



# City of Harrisonburg

409 S. Main Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

## Meeting Minutes - Draft City Council

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Tuesday, May 24, 2022

7:00 PM

Council Chambers

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### 1. Roll Call

**Present:** 4 - Mayor Deanna R. Reed, Vice Mayor Sal Romero, Council Member Christopher B. Jones and Council Member Laura Dent

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member George Hirschmann

**Also Present:** 5 - Deputy City Manager Ande Banks, City Attorney Chris Brown, City Clerk Pam Ulmer, Police Chief Kelley Warner and Mayor Matthew Tobia

### 2. Invocation

Mayor Reed offered invocation

Mayor Reed asked everyone to join in a moment of silence for the families of the children and teacher who lost their lives at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas

### 3. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Reed led the Pledge of Allegiance

### 4. Special Recognition

#### 4.a. 2022 Service Learning Program presentation

Ande Banks, Interim City Manager, stated there has been a 2-year hiatus of the Service Learning Program due to the pandemic, he is excited to bring it back to Council this year and he reviewed what the program entailed.

Wynona Janer, Morgan Stum, Angie Ventura-Hernandez, and Alex Versen presented a project to increase tree canopy across the city. They stated they worked with the Public Works Department in determining the problem and a solution to increase the number of trees in the city to include both private property and K-12 school campuses. They reviewed the Harrisonburg Conservation Assistance Program (HCAP), the Planting Plan Form application process, recent HCAP promotions, the benefits of school tree campuses, the support in the schools, actions taken in other localities, and funding needs.

Council Member Dent she appreciates the initiative to put trees on private properties. Mayor Reed asked why the Tree Campuses are only at three schools. The students stated they have only reached out to the Harrisonburg High School and middle

schools, but in the future they are hoping to reach out to the elementary schools to see who is willing to participate and support. Vice Mayor Romero stated he is so proud of the students and they are the product of the work of many teachers. He asked the group if they looked into the maintenance and the cost analysis of having trees. The students stated they haven't but through the HCAP program there is a service provided to check on the trees to make sure they are being taken care of. Council Member Jones stated he thoroughly supports the program and likes the idea and appreciates that it is not just a school project, it will help with business and residential development. He stated he would like to see this program implemented.

Sophia Alvarez Castro, Abby Fornandel, Laura Gonzalez Dutor, and Olivia King, presented a project called Operation Prom Downtown that they hope will build connections between high school students and local downtown businesses. The students reviewed the processes taken to create this project and the results of the project. which included the following:

- Communication with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance and downtown businesses
- The businesses that chose to participate with specials or discounts
- Create a photo station, the materials needed and the assembling process
- Create a website for student access
- Marketing and advertising

They shared photographs of the event, and thanked Jennifer Bayes with HDR and the businesses downtown that helped collaborate in this event.

Council Member Jones stated this was a great presentation, it is great to see high school students downtown and taking advantage of local family businesses. Mayor Reed stated she hopes this project continues for future proms. Vice Mayor Romero stated it seems as if this was a well participated event, and he hopes the students will continue to provide feedback as we would like to see more young people / high school students downtown more regularly. The students stated they hope to make this an annual event and hopes it intrigues students now to go downtown more regularly.

Arabella Bunn, Precious Castillo, Kayla Keomahavong, and Glenn Vance presented a report on accessibility in hotels in the city to lay the groundwork for the Harrisonburg Tourism and Visitor Services guide to accessible accommodates on their website. The students reviewed the purpose of the project, why the information is important, the steps they took to find the information needed, the hotels that participated in obtaining the data, what the students observed during their research and the results. The students stated they created a spreadsheet with the data that can be used by Tourism to place on their website and for future Tourism guides that will help promote Harrisonburg as a friendly city to all.

Mayor Reed asked the students if they were surprised at anything they discovered.

The students stated that many hotels don't advertise any special accommodations. Council Member Jones stated diversity, equity and inclusion is an important topic, and many times we forget that people with varying physical and mental abilities are a big part of the sensitivities and accommodations we need to make when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion. He stated he will share this information with the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce board members, as this is one of the conversations they have with the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services. Vice Mayor Romero stated this was a great presentation. He asked if there were things the students saw that were not only mandated but additional services the hotels had to better meet the needs of those with disabilities. The students stated there was one hotel that had put a lot more thought into how the accessible rooms are arranged.

Tam Ha, Phillip Lockey, Desirae Sandridge, and Micah Wickline presented a project to improve the Harrisonburg Fire Department's (HFD) capability to communicate with the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Community. They stated the project included the following:

- Helped HFD with its 1st "Sensory-Friendly Open-House"
- Created "Sensory Kits" for firefighters
- Created a "Storyboard" for emergency interactions
- Helped with creating a training program for HFD on these tools
- Completed "ride-a-longs" with HFD to learn about their responsibilities.
- Met with several City School Behavioral Health Specialists to learn about Autism.
- Online research to see what sensory tools are effective.
- Had School Behavioral Health Specialist look at the Sensory Kits for more advice.

