



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Memorandum

To: Planning Commission
From: Thanh Dang, Assistant Director of Community Development
RE: **Planning & Zoning Projects Update**
Date: February 10, 2021 (Regular Meeting)

Provided below is a list of planning and zoning related projects that Planning Commission or City Council has expressed interest in and/or has directed staff to work on, and projects that staff has initiated in response to court rulings, legislation, and other issues. This list does not include all projects that the Planning & Zoning Division are working on.

List A. Projects completed since February 2020 (last update to Planning Commission):

1. *Downtown Parking Study* – Staff from the Departments of Economic Development, Public Works, Police, Community Development, Public Transportation, and from Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance worked with DESMAN, a national consulting firm for transportation improvements and parking facilities, to examine existing parking supply and usage, forecast demand for parking, and recommend strategies for current and projected demand. The final report was completed in April 2020 and is available at <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/downtown-parking-study-2019>.
2. *Review of Short-Term Rental (STR) Regulations* – On March 26, 2019, City Council adopted the STR regulations. Two Planning Commission work sessions were held in October and December 2019 to discuss potential amendments to the STR regulations. Amendments to create a new by right use called homestays, amending regulations that apply to STRs, and requiring annual registration by homestay and STR operators was adopted by City Council on September 8, 2020. More information available at: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/short-term-rentals>.
3. *Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study* – In July 2020, the City contracted with Mullin & Lonergan Associates (M&L) to complete a housing study. The City team included representatives from Community Development, the City Manager's Office, Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority, and a local private real estate broker. In addition to recommendations, the study provides an analysis of affordability for homeownership and renting throughout all population and income segments of the City, details current demographics and housing stock, and analyzes barriers preventing the market from effectively responding to the housing demands. The final study was

completed in January 2021 and is available at <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/housing-study>.

List B. Projects currently underway and anticipated to be presented to Planning Commission for discussion or review in the next twelve months.

4. *Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances Update Project* - The existing Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances were last thoroughly evaluated and comprehensively re-written in 1997 and 1996, respectively. In the ensuing time, many changes, both major and minor, have been made to the text of the ordinances, including the addition of districts and overlays to the Zoning Ordinance. The results include ordinances containing outdated requirements, internal inconsistencies, and ordinances that can be difficult for community members to comprehend. It became apparent that a significant overhaul of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances is needed. Additionally, new ways of thinking about planning and zoning combined with new techniques and principles for implementing adopted plans offer ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of City planning and zoning. In July 2020, the City contracted with Kendig Keast Collaborative (KKC) to partner with City staff to update the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances. The first of three parts (Modules) of the ordinances is expected to be released for public comment in March/April 2021. New ordinances are anticipated to be adopted by City Council in early 2022. More information about the project, project milestones, and the Ordinance Advisory Committee is available at <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/zoning-subdivision-ordinances-update>.

A number of other projects identified by staff, Planning Commission, and City Council will be incorporated into the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances Update Project, and they include:

- a. *Floodplain Management Ordinance Updates* –The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation’s (VA DCR) Floodplain Management Model Ordinance will be incorporated into the Zoning Ordinance.
- b. *Community Gardens* – In January 2013, as part of discussions surrounding Business Gardens, Planning Commission identified that the trend of community gardens as principal uses in residential districts should be investigated by staff. A focus group was hosted on May 11, 2017.
- c. *Home Occupation* – In September 2016, Planning Commission identified that home occupation permits and/or home business licenses needed to be reviewed. Staff has interviewed zoning administrators from other Virginia communities and coordinated with the City Attorney’s Office and the Building Inspections Division on Building Code requirements for home businesses.
- d. *Off-Street Parking Requirements* – In October 2016, there was consensus among Planning Commission that parking requirements needed to be reviewed.
- e. *Recommendations from the Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study* - Among other recommendations that could be drafted as a result from the housing study, City staff has already communicated with the consultant that we would like to incorporate draft regulations for accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

5. *Downtown 2040 Plan (Downtown Master Plan)* – The City and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance are partnering together to develop the Downtown 2040 Plan. In November 2020, after an RFP process, the City contracted with Interface Studio LLC (Interface) out of Philadelphia, PA, to complete a downtown Master Plan for the City. Interface is joined by three subconsultants including Ninigret Partners (offering economic development strategies), Monteverde Engineering and Design (providing transportation, land use, streetscape, and parking expertise), and Merrit Chase (offering landscape architecture services). The City team includes representatives from Economic Development, Community Development, Public Works, the City Manager’s Office, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, and a local private architect. As noted by the RFP, the plan is expected to provide a 20-year vision; define the geographical boundaries of the downtown district; identify key redevelopment areas; and offer recommendations, strategies, and potential regulatory and funding mechanisms to achieve the community’s vision. Important dialogues should include managing highway incident traffic routed away from Interstate 81, strategies for protecting the defining character of downtown, and identifying the ideal location and footprint of a downtown urban park. The kick-off meeting for this project occurred on December 9, 2020. The final plan is expected in October of 2021.

List C. Projects currently on hold with little to no activity. Note that these items could be rectified through the rewrite of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances project. (Long-term)

6. *Minimum Street Widths, On- and Off-Street Parking Requirements, and Rear Alleys for New Neighborhood Subdivisions* – In September 2019, staff began discussions to clarify and describe in the City’s Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) minimum street width requirements for different street designs. Considerations will be made to address restrictions to on-street parking, minimum width needed for the Fire Department for access and setting up equipment, minimum width needed for providing services such as trash pickup and snow removal, impact of unnecessarily wide streets on the cost of developing new housing, and impact of wider streets on pedestrian and vehicular traffic safety and vehicular speed. Furthermore, the new R-8 zoning district, which affords flexibility for small lot creation that could result in narrow widths, could result in more driveway entrances on a street, which could have impacts on the availability of space for on-street parking. Rear alleys and overflow parking lots may be considered.

List D. Other Projects for Planning Commission awareness. (FYI)

7. *Environmental Action Plan (EAP)* – On October 23, 2018, following a presentation by the Council-appointed Environmental Performance Standards Advisory Committee (EPSAC), City Council directed staff to develop an action plan to address Buildings and Energy, Land Use and Green Space, Regional Food Systems, Sustainable Transportation, Waste Reduction and Recycling, and Water Resources. The EAP Phase 1 was adopted by City Council on January 14, 2020. Staff and EPSAC members have been working on phase 2 (establishing baselines) and will begin phase 3 (establishing targets) over the next year. More information: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/EAP>
8. *Small Area and Corridor Plans* – The 2018 Comprehensive Plan includes “Potential Small Area Plans” and “Gateway and Corridor Enhancement Area” maps that roughly identify the boundaries of neighborhoods, commercial, and mixed use areas, and

important local and regional travel routes through the City that could be prioritized specialized studies to address unique issues associated with each area.

9. *Public Alleys* – In March and April 2019, as part of discussions at Planning Commission and City Council meetings surrounding requests to close public alleys, Planning Commission expressed interest in evaluating public alleys (i.e. current use and future plans for how they might be used). The City Attorney’s Office has researched general legal issues on the topic regarding ownership, maintenance responsibilities, and liability. Staff discussions on this matter has been on hold due to other work priorities.