

MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION

June 16, 2026

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held a work session for the Zoning Ordinance Update Project on Tuesday, June 16, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 011 at City Hall, 409 South Main Street.

Members present: Richard Baugh, Chair; Heja Alsindi; KC Kettler; Rob Jezior; and Randy Seitz. Shannon Porter, Vice Chair and Laura Dent, Councilmember joined the meeting late. Also present: Thanh Dang, Deputy Director of Community Development; Wesley Russ, Deputy City Attorney; Michael Parks, Director of Communications and Public Engagement; Tyler Blanks, Zoning Administrator; Nyrma Soffel, Planner; and Meg Rupkey, Planner.

Presentations

Presentation on the Communications and Public Engagement Plan for the Zoning Ordinance Update Project

Mr. Parks presented an overview of the communications and public engagement plan for the Zoning Ordinance Update Project. He asked Planning Commissioners to keep in mind that communications strategies evolve as we continue working with the community and learn more.

He presented the goals of public engagement for the Zoning Ordinance Update Project are to:

- Educate the community on the different aspects of the Zoning Ordinance Update Project. For the initial engagement period (summer 2026 to end of 2026) those include:
 - What is Zoning?
 - Proposed new Zoning Districts and what does the map look like
 - Proposed reductions to residential lot area requirements and setbacks
 - Proposed streamlining of development and review procedures (simplified townhome development review process; consolidated commercial parking requirements)
 - Proposed Neighborhood Commercial district for neighborhood-scale businesses
 - What comes next, including introducing the future update to the Comprehensive Plan
- Create Avenues for Feedback and Encourage Input.
- Show community members how their feedback is being incorporated into the ordinance and future efforts such as the Comprehensive Plan update and beyond.

Proposed strategies include:

- Educating the community about the Zoning Ordinance Update Project by breaking the complex issue into multiple, easier-to-understand pieces and making sure different audiences have the opportunity to learn and engage on as many of these topics (or others they are interested in) as they wish.
- Creating avenues for community members to provide feedback about these multiple areas of interest in person and virtually to ensure once they learn more about the update they can speak to their reactions/needs.
- Highlighting how input received was incorporated into the project when presenting the next update to City Council and through our website so the public can see what actions their feedback led to.

Proposed tactics and activities include:

- Holding Planning Commission work sessions beginning in June 2026 through the summer to receive feedback and input from Commissioners.
- Holding a series of 2 public meetings in different locations around the community with multiple tables focused on individual parts of the update project.
- Hosting Mini-pop-ups with different audiences.
- Considering a “stakeholder” meeting that is invite-only for advocates who we know will have extensive feedback we want to make sure we capture.
- Creating a detailed website that mimics public meetings by breaking the project down into pieces. Include forms for each piece where people can provide input.
- Creating social media about the pieces of the project to encourage people to visit website & provide input.
- Considering a virtual meeting for people who can’t attend public meetings but want to speak with someone.
- Coordinating with media for stories about the update project, what it covers, and how the community can take part.
- Creating visuals for City Hall in the lobby or outside Community Development that highlights parts of the plan and leaves an avenue for people to drop off input or come into the office and speak with staffer.
- Creating a document that can be mailed to homes and businesses with more information on how to get involved.
- Promoting and use the project email list (Constant Contact). This will be a way for community members to receive updates.

Note that Vice Chair Porter joined the meeting at 6:05pm.

Discussion took place regarding Planning Commissioner’s questions and comments:

- When are we going to consider larger substantive changes? Staff responded that it will be after the 2026 work. Additionally, there will be a table at public meetings dedicated to “What comes next?” where we will collect ideas for future steps.
- The importance of educating people on “Why zoning?” and “What’s the impact of zoning?”

Review and discuss portions of the draft Zoning Ordinance text and draft Zoning Map

Mr. Russ reviewed relevant bills passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2026 that impact this project:

- §15.2-2247 and 15.2-2290 of the Code of Virginia, relating to zoning; manufactured housing. (Effective July 1, 2026)
- §15.2-2286.2, relating to small lot residential zoning district. (Effective July 1, 2026)
- §15.2-2292.3, relating to zoning; development and use of accessory dwelling units. (Effective July 1, 2027)

Discussion took place regarding Planning Commissioner’s questions and comments:

- How are the Virginia Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Law in sync with the HUD standards? Staff will look into this and report back.
- §15.2-2201 and 15.2-2286 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 15.2-2288.9, relating to affordable housing; religious organizations and other nonprofit tax-exempt properties.

Note that Councilmember Dent joined the meeting at 6:22pm.

The group reviewed questions that were received in advance from Planning Commissioners regarding draft Article B. Zoning Districts and District Standard and a portion of draft Article C. Use Regulations (only residential districts included), and the draft Zoning Map. Discussion took place regarding:

- The addition of the Flexible Residential District in response to requirements of recent amendments to State Code §15.2-2286.2.
- Reviewed definitions of “duplex,” “single-family attached,” and “townhomes” and minimum lot widths.
- Garden Communities District’s proposed minimum lot area is the same as current R-3 district. Staff is not proposing a higher density because the Comprehensive Plan prioritizes single-family detached homes and duplexes for sale, and staff prioritized not opening the door for wholesale redevelopment until we have created regulations that would not just reproduce the existing car-centric pattern.

- How do we navigate the need for more housing and also the desire for more single-family detached homes?
- In other communities, narrow lots typically rely on rear alleys. Alleys provide opportunities for rear parking, which reduces conflict points in the front, along public streets. But who is responsible for maintenance of the alleys?
- Properties that are conditionally zoned (proffers), will maintain their existing entitlements and proffers.
- When a property owner proposes to create new lots, staff proposes that commercially zoned properties that have at least 200-feet of frontage must have a shared access plan for how the lots will share driveways. This will help with entrance spacing and access management.
- Neighborhood Commercial and Mixed Use Neighborhood/Urban Village will require special use permits for auto-centric uses.
- Neighborhood Commercial district will allow some residential, such as an apartment upstairs. Staff are still working through whether this will be by right or by special use permit.
- Minimum side yard setbacks.
- Building and parking placement downtown. Proposed regulations would prohibit parking lots between buildings and public streets in downtown.
- Historic preservation, historic overlay district, architectural review board, style books, or other regulations and guidance for downtown. These topics will be discussed more later in future phases.
- Parking requirements in downtown.
- How Zoning Ordinances change over time.
- How and should the City take a more active role to fund or build infrastructure to support new housing construction?
- Why are we not doing more reform like eliminating single-family zoning, parking requirements, single room occupancy, a housing trust fund, and inclusionary zoning like Charlottesville?
- What are other communities we should look to? Blacksburg, Winchester, Lynchburg, Auburn University.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30pm.

Richard Baugh, Chair

Anastasia Montigney, Secretary