



City of Harrisonburg

409 S. Main Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Meeting Minutes - Draft City Council

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

3:00 PM

The Lucy F. Simms Center

Worksession

1. Roll Call

At 3:10 pm Vice Mayor Romero called the meeting back in session. All Council Members were present except for Mayor Reed. Others present were Eric Campbell, city manager, Chris Brown, city attorney, Pamela Ulmer, city clerk, Ande Banks, deputy city manager, Amy Snider, assistant to the city manager, Wesley Russ, assistant city attorney, Michael Parks, director of Communications, and Adam Fletcher, director of Community Development.

Present: 4 - Vice Mayor Sal Romero, Council Member Christopher B. Jones, Council Member George Hirschmann and Council Member Laura Dent

Absent: 1 - Mayor Deanna R. Reed

Also Present: 3 - City Manager Eric Campbell, City Attorney Chris Brown and City Clerk Pam Ulmer

2. Session Overview

3. Panel Presentations

Ms. Simms and Mr. Friedman introduced the Panel presenting virtually: Vaughn Poller, Neighborhood Development Administrator for James City County; Sarah Coyle, Housing Coordinator, Office of Housing for Loudon County, and Steve Lawson, president of Lawson Companies.

Mr. Poller reviewed the strategies they used for affordable housing.

Ms. Coyle reviewed the five objectives, strategies, and initiatives.

Mr. Lawson spoke on things developers look for, how his company is focused on affordable housing and noted the demand is incredible. He stated Harrisonburg is being pro-active in obtaining the housing study, which is an excellent resource for the city to move forward.

Mayor Reed arrived at 4:02 PM

Questions the Council asked the panel:

Council Member Jones: How soon could this happen in Harrisonburg. Mr. Lawson stated it could happen fairly quickly if the land is available, proper zoning is finalized and outreach to the right developers.

Council Member Dent: asked about zoning barriers. Mr. Lawson stated the city should make more zoning changes to be by-right and clear instructions to developers as to what needs to be done.

Recess

At 4:20 p.m., Mayor Reed called the meeting into recess.

At 4:30 p.m., Mayor Reed called the meeting back into session.

4. Review of Harrisonburg's Housing Needs and Gaps

Ms. Simms and Mr. Friedman reviewed how to interpret the housing mismatch in the city, common rents and income levels served by affordable housing programs, and noted the lowest income group has the smallest housing inventory available and affordable to them. They noted the city's housing sales market is very strong and the city's rental market is tight with only 2-3.5% rental vacancy. They reviewed the ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) income thresholds in the city and the cost burden amongst renter households. They reviewed the recommendations from the Housing Study, the housing spectrum based on AMI (average median income), and programs to help: Housing Trust Funds, Fee Waiver Programs, and Tax Abatement Programs.

Vice Mayor Romero stated he feels the needs in the city were not accurately collected or reflected in the Housing Study.

5. Review Harrisonburg's Housing Study Recommendations

Ms. Simms and Mr. Friedman reviewed the pros and cons of student housing. They reviewed a case study of Virginia Beach and noted they used almost every tool available to make affordable housing projects happen, such as:

- Financing tools and providing vouchers:
 - Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Funded projects, CDBG Funds, Voucher commitments;
- Infrastructure and land ownership tools:
 - Building significant infrastructure, cost sharing on infrastructure, reducing parking requirements, selling public land, and identifying land/connecting sellers to developers
- Support of proposals to funders/financers; and designation of revitalization areas:
 - Council Resolutions, City Manager Letters, zoning Letters and

designation of Revitalization Zones

- Innovative partnerships
- Building it ourselves!

They noted that NIMBY, (an acronym for "Not in My Backyard," describes the phenomenon in which residents of a neighborhood designate a new development (e.g., shelter, affordable housing, group home) or change in occupancy of an existing development as inappropriate or unwanted for their local area), seems to be the most widespread and challenging hurdles that face affordable housing developers. They reviewed how to predict and respond to NIMBYism.

Ms. Simms and Mr. Friedman spoke on tax incentives, housing inventory and needs for the city.

Discussion took place regarding what AMI to focus on for housing needs.

Recess

At 6:05 p.m., Mayor Reed called the meeting into recess.

At 6:11 p.m., Mayor Reed called the meeting back into session.

6. Setting Priorities and Goals

Ms. Simms and Mr. Friedman suggested the city's goal should be affordable housing for the lower income residents.

Key points discussed:

- The city is not the landlord
- Non-profits and other organizations are the doers
- City is partially financially involved

Ms. Simms and Mr. Friedman asked what the priorities of action of the Housing Study would be for Council. City Council's response was as follows:

- Hire a Housing Coordinator
- Incorporate new and updated provisions in the current zoning ordinance update that will facilitate the implementation of the recommendations made in the study
- Enact waiver of certain fees for affordable housing
- Provide a 10-year tax abatement for new affordable multifamily projects consisting of more than four units and the adaptive re-use or preservation of formerly vacant or non-residential structures into affordable residential uses for non-student households
- Identify city-owned assets suitable for affordable and/or mixed-income residential development and issue Requests for Proposals for development.

7. Adjournment

At 6:57 p.m., there being no further business and on motion adopted, the work session was adjourned.

CITY CLERK

MAYOR