They stated that ASD is a disorder not a disease and approximately 2,166 Harrisonburg residents are Autistic. They reviewed the challenges for the HFD when communicating with the Autism community and presented one of the sensory bags and described the uses of the contents.

Mayor Reed asked the students how many sensory bags were made and what the cost was. The students stated they made nine bags to be placed on the fire apparatuses and the approximate cost was less than \$400. Council Member Dent asked how the firefighters responded to these bags and the training. Chief Tobia, fire chief, stated it was tremendously well received and the students did an amazing job as well as Travis Karicofe, EMS Officer, HFD, who was their advisor. Vice Mayor Romero stated when working with a special population like children with Autism the items in the sensory bags are perfect. Council Member Jones stated this project is absolutely phenomenal and feels this could be useful in our Police patrol cars as well. He stated he appreciates how the students presented in such affirming language.

Jay Hook, Honors/Service Learning Government, Harrisonburg High School stated he was very proud of the group of students and recognized how hard they worked. Mr. Hook thanked Council for their time.

**4.b.** Presentation on the United Way ALICE in Focus data

Jo Benjamin, director of Community Impact, United Way of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, presented inFocus reports related to the Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) population of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County and the effects on children. She stated that approximately 6,301 households in Harrisonburg are within the ALICE threshold and 14,371 children in the city and county are below the ALICE threshold. She reviewed the hardships disproportionate impact, the age ranges of children impacted, how over 84% of the children impacted live in households with limited English spoken in the home, the majority live in rental housing and are rent-burdened, and the COVID-19 impact on the ALICE population.

She stated there are many organizations and partnerships in the area that are supporting the ALICE populations, she provided the website in which all the data is available, and she thanked City Council for the community contributions to many of those organizations.

Mayor Reed asked what the biggest ask from the United Way is. Ms. Benjamin stated housing, it is very difficult to find somewhere to live that they can afford, and the deposits are almost impossible to afford. Council Member Dent stated if ALICE was self-defining, perhaps more awareness would be had and those in that population will be encouraged to obtain the services provided. Council Member Jones stated classism is such a big problem in our country it could warp people's perception and provided an example. Vice Mayor Romero stated according to the data if you are in a limited English proficient household the chances of being in the ALICE population is greater and asked if that is due to the barrier in the language or the lack of knowing where to go for help due to lack of access. Ms. Benjamin stated the language access is a barrier for not only employment but to services as well. She stated United Way and the community, organizations and partnerships are working on how to get better access for all.

**5. Consent Agenda (any item placed on the consent agenda shall be removed and taken up as a separate matter, if so requested by any member of Council, otherwise all items will be voted on with one (1) motion)**

A motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Dent, to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:

Yes: 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

**5.a.** Minutes from the May 10, 2022 City Council Work Session

**These minutes were approved on the consent agenda.**

**5.b.** Minutes from the May 10, 2022 City Council meeting

**These minutes were approved on the consent agenda.**

**5.c.** Consider enacting an ordinance increasing the salary of each City Council member to \$18,000 per year and the Mayor to \$20,000, Section 2-4-2 of the Code of Ordinances, City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

**The ordinance was approved on second reading.**

**5.d.** Consider a request to close a public alley located between East Fairview Avenue and Port Republic Road.

**This request was approved on second reading**

## **6. Public Hearings**

**6.a.** Public hearing regarding the real estate tax rate for Fiscal Year 2022-2023 to be set at \$0.93 per \$100 of assessed value

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a state required public hearing for an increase of the real estate taxes. He stated the current real estate tax rate is \$0.90 per \$100 of assessed value and is proposed to increase to \$0.93 per \$100 of assessed value.

At 8:29 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the regular session and called the first public hearing to order. A notice appeared in the Daily News-Record on Saturday, April 23, 2022.

Randy Kline, 480 Hartman Drive, stated he feels that a three cent increase along with current inflation and the possibility of a full blow recession will hit the ALICE population the hardest.

At 8:30 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the public hearing and the regular session reconvened.

