



# CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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## Memorandum

To: Planning Commission  
From: Thanh Dang, Assistant Director of Community Development  
RE: **Planning & Zoning Projects Update**  
Date: February 12, 2020 (Regular Meeting)

Provided below is a list of planning and zoning related projects that Planning Commission or City Council has expressed interest in and/or has directed staff to work on, and projects that staff has initiated in response to court rulings, legislation, and other issues. This list does not include all projects that the Planning & Zoning Division staff are working on.

### List A. Projects completed since August 2019:

1. *Comprehensive Update of the Sign Ordinance* – In response to the June 2015 ruling by the United States Supreme Court in *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* the City's Sign Ordinance was comprehensively updated, received a favorable recommendation from Planning Commission on November 13, 2019, and was adopted by City Council on January 14, 2020. More information: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/sign-ordinance-update>.
2. *Wireless Small Cell Facilities within Public Street and Alley Right-Of-Way (ROW)* – On August 13, 2019, City Council adopted Title 6, Chapter 1, Article F of the City Code titled "Small Cell Wireless Facilities in the Public Right-of-Way" to be compliant with requirements from the Code of Virginia and from declaratory rulings from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding the rights that wireless telecommunications providers now have to locate small cell facilities—whether by collocation or by installing new poles and other structures—within the City's public street and alley ROW.

### List B. Projects currently underway and anticipated to be presented to Planning Commission for discussion or review in the coming months. (Near-term)

3. *Review of Short-Term Rental (STR) Regulations* – On March 26, 2019, City Council adopted the STR regulations. Two Planning Commission work sessions were held in October and December 2019 to discuss potential amendments to the STR regulations. The draft amendments will include a by right homestay and STRs by special use permit and are anticipated to be presented to Planning Commission in the coming months.
4. *Comprehensive Update of the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances* – Planning professionals advise communities to review their zoning ordinances once every ten years

to account for changes in zoning approaches, state codes, legal interpretations, and definitions. It is common for zoning ordinances to be reviewed following updates to a community's comprehensive plan because zoning ordinances are the local government's primary means of implementing their comprehensive plans. While amendments and additions to the City's Zoning Ordinance have been made over the years, a comprehensive review has not taken place since 1996. Similarly, a comprehensive review of the Subdivision Ordinance has not occurred since 1997. Since September 2019, staff has been working on an RFP to procure a consultant to assist with the update and anticipates releasing the RFP in February 2020. Staff will present an update of this project at the February 12, 2020 Regular Planning Commission meeting. A comprehensive update of the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances will be a multi-year project.

List C. Other projects currently underway. (Mid-term)

5. *Housing Policies* – Housing continues to be an issue of concern in the Harrisonburg community. In April 2019, City Council identified developing a comprehensive housing plan and increasing flexibility in development and redevelopment of residential areas to enhance the housing inventory as a 3-year priority.
  - a. *Comprehensive Housing Study* – The housing study will analyze the current housing market to quantify existing housing supply, assess demand for different housing types, identify barriers to meeting demands, and list potential policy tools to address housing gaps. A staff workgroup (City Manager's Office, Community Development, and Information Technology) began meeting in September 2019 and an RFP to hire a consultant to complete the study is anticipated to be released in February 2020.
  - b. Planning staff will continue to consider the Zoning Ordinance's impact on housing as we work on the update to the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances and will consider recommendations to increase flexibility, where appropriate.
6. *Floodplain Management Ordinance Updates* – In May 2017, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VA DCR) released a new Floodplain Management Model Ordinance. Staff is reviewing the City's Floodplain Management Ordinance against the model ordinance and will propose updates as necessary. Being part of the Zoning Ordinance, updates to the Floodplain Management Ordinance will be presented to Planning Commission for recommendation prior to consideration of adoption by City Council.

