspections. Examples include Special Use Permits for restaurant and home business uses.

The City saw an increase in the Encroachments, Subdivisions and Vacations case types. More property owners submitted applications for Subdivisions and the Department of Planning & Zoning merged an engineering unit within the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services into Planning & Zoning in FY 2025 to further enhance the development review process, under the One Start Initiative. The engineering unit is responsible for Grading Plans, stand-alone Vacations and Site Plan reviews. FY 2025, Public Hearing Planning Commission Dockets, and those Dockets prior to FY 2025, include Staff Reports and Presentations for all docketed cases and can be found on the [City's Meeting Dockets and Video webpage](#).

LONG RANGE PLANNING

AlexWest

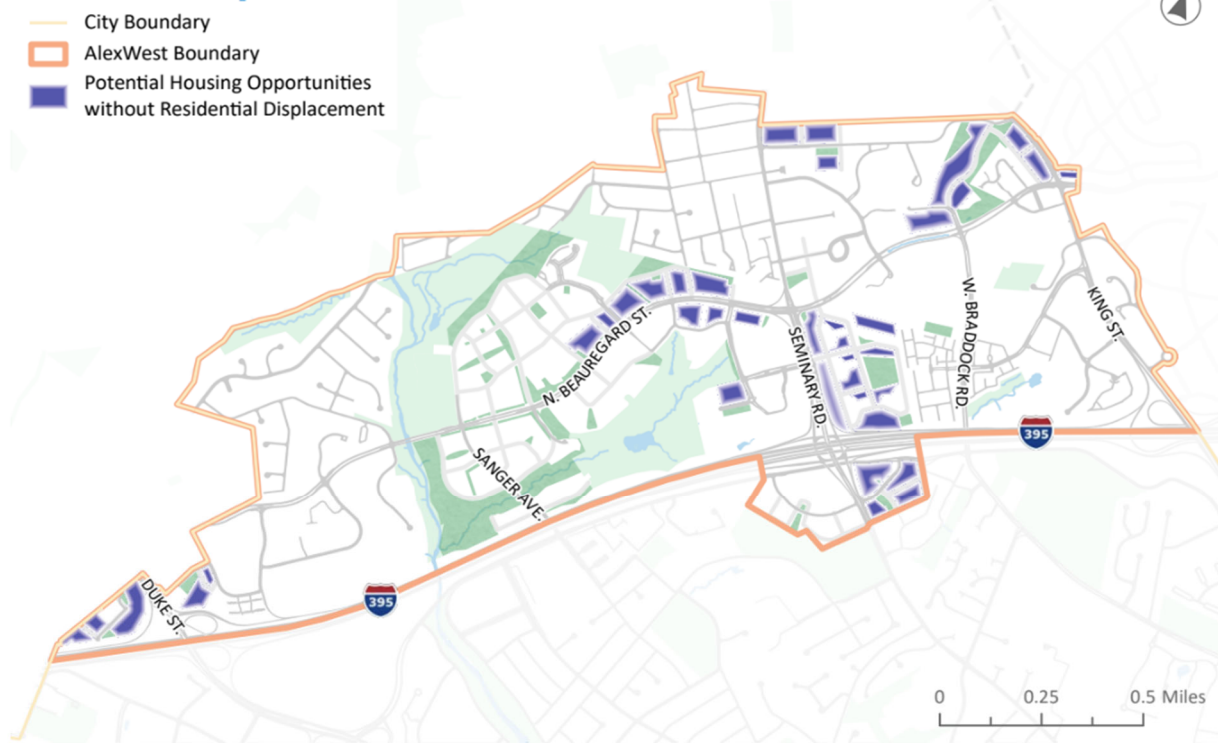
Long Range planning staff dedicated the majority of FY 2024 and the first half of FY 2025 to development of the AlexWest Plan, supported by extensive community engagement throughout all the neighborhoods and across many engagement formats. On September 5, 2024, staff presented the initiation of a Master Plan Amendment (MPA) for the creation of the AlexWest Small Area Plan, a plan that focuses on opportunities for enhancing housing affordability, development without residential displacement, community amenities, and improved access to parks and open space. The Planning Commission was generally supportive of the plan's framework and elements; however, it opted to defer the MPA pending further refinement to proposed heights and density, particularly as related to housing affordability.



