



# City of Harrisonburg

City Hall  
409 South Main Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

## Meeting Minutes Planning Commission

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Wednesday, November 13, 2019

7:00 PM

Council Chambers

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### 1. Call To Order

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held its regular meeting on Wednesday, November 13, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 409 South Main Street.

### 2. Roll Call/Determination of Quorum

Members present: Gil Colman; Mark Finks; Kathy Whitten; and Henry Way, Chair.

Members absent: Brent Finnegan; Sal Romero; and Zanetta Ford-Byrd.

Also present: Adam Fletcher, Director of Community Development; Wesley Russ, Assistant City Attorney; Thanh Dang, Assistant Director of Community Development; Alison Banks, Senior Planner; Rachel Drescher, Zoning Administrator; and Nyrma Soffel, Administrative Assistant.

Chair Way said there was a quorum with four of seven members in attendance.

**Present** 4 - Gil Colman, Mark Finks, Kathy Whitten, and Henry Way

**Absent** 3 - Brent Finnegan, Zanetta Ford-Byrd, and Sal Romero

### 3. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the October 9, 2019 Planning Commission Meeting

**Attachments:** [Minutes](#)

Chair Way asked if there were any corrections, comments or a motion regarding the October 9, 2019 Planning Commission minutes.

Commissioner Finks moved to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Colman seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of approving the October 9, 2019 Planning Commission minutes (3-0), with Commissioner Whitten abstaining.

**A motion was made by Finks, seconded by Colman, that this Minutes be approved. The motion carried by a voice vote.**

Minutes from the October 29, 2019 Planning Commission Work Session

**Attachments:** [Minutes](#)

Chair Way asked if there were any corrections, comments or a motion regarding the October 29, 2019 Planning Commission Work Session minutes.

Commissioner Whitten moved to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Finks seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of approving the October 9, 2019 Planning Commission Work Session minutes (4-0).

**A motion was made by Whitten, seconded by Finks, that this Minutes be approved. The motion carried by a voice vote.**

#### 4. New Business - Public Hearings

Consider a request from Emerihrt Harrisonburg LLC for a special use permit to allow walls and fences greater than the height otherwise permitted at 2101 Deyerle Avenue.

**Attachments:** [Memorandum](#)

[Extract](#)

[Site Maps](#)

[Application, applicant letter, and supporting documentation](#)

[Public Hearing Notice](#)

[PowerPoint presentation](#)

[Surrounding Property Owners Noticer](#)

[PC Memorandum](#)

Chair Way read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Banks said that the Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Medium Density Residential. These areas have been developed or are planned for development of a variety of housing types such as single-family detached, single-family attached (duplexes and townhomes), and in special circumstances, multi-family dwellings (apartments). Depending on the specific site characteristics, densities in these areas should be around 15 dwelling units per acre. Non-residential uses may also be appropriate.

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

Site: Brookdale Senior Living Facility, zoned R-3

North: Across Lucy Drive, commercial businesses, zoned R-3

East: Across Deyerle Avenue, vacant land, townhomes, zoned R-3

South: Townhomes, zoned R-3

West: Townhomes, zoned R-3

The applicant is requesting a special use permit (SUP) per Section 10-3-48.4(8) to allow for a fence of eight-feet in height. The fence would be constructed along the western side of the existing building and would enclose an existing patio area.

**Brookdale Senior Living** in Harrisonburg offers **assisted living facilities** and a memory care unit for Alzheimer's and dementia care residents. The applicant has stated that the existing 6-foot fence around the memory care outdoor patio area does not allow for the proper security for their memory care residents and they desire to increase the fence height to 8 feet. The patio area is a 20-foot by 20-foot space located along the western side of the Brookdale facility, and is approximately 110 feet from Lucy Drive and 70 feet from Charleston Townes townhomes to the west.

The Zoning Ordinance allows for walls and fences in business and industrial districts to be greater in height when they are used for safety or security purposes; however, within residential districts, such as this request, walls and fences are only allowed up to 6 feet in height, unless approved by SUP for a greater height. Staff does not have concerns with approving the SUP for the additional fence height at this location and suggests allowing some flexibility should additional height be needed in the future.

