

1 **Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan Focus Group Four: Business & Economic Vitality**

2 **Tuesday, October 20, 1:30pm-3pm**

3 **Meeting Summary**

4 Focus Group Participants:

- 5 • Kevin McDermott – Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
- 6 • Joan Hollen – Shenandoah Valley Partnership
- 7 • Frank Tamberino – Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce
- 8 • Thomas Jenkins – Shenandoah Bicycle Company
- 9 • Daniel Martin – Valley Mall Management

10 City Department Participants:

- 11 • Brian Shull, Department of Economic Development
- 12 • Tom Hartman, Public Works Department
- 13 • Jim Baker, Public Works Department

14 Other Participants:

- 15 • Moderator, Thanh Dang, Public Works Department
- 16 • Notetaker, Zach Nagourney, Public Works Department
- 17 • Carl Droms, Bicycle & Pedestrian Subcommittee

18  
19 1) Thanh welcomed the group, described the purpose, and guidelines for this meeting.

20  
21 2) Thanh introduced City department representatives.

22  
23 Participants introduced themselves.

24  
25 3) Thanh – What kind of places do you, your customers, or employees go in a typical week and  
26 how do they get there (walk, bike, bus, drive)? What influences their decision?

27 a) Frank –

28 i) Staff drive their cars and go to various meetings in personal vehicles. People coming  
29 to meet at his office also drive. Sometimes they might carpool, but are auto-  
30 dependent.

31 ii) Depending on the size of the meeting they will try to meet at a more centralized  
32 location, like downtown.

33 iii) Also needs to keep in mind some people may be coming from outside the area.  
34 Always makes sure there are plenty of parking spaces.

35 iv) Some people can combine multiple meetings in downtown, but he may have to drive  
36 to Massanutten, then to Broadway and back to Harrisonburg.

37 b) Joan –

38 i) Works at the Icehouse downtown.

- 39 ii) People who work downtown who come to her building will walk. But people who  
40 work in office, to go to meetings they have to drive because they cover a broad area.  
41 They live outside of Harrisonburg have to drive to work.
- 42 iii) She loves to work downtown because she likes to walk around downtown. Can walk  
43 to local restaurants or just around the block.
- 44 c) Thomas –
- 45 i) Majority of staff rides bikes to work due lifestyle and to convenience. Having safe  
46 bike, covered bike parking solves where do I park my bike? Errands that the staff runs  
47 are close enough to ride bike, e.g. bike is close to shop.
- 48 ii) Majority of customers drive to the store. Do have some that bike. Seen more of an  
49 increase in pedestrian traffic as we have seen more people working downtown.  
50 Walking to the shop during lunch. And this is more skewed then most other  
51 businesses. A good majority of JMU students are riding bikes to the shop. The shop is  
52 easy to get to by bike and makes it easier for customers to get to.
- 53 d) Daniel –
- 54 i) 90% of both staff and customers are driving. Most of his staff live outside of  
55 Harrisonburg in Bridgewater, Augusta, Grottoes, etc.
- 56 ii) Other 10% are JMU students taking public transportation.
- 57 iii) When the City added sidewalks, he thought we would have seen more biking and  
58 walking, but haven't.
- 59 e) Kevin - Are there any bike racks?
- 60 i) Daniel – 3 bike racks
- 61 f) Thomas asks Daniel – Have the sidewalks spurred more walking in that area? People  
62 working or shopping coming from outside the sidewalk area?
- 63 i) Daniel – Yes.
- 64 g) Frank – People in hotels, within a couple of blocks from there, has seen people walk all  
65 the time.
- 66 i) Thomas – Yes, when I stay out of town at a hotel. I get to walk for a few minute  
67 because I've been stuck in a car or a conference all day.
- 68 h) Daniel – A lot of it is mindset. If I want to go to Chick-Fil-A for lunch, why don't I walk?  
69 The sidewalks are there. If the City is going to make the investment for infrastructure and  
70 public safety, we need to educate people to use the sidewalks. Maybe with more traffic  
71 and population growth it would force people to walk? Like in big cities. It hasn't  
72 happened here yet to force people to walk.
- 73 i) Joan – The time to get somewhere influences the decision to drive.
- 74 j) Kevin – When you get outside of the immediate downtown and JMU the density changes.  
75 The route from the mall to Chic-Fil-A isn't that far, but it seems far away.
- 76 k) Daniel – When he worked in DC he would walk further than that. You don't think about  
77 it.
- 78 l) Frank – It's all perception.
- 79 m) Kevin – When you live in those places, there's a greater attraction to walking. He's not  
80 familiar with East Market St, but imagines that you're walking along long stretches of  
81 parking lots. There isn't much scenery to look at while walking, and the Chick-Fil-A that  
82 looks so far away. You don't think about that in a more dense place.
- 83 n) Kevin - The people he serves, through the HRMPO, are taking work trips, school trips,  
84 and shopping trips. 85 – 90% of those trips are taken by car. The college students are

85 biking and are who use transit the most. Once outside of JMU area, the public doesn't use  
86 transit as much.