Community Engagement Throughout AlexWest Planning Process

On November 7, 2024, staff returned with an updated Plan addressing the Planning Commission's questions at the Public Hearing in early fall. Staff provided revisions to allow for greater variety of height and percentage of affordable housing requirements, as well as more specifics around encouraging community amenities including a recreation center, small business preservation, and the use of existing and new housing preservation tools. The Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of the Plan. City Council approved the MPA to adopt the AlexWest Small Area Plan on November 16, 2024, replacing both the 1992 Alexandria West Small Area Plan and the 2012 Beauregard Small Area Plan.

Figure 3.1: Opportunities for Development Without Displacement



AlexWest's Anti-Displacement Strategy Through Inclusive Growth

Interdepartmental Long Range Planning

On a biannual basis, City departments involved in long-range planning and implementation jointly prepare a two-year Work Program scheduling projects, plans, and studies in line with citywide priorities. The draft Work Program is presented for Planning Commission and City Council feedback early in the calendar year. In May 2025, the Planning Commission recommended approval and City Council approved the two-year Work Program shown below. Additional information about the Work Program can be found at www.alexandriava.gov/planning-and-zoning/interdepartmental-long-range-planning-work-program.

In FY 2026 – 2027, the Department of Planning & Zoning has prioritized the Duke Street Land Use Plan, Updates to the Coordinated Development Districts (CDD) for Potomac Yard, Beauregard/AlexWest, and Eisenhower West, and Zoning Text Amendments regarding the City's small businesses.

Zoning For Housing Implementation Update

FY 2025 Zoning for Housing Implementation Update: P&Z anticipates publishing a dashboard of related implementation updates and will post that information on the [Zoning for Housing](#) website.

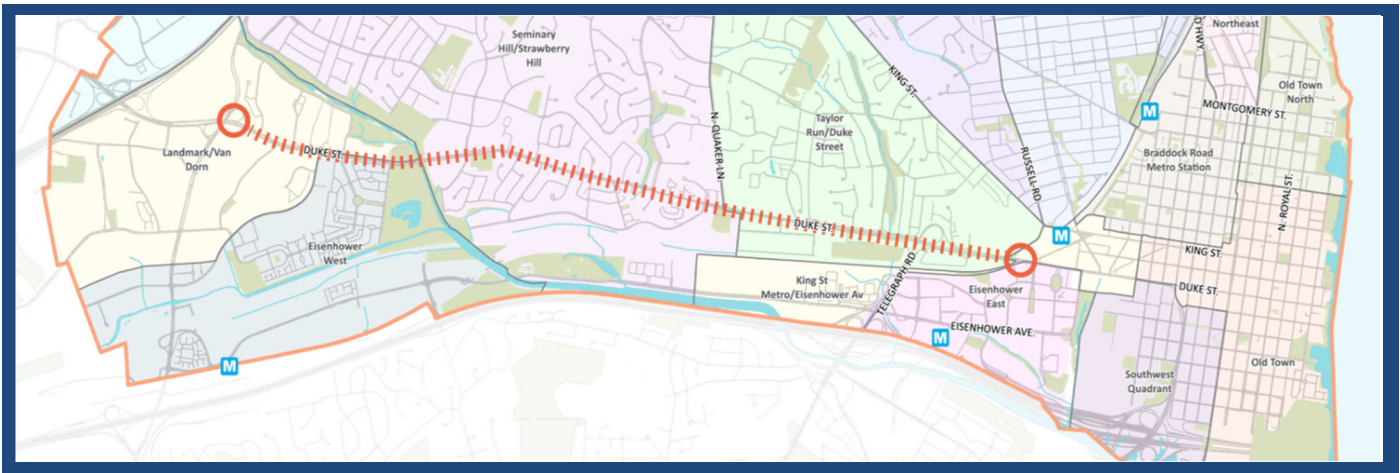
In FY2025, implementation of these reforms has resulted in the following:

- Accessory Dwelling Unit Reform
 - Approval of six additional accessory dwelling units ([79 in total since 2021 policy adoption](#))
- Coordinated Development Districts and Affordable Housing Reform
 - Amendments to two Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs) to facilitate density bonuses for affordable housing
- Townhouse Reform
 - Approximately 18 townhome property owners in various location have utilized this reform to expand their home thus enabling them to remain in place.
- Townhouses/Subdivision Reform
 - 3 new dwelling units – A property owner has utilized this reform as part of a subdivision project, subdividing one lot into two lots and changing the number of units from one to three townhomes on this site.
- Removing Dwelling Units Per Acre/Historic Development Patterns Reform
 - Approval of approximately 35 additional dwelling units throughout the city since removing the Dwelling Unit Per Acre provision
- Single Unit Zoning Reform
 - 4 new dwelling units
- Single Unit Zoning Reform/Subdivision
 - 2 dwelling units (expansion of 1 unit to 2)



Duke Street Land Use Plan

Per the approved Work Program, staff began background research, analysis, and early community engagement for the Duke Street Plan in fall 2024. Staff met with various civic groups and held pop-ups to get an early understanding of community issues, concerns, and values, as well as to identify and connect with as many stakeholders as possible. The planning effort officially launched at a community meeting on June 9, 2025, attended in person and online by over 100 people. The process is anticipated to continue through calendar year 2026.



Duke Street Corridor from Former Landmark Mall to Historic Union Station

DEVELOPMENT

The View Alexandria



In June 2025, City Council approved the redevelopment of Goodwin House's The View senior living facility with 257 net new independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, and memory care units. The proposed building would feature a pair of 14- and 16-story towers connected by a ground floor podium with rooftop open space. The building benefits from bonus height and density under Zoning Ordinance Sec. 7-700, with 7 one-bedroom units affordable at 60% AMI. Residents of these units will also benefit from a substantially reduced community buy-in, ensuring a stable monthly maintenance fee if residents progress to higher levels of care. Apart from the site's stormwater management improvements and surface parking relocation into a below-grade garage, the project retains the existing 6-story, 126-unit building.

Cardinal Path Townhomes



Cardinal Path Construction Site



Cardinal Path Units Fronting Seminary Road July 2025

First approved in December 2021, Phase 1 of this Housing Alexandria project is anticipated for occupancy this Fall. Phase 1 consists of 31 for-sale townhomes for eligible purchasers with incomes up to 80% AMI. Housing Alexandria conducted homeowner education efforts in English and Spanish with prospective first-time homebuyers who will participate in a lottery for eligible purchasers scheduled for August 2025.

Phase 11, a condominium building, will offer affordable for-sale flats as well as housing for up to twelve residents of Sheltered Homes of Alexandria (SHA) who currently reside in group homes and are ready for more independent living.

The Sansé and Naja



Sansé Construction Site



Sansé Rendering

At full build out, Housing Alexandria's mixed-income, mixed-use project will create 474 new affordable homes, with a focus on family-sized units. Construction includes four phases across two buildings and is funded by substantial City loans and external grants, including low income housing tax credit (LIHTC) equity, Virginia Housing loans and grants, Virginia Housing bonds, Amazon Housing Equity Fund loans and grants, ARPA funds, Sec. 108 loan guarantee monies, a federal earmark, CDFI funds, a private seller's note, and state and national housing trust funds secured through the Virginia DHCD. Housing Alexandria plans to help community members apply once units are available.

Sansé construction commenced in October 2023 and will feature 416 affordable rental units, a community meeting space, a plaza and open space, and flex space for use by various city departments and agencies, as well as an ALIVE! food hub. Sansé is slated for completion by mid-2026.

The second building, Naja, will begin construction in 2026 and will include 58 affordable units and neighborhood-serving commercial space such as a medical and dental clinic, affordable daycare and pre-K programs, nonprofit office space, and other retail. Naja is anticipated to be completed by 2028.