Staff supports approval of the requested special use permit with the following conditions:

1. The special use permit shall only be applicable to the proposed fence located around the 20-foot by 20-foot memory care patio area along the western side of the existing Brookdale facility.
2. The fence shall be no taller than 10 feet in height.
3. If in the opinion of Planning Commission or City Council, the fence becomes a nuisance, the special use permit can be recalled for further review, which could lead to the need for additional conditions, restrictions, or the revocation of the permit.

Chair Way asked if there were any questions for staff.

Commissioner Colman asked if there was a gate in the fence to the outside.

Commissioner Finks said yes, he visited the site and there was a gate on further side from the road.

Commissioner Colman asked if there was an emergency or life safety exit. Does this get reviewed by the Building Codes Division? Will it require a building permit?

Ms. Banks said that it would not require a building permit.

Chair Way asked if there were any further questions for staff. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and invited the applicant or applicant's representative to speak to the request.

Jennifer McNamara, Business Office Coordinator for Brookdale Harrisonburg, came forward to speak to the request. The Memory Care Patio fence is not used as a fire exit. There are two fire doors plus an exit facing Lucy Drive and two fire doors facing Deyerle Avenue.

Commissioner Finks asked whether the gate was being used as an exit because he noticed that there was a considerable step down from the patio at the fence gate.

Ms. McNamara said that the gate is used for gardening equipment and maintenance access.

Chair Way asked if there was anyone else wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Whitten moved to recommend approval, with conditions, as presented.

Commissioner Colman seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of recommending approval with conditions (4-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on December 10, 2019.

**A motion was made by Whitten, seconded by Colman, that this PH-Special Use Permit be recommended to full council to the City Council, due back by 12/10/2019. The motion carried by a voice vote.**

Consider Sign Ordinance Comprehensive Update

**Attachments:** [Memorandum](#)

[Extract](#)

[Proposed Ordinance](#)

[Current Sign Ordinance](#)

[Public comments collected after public input session #1](#)

[Public Hearing notice](#)

[PowerPoint presentation](#)

[PC Memorandum](#)

[PC Proposed Sign Ordinance](#)

[PC Current Sign Ordinance](#)

[PC Public comments collected after public input session #1](#)

Chair Way read the request and asked staff to review.

Rachel Drescher, Zoning Administrator, said that the purpose of the Sign Ordinance is to regulate the size, illumination, movement, materials, location, height, and condition of all signs placed on private property for exterior observation, thus ensuring the protection of property values, the character of neighborhoods, the creation of a convenient, attractive and harmonious community,

and the safety and welfare of pedestrians and wheeled traffic, while providing convenience to citizens and encouraging economic development. Signs obstruct views, distract motorists, displace alternative uses for land, and pose other problems that call for regulation.

On June 15, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States determined in the case *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* there are limited circumstances where municipalities can enforce content-based restrictions without infringing on First Amendment rights. The Town of Gilbert, Arizona restricted the size and time limit for temporary ideological signs more strictly than temporary political signs. A local church challenged the regulations alleging First Amendment infringements. Eventually the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, who found sign ordinances that regulate based on content are unconstitutional. Sign ordinances shall not regulate based upon the content or message of the sign. Municipalities continue to have the power to regulate signs based upon time, place, and manner.

The City's Sign Ordinance was last comprehensively reviewed and adopted on April 23, 1996. Over the past two and a half years staff has worked on the Sign Ordinance to remove content-based language and to provide opportunities for temporary signage, change penalties for illegal signage from criminal to civil, organize the ordinance to be more easily navigated, along with other changes.

Below is a list summarizing major changes from the current Sign Ordinance to the proposed sign ordinance.

**Removal of content-based language**

- Section 11-7-11 in the current Sign Ordinance regarding 'special regulations for downtown area' would be removed as this section is content based.
- Clarified content-based language under current Section 11-7-3(3), 11-7-3(4), and 11-7-3(5) regarding sign permit not required.