Vice Mayor Romero stated he has heard many concerns regarding this increase and future increases, he originally asked if ARPA funds could be used to offset, but was given information as to what ARPA funds could and could not be used for, he is aware the second high school needs to be built, but wants to be known on record, that he

sought after of other avenues of funding for the school other than real estate tax increases. Mayor Reed agreed, she stated Council and staff really looked hard into other options, and this was not viewed lightly. Council Member Jones stated he realizes it will hit the ALICE population the most, but there is a high demand for city services as well as building a new high school, such as the water infrastructure, the highway projects, Parks and Recreation services, public safety services, the list goes on. He stated if we don't raise the taxes to build the new high school then services would need to be pulled back, and at what point do we begin to make the city less attractive, hindering economic development and employment. These things all need to be kept in mind when working on a budget, offering community contributions etc. Further discussion took place regarding the need to raise taxes.

**A motion was made by Council Member Dent seconded by Vice Mayor Romero, to establish the Real Estate Tax for Fiscal Year 22/23 to be set at \$0.93 per \$100 of assessed value as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:**

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

**6.b.** Consider a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$36.4 million

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$36.4M for Public Works projects and for Harrisonburg City Public Schools Rocktown High School.

At 8:42 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the regular session and called the second public hearing to order. A notice appeared in the Daily News-Record on Tuesday, May 17, 2022.

There being no one desiring to be heard, Mayor Reed closed the public hearing at 8:43 p.m., and the regular session reconvened.

**A motion was made by Council Member Jones seconded by Council Member Dent, to approve the supplemental appropriation as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:**

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

**6.c.** Amendment to the 2021 CDBG Action Plan

Kristin McCombe, coordinator of the Community Development Block Grant, presented a proposed public art project at the North Liberty Street gateway (corner of N. Main and Liberty Street). She stated this project will involve the collaboration of

several community organizations and city departments. She stated the Arts Council of the Valley has agreed to donate time and expertise; Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) has committed \$20,000 in funding towards the art installation; Public Works Department will provide time, staff resources and \$50,000 for site improvements; and CDBG will provide staff resources and \$50,000 from excess administration funding will give time and staff resources.

Jenny Burden, executive director of Arts Council of the Valley, stated doing an art piece at this particular location has been on everyone's radar for a while. She stated she is excited to be a part of this project.

Andrea Dono, executive director of HDR, reviewed parallels between this project and the Downtown 2040 Master Plan, the public input desire for this type of art, and stated she hopes Council can support his request.

Ms. McCombe provided the anticipated timeline with an estimated completion date of Summer 2023 which includes a public input period.

She presented an amendment to the 2020 Action Plan to reallocate CDBG funding from Administration to the specific project and the amendment schedule beginning with a 30-day public hearing, public comment period this evening.

At 8:54 p.m., Mayor Reed closed the regular session and called the third public hearing to order. A notice appeared in the Daily News-Record on Tuesday, May 17, 2022, and Monday, May 2, 2022.

There being no one desiring to be heard, Mayor Reed closed the public hearing at 8:54 p.m., and the regular session reconvened.

Council Member Jones stated he and staff are so elated about this project, it is great to see something come to fruition with the multiple collaborations, affordability, and public input.

Mayor Reed wanted to make sure that the public as well as the organizations on the north end of the city are a part of the process. She referred to art in other localities and the benefits to the city art could create.

Vice Mayor Romero stated that people are becoming excited about purchasing homes in that side of town because of the growth in that area.

Council Member Dent stated she is excited the growth in public art as a sign of a vibrant and sophisticated city.

No Action Required

**This Public Hearing - No Action was received and filed.**

## 7. Regular Items

- 7.a. Consider Approval of the 2022-2026 CDBG Consolidated Plan, the 2022 Action Plan, and the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice

Kristin McCombe, coordinator of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), stated the allocations for the CDBG funds from HUD have been finalized, she reviewed the schedule, presented the final allocations for the 2022-23 CDBG reflecting small adjustments from what Council had seen in April 2022, and asked Council to approve the allocations for the 2022-26 Consolidated Plan, the 2022-23 Annual Action Plan and the analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.

**A motion was made by Council Member Jones seconded by Council Member Dent, to approve the request as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:**

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

- 7.b. Consider Approval of Amendment to the 2020 Action Plan

Kristin McCombe, coordinator of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), stated the amendment to the CDBG 2020 Action Plan is to transfer \$90,000 from the 2020 CDBG Administration to the CDBG Project 2019 Parks and Recreation Park Accessibility Improvements in Morrison Park and Hillandale Park. She stated construction costs have increased and the additional funding is needed to complete these projects. She stated the 30-day comment period closed on May 13, 2022, and no additional comments were received.

Council Member Dent stated this emphasized the need of accessibility as the Service Learning students presented earlier.

**A motion was made by Council Member Jones seconded by Council Member Dent, to approve the amendment as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:**

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

- 7.c. Consider adopting the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 budget and approving the Appropriation Ordinance

Ande Banks, interim city manager, requested Council's approval of the proposed FY 2022-23 Budget, and noted it reflects the changes to the final allocations for Community Contributions and the reduction of personal property taxes and waiving



decal fee as per Council's direction.

