



# City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

## Department of Planning & Community Development

409 South Main Street  
Harrisonburg, Virginia 22801  
(540) 432-7700 / FAX (540) 432-7777  
[www.harrisonburgva.gov/community-development](http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/community-development)

Building Inspections

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March 4, 2019

### **TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

**SUBJECT:** Public Hearing to consider the proposed Capital Improvement Program, for fiscal years 2019-2020 through fiscal years 2023-2024.

### **EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON: February 13, 2019**

Chair Way stated that the first order of business was to consider recommendation of the FY 2019-2020 through 2023-2024 Capital Improvement Program to City Council.

Mr. Fletcher said that the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a multi-year presentation of planned capital projects of \$50,000 or greater with an appropriate financing plan to fund the projects. The CIP is prepared annually to facilitate planning and the setting of priorities among capital improvement needs over a subsequent five-year period. The CIP is designed to identify projects for all City departments, as well as for Harrisonburg City Public Schools, for which funding has already been committed or is being sought for within the five-year planning period.

Planning Commission's objective is to review and evaluate the CIP and, once the document is in an acceptable format, recommend the document for approval to City Council. Remember that the CIP is not a budget and inclusion of projects in the document does not guarantee that such projects will be funded by the City or any external sources in the year presented or at the level proposed. The actual commitment of funds by the City for any capital item comes with the approval of the annual budget for each fiscal year. However, the CIP serves as an important planning tool for formulating the capital portion of the annual budget.

As can be observed by reviewing previous CIP documents, the CIP is not a static plan. It is part of annual planning and programming, where after each passing year, another year is added to the planning period to maintain the five-year forecast. Each year costs, needs, and revenue sources are reevaluated.

The proposed CIP was provided to Planning Commission at the January 9th regular meeting so that they could begin reviewing the document in preparation of the review at the February regular meeting. The Commission had almost three weeks to review the document and to submit comments and questions to staff so that responses could be collected and provided to Planning Commission in the monthly packet. The questions received, and their respective answers, are as follows:

Questions put forward by Commissioner Finks via email on January 29, 2019

City Manager Related Project

Page 17: Project MGR4

QUESTION: With the recent revelation of the history of the Harrison House, what changes are being considered to the original plan? Is there any way that major changes to 181 S. Main Street can be avoided?

RESPONSE: It is too early to identify how the project scope will change because of the first phase of research and the conclusions that were reached. The project team is considering the scope and discussions continue between the different stakeholders including the Margaret Grattan Weaver Foundation, City, Asbury United Methodist Church, and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society.

Also, just to be clear, the frontage of the building that faces South Main Street was never being proposed to be demolished. Thus, a small retail space will remain, once the project is completed.

#### Public Works Related Projects

Page 24: Project PWTELN02

QUESTION: This seems to be the only priority 3 traffic signal addition that has a workable alternative. It has also been pushed back a few times. Why wouldn't we implement the four-way stop now to help traffic flow?

RESPONSE: This signal is in the CIP due to the potential future development of the industrial zoned properties along Acorn Drive. Without the development of these properties, this intersection does not meet the warrants for a traffic signal. Public Works monitors all intersections in the City and to date this intersection has not warranted any additional improvements.

Page 34: Project PWTEM02

QUESTION: What is the life span of the current equipment used to collect traffic data?

RESPONSE: This project is for the full implementation of a new vehicle detection system called GridSmart. This new system has increased capabilities that our current aging system does not. Based on industry information, we anticipate the life span of these new detection systems to be 15 to 20 years.

Page 42: Project PWSTP02

QUESTION: Can you explain what closing Carpenter Ln. would look like? How would it affect the existing businesses?

RESPONSE: Carpenter Lane would be rerouted to align with Pike Church Road. The existing intersection of Carpenter Lane and Route 11 (South Main Street) would be closed, however, the portion of Carpenter Lane between the closed intersection and the point of realignment would be maintained to allow access.

Page 44: Project PWSTP05

QUESTION: With the construction of the second high school on the horizon, would this timeline change based on the HS completion date?

RESPONSE: No, as we predict that a majority of the traffic impact associated with the high school will be from areas north of the proposed location. I believe in our internal trip analysis we allocated 80% of the peak hour trips coming from the north.

Page 52: Project PWSTP13

QUESTION: How could the construction of toll booths to enter I-81 effect this project?

RESPONSE: If tolling is approved for I-81 it will not require toll booths. The initial proposal was to install gantries at 50-mile increments along the entire length of I-81 and those gantries would use cameras and not require attendants.

Pages 77 and 79: Projects DP20073 and DP20071

QUESTION: Have the suggestions from ULI changed any of the fundamentals of this request? Shouldn't we consider alternate methods of approaching the downtown parking issues aside from expanding both of our parking decks? Could we look at replacing only one of our decks, maintaining the other, and increasing the number of buses that service downtown?