**Civil penalties**

- Relocate the Sign Ordinance within City Code from Chapter 11, Building Code Regulations to Chapter 10, Planning and Development, specifically within the Zoning Ordinance to allow civil penalties for violations instead of criminal penalties. Note that the Building Codes division would continue to review sign permit applications and inspect for compliance with the Building Code.
- The civil penalties for illegal signage would be as follows: \$100 for first offense, \$200 for second offense, and \$500 for every subsequent offense. Note that state code does not allow municipalities to charge penalties for signs located within the public right-of-way. (Proposed Section 10-3-13(2)(a)(ii))

**Comprehensive sign plans**

- Comprehensive sign plans would continue to be an option in the proposed Sign Ordinance; however, the proposed regulations would provide more parameters for approval and would be reviewed and approved administratively and would no longer require approval by City Council. (Proposed Section 10-3-214)

- Add ability for property owners to apply for a comprehensive sign plan for M-1 zoned properties (Proposed Section 10-3-214(b)). Remove ability for off-premises signage, such as billboard advertising, in the M-1 District.

#### **Temporary signage**

- Expand temporary sign permits from only allowing specific events of government, civic, and charitable organizations to allowing any person, firm, or corporation to apply for a temporary sign permit. This signage would be in addition to each use's allowable sign amount, may be applied for two times per calendar year, and may not be erected for longer than 30 days. (Proposed Section 10-3-208(5))
- Add an allowance for grand opening signage (when a business name changes, changes in business or activity, or the site is redeveloped). The grand opening time period would begin on the day the business is open to the public and lasts for a maximum of 30 days. During this time, six extra signs, each up to the maximum size of 32 square feet and eight feet in height, would be allowed with a temporary sign permit. Feather flags would also be permitted during this time. (Proposed Section 10-3-208(5)(d))

#### **Signage allowance changes**

- Increase the allowable sign area for signs located in the R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-6, R-7, U-R, MH-1, and MH-2 zoning districts from 24 square feet to 32 square feet to match the state building code allowance for signs without an engineered review. Increase the allowable sign height from six feet to eight feet.
- More than one freestanding sign would be allowed to be located within the setback for parcels that are permitted more than one freestanding sign. (Proposed Section 10-3-213, note 1) The current Sign Ordinance only permits one freestanding sign to be located within this setback for parcels that are permitted more than one freestanding sign. (Current Section 11-7-3(14))

#### **Organization and clarity**

- Using the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia's (LGA) suggested language, the purpose and intent of the Sign Ordinance would be strengthened by:
  - Including a substitution clause that noncommercial language may be substituted for commercial language. (Proposed Section 10-3-206(1))
  - Including a severability clause that the article continues to be valid even if a specific provision does not in a court of competent jurisdiction. (Proposed Section 10-3-206(1))
- Expand the definitions section and alter definitions to align with the suggested LGA language. (Proposed Section 10-3-207)
- Outlines the sign permitting process to include:
  - Staff processing time limit. (Proposed Section 10-3-208(2)(b))
  - Grounds to revoke a sign permit within proposed Section 10-3-208(4)(b), which includes:
    - Application was false.
    - Sign was not installed according to sign permit application.
    - Sign violates the law.

- To be more reader friendly, a chart would describe the signs allowed for each zoning district. (Proposed Section 10-3-213)
- Nonconforming sign language was amended according to the LGA suggestion. This includes stronger language to remove signs where a use is no longer in operation. (Proposed Section 10-3-217)
- Signs permitted for parcels with no street frontage would be clarified. (Proposed Section 10-3-215)

**Elements of the Sign Ordinance that are relatively unchanged include, but are not limited to:**

- How sign allowance is calculated. (Proposed Section 10-3-212, current Section 11-7-23)
- The cost of applying for a permit. (Proposed Section 10-3-208(3), current Section 11-7-3(22))
- When a permit is required. (Proposed Section 10-3-209, current Section 11-7-3(1))
- Prohibited signs. (Proposed Section 10-3-210, throughout current Section 11-7-3)
- Sign allowances for B-1, B-2, and M-1 Districts. (Proposed Section 10-3-213, current Sections 11-7-6, 6.1, and 7)
- Ability to apply for a comprehensive sign plan. (Proposed Section 10-3-214, throughout current Sign Ordinance based on zoning district)
- Ability for parcels without site frontage to advertise (Proposed Section 10-3-215, current Section 11-7-9)
- Ability for properties located within an eight hundred (800) foot radius of the center of any Interstate 81 ramp intersection with the closest boundary of an intersecting street to have a taller sign. (Proposed Section 10-3-216, current Section 11-7-8)

It was drawn to staff's attention that in 10-3-213 *Signs allowed per zoning districts* we do not state where sidewalk signs are allowed to be located. We are adding a note. We will change the temporary sign note to five (5) and added a note (4) for sidewalk signs that states:

Within allowed districts, sidewalk signs should be located only in front of the business advertised and only during the hours of operation.

