



# City of Harrisonburg

409 S. Main Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

## Meeting Minutes - Draft City Council

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Tuesday, November 30, 2021

5:30 PM

Council Chambers

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### Work Session

#### 1. Roll Call

All members were present in person except for Council Member Dent, who participated virtually.

**Present:** 6 - Mayor Deanna R. Reed, Vice Mayor Sal Romero, Council Member Christopher B. Jones, Council Member George Hirschmann, Council Member Laura Dent and Mayor Matthew Tobia

**Also Present:** 4 - City Manager Eric Campbell, City Attorney Chris Brown, City Clerk Pam Ulmer and Police Chief Kelley Warner

Chris Brown, city attorney, stated Council Member Dent is requesting to participate virtually due to an illness. He reviewed the policy and noted all Council Members must approve her request in order to participate virtually from her home.

**A motion was made by Vice Mayor Romero, seconded by Council Member Hirschmann, to approve the request as presented. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.**

#### 2. ARPA FUNDING

##### 2.a. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) spending discussions

Eric Campbell, city manager, stated this work session is for Council to continue to work through and discuss from the last work session on November 16, 2021, and noted that the documents provided to Council outlining projects and options were based on the conversations at that last meeting. He stated this is not the final version but to provide a type of construct for Council to visually see what the implementation of the potential spending plan would look like. He stated it is not required for any type of key decisions at this meeting and additional work sessions can be held. He stated staff, at the request of Council, engaged with JMU Institute of Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue (ICAD) and they are interested in speaking with Council in a work session or individually, as they prepare to work on a community engagement process. He stated he would like Council's preference on that to move forward. Council Members agreed to individual conversations with ICAD.

Council Woman Dent stated the main goal of the intention of the ARPA funding is to heal the damage done by the pandemic to the community as a whole, as well as engaging the community to see how the community can step in and help. She stated

the only things she saw on the options provided by staff to be time sensitive is hiring the ARPA Coordinator as soon as possible in order to help sort through all this and that the city should be ready to build a homeless shelter in case property becomes available. She stated she sees the new fire station as an immediate need for public health and safety. She stated she urges Council to take time on the rest of the options, we have three years, Council could discuss further as certain needs become apparent. She stated many things discussed don't have costs yet such as childcare and some are still in negotiations such as funding for Victim Services and the Rescue Squad. She urges some caution and to proceed as soon as possible with the community engagement so Council can see the real needs are and what the abilities of the community to respond might be. She stated Council should pay attention to the Asset Limited Income Restrained Employed (ALICE) population, as they are one of the most impacted by the pandemic.

Council Member Jones stated Fire Station 5 is a legacy project that would typically require a bond to construct, Councils before this one dreamed of doing this project but never were in a position to do it, and he is a strong supporter for the city to have an opportunity to get that project started to add greater public safety. He stated the population in the area of the proposed new fire station has grown to include many children, there is a college and a large retirement community there, it will lower response time, help with home insurance rates, and is needed. He stated he agrees with the need for assistance with childcare. He stated we aren't able to do as much as we would like regarding broad band in the city, but the County will be able to provide broad band with the funds they have. He stated the Public Works building would absorb a lot of the funding, he strongly considers this project or at least figure out a way to supplement that project to some degree. He stated another one of his priorities would be to figure out what else needs to be done in the northeast neighborhood other than just the splash pad.

Vice Mayor Romero stated we have a great opportunity to really improve the community and mend all the harm that was done due to the pandemic. He stated we must be strategic in the way we think about what we want to do, every project talked about has value to our community, and we should look at what is most important in the community in general and not what is most important to each individual Council Member. He stated he is not willing to move forward yet as there is a lot of value in the knowledge and expertise from others in the community and needs the community to be involved in the process before decisions should be made. He stated he does agree that childcare is paramount.

Council Member Hirschmann stated he agrees with much of the thought process from everyone as to not rush into making decisions, but he feels there are a few things Council could pick out of the projects that could be done and agreed upon by all. He stated he agrees with engaging the community, childcare is very important, and the fire station is definitely needed. He stated one thing he didn't hear yet was in regard to the upgrade of the Emergency Communication Center which has been on the table

for a few years already and doesn't always function as it should in crisis situations. He stated he hasn't heard anything about helping the senior citizens either and he believes there should be something we can do to lighten their load a bit along the way. He stated Council is generally on the right path and discussion should take place on what projects to keep our eyes on but also take our time to ensure the funds are being spent where they will do the most good. He suggested the community engagement not be drawn out to long.

Mayor Reed stated she has made it clear of what her priorities are, she agrees that we can decide on projects that can be started but doesn't want to extend certain funding for an extended period of time because this Council might change and, in that process, opportunities may be missed. She stated we definitely need to hear from the community, we need to correct some wrongs and include investments in the northeast neighborhood as that neighborhood has been overlooked. She reviewed the history of the Harris pool in the northeast neighborhood, it was taken away when Westover Pool was built, it is a hurt that has been a part of that community that has never healed, and this Council should make a major move to reflect they understand what happened in that neighborhood and it will be made right. She stated the splash pad at the Ralph Sampson Park has been pushed back for years. She stated Fire Station #4 in the northeast neighborhood is in need of repairs, but after discussion with the Fire Chief, the logic behind building Fire Station 5 makes sense and is needed more. She stated the project for the Public Works building is a lot of money, and if we do both those big projects at the same time it will take the full \$11M of the first round of funding and feels we may run out of funding needed for other options. She stated she agrees with the need for assistance to childcare, she agrees with the homeless shelter, but she wants Council to think as a group, and make decisions as a whole, including community engagement that should be done quickly. She stated she hopes she has the support of the rest of Council to put a significant investment in the northeast neighborhood.

Council Member Jones stated there is a significant obvious difference while traveling from downtown to the northeast neighborhood, the streets and sidewalks are different, the lighting is darker and needs to be taken care of. He stated he would like to see more businesses move to that area, in particular black and brown businesses. He stated Council should start doing the research on the needs as part of this process and Council should be involved with community engagement.

Council Member Dent stated making amends to underserved neighborhoods is a key component of ARPA under Building Stronger Neighborhoods and Communities section and there is more leeway when serving underserved communities or particular census tracts. She agrees with the needs of the northeast neighborhood.

Vice Mayor Romero stated he supports the needs for the northeast neighborhood but are we ready to designate a certain dollar amount to this or are we saying it is a priority and involve the northeast neighborhood community to hear the needs directly

from them. Mayor Reed stated decisions will not be made without community input and is requesting the first community engagement be done in the northeast neighborhood. Further discussion took place as to who to involve in the community engagements and Harrisonburg Housing and Redevelopment Authority’s responsibilities.

Discussion took place whether another work session is desired.

Council Member Jones stated JMU and the Chamber of Commerce are working on the community engagement piece, we know where the first one should be held, consider holding the engagements by voting precincts, we already voted on the ARPA Coordinator, we all agreed the homeless shelter is going to happen, we all agreed the northeast neighborhood should be funded, the need for a new fire station was discussed and should be decided on, the need for childcare was agreed upon, all we need to know is what to do next. He stated Council could spend between now and January 2022 gathering information.

Council Member Dent stated she was for providing a fraction of the funding for the Public Works building be set aside, but finding funding for completion may be difficult, especially since this type of project would not be included in the new Infrastructure Bill funding. She stated other options should be explored without making any commitments.

Mayor Reed asked the city manager if he was clear on the next steps. Mr. Campbell stated he was.

Council discussed community engagement and the need to be deeply involved with those engagements.

**3. Adjournment**

At 6:26 p.m., there being no further business and on motion adopted, the meeting was adjourned.

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR