

Sample Design Assessment

Overview

The design criteria outlined below is tailored to measure the quality of the design of the City’s publicly accessible open spaces. Each subcategory may be assigned a rating from 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest assignable rating. The Intended use category speaks to the function of the space and its successful execution, because of this it is given a rating from 0 to 10. At the end of each assessment, the subcategories will be tallied to quantify a score for the design metric. The maximum score for the design criteria category is 100, with 10 points designated to each category.

This criterion is intended to be created and used by City staff or City consultant due to the technical nature of this assessment.

Design Assessment

1. **Intended use(s)** – Open space is designed and used to meet its intended function.

0 5 10

2. **Inclusive and welcoming** – Open space is designed to be welcoming and a meaningful place for the community.

- a. **Gateways:** open space has a defined entrance(s). The gateway is obvious and inviting and can include an entry gate or passage, increased lighting, increased landscape, and other decorative features or signage identifying these entrances.
- b. **Comfortable:** open space feels comfortable, safe, and clean. There is seating and shade available, and pathways are wide enough for people to talk side-by-side.
- c. **Inviting:** open space is designed to provide positive experiences for users. Users feel as if they belong in the space. Open space is well maintained. There are people using the open space.
- d. **Accessible:** open space is designed to allow users to enter and use the space. There are no physical barriers to enter, including gates and unwelcoming signage.
- e. **Sense of community:** open space is designed to make one feel as if they are part of a community and encourages social interactions from different backgrounds and neighborhoods.

0 5 10

3. **Maintainable and sustainable** – Open space is designed with maintenance in mind, including amenities that are intended to withstand high use and optimized for life cycles, and is supported by partnerships with the community.

- a. **Maintainable:** open space is designed with awareness of maintenance that allows efficient access for operations and maintenance and support facilities (if needed). Open space does not have any or many propriety pieces of equipment.

- b. **Sustainability within region:** plant materials and design within the open space are native and moderate to low maintenance.
- c. **Materials and structures:** open space materials and structures are sustainable and appropriate for purpose, site, and design. Materials and structures follow the City of Alexandria’s Park’s Facilities and Standards Manual.
- d. **Replacement schedules:** materials used in the open space are easily replaceable and have optimized life cycles that consider standard community use.
- e. **Partnerships:** open space has partnerships, sponsors, volunteers, and/or donations for the development, design, construction and/or operation of the space. Signage displayed in park commemorating partnerships.

0 5 10

4. Good design – Open space is designed to go beyond function, is aesthetically pleasing, and responds to its environment.

- a. **Attractiveness:** open space is aesthetically pleasing. There are beautiful elements within the open space.
- b. **Amenity design and location:** amenities and open space features consider utilization of space, including pedestrian traffic patterns, with amenities located in places that maximize use and support the overall open space and its natural features or open space concept and design.
- c. **Unique:** design emphasizes the open space’s uniqueness in its originality, distinction, and style, establishing its individual character in union with the open space's activities and location (i.e. characteristic architectural details, colors, materials, furnishings, play equipment and/or plant selection).
- d. **Defined space:** open space is designed to visually define the limits of the open space; one knows when they are in the open space.
- e. **Unified:** open space elements are designed to work together and feel cohesive. Components feel related.

0 5 10

5. Sensitive to context – Open space is designed in a manner that consider its physical and social context. The surrounding area is incorporated in the planning and design of the space.

- a. **Contextual design:** open space reflects the context of the surrounding environment. The open space does not feel like it has been “dropped into place” and reflects the area. Design uses materials and designs that are complimentary to the context of that place.
- b. **Compatibility:** open space is compatible with its surroundings and creates a sense of place, both internal and external to the site, that contributes to the sense of place and community vitality envisioned for the entire neighborhood and celebrates and incorporates the surrounding community’s identity.

- c. **History:** open space incorporates the area’s history in its design. This could include educational signage and memorials or having historical features within the open space.
- d. **Physical features:** open space incorporates physical and natural features of the site into the design by considering the use native plants and landscaping, physical features of the site, and topography.
- e. **Social and cultural context:** open space’s design incorporates social, cultural, public art, and interpretive media, such as signage, to tell the story of the space’s location.

0 5 10
○ ○ ○

6. **Multiple-benefit infrastructure** – Open space is designed to integrate multiple types of infrastructure, including educational opportunities, stormwater or water management, community services, and other green infrastructure opportunities.
- a. **Green infrastructure:** open space incorporates above-ground infrastructure that provides environmental benefits in addition to its intended function, such as bioretention areas (i.e. rain gardens), permeable pavements, rainwater harvesting, and green roofs.
 - b. **Energy efficient initiatives:** open space is designed with energy conservation in mind, such as increased tree canopy cover around park facilities and energy-efficient lighting.
 - c. **Stormwater infrastructure:** open space’s incorporates stormwater management and flood prevention into its design.
 - d. **Programs and community resources:** open space supports community programs and resources like mobile schools, afterschool care, summer camp programs, and farmers markets.
 - e. **Educational opportunities:** open space design includes education opportunities such as signage illustrating native flora and fauna, infrastructure features, and historical and cultural information.

0 5 10
○ ○ ○

7. **Signage and navigation:** A good open space signage system performs multiple functions — it provides information and directions for people to find their way around the open space, encourages learning experiences, helps maintain the image of the open space, and communicates open space rules.
- a. **Identification signage:** open space has signage that includes the space’s name and address.
 - b. **Regulatory signage:** open space has signage that includes the open space’s rules and regulations, hours of operation, and applicable codes.
 - c. **Wayfinding signage:** open space has signage that provides information which guides users through the space and helps users orient themselves to the space, easily find their destination, locate points of interest, such as restrooms and sports fields, and discover information in increments.

- d. **Interpretive signage:** open space has signage that provides special signage reflecting the historic, cultural, or natural character of the area.
- e. **Educational signage:** open space has signage that seeks to educate users about unique community features, such as wetlands, tree groves, or historic elements.

0 5 10

8. **Health and wellness** – The open space promotes health and wellbeing via opportunities for exercise, stress reduction, improved mental health, less exposure to air and noise pollution, opportunities for exercise, and urban wellness.

- a. **Physical activity and recreation:** open space is designed to provide access and opportunities for physical activity and recreation, including playspaces, walking paths, sports courts, athletic fields, and open fields.
- b. **Relaxation:** open space is designed to provide opportunities for gathering and relaxation, including picnic shelters, seating, picnic tables, or lawns.
- c. **Social interaction:** open space is designed to promote social interactions and encourage users to linger and be in the space.
- d. **Community gathering:** open space is designed to accommodate community gatherings by including amenities such as picnic shelters, open lawns, spectator seating, or other amenities that support community gathering.
- e. **Provides contact with nature:** open space is designed to allow users to interact with nature and may include seating that allows users to sit within or view nature or pathways that navigate through nature.

0 5 10

9. **Environmentally resilient** – The open space is designed to respond to environmental changes by helping mitigate the effects of climate change and preventing future carbon-related impacts in reducing the City’s rising heat island effect and carbon capture.

- a. **Climate change resilience:** open space incorporates resiliency to climate change in its design.
- b. **Heat vulnerability:** open space offsets heat island effects, increases canopy cover, and absorbs carbon.
- c. **Stormwater management:** design of open space combats stormwater runoff through green infrastructure.
- d. **Waterway accessibility:** design of space promotes accessibility to waterways.
- e. **Conservation:** Retains, extends, and maximizes connectivity of the existing natural values of the space wherever practical, including enhancement of biodiversity, flora and fauna, and microclimate, with attention to ecological sensitivity and habitat fragmentation.

0 5 10

10. ALL Alexandria Resolution – Open space is designed in a way that supports the tenants outlined in the ALL Alexandria with emphasis on the importance of community involvement to identify, develop, and implement policies in the pursuit of equitable outcomes. Open space should be designed for users of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

- a. **All ages:** open space is designed to appeal to a variety of ages.
- b. **All abilities:** Open space is designed to provide basic facilities with the widest appeal to the maximum number of users (e.g. sun, shade, trees, lawn, paths, seats, picnic facilities, etc.), promote interactivity between participants for all levels of ability, and foster the development of motor and social skills.
- c. **Multisensory design:** open space is designed to optimize the sensory experience of the place through design and offer opportunities for those with sensory or physical disabilities to use smell, sound, and touch to enhance the user experience.
- d. **ADA accessible:** open space design applies universal design principles in the open space’s accessibility, functionality, and useability for diverse groups of users. Open space should have ramps, even pedestrian surfaces, handrails, tactile hazard warnings, etc.
- e. **All backgrounds:** the open space is designed to provide opportunities for various interests and backgrounds and is responsive to the cultural and recreational needs of the community that the space will serve.

0 5 10

Bonus Section

- **Emerging trends** - open space should be designed to be flexible to change over time as community demands evolve and adaptable in its ability incorporate emerging trends into its design, including technological amenities.
- **Technology:** open space enhances the user experience through additional opportunities for engagement through technology that encourage interaction with nature and other park features, such as geocaching, self-guided trails with QR codes, live streaming, free Wi-Fi, educational technology and virtual hikes.
- **Flexible:** open space balances longevity and adaptability (i.e. ability to change over time to replace uses preferred in earlier generations with new activities). Open space is multi-functional and adaptable.