An additional revision is located on page 4 of the sign ordinance, section 10-3-208(5)(d)1, feather flags will be changed to feather *signs* according to the definition used in section 10-3-207.

Staff recommends approval of the Sign Ordinance Comprehensive Update.

Chair Way asked if there were any questions for staff.

Commissioner Finks said that there do not seem to be substantial changes from what the ordinance currently states regarding the districts in which sidewalk signs are allowed.

Ms. Drescher said that it directly transfers from our current ordinance to our proposed ordinance. We simply changed the name. We previously called them portable signs. Now we are calling them

sidewalk signs due to the confusion regarding what portable meant.

Commissioner Finks asked if there was any mention regarding a lighting ordinance during the discussions for the Sign Ordinance update. Was there any discussion regarding adopting a lighting ordinance in Harrisonburg, at least in regard to signs?

Ms. Drescher said that very early in the discussion we did talk about it. There are dark sky ordinances in many localities. It was a bigger project than what our Sign Ordinance review was ready to tackle. It is a separate conversation.

Commissioner Finks said that if the City were to consider a comprehensive lighting ordinance, how would that affect the Sign Ordinance in its current form or in the proposed changes? Would it require another change of the Sign Ordinance if the City were to adopt a lighting ordinance?

Ms. Drescher said that it could. We have illumination in section 10-3-211. That would be where the adjustments would be made.

Commissioner Finks said that a lighting ordinance would have more to do with the time of day rather than the type.

Commissioner Colman asked for more information regarding section 10-3-214(2)(b), Comprehensive Sign Plan in B-2 and M-1 Districts. Individual parcels waive their right to a freestanding sign if they take part in a comprehensive sign plan. A campus would have a primary sign, but each business within also needs to attract people. Where can each business have signs so that people know how to find them?

Ms. Drescher said that the mall has a comprehensive sign plan and is located on multiple parcels. They have one for each entrance. The development is treated as one parcel, one shopping center.

Commissioner Colman said that if there is an industrial park. There would be a sign in the front where all the businesses are listed, but if I go in the complex, how do I find the business I am going to? We are advocating for trees and landscaping, but they can impede visibility. How do clients find the businesses? It seems that they should have a sign at their respective entrances. We may not have that situation right now, but they do in other larger cities. JMU has numerous signs identifying the various buildings on campus so that people can find them. There should be the opportunity to have signs identifying the businesses within, along the connector path.

Ms. Drescher said that she would need to look at the specific situation.

Mr. Fletcher said that in many instances there will be wall signage that will be able to identify the buildings.

Ms. Drescher said that the purpose of the sign ordinance is to prevent clutter from the public



street. If I am going into a development and it is internal and not visible from the street or adjacent properties, it might be permitted. It may not be something regulated by our ordinance.

Commissioner Whitten said that the office park behind Steven Toyota is a good example.

Ms. Banks said that if there is an industrial park that is on a private street. For example, along Acorn Drive you have your sign that lists the businesses, then you turn on a private street and you are looking at things that are not seen from the public street. If it is not on the public street, but on the private street, you can have signs. You could have wall signs, as well.

Commissioner Colman said that trees and landscaping obstruct the view of wall signs. Some of the commercial parks in Richmond have signs for each group of buildings. I cannot see them from the public street because they are obstructed by trees. I have to enter and drive along to find them.

Mr. Fletcher said that there are ways to accommodate that from an advertising perspective for the development. It could be that they have one freestanding sign on the front parcel that identifies the complex and the business in which that sign is located. They may choose to not do a comprehensive sign plan. When you turn in, each individual lot would have a freestanding sign. This is if you want to place multiple businesses on the sign out front.

Ms. Banks said that this is not new to the Sign Ordinance; but is not something that the Planning Commission has reviewed. Comprehensive sign plan requests went directly to City Council.

Commissioner Colman said that now is the chance to look at these things and see if we need to adjust them. It has been there for a long time, and I do not know that we have an issue with it. I am thinking ahead.