- 87
- 88 4) Thanh – What're the most important transportation factors that influence a business location?
- 89 a) Frank – It depends on the type of business. For chains and commercial businesses that are  
90 dependent upon traffic coming through the door (retail, service) most look at Average  
91 Daily Traffic count – how many cars are passing by. Can you turn in and turn out? For  
92 companies that are not dependent on that traffic, like IT companies, can locate anywhere.  
93 Not sure how many are not downtown. Most are in downtown because that is what they  
94 want and they want to intermingle with others and have synergy between them.  
95 However, if they are looking to relocate and are used to being a suburban location, they  
96 may just choose another suburban location with a large footprint.
- 97 b) Joan – Sometimes companies who want to locate here will ask if there is public  
98 transportation available for employees to get around. SRI was in favor of bike paths for  
99 their employees. Some companies use biking as a huge asset for quality of living.
- 100 c) Frank – Some people see biking as either a recreational activity or a form of  
101 transportation.
- 102 d) Thomas – From a retail perspective, he looks at traffic around the business and ease of  
103 getting in and out. Non-retail depends on other things. Sometimes companies see a  
104 location and having the option of a facility nearby for employees to bike for  
105 transportation to work is an appealing feature for employers. So that recreational cyclists  
106 may find they can do it for transportation. DEQ office on the southside of Harrisonburg is  
107 a hard place to get by bike. They have lots of employees who are environmentally  
108 conscious who would bike but are limited. Public transit would be appealing for big  
109 stores like Wal-mart, Target to attract employees and shoppers.
- 110 e) Thanh (directed to Joan) – What kind of response do you give to people calling?
- 111 i) Joan – Promotes Bike the Valley website, City's recognition for biking. Hasn't  
112 promoted bike to work because she doesn't have material to promote what she  
113 doesn't know.
- 114 ii) Thanh – What about transit?
- 115 iii) Joan - Only Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro have transit.
- 116
- 117 f) Kevin – The Governor and others, when talking about VTrans vision process. Another  
118 way for cities to attract businesses and have a great economy to focus more on making  
119 your place a place where people want to stay and live. And then they'll come and build  
120 their business from the ground. He thinks Harrisonburg has a great start on that with JMU  
121 here. If you can make it attractive for people to live and they will want to stay. The  
122 Millennial generation wants a town that is bikeable, walkable and transit friendly. It  
123 makes it more attractive.
- 124 g) Thomas – D.C. is trying to figure out a way to retain the Millennials. The cost of living  
125 keeps going up.
- 126 h) Daniel – Tyson's Corner is trying to make it easier to work, play, live and stay in that  
127 area.
- 128 i) Frank – Reston, VA, building a small city and shutting everyone out.
- 129 j) Kevin – Out in Denver, many malls that were not doing well have been redeveloped into  
130 community centers and residential areas have been put in alongside retail.

- 131 k) Frank – In Denver, a business’s rented bikes for a beer tour.  
132
- 133 5) Thanh – Do you think improved infrastructure would attract businesses and/or local tourism?  
134 a) Kevin – 100% yes!  
135 b) Joan – agrees.  
136 c) Kevin - People want to vacation at places that are easy to get around.  
137 d) Thomas – Agree. Bicycle tourism has increased and will continue increase. But people  
138 want to be able to bike not just for recreational purposes, but they want that whole day  
139 experience to be able to walk to restaurants, to hotel, etc. or use public transportation. I  
140 think that is still missing here.  
141
- 142 6) Thanh – Are there any examples of transportation infrastructure improvements that you have  
143 seen that promotes this type of environment?  
144 a) Joan – Adding sidewalks and crosswalks by the mall has been helpful for people walk out  
145 there. Has improved safety. And allowed people to walk to restaurants, etc.  
146 b) Kevin – Downtown streetscape improvements, ascetics, has really helped add to the pride  
147 of Harrisonburg. If they are visiting, they may think they want live in a place like  
148 Harrisonburg, how fun it looks, that is easy to walk around.  
149 c) Kevin - There are a lot of mountain biking and hiking opportunities outside of the city,  
150 like Shenandoah National Park. That is really attractive and those resources that  
151 successful cities play off of.  
152
- 153 7) Joan – Are the any statistics of people who come from outside of Harrisonburg, who come  
154 here for recreational biking? She lives outside of Bridgewater and sees tons of people on  
155 bikes. The evening bicyclists may be local. On the weekends, there may be hundreds of  
156 people biking by and wonders if people are parking somewhere and then riding.  
157 a) Carl – a lot of people from Harrisonburg, Massanutten, and other places do park in  
158 Bridgewater and then bike.  
159 b) Kevin – Currently working on an Economic impact Study. A survey was released around  
160 April 2015 using survey monkey, as promoted for visiting and local bicyclists to go on to  
161 answer some questions about what their spending habits regarding bicycling and how  
162 often they visit and where they ride. Survey will close in mid-November 2015. Results  
163 will be run through an economic impact model to see what economic impact of local  
164 bicyclist is. About 1,200 people have filled of the survey to date.  
165
- 166 8) Thanh – Have you observed or received feedback of difficult places and routes to access for  
167 biking, walking, or transit?  
168 a) Frank – Anywhere along 33 where there isn’t a sidewalk.  
169 b) Daniel – North Main Street from the county building to the north. There’s always people  
170 walking on the road and in the grass.  
171 c) Thomas –  
172 i) Anywhere on Country Club Road.  
173 ii) Getting from east-west sides of town to the other.  
174 iii) Along Route 33 crossing 81.  
175 iv) On MLK Jr. Way from Route 33 to 42 is difficult.  
176 v) And hard to get to the very south end of town, DEQ offices.

