

Draft DOWNTOWN PARK BUSINESS PLAN

September 2024

[Working Document]

Build Our Park Mission Statement

Work with private and public partners to create and sustain a vibrant, beautiful and welcoming urban park in Harrisonburg's city center for the economic benefit and quality of life enhancement of our downtown district, larger Harrisonburg community and central Shenandoah Valley region.

Description of Downtown Park

Downtown Harrisonburg Park Corporation ("Build Our Park") is a private nonprofit 501(c)3 organization that collaborates with City of Harrisonburg ("City") officials to design and build an urban park downtown ("Park" or "the Park"). The proposed Park will be constructed with money from private donations and grants and maintained and operated by the City through a partnership between the Department of Parks and Recreation and a future private park conservancy (working name "Friends of the Park").

The Park will sit on property owned by the City located south of the Turner Pavilion, comprised of tax map parcels 25-J-19 through 22 and a portion of 25-J-10. This area includes the existing gravel lot south of Warren Street and extends north to the Turner Pavilion. The west border is Liberty Street, and the east border is the alley and pocket park behind the Municipal Building.

The Park will serve as a destination public space, providing spatially defined amenities that aim to establish an inclusive, multicultural, and multi-generational experience, as has been successfully implemented in other downtown communities. Additionally, this city Park will function as a pedestrian hub that provides access and connection to other multi-modal and pedestrian oriented systems throughout the city, including the future 10.5 mile greenway, extending from the point near Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community to the other terminus near the Sentara RMH Wellness Center, and passing through downtown adjacent to the park.

The park is anticipated to be built once funding is available. The following amenities are expected to be included:

- Multi-purpose lawn or common green
- Grove garden with landscaping, trees and plants
- Plaza for people gathering, displays, programming and activities
- Turner Pavilion for farmers market, programming and activities
- Permanent stage for larger performances
- Staging area for small performances
- Restrooms and storage facilities
- Sunshades or pergolas for people gathering
- Nature-based play area or features
- Water fountain or feature
- Public art
- Donor/Leadership recognition wall or other feature
- Lighting and benches
- Solar panels on appropriate structures
- Promenade providing connectivity to greenway and downtown

The Team

The current Build Our Park board of directors include dedicated people with a variety of skills sets and demographics. The board roster includes:

Letitia Bates, At the Wheel Coaching
Erin Bishop (vice president), Bishop Racing L
Tim Brady, Empwr Solar
Eddie Bumbaugh (president), Hotel Madison
Jared Burden, GreeneHurlocker, PLC
Bill Culbreth, Virginia Workers Compensation Commission
Andrea Dono, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance
Lee Foerster, City of Harrisonburg (retired)
Sara Kate Garman (treasurer), Hess Financial
Barry Kelley, Matchbox Realty
Zach Koops, Zach Koops Real Estate
Jamie Marsh (secretary), Free lance writer
Trevor Parmer, LD&B Insurance

Andy Perrine, James Madison University
Arushi Sachan, Eastern Mennonite University
Valerie Sampson, Salon Eleven
Henry Way, James Madison University

Ad hoc members currently representing the City Administration and City Council are: Ande Banks, Laura Dent, Chris Jones, and Brian Mancini.

The Case for Building a Downtown Park

The *Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 Master Plan*, commissioned by the City in 2020 in partnership with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, recommends that the City “build a destination downtown park to serve all ages and provide a range of programming.” The Master Plan notes that “less than 1% of the downtown area is used for green space.” The Master Plan further states that a signature park would be of great benefit to the community and serve as a central hub for bringing people together and is the kind of place that should be provided for our community.

Moreover, as City Council appropriates ARPA funding, the Downtown Park will meet one of the City’s goals of “enhancing community space” by providing urban green space, public art, local history interpretation, sustainability, multicultural programming and community activities.

According to the Urban Land Institute, urban parks have proven economic benefits, including but not limited to higher property values, enhanced quality of life and new development close by. As such, the Park planning process will focus on these anticipated community benefits.

Park board members and former members of city administration and City Council have visited and studied other urban parks around the country and even internationally. Other successful urban parks include festivals, musical performances, multi-generational games and play activities, yoga and dance classes, public art, arts and crafts workshops, movie nights, discussion circles, health and nature workshops, and multicultural programming.