Ms. Drescher said that if it is a development where you are driving in and it is interior then that is not what we are regulating. This is to regulate signs placed on private property for exterior observation.

Commissioner Whitten said that when you drive into places and you cannot find anything because the signs are so small or so low, you know that they have a restrictive sign ordinance. We want people to be able to find things.

Mr. Fletcher said that we would likely regulate any freestanding sign. I think that when a situation like that comes up, we would brainstorm with them and try to figure things out. If it does not work, as with any ordinance, if we need to make any amendments, we may.

Commissioner Colman said that it makes sense. I want to ensure that we are forward looking. This is not a simple document.

Chair Way asked if there were any further questions for staff. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone wishing to speak to the sign ordinance update. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Colman asked to see section 10-3-13(1)(a)(ii).

Mr. Fletcher indicated the sections location within the document.

Commissioner Finks asked who could apply for a comprehensive sign plan.

Ms. Drescher said that the property owner has to sign off on comprehensive sign plans. We allow the property owner or tenant or a contractor on behalf on either one of those to apply for a regular sign permit.

Commissioner Whitten moved to recommend approval of the Sign Ordinance Comprehensive Update, as presented.

Commissioner Finks seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of recommending approval, as presented (4-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on December 10, 2019.

**A motion was made by Whitten, seconded by Finks, that this PH-Zoning Ordinance be recommended to full council to the City Council, due back by 12/10/2019. The motion carried by a voice vote.**

**5. New Business - Other Items**

None.

**6. Unfinished Business**

None.

**7. Public Comment**

None.

**8. Report of Secretary & Committees**

**8.a. Proactive Code Enforcement**

Ms. Banks said that the proactive code enforcement program inspected the Forest Hills & JMU section of the City. Violations related to signage were found. The proactive code enforcement program for November 2019 will be directed toward the Bluestone Hills & Valley Mall section of the City.

## October 2019 Proactive Code Enforcement Report

**Attachments:** [October 2019 Report](#)

### 8.c. Rockingham County Planning Commission Liaison Report

Ms. Dang presented the Rockingham County Planning Commission Liaison Report on behalf of Commissioner Ford-Byrd. The first item was a rezoning from A-2 to R-5 for the Crow Point independent living facility. It is a 147-unit facility. Staff recommended approval and it was approved (5-0).

The second item was a rezoning from R-3C and A-2 to R-3C to bring professional businesses to the area. This is in the town of Elkton's growth area. Staff recommended approval and it was approved (5-0).

A public hearing will be held on November 19, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. regarding the Stone Spring Urban Development Area Draft Plan.

### 8.b. Board of Zoning Appeals Report

None.

### 8.d. City Council Report

Mr. Fletcher said that there were three items reviewed. The preliminary plat variance request for Millwood Townhomes to subdivide into 39 townhome parcels. It was approved unanimously.

There were two STR requests. One was a public hearing for 907 Ridgewood Road. It was denied by a 3-1 vote, Councilmember Jones abstaining. The other was the return of 165 New York Avenue. It was denied unanimously.

## 9. Other Matters

### Discussion of Short-Term Rentals

**Attachments:** [Discussion of Short-Term Rentals](#)

Chair Way invited staff to discuss STR.

Ms. Dang said that the minutes from the October 29 work session along with a photo of the white board from the meeting are included within this agenda packet. The table before you is a summary of the white board.

As described in the October 29 work session minutes, Question #4: *Where can homestays and STRs be allowed to operate, and how many guests and accommodation spaces should be allowed?* remains unresolved, and we discussed giving the group more time to consider this

question. On November 1, I sent an email to the group stating the following:

“I believe that the group was in agreement to allowing by right homestays in all zoning districts in which residential uses are allowed and to limit the number of guests to a maximum of 4 at a time.

