

DOWNTOWN PARK
HARRISONBURG, VA
BUSINESS PLAN WORKING DRAFT

January 12, 2023

Build Our Park Mission Statement

Work with private and public partners to create a significant urban park in our vibrant downtown for the economic benefit and quality of life enhancement of our downtown district and the larger community.

Description of Downtown Park

Build Our Park is a private nonprofit corporation that has been collaborating 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 eventually maintained by the City, with the prospect of a private conservatory (working name “Friends of the Park”). The Park will sit on land owned by the City.

The proposed footprint of the park utilizes city-owned property starting to the south of Warren Street, including the gravel lot, and extending north to Bruce Street. The west border is Liberty Street and the Harrisonburg Electric Commission (“HEC”) property line, and the east border is the alley and pocket park behind the Municipal Building. These boundaries are consistent with the recommendations of the Urban Land Institute and the Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 master plan.

Optional for inclusion in the park is the lawn behind the Smith House and The Community Foundation building, along with a sculpture garden to be created in collaboration with the Arts Council of the Valley. A spur to the park from the future 10.5 mile greenway, extending from Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community to the Sentara RMH Wellness Center and passing through downtown, could provide a desirable destination point, as has been done in other communities with greenways and urban parks.

The park is anticipated to be built in phases as funding is available. **Phase 1** will be the grassy lot to the south of Turner Pavilion to Warren Street, with the inclusion of the gravel lot to the south of Warren. Amenities for Phase 1 could include the following:

- Movable or permanent small stage for performances
- Pergolas surrounding the perimeter providing shade for small gatherings; benches and picnic tables
- Landscape beds featuring native plants
- Tiered sitting area facing Turner Pavilion

- Nature-based children's play area, including rocks and logs for climbing
- Water feature or fountain near the existing rain garden
- Walking/running path around the perimeter
- Solar panels added to the roof of Turner Pavilion

Restrooms will be located within the existing facilities in the basement at the rear of the former Municipal Building. Temporary portable toilets will be brought in for special events. A plan for storage involves a portable container decorated with art that reflects the community and its history.

In addition, games and amenities for adults are envisioned, as is the case in other urban parks. Depending on space and funding, examples include corn hole, shuffle board, horseshoes, and a public piano.

The vision for **Phase 2** focuses on the area north of Turner Pavilion. Acknowledging the need for the farmers' market to have vehicular access, the paved parking area to the south and one two-lane section to the north will be maintained.

The remaining area will be green and open space that will be available for festivals, performances, and other activities. There will be a designated space for a mobile stage.

The section to the east will be a wide pedestrian path connecting to the sidewalk leading along Blacks Run to Court Square, as recommended in the Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 study. The northern portion will be closed to traffic starting at the Smith House and Virginia Quilt Museum. Vehicular access will remain on the southern section, with Warren Street remaining open.

An optional project would be an art garden in the lawns behind the Smith House and The Community Foundation, to be developed in collaboration with the Arts Council of the Valley. This idea ties in existing art displays and would enhance public art in the whole area.

A possible **Phase 3** involves daylighting Blacks Run in collaboration with the HEC. This concept has been widely endorsed by the public but would involve significant costs and issues of property ownership and is not part of this proposal.

The Team

The current Build Our Park board of directors includes people with a variety of skill sets, and the board is actively recruiting additional talent as this project moves forward. The board roster is:

Mary Ann Alger (treasurer), community volunteer/JMU

Letitia Bates, Arts Council of the Valley

Erin Bishop (vice president), Alpine Loop Gran Fondo

Tim Brady, Rocktown Beer and Music Festival

Eddie Bumbaugh (president), Hotel Madison

Jared Burden, GreeneHurlocker PLC

Bill Culbreth, Virginia Workers' Compensation attorney

Andrea Dono, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

Lee Foerster, City of Harrisonburg (retired)

Barry Kelley, Matchbox Realty

Zach Koops, KlineMay Realty

Trevor Parmer, LD&B Insurance

Andy Perrine, JMU

Arushi Sachan, Eastern Mennonite University

Erin Smith (secretary), JMU

Henry Way, JMU

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

The Build Our Park board has and will continue to work closely with City officials. Build Our Park has raised over \$300,000 of private money thus far; roles and responsibilities of this public/private partnership will be clearly defined prior to a larger, more public fundraising phase that will include naming opportunities.

The board has committees that include marketing/promotion, fundraising, construction oversight, and finance/treasury.

The Park's design and amenities will be developed jointly with City staff, particularly the Department of Parks and Recreation. There will be a time for public input; it has been years since the Park board conducted public meetings, and updated input and buy-in are essential. The design will also factor in public safety and feasibility. City Council will issue the final approval.

Project oversight will be provided by two project managers, one each from the Park board and the City. A similar structure was in place when Turner Pavilion was built. A detailed project oversight plan is in development.

The City will own and maintain the Park. The Build Our Park board will be replaced by a nonprofit park conservancy similar to other communities. A detailed plan for the conservancy will be in place prior to construction.

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 space the community should have.

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 have visited and studied other urban parks around the country and even internationally. Other successful urban parks include musical performances; yoga and dance classes; public art; arts and crafts workshops; movie nights; discussion circles; health and nature workshops; and multicultural programming.

With this in mind, the Park board developed the following guiding principles pursuant to community input: maximize green space; focus on family-friendly features; accommodate activities that appeal to a broad range of interests; preserve and expand and the farmers’ market; create a new civic plaza space for community programming and events; develop linkages to contiguous spaces; emphasize sustainability and adaptability over time; create a catalyst for downtown development; involve as many community members as possible in the planning and funding process.

Construction Costs and RFP Process

These details are currently in subcommittee discussion and development with City representatives pending approval from City Council to mark the proposed park footprint. Variables include phasing, timing, and input.

Fundraising, Timeline, and Cash Flow

The construction process will be subject to a detailed timeline co-managed by the City and the Park board.

The Build Our Park board of directors has formed a fundraising committee co-chaired by Barry Kelley and Becky Messerley. Currently the Park's account at The Community Foundation has a balance of \$285,000. The plan is to raise all funds for each phase prior to the start of construction of each phase. Once City Council authorizes the Park footprint, the Park board will launch the active phase of its fundraising.

Private fundraising will include large and small gifts from corporations and individuals along with event-based fundraising and possibly grants. Some gifts will take the form of multi-year pledges, the timing of which will be included in cash flow projections. There will be naming opportunities for donors. The Park board will also be seeking in-kind donations.