The Whitley



N. Washington Street rendering of Whitley Phase 2 (Whitley 1 massing visible in the rear)

Approved in late 2021, and currently under construction, Phase 1 of this project is a five-story condominium project with 78 units, including eight affordable for-sale units. Access to the project will be from a private drive aisle accessed from Madison Street, shared with The Whitley Phase 2. The Whitley fills a long vacant parcel and surface parking lot and marks the transition from the lower-scale historic district buildings to the west to the larger buildings in the Old Town North neighborhood to the east.

Phase 11, approved in early 2025 with parcels technically in the Old Town North SAP, will replace a stalled construction project originally intended to be a new hotel and convert it to another multi-unit condominium project (49 units) with one affordable unit. Approved in early 2025, the project will utilize the previously constructed underground parking garage and general building footprint but with new architecture that is more appropriate to its residential use. The historic townhouse at 802 N. Washington Street will be integrated into the overall project.

WestEnd Redevelopment (former Landmark Mall)



Construction continues on the new WestEnd Redevelopment project at the site of the former Landmark Mall, which includes multiple commercial and residential blocks, as well as preparations for anticipated parks and open space.

The infrastructure work for WestEnd was approved as part of the former Landmark Mall development site plan, and all public roads, curbs, and necessary utilities have been constructed.

In October 2024, City Council approved 110 townhouses, associated private streets, and 50,000 square feet of accessible private open space on Blocks L + M, the latest approval for WestEnd Alexandria.

Previously approved Blocks E, G, I, and K are in the process of having building permits issued. Block D is currently under City review and is proposing 275 residential units, expected for Planning Commission and City Council public hearings in Winter 2025.

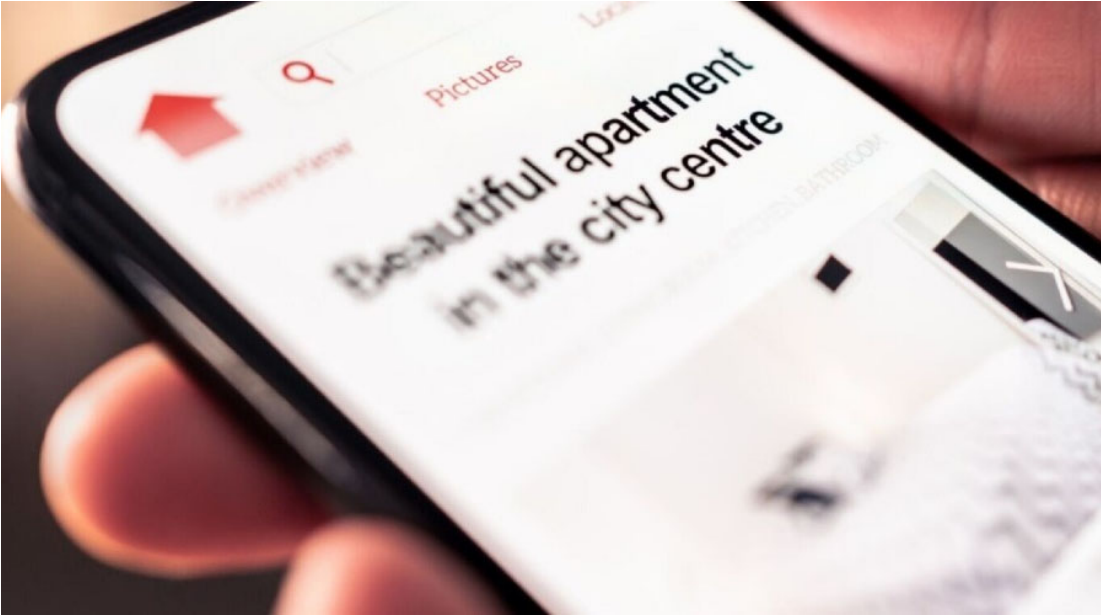
The new INOVA Hospital complex, initiated construction this past fiscal year, with completion of the hospital expected by Spring 2026 and the medical complex by the end of 2028.

Block J, the site of a future fire station and affordable housing, is in the early stages of site plan development.

WestEnd's open space pavilions are in the process of securing building permits before construction of the central plaza will officially commence.

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS AND LAND USE SERVICES

Short-Term Residential Rental Ordinance



Short-term residential rentals are dwelling units or spaces within existing homes that are rented for less than 30 consecutive days. These rentals are often promoted through platforms like Airbnb and VRBO. Typically located in residential neighborhoods, they offer an alternative to traditional accommodations such as hotels, appealing to those who prefer a homier, neighborhood-based environment or families and larger groups seeking to stay together in one space rather than in multiple hotel rooms. Although short-term rentals have been present in Alexandria for nearly a decade, their rapid growth during the COVID-19 pandemic prompted significant community discussions about their impact on neighborhood character and quality of life.

After calls from residents to better regulate the growing short-term rental market in Alexandria, City Council directed the Department of Planning & Zoning to study the issue and develop regulations. During the study, staff found approximately 525-735 short-term residential rentals operating at any given time with the number fluctuating depending on the season or special events in the region. Staff found most resident concerns and complaints centered around noise, trash, parking, and large parties. In February 2025, the Planning Commission recommended adoption of a Short-Term Residential Rental Ordinance to better regulate the operation of short-term rentals and require an annual permit. City Council subsequently approved the adoption.

While many of these concerns are already regulated under the existing City codes and ordinances, particularly those related to noise and trash, to strengthen current regulations, the Short-Term Residential Rental Ordinance establishes occupancy limits, prohibits large parties and events in residential zones, and sets parking minimums. Additionally, the Ordinance requires occupant education of city rules regarding the most common complaints by providing a “Good Neighbor Guide” to guests and posting the guide in the

complaints by providing a “Good Neighbor Guide” to guests and posting the guide in the rental. Additionally, as part of the permitting process, operators are now required to notify neighboring properties, sharing contact information and ways to submit complaints to both the operator and the city. If a short-term rental repeatedly violates city codes and ordinances, the city now has the authority to revoke its permit.

The Short-Term Residential Rental Ordinance became effective September 1, 2025.

Sign Ordinance Update



In March 2025, the Planning Commission reviewed, and City Council adopted, amendments to the City’s Sign Ordinance regulations. While the updates reflect incremental changes to existing regulations, the significant reformatting and reorganization eliminated redundancies with other Zoning Ordinance provisions, City policies, and the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC), improved usability, and reduced complexity.

Incremental changes included increasing the maximum number, size, and height allowances for minor freestanding, wall, and temporary signs on properties with commercial, mixed, or multi-unit residential uses, allowing up to 50% more signage and putting Alexandria in line with neighboring jurisdictions. In addition, to reduce the number of signs requiring a full hearing special use permit, updates created an administrative SUP process for signs that exceed the maximum permitted number, height, or sign area; temporary signs that are posted for more than 120 days without interruption; and digital signs. The Special Use Permit requirement for illuminated signs above 35 feet was eliminated.

2525 Mt. Vernon Avenue Special Use Permit



Office to residential conversions in Alexandria have become an increasingly popular trend driven by several factors, including changing work patterns, economic considerations, and revitalization efforts. Not only can converting outdated office buildings offer more housing options, but it can help preserve neighborhood character and create more vibrant communities.

A recent conversion at the former Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) building in Del Ray was reviewed by the Planning Commission and approved by City Council in May 2025. The existing office building will eventually be home to a daycare and retail/restaurant uses on the ground floor and 30 residential uses on the upper floor. To facilitate this conversion, the applicant requested Special Use Permit approval for yard and open space modifications and a 38-space parking reduction. The proposal furthers the Mount Vernon Avenue Business Area Plan which encourages second floor residential uses with retail and restaurant uses concentrated on the ground floor.

Retail Restrictions on Tobacco, Nicotine Alternatives, and Hemp Products



The American Lung Association states that smoking during childhood and adolescence causes significant health problems in young people and can contribute to continued use through adulthood. Addressing this critical public health concern, the General Assembly of Virginia has approved multiple bills to curb minors' access and exposure to tobacco, nicotine vapor, alternative nicotine, and hemp products. Recent efforts include enacting stricter state retail licensing requirements and providing localities with the opportunity to adopt zoning ordinance measures.

Supporting a local zoning and land use approach, the General Assembly approved HB 947 on April 5, 2024, amending the Code of Virginia with the addition of § 15.2-912.4 to reduce minors' access and exposure to tobacco, nicotine vapor, alternative nicotine, and hemp products through a distance requirement from vulnerable underage populations. The legislation allows any locality the option to prohibit new retail operations that primarily sell tobacco products, nicotine vapor products, alternative nicotine products, or hemp products from locating within 1,000 feet of a child day center or a public, private, or parochial school.

In November 2024, the Planning Commission recommended adoption of Zoning Ordinance amendments to implement HB 947 in Alexandria. City Council affirmed the Planning Commission's recommendation and adopted the amendments unanimously. Amendments include changes to the retail shopping establishment definition to add nicotine vapor products, alternative nicotine products, and hemp products to the existing tobacco reference. They also prohibit retail shopping establishments with a principal use selling tobacco products, nicotine vapor products, alternative nicotine products, or hemp products intended for smoking from operating within 1,000 linear feet of a child day care center, or a public or private academic early childhood, elementary, middle, or high school. In accordance with state law, any such use in operation prior to July 1, 2024, may continue to operate at its existing location but may not expand.

MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

Then Chair Nathan Macek and Planning Commissioner Melinda Lyle met term limits in February 2025. New Planning Commissioners Robert Dube and Holly Lennihan were appointed in March 2025. Elections were held in March 2025; Vice-Chair Melissa McMahon was elected Chair and Planning Commissioner Stephen Koenig was elected Vice Chair. All members attended 75 percent or more of the scheduled meetings in FY 2025.

Planning Commission appointments to other Commissions and Work Groups for FY 2025 are noted below:

FY 2025 Planning Commission Appointments to Other Commissions and Work Groups

Group	Planning Commission Member
Transportation Commission	Melissa McMahon and Jody Manor
Waterfront Commission*	Jody Manor
Green Building Policy Advisory Group	Stephen Koenig
ARHA Redevelopment Work Group**	Robert Dube
Eisenhower West/Landmark Van Dorn Implementation Advisory Group*	Vivian Ramirez
George Mason Elementary School Superintendent Advisory Group	Stephen Koenig

*Appointments subject to City Council Approval
**Group was also previously represented by another Planning Commission member during earlier part of FY 2025.

City of Alexandria, Boards and Commissions Meetings Attendance Report

JULY 1, 2024, THROUGH JUNE 30, 2025

Commission: Planning Commission
Chair: Chair Melissa McMahon

Public Hearing Meetings

Board Member	2024				2025						
	Sep 5	Oct 1	Nov 7	Dec 3	Jan 9	Feb 4	Mar 4	Apr 1	May 6	Jun 4	Jun 23
Melissa McMahon Chair	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	V	X	X	X
Stephen Koenig Vice Chair	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
David Brown	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jody Manor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vivian Ramirez	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	X	X	X	X
Robert Dube	Terms began on March 1, 2025						X	X	X	X	X
Holly Lennihan							X	X	X	X	X
Nathan Macek	X	X	X	X	X	X	Terms ended on February 28, 2025				
Melinda Lyle	X	X	x	X	X	X					

*There was no Planning Commission Public Hearing in the month July 2025 and August 2025.

INDICATE: (X) PRESENT; (E) EXCUSED, (U) UNEXUSED, (V) VIRTUAL
LIST OF THOSE WHO DID NOT ATTEND 75% OF MEETINGS: None.

APPROVED:

Chair Melissa McMahon

Other

Planning Commission Information

The Planning Commission's process for elections to fill leadership positions, namely, Chair and Vice Chair, is covered in its by-laws and involves the election of officers on an annual basis in March. Elections this year are described in the summary of membership and attendance. As called for in the by-laws, it is the vote of the Planning Commission that determines changes in leadership. Membership changes can also affect changes in the Planning Commission's leadership.

Questions?

Please contact Planning & Zoning staff at 703.746.4666 or email the Planning Commission at PlanComm@alexandriava.gov.

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