In the past and present our citizens and visitors have had the opportunity to visualize what an urban park can bring to our community. Events such as the Alpine Loop Gran Fondo, Best Weekend Ever (featuring World Refugee Day at Turner Pavilion), and most recently the Levitt AMP music series have highlighted the support and need for an urban park in our downtown. Once constructed there is a reasonable expectation that the number of events and uses will increase significantly. Furthermore, a variety of diverse community groups and community members have asked HDR for the use of the Levitt stage between Wednesday concerts for their programming, but the minimum \$2000 per use cost for the stage has been a barrier. A permanent stage will allow for more equitable community building for groups who can't afford that high usage fee for the stage.

Guiding Principles

Based on the experience of other urban parks but tailored to our unique needs and aspirations, the Build Our Park board adopted the following guiding principles:

1. Keep the park people-focused, child friendly, inclusive and accessible by promoting positive social relationships, multigenerational use and multicultural life.
2. Actively design park amenities and program activities to appeal to a broad range of interests and diverse populations.
3. Create a civic plaza and open space to celebrate community and to support large and small programs, activities and events.
4. Develop a park that features history, the arts, plants and area natural resources.
5. Collaborate with the Farmers Market as a key park amenity.
6. Make the park as nature based, sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.

7. Create and reinforce linkages to, from and through the park to neighboring areas to encourage public access, cycling and walking.
8. Make the park a catalyst for downtown development by attracting a diversity of businesses, services, residents and visitors.
9. Form a future park conservancy to provide financial support and citizen input into ongoing park maintenance and programming.

Design and Construction

The current feasibility study and conceptual plan for the Park was developed by a local team comprised of Monteverde Engineering & Design Studio and Eugene Stoltzfus Architects. This collaboration brought a multidisciplinary approach to the Park's design process, incorporating professional services in Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design and Civil Engineering. Furthermore, the extensive public engagement and stakeholder outreach conducted to date has been proven crucial, continuing to serve as a primary guide throughout the entire design process. The visual renderings and design recommendations include a blend of original ideas and past design proposals to create a park that meets the needs of our community in a way that is realistic and affordable.

Upon approval from City Council, Build Our Park and the City of Harrisonburg will enter into a Construction and Consulting Agreement. Build Our Park will hire a firm or team to design and develop construction documents and details for park amenities. All phases of this process will include collaboration with the director of Parks & Recreation. Input will be solicited from key stakeholders and the general public.

Once funding is secured to cover the cost of construction and the final construction documents are approved by the director of Parks & Recreation, construction will begin while taking into account the operation of the farmers market and other construction projects nearby. Similar to the process used successfully in the construction of the Turner Pavilion, Build Our Park and the City will designate a project manager to co-manage the construction and approve payments. A document has been drafted by the City Attorney to clarify the roles and responsibilities.

Upon the completion of the park construction, the City, under the Department of Parks & Recreation, will assume responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the park. Build Our Park will transition to a private conservancy, tentatively named Friends of the Park, to provide citizen input and funding assistance for park programming and amenities.

Fundraising Plan

Build Our Park currently has an account with The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg & Rockingham County in the amount of approximately \$281,000. The co-chairs of our fundraising campaign are Barry Kelley and Becky Messerley. The fundraising committee has several teams composed of board and community members focused on securing donations from individuals, families, businesses and organizations. Fundraising events will be held and applications for grants will be pursued. In some cases the City may partner depending on the nature of the grant source.

The estimated cost of the park design work, site preparation, construction and amenities is \$2 million. In-kind donations in the form of work, equipment, supplies and expertise will be solicited. As appropriate, work by City departments will be welcomed.

Maintenance and Operations

The director of Parks & Recreation estimates that the park can be maintained at an annual cost not exceeding \$40,000. This involves the labor of one dedicated staff person, plus equipment and supplies. Under current operations, the department provides mowing services for the existing lawn area, the City covers maintenance of the Turner Pavilion and staff are provided when large events are held.

Additional income is anticipated for facilities rentals and events. As mentioned previously, the park conservancy will offer supplemental funding for programming and other park amenities.

Park Supporters

During this summer, Build Our Park Board Members have met with key stakeholders surrounding the park footprint. Conceptual drawings were presented, questions were answered and input was invited. Neighboring businesses and organizations have been supportive of our conceptual park plan.

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