RESPONSE: The ULI project reemphasized and confirmed staff's previous thoughts and ideas to promote the spaces for public/private partnership opportunities for a mixture of uses including retail, other commercial uses, residential, and multiple stories of parking to support downtown. City Council recently offered support for staff to proceed with the idea of creating a downtown masterplan, which more than likely would include additional considerations about the use of the spaces where the existing parking decks are located, whether the existing parking decks are appropriate sites for mixed-use redevelopment including adding more parking, and also a vetted list of viable sites for additional parking structure(s) downtown.

Page 78: Project DP20074

QUESTION: How can we justify the expense of this project with a seven-year payback if there's a potential benefit of demolishing these decks in seven years?

RESPONSE: We receive numerous concerns about the lighting in both parking decks. This project involves upgrading the existing lights to LED, which generate more light and are more reliable than the current bulbs. With uncertainty in the timeframe associated with deck replacement we feel these upgrades are still advantageous for the City.

#### Parks and Recreation Related Projects

Page 69: Project P&R 19-1

QUESTION: Have we looked into obtaining any grants from organizations like KaBoom?

RESPONSE: Yes, we will look into grants for funding of construction. However, since these are very competitive and typically require a match by the City, we wanted to secure City funding so regardless of the outcome of the grant request, we would have funding available to renovate a playground that is way past its useful life.

We have received funding in FY19 to hire a qualified consultant firm to complete a Master Plan for Purcell Park. Included in the scope of work is a focus on redesign of Kids Castle. Through the Scope of Work, we have emphasized the need to engage the community in the process so their input can be thoughtfully evaluated and considered in the reimagining of Kids Castle and Purcell Park as a whole. We will soon post the RFP for consideration with a plan to begin the work of the Master Plan in May/June. Once the conceptual design is completed with estimated costs we will begin to seek grant funding through various resources CDBG, VA DCR, and others as deemed appropriate.

#### School Fund Related Projects

Page 83: Project 220

QUESTION: What has caused the advanced rate of decline of these doors? Will the replacements fare better?

RESPONSE: The doors are still operational and functioning. They have not declined to the point that they need to be replaced immediately. The school division continues to repair and adjust the doors as needed. The doors installed were not a good design choice in 2006 when the building was designed and components were specified. This type of door is typically not found in schools. Doors of this type are usually found in commercial buildings where the door use is not as demanding.

#### Public Transportation Fund Related Projects

Page 118: Project trans1

QUESTION: From my understanding of this request, we would only be adding a few new buses to the Harrisonburg fleet, and mostly replacing aging buses to keep us at current capacity. With a goal of reducing greenhouse emissions forthcoming from the EPSAC Environmental Action Plan, shouldn't we be looking to increase the number of buses in our fleet by a bigger margin? Convincing Harrisonburg residents that work downtown to ride the bus to work would be an important part of reducing greenhouse emissions in Harrisonburg.

RESPONSE: Adding buses is not as easy as it may sound. A feasibility study would have to be done to justify additional buses, local funds would need to be appropriated for match Capital and operating costs. At this time, we are looking at a reduction in state operating funds for Harrisonburg due to new state formulas. A lot of things would need to change to get people out of cars and on buses. We are at 2+ cars per household, provide parking and continue to improve roads. Currently, our city passengers are Seniors, low income, public transit dependent, and public-school students. Very few middle class or professional people use public transit in Harrisonburg. Even at JMU, our passengers are not professors or administrators.

#### Stormwater Management Fund (Public Works Department) Related Projects

Page 127: Project PWSWPR15

QUESTION: Considering that this project would benefit EMU, is there any sort of cost-sharing arrangements we could propose?

RESPONSE: In preliminary discussions with EMU they have agreed to donate all required easements for this work.

The draft CIP was posted on the City's Capital Improvement Program webpage on January 10, 2019. On the same day, staff notified media sources as well as all other individuals that receive the notice of Planning Commission packet postings that the draft CIP was available online for review. (NOTE: The CIP document was removed from the webpage for a few days after errors were found. Once corrections were made, the document was re-uploaded.)

There is no specific staff recommendation. Inclusion of projects in the document does not indicate staff support of or opposition to any of the items or the proposed timing of the projects.

Chair Way asked if there were any questions for staff.

Mr. Finnegan had a follow-up question to Mr. Finks' question regarding public transportation on page 118 of the CIP. Public Transportation responded that "[a]t this time, we are looking at a reduction in state operating funds for Harrisonburg due to new state formulas." What are the "new state formulas" for

public transportation? Is that a question that should go directly to the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation?

Mr. Fletcher responded that he is unable to answer questions regarding the state formulas. He understands what was just quoted, that there has been a change in the formula that has caused the reduction. However, he does not know what the changes in the state formulas are.

