

MINUTES
City of Alexandria, Virginia
OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE
Community Meeting – Virtual ¹
January 28, 2021
7:00 p.m.

Open Space Steering Committee Members

Present:

Kaitlyn Blume, 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:

David Brown, Planning Commission Member
Tatiana Gutierrez, Member at-large
Mike Olex, Environmental Policy Commission Member

City Staff

Jack Browand, Division Chief, Park Planning Division, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Nathan Imm, Principal Planner, Planning & Zoning
Judy Lo, Acting Principal Planner, Park Planning Division, RPCA
Melanie Mason, Principal Planner, Stormwater Management Division, T&ES
Ana Vicinanzo, Urban Planner II, Park Planning, RPCA

Guests = None.

Call to Order

Ana Vicinanzo (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

¹ **January 28, 2021 Steering Comm. Meeting video is posted at**
https://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=29&coa_view_id=29&coa_clip_id=4808

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 discuss public access easements and the extent of public accessibility.

Presentation PPTs are posted to:

<https://media.alexandriava.gov/docs-archives/recreation/parks/open-space-steering-committee-meeting---1.28.2021.pdf>

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

AGENDA ITEM 1: FOIA / Open Meetings Rules - Jack (RPCA)

- **Overview of FOIA / Open Meeting Rules** – Since Open Space Committee was established by City Council so subject to all the open meeting rules.
 - Any gathering of three or more committee members is an official meeting and must be open to the public.
 - Official meetings must be public noticed a minimum of three working days prior to the meeting day.
 - Committee members are not permitted to carry out committee business using electronic communication.
 - Committee meetings may only occur if a Quorum is present / virtual.
- **Sharing resources - Q:** Can resources be shared prior to the meeting?
A: Yes, all information can be sent to Ana who will then share, prior to the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Update on definition and purpose – Ana (RPCA)

- **Task 1 Update** –
 - **Purpose** – The definition will live in the updated Open Space Master Plan. Staff is also looking into creating a supporting guidance document.
 - **Draft definition** – Publicly Accessible Open Space in the City of Alexandria is: Outdoor space that has guaranteed public access

with the primary purpose being formal or informal recreation; or the conservation and protection of natural, cultural, or historic resources; and which enhances the health and well-being of Alexandria.

- **Draft purpose, characteristics, goals, etc.**

AGENDA ITEM 3: Extent of Public Accessibility Discussion – Ana and Judy (RPCA)

- **Overview of Public Access Easements** – Public access easements allow the public to access portions of a private property. They are filed as a legally binding agreement within a deed. Owners are responsible for maintenance of the easements and may restrict hours of access, typically sunset to sunrise each day.
- **Programming within Public Access Easements** – The committee was asked to comment on to what extent should there be restrictions on programming and activities within the easement area, such as holding private or public events, allowing businesses or residents to vend services (classes, farmer’s markets, etc.), and the number of events or programs allowed.
- **Design within Public Access Easements** – Discussion as to what design elements make a space feel public vs private space.

Committee Discussion - Highlights

- **Discussion of easement photos** – North Old Town by Sunrise Retirement Home: purpose for “pedestrian ingress – egress”, but no true open space or recreation purpose.
- **Programming within Public Access Easements** –
 - **Q posed to committee:** What is a reasonable amount of private usage of publicly accessible open space? Should there be fees associated for private use of the public space?
 - **Comment:** Developers shouldn’t get the credit for open space, if they will be privatizing it 50% of the time. Also, is it public open space if there is a lock on the gate, etc.?
 - **Discussion on benefits to the owner**
 - **Comment:** Developers should only have limited abilities to close the public open space. The ability also depends on the size of the space.
 - **Comment:** Developers should have limited ability as far as time, but also as far as space utilized (half or more space is

a concern). There shouldn't be a strict amount of time per week, per month or per year, but more a function of the space itself.

- **Q posed to committee:** If a space is shut down 100% of the time for drop in use, should that be considered within the publicly accessible open space formula?
 - **Comment:** No, because it is not publicly accessible if it is exclusively used for private use.
 - **Comment:** Concern for if a developer initially claims it will be publicly accessible open space, but then continues to privatize it.
- **Discussion of Design within Public Access Easements:**
 - **Comment:** Barriers such as shrubs and walls signal that the public open space is a distinct separation from the private space.
 - **Comment:** Connectivity of the spaces create a feel of public open space.
 - **Comment:** Gates make the spaces feel much more private. Window well, utilities and brick pathways right next to a property make portions of the area feel private to the property owner and unclear where the property lines are.
 - **Comment:** Lighting for walk at dusk would make the space more inviting.
 - **Comment:** Narrowness of space and no distinct separations from building make the space feel private and not like open space.
 - **Comment:** Signage is necessary in small, narrow spaces. However, when the space is larger or feels more inviting, there may not be a need for signage.
 - **Comment:** Potentially there should be a minimum size of a space for it to be considered open space. Additionally, design elements such as recesses in walls would make a space more inviting.
 - **Comment:** Signage that is located within a gated area does not make the space feel public. There should be a sign standard, that doesn't signify "private property".
 - **Q to committee:** How do we make publicly accessible open space feel public and not privatized? What are characteristics that make the spaces feel public versus private?
 - **Comment:** There should be uniform signage to signify publicly accessible open space.
 - **Comment:** Signage should signify when an area is open to the public, as opposed to when it is closed.

- **Discussion of signage in Wilkes / Payne Street public access**

AGENDA ITEM 4: Next Steps – Ana (RPCA)

- Using the input collected from tonight’s meeting, staff will begin drafting extent of public accessibility on publicly accessible open space.
- Before next meeting, staff will send out the definition, purpose, characteristics and goals document for the committee to review and edit.
- The zoom link for next meeting will also be sent out.

Public Comments

There were none.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for February 24, 2021.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.