



# CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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June 6, 2022

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

**SUBJECT:** *Consider amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan*

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING HELD ON: May 11, 2022**

Chair Finnegan read the request and asked staff to review.

Erin Yancey, Planning Manager for the Department of Public Works, said we did this in 2020, as well. We plan to do this every time a new Smart Scale grant funding opportunity comes around. Smart Scale is State and Federal funding as we continue to study our corridors for traffic improvements. We are currently in another funding round. We want to add our projects that are not already in the Comprehensive Plan to the Plan because it gets us more points, making it more likely for us to obtain the funding. We have seven applications this round and five of them are already in the Plan.

The City of Harrisonburg Comprehensive Plan presents a vision of what kind of community the City would like to be in the future and identifies steps to move toward that vision. The Plan is the central organizing umbrella under which other plans, regulations, and initiatives exist. The Plan establishes the preferred overall long-term vision for our community. The Plan is not a regulatory document but serves as a guide for Harrisonburg and it helps City and community leaders with setting policies and decision-making.

Virginia Code Section 15.2-2223 requires the City to have a Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive plans deal fundamentally with the physical characteristics of a community. Hence, land use is the core element of a comprehensive plan. However, in order to arrive at an appropriate plan for the use of land, other physical aspects must be addressed, such as environmental features, transportation, water and wastewater facilities, and other public facilities.

Chapter 12 includes the Street Improvement Plan, which contains project descriptions and a map that identifies transportation infrastructure improvements that the City may pursue to address safety, congestion, bicycle and pedestrian needs, and new development. Projects are not prioritized

in the Street Improvement Plan. Instead, the City will utilize the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization's Long Range Transportation Plan to represent prioritized projects.

The proposed amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the Comprehensive Plan include adding two projects that have been recommended by transportation studies that have been completed since the 2020 amendment of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The studies were conducted to identify solutions for facilities that have a high number of crashes, congestion, speeding, and/or were identified in a statewide analysis as having a high potential for safety improvement. Studies include the Mount Clinton Pike Operations and Safety Analysis (study limits: Norfolk Southern railroad to North Main Street), and a STARS (Strategically Targeted Affordable Roadway Solutions) study of South Main Street from Mosby Road to Pleasant Valley Road. Both studies were completed by engineering consultants and funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

With regard to the Mount Clinton Pike Lane Reconfiguration between the Norfolk Southern Railroad and North Main Street, the study recommended a roundabout at the Mount Clinton Pike/Acorn Drive intersection. For the STARS study along South Main Street, the recommendations included to modify the project limits for project SE-28, which is a planned improvement that is already included in the Street Improvement Plan. SE-28 would add a median to South Main Street between Stone Spring Road/Erickson Avenue and Mosby Road. The STARS study recommended to update this project by extending the limits of this project from Mosby Road south to Pleasant Valley Road.

Additionally, the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan includes clarifications that because private development layouts are unknown there will need to be additional public streets to create an effective transportation network that cannot be determined in a long range plan.

The Department of Public Works will pursue grants to implement these recommendations. The amendments to Chapter 12, Transportation of the Comprehensive Plan are being made so that the City's transportation funding applications (via Smart Scale) can obtain higher scores by meeting the criterion of the projects' inclusion in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The projects' inclusion in the plan will also allow City staff to work with developers to plan for implementation of the improvements as adjacent properties develop. The Planning Process section of the chapter describes the methods used in developing the Street Improvement Plan, which includes traffic/transportation studies.

There have been text edits in a few locations throughout the chapter to address an issue that staff is frequently faced with when discussing street accommodations with developers. Developers' site designs often do not include the level of street network connectivity envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan to provide the appropriate traffic distribution and capacity to the network proportional to the need created by the development proposal. A common misconception of the development community is that the City only needs new streets that are identified in the Street Improvement Plan. However, the Street Improvement Plan is primarily a plan for major routes at a city-wide scale, including arterial streets, which are intended to serve through traffic, and collector streets, which serve to connect arterial routes, and provide some property access. Local

streets are lower volume neighborhood streets that are primarily intended to provide neighborhood circulation and access to property. Local streets are usually constructed by developers to serve the needs of a particular development and connect into the greater transportation network. Staff cannot predict what development proposals will look like with the needed accuracy to identify all distribution, circulation, access, and safety needs, as they are largely dependent upon characteristics, including physical and topographical characteristics, specific to the development. Oftentimes, street layouts and designs need to be decided upon in coordination with the development's layout to ensure streets appropriately serve the development, and that the development interacts with the greater network safely and efficiently. Language has been added to the chapter narrative to explain that the Street Improvement Plan is primarily a major routes plan that is intended to address street network needs on a city-wide scale, and is not intended to identify every street that may be needed to serve individual developments.

Chair Finnegan asked if there were any questions for staff.