Mr. Finks expressed that he is satisfied with the answers to his questions. He clarified that some of his questions were generalizations. I had a good idea of what the answer would be, but wanted to see it in writing, in order to understand the thought process. It had to be directed towards transportation, but it is a City-wide concern. I have recently ridden the City buses in Harrisonburg and have found them to be great. The mobile application works very well. Every time I take the bus, the app tells me exactly when the bus is going to arrive. I think they can be a great resource for the City. Right now, we do not have enough buses to have more regular routes. That probably deters residents from riding the bus. My question is about trying to rethink our priorities regarding public transportation in Harrisonburg. I get concerned when we talk about building taller parking decks and more pavement downtown, to facilitate more cars coming downtown, when we have a public transportation system in place. The City is primed to find the right metric to get people to ride the bus, rather than driving downtown, and getting the businesses in the downtown area on board. It is an important question to look at for our future, for climate change, for getting cars off the road. If we can get people on buses and get them off the roads, it will solve many of the issues we have, such as having to widen or repair our roads.

Mr. Colman said that we worked so hard to look at these things in our Comprehensive Plan. It is good to see them reflected in the CIP. That is not always the case. I appreciate the fact that now we have the goals in the CIP and they align with goals in the Comprehensive Plan. Regarding the buses, I understand that it is conflicting because we cannot just put more buses out there that people will not use. It would be interesting to see if there is a way to encourage people to use the buses. I do understand because I have ridden the buses. If I do not have time to wait for the next bus, I might as well walk home. That may be one of the issues- to encourage the people to actually use the public transportation system.

Mr. Finks said that it is not an issue that is going to be solved by City government alone. It is going to require that citizens take this issue on and try to encourage everyone to ride the bus. There is only so much the City can do as far as encouraging people. It will take having everyone involved to make it a priority.

Mr. Romero said that the City of Harrisonburg Public Schools have an event coming up called STEM Day at the Valley Mall. We are looking for more ways to get people to attend and sometimes transportation is an issue. I have been having conversations, today and yesterday, with Avery Daugherty, Transit Superintendent. What we are planning is to offer free transportation to anyone who has children in the City schools on that day. Mr. Daugherty liked the idea because people are underutilizing the system due to the lack of experience on how to use it. We will be able to see how many people take that opportunity to use public transit and get their feedback. Did they enjoy it? Was there too much wait time? It comes down to advertising and letting people know about this service. People see the buses go up and down the street, but do not know how to access them. I will provide more information after the event.

Mrs. Whitten asked if they were going to get counts.

Mr. Romero replied, yes. They are going to give the parents flyers. The parents get on the buses, give the flyers to the driver, and the driver, in turn, will give them a ticket for the ride back home, after the event. Our hope is that we will have a lot of people riding the buses and keep more cars off the road.

Mr. Colman said that when the International Festival was out on Hillandale Park, a lot of people rode buses. I rode the bus to the Festival. It was a good experience. It may be a combination of both, people being aware of and comfortable with the buses and having the buses available to take the people.

Mr. Finnegan said I do think it is buses, but I think it is also multi-modal. I had a knee-jerk reaction to the scooters, which was negative, but in talking with Kyle Lawrence from the Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition, I got a different point of view. He said that it is another way to take cars off the road. City Council discussed the scooters last night. I think we should be multi-modal, as many things as we can do, to reduce the cars on the road. Which does lead me to page 77 (of the CIP), the Water Street deck, which has been postponed. Is the plan to take the parking deck, tear it down and put another on in its place? Or to build a new deck somewhere else, not downtown?

Mr. Fletcher answered that it is all of the above. I have been in meetings where different ideas have been discussed. We look at timing and sequence, for example: if we take it down, where do people park? Is that the right place? The City Manager just recently received some direction from the City Council about doing a Downtown Master Plan. Part of the Downtown Master Plan could be the inclusion of ideas about what to do with those parking decks. Are they in the right location? Should they stay in the location? What kind of facilities should they be? Through a grant, we had the Urban Land Institute bring a panel of experts to make recommendations. Some of the ideas that came out of that group echoed ideas that had been discussed before, but at least it gave direction that may make it more amenable to the public.

Chair Way asked if there were any other points for discussion or if there was a motion for recommendation.

Ms. Ford-Byrd addressed Mr. Romero saying that she appreciates that he offered the opportunity to give us the information that you are going to receive regarding the buses. I did see, in the response to the questions on the CIP, that there is not a great use of the buses by the middle class. Is it timing that is the issue or is there something else that is happening? I am very interested in seeing that information. That can help us as we move forward.

Mr. Finks moved to recommend approval of the CIP.

Mr. Colman seconded the motion.

Chair Way said we have a motion and a second to recommend the CIP to City council.

All voted in favor (7-0) of the motion.

Chair Way said the CIP is recommended for approval and will move forward to City Council on March 12, 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Alison Banks*

Alison Banks  
Senior Planner