I believe there was agreement to allow STRs with an approved SUP in all zoning districts in which residential uses are allowed, but that can continue to be explored. Unresolved is what the maximum number of guests in a STR (requires SUP approval) should be. Ideas discussed at the work session included:

1. To allow STRs with an approved SUP in all zoning districts in which residential uses are allowed, and to consider the maximum number of guests allowed at a time on a case-by-case basis.
2. ... to regulate the maximum number of guests allowed at a time based on the square footage of livable space within a dwelling. Livable space of single-family detached, townhomes, and duplex units on their own parcels can be found here in the Real Estate system: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/real-estate-info-system>. It should be acknowledged that if the livable space information is incorrect, owners can request the information be updated or appeal with the Real Estate Office. I am not sure yet how we would determine livable space for a duplex unit that shares a property with another duplex unit, or for apartments.
3. ... to regulate the maximum number of guests allowed at a time based on the number of bedrooms or accommodation spaces with a dwelling. A number of localities established a maximum of two adult guests per bedroom, and do not restrict the number of children allowed.
4. ... to regulate the maximum number of guests at a time based on the (long-term) occupancy regulations. In other words, if a family or up to four people are allowed for long-term occupancy, then a STR could be operated to allow the addition of a family or up to four people for STR. Please refer to Table 2 within the October 23 memorandum.
5. ... to regulate the maximum number of guests based on zoning districts. In other words, a maximum number of guests could be established for each zoning district. Zoning information including an interactive web map of the zoning districts can be found here: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/zoning>.
6. ... to regulate the maximum number of guests based on future land use (Land Use Guide of the Comprehensive Plan). In other words, a maximum number of guests could be established for each future land use designation. The Future Land Use Guide map and the Comprehensive Plan is available here: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/comprehensive-plan>.”

I had offered to compile responses from Commissioners for your review before the November 13 meeting. Two responses have been received.

From Commissioner Whitten:

“I would propose a limit on STR that mirrors the Homestay limit of 4. Two rooms seem adequate no matter the size of the property if this is home-based business. Also, I would like to see a limit of 120 days per year for STR. I would also propose that STR must not occur within 500 feet of an existing STR.”

From Commissioner Finks:

“I think for STRs we have to handle them on a case by case basis, none of the other possibilities discussed are one size fits all. I originally had liked the idea of square footage being the determining factor, but I think there are too many questions on how to implement that properly.

If we use any of the other ideas discussed will run into issues related to Bed and Breakfast applications.

It seems there is a sense from other commissioners that if we put a hard and fast number in writing it might dissuade so many people applying for STRs, I believe that allowing for by right homestays could do that all on its own.”

Staff continues to recommend that STRs by SUP should be allowed to operate in any zoning district in which residential uses are allowed, and that the maximum number of guests allowed at one time should be considered on a case by case basis. While staff believes that there should be the opportunity to determine on a case by case basis whether an operator should be required to maintain a STR property as their primary residence, at this time staff is comfortable supporting Planning Commission’s recommendation to require that a STR property shall be an operator’s primary residence.

Chair Way clarified that Ms. Dang was referring to the STR with the SUP, not the by-right homestay.

Ms. Dang said that is correct. She is referring to the STR with the SUP.

Ms. Dang asked for the Planning Commission to consider the remaining question. Should we have a maximum cap within the regulations for the STR by SUP? Should we evaluate them on a case-by-case? If you do want to establish a maximum cap, how would that look? Our intent is that once we have recommendations from the Planning Commission, staff would craft the ordinance amendment document and it would be presented back to the Planning Commission.

Chair Way said that staff is seeking for clarification on question #4. I am cautious about giving an answer with so many of our members absent today. What is the timeframe you expect? Are you expecting to have something to present next month?

Ms. Dang said that will take staff some time after the Planning Commission makes its recommendations. We will not have something to present to you next month.

Chair Way said that if we have more of our members present next month, they will still have a chance to contribute. I do not want to lose voices.

Commissioner Colman said that he wants to hear everyone.

Commissioner Whitten asked what the December schedule looked like.

Ms. Dang said that there were nine sites to review, thirteen items total. Some sites have multiple requests. There is only one STR among those.

Commissioner Whitten said that she has expressed her views and that her comments are in the record.

Commissioner Finks said that his comments are in the record, as well.

Commissioner Whitten said that it would be nice to send a memo to the members who are not present. We could have an email thread to discuss the matter.

Commissioner Colman said that if email like this come through, it would be nice to share them with everyone, so we know what everyone else is saying.

Mr. Russ said that when you have emails among the members, you are functionally having a meeting. Two individual members emailing each other is fine, but when you have the entire Planning Commission discussing and making decisions in an email thread, it is a meeting.

Commissioner Whitten said that it sounds like an electronic work session.

