

MINUTES
City of Alexandria, Virginia
OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE
Community Meeting – Virtual ¹
December 9, 2020
7:00 p.m.

Open Space Steering Committee Members

Present:

Kaitlyn Blume, Member at-large
David Brown, Planning Commission Member
Tatiana Gutierrez, Member at-large
Martha Harris, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission Member
Brian McPherson - Park and Recreation Commission Member
Kurt Moser, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT)
Brandon Pinette, Member at-large
Micheline Smith, One at-large member from the development community (Paradigm)
Denise Tennant, Beautification Commission Member

Vacancy:

One at-large member from the business community

Absent:

Mike Olex, Environmental Policy Commission Member

City Staff

Jack Browand, Division Chief, Park Planning Division, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Ellen Eggerton, City Sustainability Coordinator, Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES)
Judy Lo, Acting Principal Planner, Park Planning Division, RPCA
Melanie Mason, Principal Planner, Stormwater Management Division, T&ES
Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner II, Park Planning, RPCA

Guests = None.

Call to Order

¹ December 9, 2020 Steering Comm. Meeting video is posted at http://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=29&coa_clip_id=4759&coa_view_id=29

Ana Vicinanza (RPCA) called the virtual meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She read a prepared statement that cites the City policy and legal authority governing the use of virtual meetings during the COVID-19 Pandemic emergency and provides information on how the public can access and participate in this virtual meeting.

Public comment is received at the end of the meeting with individual comments limited to no more than three (3) minutes per person.

The meeting's focus was to review and build upon the draft definitions of publicly accessible open space in order to get closer to a final definition.

Presentation PPTs are posted to:

[https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%2012.09.2020%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%2012.09.2020%20(1).pdf)

Presentation details are posted online at the above link. Highlights included:

AGENDA ITEM 1: Project Timeline - Ana (RPCA)

- **Overview of three tasks of timeline** – Staff is currently in Task 1 (defining publicly accessible open space), with each task taking approximately six months to complete.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Themes from Last Meeting – Ana (RPCA)

- **Major themes from last meeting** –
 - **Access / Perception of Public Accessibility** – Committee members expressed desire for areas to be clearly distinguishable as publicly owned versus privately owned. Accessibility was loosely defined as anyone, anywhere, at any time can access the land in a meaningful way, whether we are standing in it or not.
 - **Useable Open Space** – Committee members were interested in diversity of use, getting more quality out of the spaces and whether the areas can facilitate multiuse. The City's portfolio must require a diversity of use and be evaluated geographically. It was also expressed that the open space should not include buildings and should provide access to nature.
 - **Quality of Open Space** – Quality was desired but seen as more aspirational and not necessarily set requirements.
 - **Purpose** – The major purposed themes captured included to protect, expand and value the City's open spaces.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Open Space Definition Discussion – Judy (RPCA)

- **Staff developed four proposed definitions for publicly accessible open space –**
 1. Space that is made available for public use for the purposes of outdoor recreation and leisure, cultural arts, and the protection of environmental, cultural, and historic resources, and which is intended to enhance the health and well-being of the community.
 2. Land that has been reserved for the purpose of formal and informal sport and recreation, preservation of natural environments, and/or provision of green space.
 3. Space that supports recreation and leisure, natural resources, casual use, historic and cultural resources and is either publicly owned or has guaranteed public access – including parks, plazas, trails, streets, and recreation facilities. (Arlington)
 4. Land that preserves and enhances Alexandria’s vegetative and recreational areas and protects natural and developed amenities intended as areas for respite, with sunlight and fresh air for leisure activities.

Committee Discussion - Highlights

- **Comments on Definition 1 -**
 - Definition appears to be the most complete and well rounded, however the word “outdoor” should be moved to be beginning of the definition to state, “**Outdoor** space available for public use”.
- **Comments on Definition 3 –**
 - Concern on counting streets as open space
- **Comments on Definition 4 –**
 - Appreciates the use of preserving the area
- **Purpose – Q:** For whom are we writing the definition? Are we defining it based on Zoning Ordinance, Open Space Master Plan or education? **A:** One use may be in open space planning in development (both public and private). Also, would be used as related to the City’s Environmental Action Plan in metric measurement.
- **Comments on Definition 2 –**
 - Like the use of “formal and informal”
- **Amendments to Definition 1 –**

- Incorporate: “formal and informal” recreation, “enhance” areas, “publicly owned or guaranteed public access”, examples of publicly accessible open space (such as Definition 3)
- Do not include vegetative
- Amend: “space available” to “Outdoor space available for public use”
- **Conversation of defining what is and what is not publicly accessible open space**
 - Staff plans to have a matrix of examples of what is publicly accessible open space
 - Discussion on providing a matrix of what is *and* what is not publicly accessible open space
 - Concern was raised of being too definitive and excluding situations the committee does not currently anticipate; however, other members described a need for a balance, as to not be too general
- **Define “quality” of open space:** in future meetings determine qualitative and quantitative measures of open space, since not all open space is created equal
- **Amended definition:** Outdoor space for public use for the purpose of outdoor recreation and leisure, cultural arts, and the protection of environmental, cultural, and historic resources, and which is intended to enhance the health and well-being of the community.
- **Q: Is there anything you do not like from the definitions?**
 - **A:** Definition 3 – the use of streets and potential interpretation of including indoor space as well
- **Q: Do open air / auxiliary structures in park count as open space?**
 - **A:** The group does think open air / auxiliary structures (such as gazebos) should be included as open space.
- **Q: Where do dog parks fall, as far as open space?**
 - **A:** Yes – would be included as open space.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Next Steps – Ana (RPCA)

- Using the input collected from tonight’s meeting, staff will begin refining the open space definition and will try to send out prior the next meeting.
- Staff will compile a list that includes the purpose, characteristics, and goals of publicly accessible open space and share it with the Committee in the coming weeks.

- The definition will be applied to create a Publicly Accessible Open Space Guidance document and will use this definition to formulate a draft framework and outline of all three tasks.
 - **Q:** There was confusion as to what a developer could call open space (example: putting down concrete and calling a plaza or gating off an area, above ground space).
 - **A:** There is currently no clear definition of open space. We are hoping to use the guidance document to provide complementary space between the public and private realms, as well as providing equity across the City.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Montgomery County's Open Space Definition – Ana (RPCA)

- The group reviewed the County's public open space definition, as well as amenity open space definition.

Public Comments

There were none.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2021.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.