



City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

Office of the City Manager

409 South Main Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22802
(540) 432-7701 / FAX (540) 432-7778

Eric D. Campbell
City Manager

TO: Eric Campbell, City Manager
FROM: Amy Snider, Assistant to the City Manager
DATE: May 14, 2019
RE: Pilot Program for Interpretation Services at City Council and Planning Commission Meetings

Summary: The City of Harrisonburg is richly diverse, with dozens of languages spoken by our residents. The City of Harrisonburg recognizes and embraces its diversity. We are committed to improving our connection and communication with all residents, regardless of the language they speak. City staff recommends the creation of a one-year pilot program to provide simultaneous and consecutive interpretation service upon advance request for both City Council and City Planning Commission meetings. The initial pilot aims to provide interpretation services in Spanish, Arabic, and Kurdish, with the intent to explore addition of other language groups at the end of the pilot. By providing interpreters upon request for City Council and Planning Commission meetings the City hopes to enable residents with limited English proficiency to further engage with our City and to more easily share their perspectives with City leadership.

Background

One of the City Vision priorities adopted by City Council on April 22, 2019 was the creation of a pilot program to provide interpretation services at City Council and Planning Commission meetings.

The pilot program plans to provide simultaneous and consecutive interpretation at City Council and Planning Commission meetings:

- Simultaneous interpretation is when speech is interpreted into another language in real time with minimal delay and is broadcast often through use of specialized equipment and headsets to a listener. This type of interpretation is best during presentations and discussions by a group.
- Consecutive interpretation is when an individual speaks typically in shorter segments while the interpreter listens and then the interpreter delivers the speech in another language. This type of interpretation would be best during public comment, public hearings, public input, and presentations by an applicant.

The pilot program will be managed by City staff. The pilot program will initially only provide interpreters for City Council and City Planning Commission meetings. The program will require individuals in need of an interpreter to submit their request a minimum four days prior to the meeting at which the services will be needed. Exact details on how to request an interpreter will be announced at a later date.

The City plans to utilize interpretation equipment, often called “talk and listen kits,” owned by the Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS). The City will borrow the equipment on an as-needed basis.

The City is currently in the process of establishing a pool of qualified interpretation vendors for the pilot program. Interpreters will be scheduled for a meeting when the City receives a request for interpretation services. An interpreter will be paid \$30 per hour for their service. The interpreters must remain at the meeting for the duration of time the individual requesting the service is in attendance. Paid professional interpreters are necessary for the accurate interpretation of complex and important topics discussed at these meetings, such as property tax rates, zoning cases, and ordinances.

Key Issues: Interpretation Services.

Environmental Impact: None

Fiscal Impact: The pilot program will cost \$30 per hour of service provided by an interpreter.

Prior Actions: Adoption of the City Council Vision Priorities.

Alternatives: None.

Community Engagement: None.

Recommendation: None. No action necessary.

Attachments: Council Presentation.

Review:

The initiating Department Director will place in Legistar, in sequence of transmittal, the names of each department that must initial their review in order for this item to be placed on the City Council agenda. The completion of review only addresses the readiness of the issue for Council consideration. This does not address the recommendation for approval or denial of the issue.

###