Mr. Fletcher asked if it would be possible to have another hour-long work session.

Ms. Dang said yes, if we can find a time that worked for most. One member was absent at the last work session because there was not a time that worked for everyone.

Mr. Fletcher said that this time of year could be very busy or very quiet.

Ms. Dang said that it sounds like a work session should be done, given the agenda for the next meeting. Otherwise, we would be delaying the discussion until January.

Commissioner Whitten said that she does not think that the end of a long meeting is the time to have a productive discussion.

Chair Way said that another work session would be much more focused because we have already narrowed it down to key questions.

Ms. Dang said that she would email the Planning Commission to request dates and availability.

Commissioner Colman said that, given City Council's decision on the STR during their last meeting, it is interesting that they have been approving STR requests, but now they did not. They may be looking at what we are doing and responding to that. The 907 Ridgewood Road STR was requesting two accommodation spaces for four people. That is what we are recommending as the base for the by-right option. Perhaps we should revisit that number, given the previous recommendations by City Council.

Commissioner Whitten said that just because a number is reasonable, it may not be reasonable for a particular place. There may not be a number that is reasonable. Maybe that is what they are saying. I do not really know what they are saying.

Commissioner Colman said that if we are going to focus on four, do we need to revisit question #2?

Commissioner Whitten expressed her disagreement with the idea presented at the last work session that Harrisonburg does not have neighborhoods. People who live in Harrisonburg can identify their neighborhoods. I also do not like comparing Harrisonburg to Charlottesville. Charlottesville has done a poor job of keeping the neighborhoods close to the university campus looking nice. Harrisonburg has not let that happen. There was intentional work during zoning ordinance changes in the 1990s in response to older homes being turned into student rentals. Old Town would look very different, by now, had those changes not been made. I believe in the Harrisonburg neighborhoods.

Chair Way said that neighborhoods are a cultural force and are the building blocks of cities. In theory, they make a lot of sense. In practice, how do you draw lines around them? What do those lines mean? How do they include? How do they exclude? How do you fit them together? There is a sense of neighborhoods, but there is a lot of uncertainty, as well. Perhaps the Planning Commission should consider how we think about neighborhoods, not just how they look in terms of literally drawing lines around them, but how can we think about and talk about them in friendly, inclusive, and open to change while respecting the things that we hold dear about them. Harrisonburg is unique in having elements of big cities and small cities. Likewise, our neighborhoods, they have some characteristics of neighborhoods in larger cities and of those in smaller cities. We can think about the delineation and identification of neighborhoods in a different way. I appreciated the comments in the work session about the value and the problems when thinking about neighborhood.

Commissioner Finks said that Harrisonburg does not have official overlays that delineate and name neighborhoods other than downtown. We, as a City, do not have specific plans for individual neighborhoods. It is not that individuals or citizens do not recognize neighborhoods, but how the City deals with neighborhoods.

Ms. Dang said that within the Comprehensive Plan, with the Potential Small Area Plans map, there is an intentionality with the blurring of the lines around the areas because it was uncertain where a boundary began.

Chair Way said that problems happen on the edges of neighborhoods. Mr. Fletcher once mentioned that we tend to think about Harrisonburg as a large city that has many things going on; but it is the size of a singular neighborhood in a big city, or a subsection of a big city. We have to re-scale what we think of in terms of how big a neighborhood is.

## 10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

### NOTE TO THE PUBLIC

Staff will be available at 4:30 p.m. on the Tuesday before the next Planning Commission meeting for those interested in going on a field trip to view the sites on the next agenda.

Language interpretation service in Spanish is available for Planning Commission meetings. To ensure that interpreters are available at the meeting, interested persons must request the accommodation at least four (4) calendar days in advance of the meeting by contacting the City Clerk at (540) 432-7701 or by submitting a request online at:  
[www.harrisonburgva.gov/interpreter-request-form](http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/interpreter-request-form)

El servicio de intérpretes inglés-español está disponible para las reuniones públicas de la Comisión de Planificación. Para asegurar la disponibilidad de intérpretes, cualquier interesado deberá solicitar la presencia de un intérprete al menos cuatro (4) días calendarios antes de la reunión comunicándose con la Secretaría Municipal al (540) 432-7701 o por medio de la página por internet al:

<https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/interpreter-request-form>