

MEMORANDUM

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Date: March 10, 2021
Project: ARHA 600 N Fairfax
Project No: 221012.00
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Subject: City of Alexandria Entitlement and Development Review Narrative

Any major development project in the City of Alexandria is required to go through a review process through the Department of Planning and Zoning. A high level of attention is focused on each application to ensure that the plan is consistent with the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance. The department also verifies that the proposal consists of the highest quality building and urban design while providing a public benefit through community engagement.

The guiding documents for the development review process are through the City of Alexandria Zoning Ordinance, Master Plan, Small Area Plans, and Design Guidelines. Ultimately, the future vision and goals for the redevelopment of various locations within the city are further defined through the Small Area Plans. Within those documents, specific details are provided as to how land should be used and how neighborhoods, parks and buildings should be designed.

The review process also incorporates public outreach to allow the surrounding community and civic groups to be involved in the proposed redevelopment. Planning and Zoning staff will work with the applicant to help schedule the appropriate public meetings to get their input on the proposal and the impacts the project may have on the neighborhood. There are also design review boards and committees assigned to various portions of the City that require involvement and presentations for their endorsement to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval.

Development applications are typically submitted to the City in two forms, a Development Site Plan (DSP) and a Development Special Use Plan (DSUP). Once submitted, an urban planner within the Department of Planning and Zoning is identified as the project manager and they work to coordinate reviews among the other City departments. A property owner must have an approved DSP or DSUP before building permits can be released. The key difference between the two is that a DSP is considered a request to develop a site by-right in compliance with existing Zoning Ordinance requirements, while a DSUP is a request that will not comply with specific Zoning Ordinance requirements. Examples include relief from certain requirements such as minimum parking ratios, building setbacks, or increase in building height or square footage (FAR). Typically, an applicant must demonstrate that the project provides substantial public benefit to have relief granted from the Zoning Ordinance. Another key difference between the two development applications is that a DSUP requires both a Planning Commission and the City Council hearing for approval, while a DSP only requires the Planning Commission's approval.

The City divides the development review timeline into five separate phases. The overall process from initial design concepts to a project closeout can take as much as four years to complete on larger complex projects that require more lengthy reviews and buy in from the City, stakeholders, and the surrounding community.

1. The Concept Plan Review is considered the first phase and serves as an introduction of the applicant's proposed design to the Planning and Zoning staff. Staff can then provide their initial reactions relative to how consistent the project is with the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance. They will also offer guidance on the types of applications necessary for approval and what issues may need to be addressed through the review. This phase includes two separate stages with two Concept Plan submissions.
2. The second phase is the Preliminary Plan Review, which is submitted and filed as a preliminary DSUP application once the proposal has been refined through months of back and forth through the Concept Plan Review. The application is reviewed by all City departments to verify it is complete and meets the expectations of the Preliminary checklist. The process typically includes a "Completeness" submission and a subsequent "Preliminary" submission. After the staff has reviewed and deemed it complete, a public hearing is scheduled. The project planners then draft a staff report and develop conditions for City approval. The applicant can negotiate the conditions prior to going to the public hearings for Planning Commission and City Council.
3. The Final Site Plan commences once a proposed development has been approved by the City with conditions. This must be approved prior to the release of building permits and beginning of construction. The staff will review more detailed engineering and design drawings based on what was committed to in the preliminary plan. These plans typically go through multiple cycles of reviews to address any issues before being deemed approved. The applicant is required to provide cost estimates and post performance and maintenance bonds prior to the permit issuance.
4. Phase four is the Building Permit and Construction Phase. The building permit drawings are submitted for building review only after the Final Site Plan release. Once any comments are addressed and revised sheets have been submitted, building permits can be issued and construction can begin. At this point, a pre-construction meeting is held with the community as required by the conditions of the DSUP. Inspections are also conducted through the course of the construction to verify the building design complies with both the Building Permit and the Final Site Plan. Once inspections are at a level of completion to allow for it, a certificate of occupancy (CO) can be requested to grant building occupation.
5. The fifth and final phase is the Project Closeout. Once construction is complete the applicant submits as-built plans and requests a bond release. The as-built plans overlay the construction survey on the site plan of which the City reviews and inspects for consistency. If the project is not constructed as specified, then the City can pull the bond and complete the project as required with the funds. Two years after project completion, the applicant can request release of the maintenance bond. This is posted to ensure the landscape materials are healthy and maintained. Once any maintenance comments are addressed from the City the project is officially closed and all bonds released.

More information can be found in the City of Alexandria Development Review Process Brochure at the link below.
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/DevelopmentReviewProcessBrochure2018.pdf>