Council Member Jones asked if Mr. Parks, director of Communications, can do a press release on the amendments. Council Member Dent agreed and stated especially since this will provide some tax relief to residents.

Vice Mayor Romero asked if there is any indication as to when the General Assembly will pass the state budget. Mr. Banks stated the General Assembly will be reconvening on June 1, 2022, and staff has ideas as to what projects can be pushed back if need be based on the state budget.

Council Member Dent asked if the adjustment to the personal property taxes change the amounts in the budget in any appreciable way. Mr. Propst, director of Finance, stated the budget was built based on the taxes they needed, not actually what could be collected, and it was a wash on the revenue side.

Mayor Reed stated she incorporates by reference her disclosure from the last meeting regarding to the budget.

Vice Mayor Romero stated he incorporates by reference her disclosure from the last meeting regarding to the budget.

**A motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Dent, to adopt and approve the FY 22-23 Budget and approve the Appropriation Ordinance as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:**

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

## 8. Reallocations

- 8.a.** Consider a reallocation of funds within the General Capital Projects Fund in the amount of \$200,052.05 for the North Main Street Sidewalks project.

Larry Propst, director of Finance, presented a reallocation request related to the supplemental appropriation approved earlier, for North Main Street sidewalks in the amount of \$200,000.

**A motion was made by Council Member Jones, seconded by Council Member Dent, to approve the reallocation as presented. The motion carried with a recorded vote as follows:**

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

## 9. Other Matters

### 9.a. Comments from the public, limited to five minutes, on matters not on the regular agenda. (Name and address are required)

James “Bucky” Berry, spoke on Governor Younkin’s request to provide law enforcement officers with a 20% salary increase, the lack of officers in the police academy and in the HPD, the cost of food, insurance, and gas, pay increase needed for HPD.

### 9.b. City Council and Staff

Council Member Jones stated he really appreciated staff for this meeting, it was stacked with all the things he really cares about and he is really proud of the direction the city is heading towards. He stated he attended the HDR’s Downtown Dinner Party and it was good to see people out and moving beyond COVID-19. He enjoyed the youth with the Service Learning Program bring ideas that can actually be used in the city.

Council Member Dent seconded Council Member Jones, she is excited to see the move towards public art and she was really inspired by the Service Learning Program coming up with ideas that solve real issues and needs in the city. She stated she attended virtually a conference in Sweden on a global consortium of local governments working for climate mitigation. She reviewed some of the class titles and she stated one of the things she really took from this conference was the importance of acting locally such as our discussions with the Northeast Neighborhood on energy efficiency and renewable energy approaches.

Vice Mayor Romero stated it is always exciting to see high school students come before Council and present, seeing the fruits of their efforts and the work of so many dedicated educators, community members, etc. He stated he is proud to have a space where they feel comfortable and a way to contribute to making this a better city.

Mayor Reed stated the students did a great job and it was on things that could actually be implemented now and make significant impacts on the city and its residents. She wished Council Member Dent a happy birthday. She stated she attended the HDR Downtown Dinner Party as well, it was her first time going and it was a great event.

Ande Banks, interim city manager, reminded the community that the ribbon cutting ceremony will be held on May 25, 2022, at 1:00 pm at Hillandale Park to open the Friendly City Trail.

## 10. Boards and Commissions

### 10.a. Community Policy and Management Team

Ande Banks, interim city manager, stated Ms. Conway currently serves on the board

along with Kira Newman, as parent representatives. He stated if Council desires another position be created he would be happy to check with the board to see if that is possible.

A motion was made by Council Member Dent, seconded by Vice Mayor Romero, to reappoint Jessica Conway, to the Community Policy and Management Team. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

**11. Closed Session**

**11.a.** Closed Session as authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711(A), under:

Subsection 3 for a discussion of the disposition of publicly held real estate;

At 9:24 p.m., a motion was made by Vice Mayor Romero, seconded by Council Member Dent, to enter into closed session as authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711(A), under: Subsection 3 for a discussion of the disposition of publicly held real estate and for the acquisition of real estate for a public purpose. The motion carried with a recorded roll call vote taken as follows:

**Yes:** 4 - Mayor Reed, Vice Mayor Romero, Council Member Jones and Council Member Dent

**No:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Council Member Hirschmann

**12. Adjournment**

At 10:15 p.m., the closed session ended and the regular session reconvened. City Attorney Brown read the following statement, which was agreed to with a unanimous recorded vote of Council: I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under Chapter 37 of Title 2.2 of the Code, of Virginia, 1950, as amended, and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered in the closed meeting by the City Council.

At 10:15 p.m., there being no further business and on motion adopted, the meeting was adjourned.

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR