



City of Alexandria, Virginia Planning Commission Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023

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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 2023, the Planning Commission held 11 Public Hearings.

All Public Hearings, and all the other Public Hearings 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. Additionally, public comments were received at Public Hearings via Zoom and telephone. The video and audio recordings were posted on the City website shortly after the Public Hearings.

Work Sessions

At the end of FY 2022, the Planning Commission participated in a Joint Work Session on June 27, 2022, with the City Council and the Alexandria Housing & Redevelopment Authority (ARHA) regarding the progress of ARHA's Strategic Plan and, more specifically, the Samuel Madden Redevelopment proposal.

On October 17, 2022, the Planning Commission participated in a Joint Work Session with the City's Environmental Policy Commission (EPC). The purpose of that meeting was to layout a framework for linking the City's climate action plans and policies with its land use entitlement processes. Congressman Don Beyer discussed the Federal Inflation Reduction Act and its benefits to local municipalities as well as its impact on reducing global greenhouse gases. Specifically, he discussed tax credits and energy efficiency incentives. At this work session, the Planning

Commission and EPC agreed to form a Small Work Group to identify recommendations that could then be placed into a joint letter to the City Council. The Small Work Group was established with three members from the EPC and two members from the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission members were Chair Nathan Macek and Planning Commissioner Stephen Koenig. The Small Work Group met five times.

On January 30, 2023 a second Joint Work Session between the Planning Commission and EPC was held at which time a draft [joint letter](#) to the City Council with recommendations regarding proposed linkages between climate action and entitlement processes was reviewed and approved with some edits by both bodies.



Alexandria City Hall and Market Square

Zoning For Housing/Housing For All

On June 26, 2023, a Joint Work Session was held between the City Council and Planning Commission on the status of the proposed Zoning for Housing reforms. The two bodies shared their thoughts and feedback on each proposed reform. Such information, along with ongoing community input is part of the associated research on the reforms.



Zoning for Housing/Housing For All - March 2023 Kickoff

Planning Commission FY 2023 Retreat

The Planning Commission held an in-person Retreat on December 1, 2022, at the Charles Houston Recreation Center which included (1) a discussion on the topic of Implicit Bias and Micro-Aggressive Behavior; (2) an Energy and Climate Plan update and discussion; (3) a Zoning for Housing/Housing for All discussion; (4) a Density Bonuses (Art and Housing Bonuses) discussion; and a 5Plan Implementation discussion.

More information regarding the Retreat can be found on the City's Dockets and Webcasts webpage under the [December 1, 2022, Planning Commission Retreat](#).



Image: Charles Houston Recreation Center

A record of the Planning Commission's representation on other City Boards and Commissions in FY 2023 is included later in this report.

SUMMARY OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

Regulatory Cases	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Public Hearing Special Use Permits (SUP)	37	19	37
Encroachments, Subdivisions and Vacations	21	15	8
Development Projects (DSP/DSUP)	35	22	18
Master Plan Amendments and Re-zonings	14	21	12
Zoning Text Amendments	10	12	9
Consolidated Development District (CDD) Conceptual Design Plans	5	5	2
City Charter Section 9.06	2	8	2
Transportation Management Plan Special Use Permits	13	11	10
Total	137	113	98
Administrative Approvals			
Administrative Special Use Permits (SUP)	26	35	40

Ninety-eight (98) regulatory cases were considered by the Planning Commission in FY 2023, with the Planning Commission holding 11 public hearings. The number of cases for FYs 2021, 2022 and 2023 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 and Site Plans are cases which are approved by the Planning Commission and do not require approval by the City Council.

Public Hearing Special Use Permits (SUP) were the only regulatory case type in the chart above that increased in numbers from FY 2022 to FY 2023. Seven categories of case types decreased in numbers. They include Encroachments, Subdivisions and Vacations; Development Projects, Master Plan Amendments and Rezoning; Zoning Text Amendments; Consolidated Development District; City Charter Section 9.06; and Transportation Master Plan Special Use Permits. However, Fiscal Year 2023 included a number of large-scale projects, requiring significant staff time.

The following pages provide examples of several case types, within the categories, that were included on the Planning Commission’s FY 2023 Dockets. All FY 2023 Planning Commission Dockets, and Dockets prior to FY 2023, include Staff Reports and Presentations for all docketed cases and can be found on the [City’s Meeting Dockets and Video webpage](#).

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LONG RANGE PLANNING

Chesapeake Bay Preservation

Water Quality Supplement Chapter

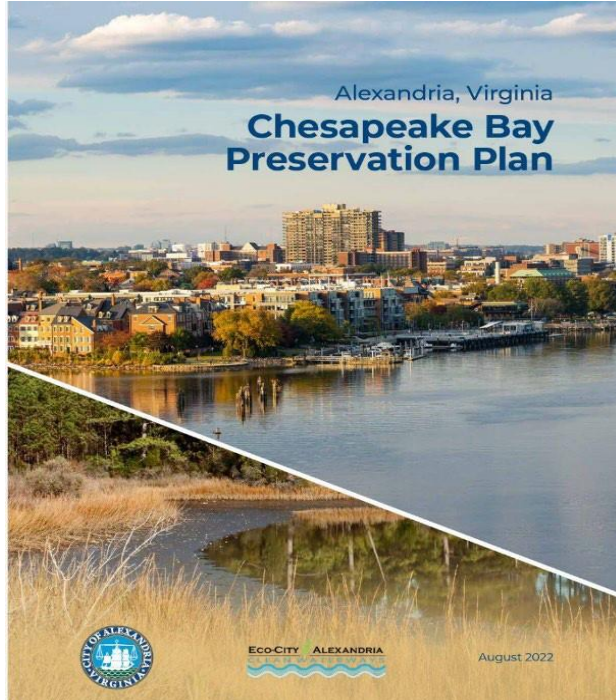
In September 2022, the Planning Commission approved a Master Plan Amendment to update the Water Quality Management Supplement Chapter of the City's Master Plan and to rename it the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Plan. The updated chapter includes data, policies and policy implementation related to the location and extent of Chesapeake Bay Preservation Areas; physical constraints to development; shoreline and streambank erosion problems; existing and proposed land uses; catalog of existing and potential water pollution sources; and public and private waterfront access areas.

Draft Energy and Climate Change Action Plan

In January 2023, the Planning Commission received an update on the Draft Energy and Climate Change Action Plan (ECCAP), which was later finalized in May 2023. The ECCAP is a framework for how the City, working with its government stakeholders, residents, business, and institutions, will achieve its ambitious, but necessary climate goals and shared vision for a low carbon and more resilient future.

Unit Block of King Street Pedestrian Zone

In November 2022, furthering the goals of the Waterfront Plan and King Street Retail Strategy, the Planning Commission deemed the permanent opening of the Unit Block of King Street and the northern portion of the Strand as pedestrian zones to be consistent with the City of Alexandria Master Plan pursuant to Section 9.06 of the City Charter.



LONG RANGE PLANNING

Duke Street in Motion



In June 2023, the Planning Commission endorsed the recommendation of the Duke Street in Motion Advisory Group for the long-term plan for the corridor to include center running bus lanes with separate spaces for pedestrians and cyclists. This long-term plan would be partially dependent on redevelopment and available funding and should be assessed further during the Duke Street Small Area Plan process. In the near term, the City should work toward this long-term plan as much as possible, when finalizing a design that can be constructed with available funding.

In correspondence to City Council, the Planning Commission noted the importance of securing additional funding through federal grants to address community concerns regarding the proposed transit way.



DEVELOPMENT

Landmark/Inova



Figure 1 Inova Hospital Campus viewed from West End Blvd. looking West.



View of the southern facade of the Block K building.



View of the Blocks E & G buildings with the Central Plaza in the foreground.



View of the Southwest corner of the Block I building.

Landmark/Inova

In December 2022 and March 2023, the City Council approved West End (formerly Landmark Mall) Blocks E, G, I, and K (“phase one blocks”); and the Inova Hospital Campus, respectively. The Phase I blocks will be the core of the new neighborhood providing over 1,100 apartments, including 45 committed affordable: about 200,000 sq. ft. of retail, and nearly 120,000 sq. ft. of office.

The 1.1 million sq. ft. Inova Hospital Campus will feature a state-of-the-art hospital, cancer center, specialty care center, and healing garden adjacent to the open space in the Central Plaza.

Each building will achieve at least LEED Silver plus the enhanced sustainability requirements for the Coordinated Development District. The development will deliver considerable storm water quality and quantity improvements compared to the former Landmark Mall building and parking.

The contemporary design of each building reinforces the reimagining of the site into a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood with ample ground floor activity through shops, restaurants, and other businesses. In September 2023, the Planning Commission and City Council will review the open space blocks, the comprehensive sign plan, and an amendment to the Block E residential building design.

- Address: 5801 and 6001 Duke Street
- Approved: December 2022 and March 2022

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DEVELOPMENT

VT Innovation Campus and Metro Station



Image: Building under construction (Summer 2023)



Image: Rendering of completed building

VT Innovation Campus and Metro Station

The first of three buildings at the Virginia Tech Innovation campus in North Potomac Yard is currently under construction. The 300,000 square foot, 11-story building will be the home of graduate education in computer science and computer engineering. The gem-shaped building design is centered on sustainable design with photo-voltaic panels, to harvest energy from the sun, covering much of the exterior of the structure. The 3.5-acre campus will be home to two additional buildings, each at 150,000 square feet, to be constructed at a later time.

- Address: 840 E Reed Ave. (VT)
- Anticipated opening date: Fall 2024

To support the innovation campus, and a long-standing goal of the City, the Potomac Yard/VT Metro station completed substantial construction and opened to the public on May 19, 2023. This included the main station, the north and south pavilions and an interim plaza.



Image: PY Metro Station North Pavilion

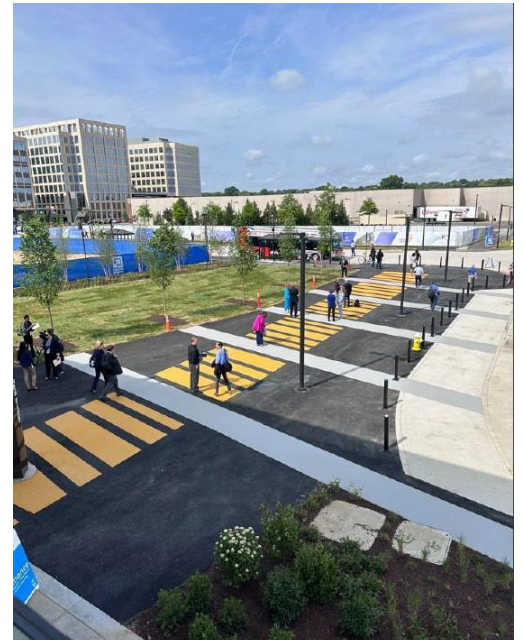


Image: PY Metro Station North Pavilion Interim Plaza

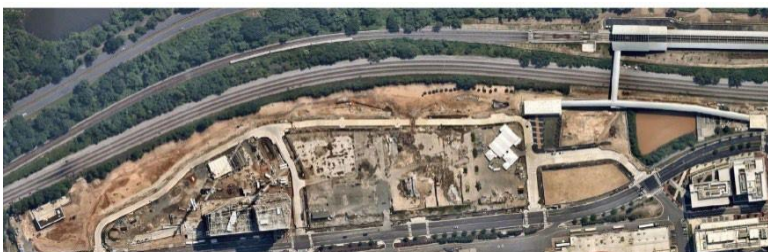


Image: Spring 2023 aerial of North Potomac Yard Innovation District Construction Development

DEVELOPMENT

Potomac River Generating Station

Potomac River Generating Station

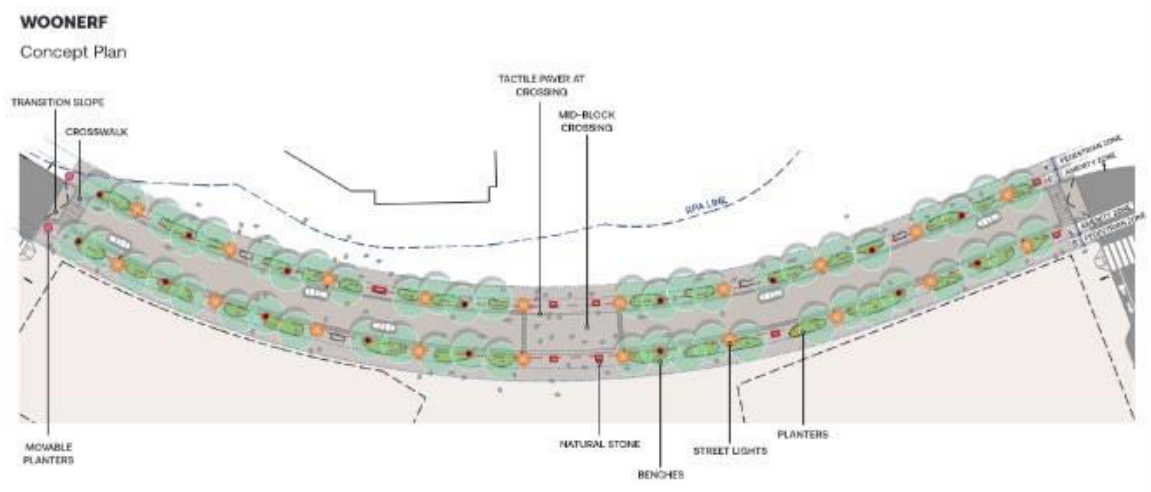
In July 2022, City Council approved a Coordinated Development District (CDD) for the 18-acre Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) site. The conceptual design included six blocks, the extension of North Fairfax and North Royal Streets into the site, a woonerf, or shared street, and five acres of publicly accessible open space. The CDD approval permits up to 2.5 million square feet of gross floor area across the site for mixed use development that includes at least 20% commercial uses, 30,000 square feet of arts space, a minimum of 58,300 square feet of affordable set-side units and a potential public-private partnership for an on-site affordable housing project with approximately 100 units.

During FY 2023, the applicant prepared a Coordinated Sustainability Strategy that was endorsed by City Council in May 2023. In June, the Planning Commission approved the Infrastructure Development Site Plan. Staff has reviewed concept plans for buildings on Blocks A, B and C, as well as for the waterfront park and railroad corridor/linear park open spaces. In July 2023, the City was awarded the Virginia American Planning Association Red Clay Award for Virginia Development of the Year.

- Address: 1300 N. Royal St
- Approved: CDD – July 2022; Infrastructure DSP – June 2023



Image: Street and block layout indicating hierarchy of public realm and paving materials



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DEVELOPMENT

The Mansly

The Mansly

In Fall 2022, the City Council approved an infill mixed-use development with 24 multifamily units behind two existing historic building facades and over 6,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial use. The high-quality design and architectural character has been endorsed by the Board of Architectural Review, and will include the adaptive reuse and rehabilitation of two early 20th-century buildings. The contextually responsive infill development will enhance the retail corridor and utilizes existing transit services with no new parking provided onsite.

- Address: 615-621 King Street
- Approved: September 2022
- Anticipated start of construction Fall 2023 with completion in Fall 2024



Image: Rendering of completed project and street activation along King Street

IMAGE CREDITED TO WINSTANLEY ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS

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DEVELOPMENT

Simpson Park

Simpson Park Renovations

Endorsed by the Park and Recreation Commission in 2014, and updated in 2021, the City Council approved the renovation of Eugene Simpson Stadium Park (Simpson Park). The project involves:

Renovation of existing outdoor recreation amenities including the replacement of two athletic fields (one synthetic, one natural turf), replacement of bleachers, dugouts, additional storage, a new dedicated concession stand, and new basketball court with lighting.

The project includes increased landscaping throughout the park, including a planted tree buffer along the E. Duncan alleyway, additional landscaping around the dog park area, and doubling the amount of crown coverage for the project area with over 100 new trees.

The plans also comprise improved pedestrian amenities, including hardscape trails, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant access, picnic areas, increased safety lighting and pedestrian safety along E. Monroe Avenue.

The project also features enhanced stormwater management using bio-retention areas, planted swales and below grade retention areas under the new synthetic turf field that complies with the Green Building policy for 100% treatment through green infrastructure.

- Address: 426 E Monroe Ave
- Approved: June 2023
- Anticipated start of construction Fall 2024, with completion in spring 2026



Image: Rendering of proposed park improvements and new parking and driveway area

DEVELOPMENT

Mark Center

Mark Center Drive

In June 2023, City Council approved Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) #2022-10027 for The Rutherford, a new 367-unit multifamily building in Mark Center, located on a 4.25-acre site behind the Hilton Hotel. It will include 25 affordable units, a 405-space parking garage and 40% on-site open space. Given site topography, the building's primary entrance, parking and loading will be accessed from Mark Center Drive.

The project is providing right-of-way and assisting with the construction of the Mark Center Transit Facility expansion, which will be located on Mark Center Avenue, across the street from the current facility. This will serve current bus traffic, as well as the future West End Transitway. They are also providing contributions for the Beauregard Implementation Fund, public art, installing 700 feet of new sidewalk and street trees along Mark Center Drive, and meeting the City's Green Building Policy.

- Project Name: The Rutherford
- Address: 5050 Mark Center Dr.
- Approved: June 2023



Image: Site plan



Image: Site plan

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DEVELOPMENT

CLI/Elbert Avenue

CLI/Elbert Avenue

The all-affordable CLI/Elbert Avenue multifamily residential project received preliminary Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) approval in February 2023. It is the second re-development approved since adoption of the new Arlandria-Chirilagua Small Area Plan and the fifth to use the Residential Multi-family (RMF) zone, adopted in 2019. In this approval, the existing 28-unit, all-affordable multifamily residential building, owned by Community Lodgings, Inc., would be replaced with a new 91-unit, all affordable multifamily residential building. The new six-story building would measure 115,401 net square feet in size and feature primarily two-bedroom units, although several one- and three-bedroom units are also approved. Community amenity spaces and garage parking are anticipated on the first floor and a courtyard is proposed on the second floor between the two major wings of the building. Additional open spaces for residents are provided on two rooftop terraces on the sixth floor and on the ground level in front of the building. The units will be offered at rates affordable to households earning between 30% and 60% of area median income (AMI).

Address: 3908 Elbert Avenue

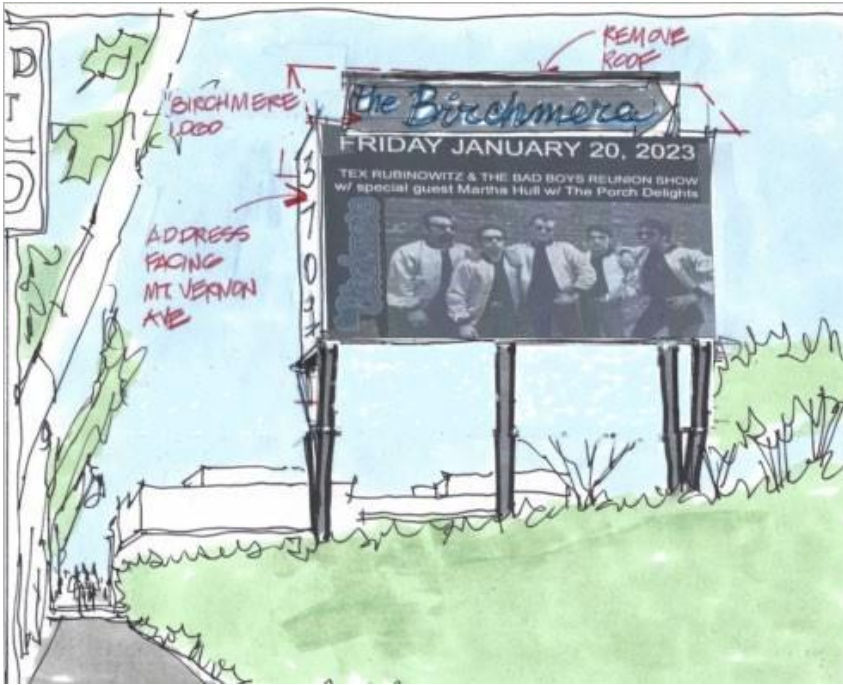
Approved: February 2023



Image: Site rendering

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS AND LAND USE SERVICES

The Birchmere



In March 2023, the City Council approved The Birchmere’s music hall’s request for a digital sign. The current sign ordinance does not allow digital signs unless a Special Use Permit (SUP) is approved. The sign replaced the changeable copy sign, which was outdated and required manually changing the performers listed on the sign each day. Staff found the sign supports a unique and specific use that could not be accomplished within the existing regulations, as the advertising on the changing digital displays provides the ability to showcase the daily changing performers. The SUP approval was conditioned that the sign

incorporates the old Birchmere sign, which contributes to Arlandria’s character established by other legacy businesses with larger, historical signage, such as Waffle Shop and RT’s Restaurant. This case highlighted the need to re-evaluate the current digital sign prohibition in the upcoming sign ordinance update and how this type of modern technology for other specific uses, such as schools, would provide a benefit the public. A sign ordinance update is expected in FY 2024 which will consider permitting digital signage in certain locations or for particular uses.

ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS AND LAND USE SERVICES

Healthcare Uses and Protection of Abortion Access

In June 2022, the City Council adopted Resolution #3087 which asked that the City Manager work with the Director of Planning & Zoning, in consultation with the City Attorney, to review existing land-use regulations regarding the operation of a clinic providing abortion services and bring forward for consideration Zoning Text Amendments to ensure unfettered administrative approval in any commercial or mixed-use zone.

In response to the City Council's Resolution, staff identified inconsistencies in the Zoning Ordinance's healthcare-related use definitions. Staff recommended amendments to these definitions to ensure abortion service providers would be permitted without special approval in commercial and mixed-use zones. Additionally, staff proposed amendments to the health profession office and medical care facility use definitions that clearly distinguish the two. Because the medical care facility use definition dates back at least to the 1963 Zoning Ordinance, staff proposed updates to modernize the language.

In April 2023, City Council approved staff's recommendations in a Zoning Text Amendment. The text changes modernized the Zoning Ordinance's healthcare-related use definitions. The term "abortion services" was also added to the healthcare-related uses definitions. This way, it would be clear that healthcare-related uses may include abortion services. This ensures

that an approval of an abortion service provider would no longer require staff to first determine that such a provider would be considered a healthcare-related use. Having the term explicitly included in the Zoning Ordinance healthcare-related use definitions ensures that abortion service providers can operate in the City without special approvals.



ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS AND LAND USE SERVICES

99 Canal Center Plaza

In June 2023 “The Bike Club” was approved to use two temporary trailers for cooking and beverage preparation with 60 outdoor seats and live outdoor entertainment on an existing surface parking lot which is part of the Canal Center Plaza. The restaurant’s musical offerings would be amplified at low levels accommodating local singers, jazz, bands and acoustic musicians during weekend days and evening hours.

Staff supported the application noting that the temporary trailers provide a start-up business opportunity while enlivening the outdoor plaza which is largely unused by the community and Canal Center office workers. Located just 45 feet from the Mount Vernon Trail, it would also provide a convenient food and drink stop for bicyclists, runners and pedestrians using the trail.



MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

There were no changes in the membership of the Planning Commission for FY 2023. Elections were held in March 2023; Chair Nathan Macek was re-elected as Chair and Vice Chair Melissa McMahon was re-elected a Vice Chair. All members attended at least 75 percent of the scheduled meetings in FY 2023.

Planning Commission appointments to other Commissions and Work Groups for FY 2023 are noted below:

FY 2023 Planning Commission Appointments to Other Commissions and Work Groups

Group	Planning Commission Member
Transportation Commission*	Melissa McMahon and Jody Manor
Waterfront Commission*	Nathan Macek
Potomac Yard Metrorail Implementation Group*	Stephen Koenig
ARHA Redevelopment Work Group	Stephen Koenig
Eisenhower West/Landmark Van Dorn Implementation Advisory Group	Mindy Lyle (Chair)
Open Space Steering Committee	David Brown
Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group	Mindy Lyle
Superintendent's Advisory Team	Vivian Ramirez

*City Council appointments

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
 MEETINGS ATTENDANCE REPORT
 JULY 1, 2022 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2023

COMMISSION: Planning Commission
 CHAIR: Nathan Macek

Public Hearing Meetings

Board Member	2022				2023						
	Sept 6	Oct 6	Nov 1	Dec 6	Jan 5	Feb 7	Mar 7	Mar 30	May 2	Jun 6	June 23
Nathan Macek, Chair	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	V	X
Melissa McMahon, Vice Chair	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	E	X	X
Mindy Lyle	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
David Brown	X	X	X	X	X	X	V	X	X	X	X
Stephen Koenig	V	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jody Manor	X	V	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vivian Ramirez	X	X	E	X	X	X	X	E	X	X	E

*There was no Planning Commission Public Hearing in the month of July 2022, August 2022, or April 2023.

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

APPROVED:

Nathan Macek, Chair

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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Department of Planning & Zoning
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