Chair Finnegan said I have a question about the major streets plan. When we talk about major streets are we talking about potentially putting more traffic through residential neighborhoods? I would like to see traffic calming measures in residential neighborhoods. Can you speak to that? Will changing that classification, the clarification of the major streets plan, make it more difficult to put in speed pillows and things like that in those neighborhoods?

Ms. Yancey said in the Comprehensive Plan we do not have a lot about traffic calming. We handle that separately. There is nothing to say that we cannot put traffic calming measures in new development. The Plan does not speak to that. Being a major streets plan, the involvement with neighborhood streets is pretty low.

Councilmember Dent said regarding Mount Clinton Pike going from four lanes to three lanes, it also mentions bike lanes and pedestrian improvements. I also note that is right beside the new gas station and retail development that we recently approved in City Council. We were talking a lot about the pedestrian and bike there.

Ms. Yancey said there will be room to add bike lanes with that project.

Commissioner Armstrong said there is a long series of businesses on South Main Street, both north and south of Mosby Road. When I first read "a median being installed," I did not understand that it would not be continuous, that you would still have driveway access, because there is a whole strip mall all along there.

Ms. Yancey said when you think about access to businesses along East Market Street, out where Target and Kroger is, it will be similar to that. There will be dedicated left turn lanes throughout the corridor, but not for every single entrance.

Commissioner Armstrong said otherwise it would be hard.

Councilmember Dent asked where exactly is the high school along that?

Chair Finnegan said further south.

Councilmember Dent said that could help calm traffic in that direction.

Chair Finnegan said I do not want to confuse a median with traffic calming. Medians could make things more pedestrian hostile. If I were trying to walk from the Valley Mall to Kroger, there are sidewalks. That is not pedestrian friendly. Is it anticipated that this would increase speed?

Ms. Yancey said we are going to have a lower design speed in part of the corridor, at least. We will get into detailed design if we get the funding in eight years. You can design the lanes a bit narrower. We will have plantings in the median, including trees, hopefully. It should get more aesthetically pleasant. We will also be adding a sidewalk at least on one side, if not both. It should get better. There is a plan to do a special treatment for the crossing to the high school at Baxter Drive.

Mr. Fletcher said regarding the question about the major streets, if you look at your map and focus in on Smithland Road, Linda Lane, and Keezletown Road, you will see three lines. The point Ms. Yancey was trying to make is that the City clearly wants more streets interconnected in that area. Those are the major streets that we want to be able to connect. What we are clarifying is that, while you only see three lines, there would be many more local streets that would be built in that space to accommodate the development that would occur in that open area.

Chair Finnegan said part of my question was, is there some designation by doing this, some word or language, that would make it more difficult to put in traffic calming in residential neighborhoods?

Ms. Yancey said no.

Chair Finnegan asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Councilmember Dent said I was trying to figure out where in there the high school is located. It seems like it is in that corridor where there is the median. That might help, whether there is traffic calming or what, impose some order where there is going to be more traffic going in and out of the high school. Is that part of the intent?

Chair Finnegan said this is between Stone Spring Road and Ericson Avenue and Mosby Road.

Ms. Yancey said that is an existing, funded project.

Councilmember Dent said I see it now on the flip side of the map.

Ms. Yancey said on South Main Street, the project from Stone Spring Road to Mosby Road is a funded project. We would be amending that project in the transportation chapter to extend it down to Pleasant Valley Road.

Chair Finnegan said so that does include the high school. I am hopeful that we can consider and hopefully find funding for pedestrian walkways that go over South Main Street. I have seen this in other cities. As long as you do not have a situation as in Charlottesville where trucks constantly run into the bridge, it is much safer for pedestrians.

Commissioner Armstrong said I can speak in support of trying to address that center turn lane which turns into a left turn lane at Ericson Avenue. It is confusing because people are entering the left turn and some people are coming out of the shopping mall. It is obviously a very hazardous spot as both a driver and a pedestrian. I can see this helping.

Commissioner Byrd said having experienced this on Route 33 and noticing how people change the way they are driving because they have no choice, I can support. I understand what its purpose is for vehicles.

Chair Finnegan said I do think it is important to keep that in mind. Charles Marohn, who wrote Strong Towns calls roads like this “strodes,” street-roads that are pedestrian hostile. I am still in favor of this, but I would like to see more pedestrian friendly ways to get around, referring to the presentation we heard at the beginning of this meeting, safe ways to get around if you do not have a car.

Commissioner Whitten said getting less cars is the way to start.

Councilmember Dent said it is good to hear that you are planning to plant trees. Anything that cuts down on the urban heat wave from asphalt is a good thing.

Commissioner Byrd moved to recommend approval of the Comprehensive Plan amendments, as presented.

Councilmember Dent seconded the motion.

Chair Finnegan called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Armstrong	Aye
Commissioner Baugh	Aye
Commissioner Byrd	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Orndoff	Aye
Commissioner Whitten	Aye
Chair Finnegan	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment passed (7-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on June 14, 2022.