List D. Projects currently on hold with little to no activity. Note that these items could be rectified through the rewrite of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances project. (Long-term)

7. *Community Gardens* – In January 2013, as part of discussions surrounding Business Gardens, Planning Commission identified that the trend of community gardens in residential districts should be investigated by staff. Staff has prepared a process to solicit public input on community gardens to inform drafting of ordinance amendments. A focus group was hosted on May 11, 2017. This project was later placed on hold due to staff turnover and other work priorities.

8. *Home Occupation* – In September 2016, Planning Commission identified that home occupation permits and/or home business licenses needed to be reviewed. Staff has interviewed zoning administrators from other Virginia communities and continues to coordinate with the City Attorney’s Office and the Building Inspections Division on Building Code requirements for home businesses. This project has been placed on hold due to staff turnover and other work priorities.
9. *Off-Street Parking Requirements* – In October 2016, there was consensus among Planning Commission that parking requirements needed to be reviewed by staff.
10. *Minimum Street Widths, On- and Off-Street Parking Requirements, and Rear Alleys for New Neighborhood Subdivisions* – In September 2019, staff began discussions to clarify and describe in the City’s Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) minimum street width requirements for different street designs. Considerations will be made to address restrictions to on-street parking, minimum width needed for the Fire Department for access and setting up equipment, minimum width needed for providing services such as trash pickup and snow removal, impact of unnecessarily wide streets on the cost of developing new housing, and impact of wider streets on pedestrian and vehicular traffic safety and vehicular speed. Furthermore, higher density, smaller width development afforded by the new R-8 zoning district could result in more driveway entrances on a street, which could have impacts on the availability of space for on-street parking. Rear alleys and overflow parking lots may be considered.

List E. Other Projects for Planning Commission awareness. (FYI)

11. *2020 Census* – Community Development and Information Technology are leading the effort on technical GIS, mapping, and addressing needs for the U.S. Census Bureau. The City Manager’s Office is leading the effort on community outreach to educate the public on Census Day (April 1, 2020) and the importance of participating in the decennial census.
12. *Environmental Action Plan (EAP)* – On October 23, 2018, following a presentation by the Council-appointed Environmental Performance Standards Advisory Committee (EPSAC), City Council directed staff to develop an action plan to address Building Standards and Energy Efficiency; Waste Reduction and Recycling; Renewable Energy; Stormwater, Water Quality, and Water Conservation; Sustainable Transportation; Regional Food Systems; and Land Use and Open Space. The EAP Phase 1 was adopted by City Council on January 14, 2020. A plan/schedule for phase 2 (establishing baselines) and phase 3 (establishing targets) are being developed and will be initiated in 2020.
13. *Water/Sewer Forecasting* - A team of staff from Public Utilities, Community Development, Information Technology, Economic Development, and the City Manager’s Office was chartered in July 2018 to develop, and periodically update, anticipated water and sewer demands for City buildout conditions. During 2019, the Land Use Committee has developed methodology to forecast water use based on existing Zoning designations and the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Guide.
14. *Downtown Parking Study* – Staff from the Departments of Economic Development, Public Works, Police, Community Development, Public Transportation, and from

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance have been working with DESMAN, a national consulting firm for transportation improvements and parking facilities, to examine existing parking supply and usage, forecast demand for parking, and recommend strategies for current and projected demand. The final report is anticipated by the end of February 2020.

15. *Downtown Master Plan* – The City and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance are partnering together to develop a downtown master plan in 2020. A consultant will be hired in early 2020 to assist with the process.
16. *Small Area and Corridor Plans* – The 2018 Comprehensive Plan includes “Potential Small Area Plans” and “Gateway and Corridor Enhancement Area” maps that roughly identify the boundaries of neighborhoods, commercial and mixed use areas, and important local and regional travel routes through the City that could be prioritized specialized studies to address unique issues associated with each area.
17. *Public Alleys* – In March and April 2019, as part of discussions at Planning Commission and City Council meetings surrounding requests to close public alleys. Planning Commission expressed interest in evaluating public alleys (i.e. current use and future plans for how they might be used). The City Attorney’s Office has researched general legal issues on the topic regarding ownership, maintenance responsibilities, and liability. Staff discussions on this matter continues.