

Policy for Naming City Spaces and Facilities

Purpose

This policy is to ensure that given names to city spaces and facilities are consistent with the values and characters of the community. City Council is committed to approaching the naming or renaming of city spaces and facilities with care, forethought, and deliberation, and in a manner that engages with and solicits input from the community.

For the purposes of this policy, “city spaces and facilities” refers to any property under the city’s ownership or control, including buildings, structures, streets, open spaces, public parks, natural areas, environmental habitats, and land.

Procedures

New City Spaces and Facilities

New city spaces and facilities should be referred to in City communications by an address designation or generic placeholder name until City Council adopts a resolution selecting a name. City Council will strive to select a name for new city spaces and facilities prior to their public use.

At an appropriate point in the development process of any forthcoming city space or facility, the City Manager will request City Council provide guidance on the most appropriate method of soliciting public input on the name for such city space and facility. At a minimum, City Council will hold at least one public hearing on the naming of any new city space or facility prior to adopting a resolution selecting a name.

Renaming Existing Facilities

While acknowledging that the existing names of city spaces and facilities can produce strong emotional attachments, City Council also recognizes that some existing names may not reflect the community and its commitment to proactively embracing and uplifting marginalized groups.

To that end, City Council directs the City Manager to place on its agenda any public requests to rename existing city spaces and facilities upon receipt of an application that meets the requirements of this policy. Alternatively, any two members of City Council may request discussion of the name of an existing city space or facility be placed on the agenda.

When considering the appropriateness of an existing name, City Council will give due consideration to any listings on state or national registries of historic places.

Once City Council has considered the matter of the name of an existing city space or facility, City Council will, either at the first meeting during which it is on the agenda or at any meeting thereafter, determine if further consideration is warranted.

If City Council determines further consideration is warranted, City Council will provide guidance to the City Manager on the most appropriate method of soliciting public input on the existing name of such city space or facility.

- At a minimum, City Council will hold at least one public hearing on the matter prior to adopting a resolution to replace the existing name of a city space or facility.
- Whenever the relevant city space or facility is a street, the City Manager or a designee will provide written notice of the opportunity to provide public input on the name to all owners and residents of properties addressed off such street.

Criteria

When selecting a name for a city space or facility, City Council will give due consideration to the following factors:

1. Geographic locations, natural features, associated places of historical or cultural significance, and features particularly identified with the land or structure of a city space or facility are all appropriate considerations for names of city spaces and facilities.
2. Naming city spaces and facilities after individuals who are still living or who have been deceased less than three years should be avoided.
3. City spaces and facilities ordinarily should be named after individuals only if there is a longstanding affiliation with Harrisonburg and if the individual:
 - a. Enhanced the quality of life or wellbeing of Harrisonburg residents,
 - b. Contributed to the preservation of Harrisonburg's history and culture,
 - c. Made exemplary or meritorious contributions to Harrisonburg or its residents, or
 - d. Contributed to the acquisition, development, or conveyance of land, buildings, structures, or other amenities for the community.
4. Names that could be construed as advertising a particular business should be avoided.
5. Names that could be considered discriminatory or derogatory from the point of view of race, sex, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, or social group will be avoided.
6. In order to minimize confusion, names that are similar to existing city spaces and facilities should be avoided. Potential names will be reviewed by Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Communications Center for comment on potential confusing with existing street names.

Donations

City Council welcomes the donation of land and financial resources toward the creation of new city spaces and facilities. Generally, City Council considers it appropriate to honor donors through plaques. On a case by case basis, City Council will consider naming portions of a city space or facility after a substantial donor.

From time to time, City Council will accept the donation of public art or monuments. City Council reserves the right to relocate or remove any donation from public space. Prior to removal of a donated item, the city will make every reasonable effort to relocate the donation to another location, if appropriate, or return the item to the donor.

Renaming Applications

Requirements

1. The application must be sponsored by a resident of the City of Harrisonburg, Virginia.
2. The application must identify the city space or facility to be renamed.
3. The application should identify a proposed new name; however, City Council reserves the right to consider other potential names throughout the process.
4. The application must be accompanied by a petition containing the name, address, and signature of at least 100 residents of the City of Harrisonburg. Alternatively, if the application is to rename a street, the application may instead contain the signatures of at least 51% of the residents or owners of properties addressed off that street.
5. The application must include a narrative explaining the rationale for the request, including any concerns with the existing name or the merits of any proposed new name, as applicable.

Processing

1. Applications should be submitted to the City Manager's Office.
2. The City Manager or other relevant city staff will review the application and determine if it is consistent with this policy. Consistent applications will be forwarded with a staff report for City Council review and considerations.
3. Applications determined by the City Manager to be incomplete or inconsistent with this policy will be returned to the applicant with a written explanation. The application may resubmit an amended application with new or additional information based on the City Manager's explanation at any time.