



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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To: Ande Banks, Interim City Manager
From: Thomas Hartman, Director – Department of Public Works, Adam Fletcher, Director – Department of Community Development, and Harrisonburg Planning Commission
Date: June 14, 2022 (Regular Meeting)
Re: Comprehensive Plan Amendment – Chapter 12, Transportation

Summary:

Public hearing to consider amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan originally adopted on November 13, 2018. Chapter 12 will be updated to add projects that have been recommended by traffic studies that have been completed since the chapter was amended in July 2020 to identify operation and safety improvements for City streets. The update also identifies projects that have been awarded funding since the 2020 update.

Staff and Planning Commission (7-0) recommended approval of the Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Background:

The City of Harrisonburg Comprehensive Plan presents a vision of what kind of community the City would like to be in the future and identifies steps to move toward that vision. The Plan is the central organizing umbrella under which other plans, regulations, and initiatives exist. The Plan establishes the preferred overall long-term vision for our community. The Plan is not a regulatory document but serves as a guide for Harrisonburg and it helps City and community leaders with setting policies and decision-making.

Virginia Code Section 15.2-2223 requires the City to have a Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive plans deal fundamentally with the physical characteristics of a community. Hence, land use is the core element of a comprehensive plan. However, in order to arrive at an appropriate plan for the use of land, other physical aspects must be addressed, such as environmental features, transportation, water and wastewater facilities, and other public facilities.

Chapter 12 includes the Street Improvement Plan, which contains project descriptions and a map that identifies transportation infrastructure improvements that the City may pursue to address safety, congestion, bicycle and pedestrian needs, and new development. Projects are not prioritized in the Street Improvement Plan. Instead, the City will utilize the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization's Long Range Transportation Plan to represent prioritized projects.

Key Issues:

The proposed amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the Comprehensive Plan include adding two projects that have been recommended by transportation studies that have been completed since the 2020 amendment of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The studies were conducted to identify solutions for facilities that have a high number of crashes, congestion, speeding, and/or were identified in a statewide analysis as having a high potential for safety improvement. Studies include the Mount Clinton Pike Operations and Safety Analysis (study limits: Norfolk Southern railroad to North Main Street), and a Project Pipeline study of South Main Street from Mosby Road to Pleasant Valley Road. Both studies were completed by engineering consultants and funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

With regard to the Mount Clinton Pike Lane Reconfiguration between the Norfolk Southern Railroad and North Main Street, the study recommended a roundabout at the Mount Clinton Pike/Acorn Drive intersection. For the Project Pipeline study along South Main Street, the recommendations included to modify the project limits for project SE-28, which is a planned improvement that is already included in the Street Improvement Plan. SE-28 would add a median to South Main Street between Stone Spring Road/Erickson Avenue and Mosby Road. The Project Pipeline study recommended to update this project by extending the limits of this project from Mosby Road south to Pleasant Valley Road.

Additionally, the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan includes clarifications that because private development layouts are unknown there will need to be additional public streets to create an effective transportation network that cannot be determined in a long range plan.

The Department of Public Works will pursue grants to implement these recommendations. The amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the Comprehensive Plan are being made so that the City's transportation funding applications (via Smart Scale) can obtain higher scores by meeting the criterion of the projects' inclusion in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The projects' inclusion in the plan will also allow City staff to work with developers to plan for implementation of the improvements as adjacent properties develop. The Planning Process section of the chapter describes the methods used in developing the Street Improvement Plan, which includes traffic/transportation studies.

There have been text edits in a few locations throughout the chapter to address an issue that staff is frequently faced with when discussing street accommodations with developers. Developers' site designs often do not include the level of street network connectivity envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan to provide the appropriate traffic distribution and capacity to the network proportional to the need created by the development proposal. A common misconception of the development community is that the City only needs new streets that are identified in the Street Improvement Plan. However, the Street Improvement Plan is primarily a plan for major routes at a city-wide scale, including arterial streets, which are intended to serve through traffic, and collector streets, which serve to connect arterial routes, and provide some property access. Local streets are lower volume neighborhood streets that are primarily intended to provide neighborhood circulation and access to property. Local streets are usually constructed by developers to serve the needs of a particular development and connect into the greater transportation network. Staff cannot predict what development proposals will look like with the needed accuracy to identify all distribution, circulation, access, and safety needs, as they are largely dependent upon characteristics, including physical and topographical characteristics, specific to the development. Oftentimes, street layouts and designs need to be decided upon in coordination with the development's layout to ensure streets appropriately serve the development, and that the development interacts with the greater network safely and efficiently. Language has been added to the chapter narrative to explain that the Street

Improvement Plan is primarily a major routes plan that is intended to address street network needs on a city-wide scale and is not intended to identify every street that may be needed to serve individual developments.

Environmental Impact:

N/A

Fiscal Impact:

N/A

Prior Actions:

N/A

Alternatives:

- (a) Approve the Comprehensive Plan amendments as presented.
- (b) Approve of the Comprehensive Plan with modifications or additional amendments; or
- (c) Deny the Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Community Engagement:

As required, the request was published in the local newspaper twice advertising for Planning Commission’s public hearing and twice advertising for City Council’s public hearing. The advertisement was published as shown below:

Comprehensive Plan Amendment – Chapter 12, Transportation

Public hearing to consider amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan adopted on November 13, 2018 and amended July 14, 2020. Virginia Code Section 15.2-2223 requires the City to have a Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive plans deal fundamentally with the physical characteristics of a community. Hence, land use is the core element of a comprehensive plan. However, in order to arrive at an appropriate plan for the use of land, other physical aspects must be addressed, such as environmental features, transportation, water and wastewater facilities, and other public facilities. Chapter 12 includes the Street Improvement Plan, which contains project descriptions and a map that identifies transportation infrastructure improvements that the City may pursue to address safety, congestion, bicycle and pedestrian needs, and new development. Chapter 12 would be updated by adding projects that have been recommended by various studies that have been completed since the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. These include the Mount Clinton Pike Road Reconfiguration Study and the South Main Street Project Pipeline Study.

In addition, a notice was provided on the City’s website at <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/public-hearings>.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends (a) approval of the Comprehensive Plan amendments as presented.

Attachments:

Extract from Planning Commission

Updated Proposed Amendments to Chapter 12 Transportation – Chapter Text

Updated Proposed Amendments to Chapter 12 Transportation - Street Improvement Plan Map

Review:

Two days prior to the Planning Commission's meeting, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) completed their review of the amendments and provided comments which are available in the attachment file titled "Updated Proposed Amendments to Chapter 12 Transportation – Chapter Text." VDOT's comments and requested updates were presented to Planning Commission.

Planning Commission (7-0) recommended approval of the Comprehensive Plan amendments.