



City of Harrisonburg Environmental Performance Standards Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

October 29, 2025 5:00-7:00 p.m.

Public Works

Members in attendance: Laura Dent, City Council Representative; Andy Kohen, School Board Representative; Bill Howe (arrived 6:00pm); Dave Powell (virtual); Doug Hendren; Ferwerdin Barzanji; Joy Loving; Rob Alexander

Staff in attendance: Keith Thomas, Shayna Carter, Maya Waid

Others in attendance: Brian O'Dell, General Manager of HEC; Zach Nyce, Manager of Engineering HEC; Harsit Patel, PW Support Services Manager

Call to Order

Rob Alexander called the meeting to order.

Approval of Virtual Participation

Rob Alexander advised the Committee that David Powell requested to participate in the meeting virtually as allowed in the Bylaws and in accordance with § 2.2-3708.3 Appendix A of the Code of Virginia. David Powell noted an illness prevented him from physically attending tonight's EPSAC meeting. Rob Alexander called for a motion to allow for his participation. Joy Loving motioned to approve David Powell's virtual participation. Doug Hendren seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Per § 2.2-3708.3 Appendix A of the Code of Virginia, David Powell may make motions, vote, join in closed meetings, and otherwise participate fully as if he or she was physically present.

Review and Adopt Meeting Summary

Joy Loving moved to approve the July 30, 2025 EPSAC Meeting Summary. Andy Kohen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Carl Larsson addressed the Committee to express concerns about the proposed Link development project. He questioned what role the Committee has in environmental performance standards and how development projects are evaluated against the Environmental Action Plan (EAP). The Committee asked Carl Larsson to submit his comments by email to the Sustainability and Environmental Manager so they could be included in the next meeting.

The Committee then discussed EPSAC's role in evaluating potential development projects. Doug Hendren noted that during his time on the Committee, he was not sure the group had ever formally considered its role in development review. Laura Dent provided a brief overview of the process developers go through with the Planning Commission and City Council. Rob Alexander suggested that the Committee develop a request to the City Manager outlining how EPSAC could play a role in proposed development. He also proposed setting aside time at the January meeting to further discuss the topic.

Focus Area Updates

Keith Thomas directed the Committee's attention to an attachment in the agenda under Focus Area 2 that included responses to several questions raised at the previous meeting.

Keith Thomas then reviewed the Focus Area 4 target data document, noting that it summarized all data available to date and showed progress toward the 2025 targets. He asked what process the Committee wanted to use to evaluate targets for 2030 and beyond, as well as how to set targets that currently have “TBD” benchmarks. Keith Thomas briefly reviewed the process the Committee previously used to establish the 2025 targets. The Committee agreed that using the same format would be appropriate. Doug Hendren, Dave Powell, Rob Alexander, and Laura Dent all expressed interest in participating in the Focus Area 4 working group.

Tom Hartman provided an update on the Liberty Street project, noting that the 30 percent design phase had been completed. He also shared that a public meeting is planned to gather additional community input. The next step in the project will be to begin the right-of-way process.

Harsit Patel introduced himself to the Committee and gave an overview of the City’s recycling program. He noted that recycling tonnage has increased in recent years. The City currently operates a cardboard pickup service for businesses, and beginning in 2026, the service will expand to residential pickup through an online or call-in reservation system that uses route management technology to create the most efficient collection routes. Harsit Patel explained that this technology has helped reduce fuel use in sanitation collection and lower the City’s carbon footprint.

Rob Alexander asked whether reduced fuel usage would be reflected in the City’s greenhouse gas inventory. Keith Thomas responded that changes in fuel consumption would appear in the inventory, as fleet fuel usage is included in the data. Joy Loving asked whether the new cardboard collection process would affect users of the Recycling Center or the mobile recycling unit. Harsit Patel said he did not anticipate any impacts. Ferwerdin Barzanji asked why bulk items could not be collected using trash trucks. Harsit Patel explained that bulk items cause increased wear on sanitation compactors. Ferwerdin Barzanji then asked how staff would help residents learn to use the new system. Harsit Patel said staff have held several public events to assist residents to navigate the online system. He also noted that residents can always call in or come to our office for help. Andy Kohen asked whether the changes would affect staffing levels. Harsit Patel responded that there would be no staffing impacts. Tom Hartman added that schedules have been adjusted to accommodate the changes.

Community Goals Updates

Keith Thomas reported that staff are still waiting for Dr. McGinnis to complete the 2024 greenhouse gas inventory. Keith Thomas noted that Dr. McGinnis has had to change his workload to adjust to new timelines on several federal grants he is working on.

Updates from Sustainability & Environmental Manager

Keith Thomas provided an update on the Turner Pavilion solar project, noting that staff have completed the procurement process and selected AEC, the same contractor that installed the solar system at Bluestone Elementary. He explained that the project will include a 35.2 kW system, which is smaller than originally anticipated due to building code requirements. Keith Thomas added that AEC is currently conducting a structural assessment of the facility and that some additional repairs will be required to meet code. Doug Hendren asked for clarification on why the system size was reduced. Keith Thomas explained that staff received an initial set of designs that were reviewed by the Building Official, who provided comments that resulted in a smaller system. Brian O’Dell added that fire code setback requirements also contributed to the reduction. Keith Thomas further clarified that the initial design had been based on the residential building code, which was not appropriate for Turner Pavilion.

Bill Howe expressed interest in making the City's solar production data publicly available through a website or dashboard. Doug Hendren agreed, noting that public education about solar is part of the Committee's mission and that sharing solar data could support that goal.

Keith Thomas then reminded Committee members of expiring terms and to reapply if they were interested in continuing to serve.

Joy Loving asked about the Solarize numbers in the updates document and why they are so low. Brian O'Dell cautioned the Committee against using Solarize participation rates as a proxy for overall solar adoption in the City, noting that HEC had 24 new solar connections this year.

Harrisonburg Community Town Hall Updates

Rob Alexander reviewed the draft plan for the proposed event. Dave Powell shared that he has begun reaching out to several industrial and large energy users in the City to describe the event and gauge interest. He reported that approximately 25 organizations have expressed some level of interest in attending.

Rob Alexander asked the Committee for input on the best time of year to hold the event. Dave Powell noted that a summer timeframe would not be ideal. Rob Alexander then conducted a straw poll on holding the event in the spring or fall. The Committee was split between the two options, so Rob Alexander suggested that the subcommittee planning the event further discuss and refine the timeline.

Rob Alexander also noted that Keith Thomas, Dave Powell, and he would meet soon to organize and prepare ahead of the next subgroup meeting.

Other Committee Topics

Laura Dent announced that she would be attending the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 30) which will take place in November in Belém, Brazil. She advised she would give an update on the conference at the January meeting.

Next Meeting Dates

2026 Dates

- January 28, 2026
- April 29, 2026
- July 29, 2026
- October 28, 2026