

TO: Kurt Hodgen, City Manager  
FROM: Brenda Black, Tourism  
DATE: August 14, 2017  
RE: Branding Assessment

**Summary:** The city's Tourism Office, Harrisonburg Economic Development, and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance have partnered to participate in a branding assessment. In an effort to understand the current collateral being used and to outline the purpose of creating a brand, all city departments have been invited to participate in the process.

Community branding is a preservation process. It is our goal to proactively identify attributes people love about Harrisonburg and highlight those characteristics to brand the culture, resources, partnerships, and city.

This process will solicit input from different stakeholders and the community at large through a public process.

**Background:**

In May, the city's Tourism and Visitor Services, Harrisonburg Economic Development, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, and Jeremiah Bishop Racing LLC submitted a joint application for a \$50,000 Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) marketing leverage grant. The partners intend to use the grant on a fresh and compelling marketing campaign that aligns our messages and will help Harrisonburg have a greater impact from collaborative economic development efforts. The partners expect to hear back from the VTC in September regarding the grant award.

In the meantime, we have taken the first step in initiating this coordinated marketing campaign by leading a process to create a unified brand for the city. A brand is much more than a tagline, a logo, or an image. It is a system that can be employed, a toolbox that can be shared, and an exercise that the community goes through to explore what makes it truly unique and marketable. Each partner contributed \$5,000 to hire Arnett Muldrow and Associates to lead the community branding process and design the brand statements, logo and design concepts, and messaging for this marketing effort.

The project manager, Ben Muldrow, has conducted his introductory site visit and will return to Harrisonburg in mid-September to continue the research process with a series of inclusive public input forums and to unveil his brand concept on the final evening. His visit will engage the public to ensure that his work will bring community members into the process by asking them to identify what makes Harrisonburg special so we can align Harrisonburg's identity with its values and garner early buy-in from residents, our future brand ambassadors. A major outcome of a branding initiative is building community pride around an agreed set of values, images, and phrases and leverage those tools to project community pride for our residents.

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**Key Issues:**

In the past, different font styles, logos, messaging, taglines, and overall strategies have been used by Tourism, Economic Development and HDR. By not coordinating the look and feel of our outreach efforts to prospective businesses, tourists, customers, and residents we missed an opportunity to cohesively showcase the best of what Harrisonburg has to offer in the most professional, engaging, and eye-catching ways. In order to more efficiently and effectively use resources and to have a greater impact on our audiences, the partners seek to align their messaging, which begins with developing a unified Harrisonburg brand and strategy. A branding initiative can save time, effort, and funds by creating a palette of logos, tagline options, design templates, and marketing pieces for a variety of stakeholders.

Neighboring towns in the Shenandoah Valley are channeling resources into strategic branding and marketing campaigns. Harrisonburg must not only be competitive among these communities but we must stand out among them in order to capture the attention of future employers, customers, residents, investors, and tourists.

Additionally, the partners would like city council to participate in the input process in whichever method is most convenient.

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**Environmental Impact:**

None

**Fiscal Impact:**

\$5,000 match from Harrisonburg Economic Development

\$5,000 match from Harrisonburg Tourism

\$5,000 match from Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

**Prior Actions:**

**Alternatives:**

(a)

(b); or

(c) Do not adopt ordinance at this time

**Community Engagement:**

Arnett Muldrow & Associates will facilitate 12 focus group meetings with diverse community stakeholders and one public input meeting in addition to conducting an online survey in order to help us lead an inclusive community process. The public input meeting will be held at the Massanutten Regional Library on September 11<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. The brand concept presentation will be delivered to the public on September 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. at the Ice House.

**Recommendation:**

**Attachments:**

**Review:**

*The initiating Department Director will place in Legistar, in sequence of transmittal, the names of each department that must initial their review in order for this item to be placed on the City Council agenda. The completion of review only addresses the readiness of the issue for Council consideration. This does not address the recommendation for approval or denial of the issue.*

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