- 177 d) Kevin –  
178 i) Big break from inside the city to outside. Hard to get around outside the core of the  
179 City and going out into the County.  
180 ii) 33 on the east and west side.  
181 iii) 11 on both the north and south side are difficult.  
182 iv) Also heard difficult to get from Belmont to the City.
- 183 e) Daniel – What about Reservoir St improvements?  
184 i) Tom – It will have bike lanes and sidewalks.
- 185 f) Frank – Not having sidewalks on a road isn't a bad thing if traffic is moving slowly,  
186 people are more courteous. But for roads with higher traffic and higher speeds, you're  
187 taking your life into your own hands.  
188
- 189 9) Thanh – What can be done to encourage people to bike and walk more? Infrastructure,  
190 encouragement, education.
- 191 a) Thomas – Education is a big thing. Getting people in the mindset that walking and biking  
192 doesn't take that long door to door. Employers should encourage biking/walking from a  
193 health perspective. Parking can be a big expense, such as in places like downtown. To  
194 educate from different angles from the city and employers – example: you work here,  
195 these are all the places that are a 5 minute walk. Some people are driving a few blocks to  
196 get to lunch and it takes longer than walking.
- 197 b) Thanh – Have you seen any employer programs that should be tried around here?  
198 i) Frank – In Florida, employers encouraged employees to walk and bike so they  
199 wouldn't have to pay for all the parking spots. The best incentives is a disincentive,  
200 make it inconvenient for people to use a vehicle. But that can be counterproductive if  
201 people say they just won't go there any more, it could hurt a business.
- 202 ii) Daniel – There is probably a distance, that helps people decide whether to bike or  
203 walk. A lot of the mall employs people from outside Harrisonburg. Education is key  
204 once you're at the location – you park at the mall or you live downtown, then you  
205 park your car for the day and walk, bike, or use transit to get around within the City.
- 206 iii) Thomas – Thinks that staff at JMU could commute to campus via car. Then when  
207 they get here, they could park at a satellite parking lot for staff, they could retrieve  
208 their bike out of a covered/ secure locker, and then bike to and around campus all day  
209 and for errands. I think people get into the mindset that it's one or the other, but I  
210 think it can be both.  
211
- 212 c) Thanh – Have you thought more about a carpool lot, Park & Ride in the area?  
213 i) Kevin – Thinks it's been a missed opportunity not to have a Park & Ride in  
214 Harrisonburg. Thinks it's needed. Putting one outside of downtown, then provide  
215 transit service or walk into downtown or to JMU campus. It works both ways. People  
216 in Harrisonburg and Rockingham might park there and carpool to Staunton, Augusta,  
217 and Waynesboro for work. Kevin lives out near Charlottesville and see this type of  
218 Park & Ride around the UVA campus, where people park outside of campus and  
219 takes a bus in for free.
- 220 ii) Thomas – Thinks RMH had some incentives when they were located in their old  
221 location.  
222 (1) Brian – Many RMH employees would park in municipal lots the ride or walk in.

- 223           iii) Kevin – Does EMU have any issues with parking? Would they be attracted to Park &  
224           Rides?  
225           (1) Frank –Doesn't think EMU has any issues. Bridgewater is starting to develop  
226           some issues with parking availability.  
227           (2) Brian – EMU has started adding more bike sheds with new dorms.  
228
- 229 10) Thanh – If you were given a list of new bike/ped projects and programs needed in the City,  
230           how would you prioritize which projects should be funded first? What factors are most  
231           important?
- 232           a) Joan – Safety, places where people have been hit.  
233           b) Daniel – Areas where there's congestion for vehicles, buses, etc. Should alleviate  
234           tensions in those areas.  
235           c) Frank – Highest priorities would be congested areas.  
236           d) Kevin – Whatever projects get you the most bang for your buck, areas that could help the  
237           most people. Look at population density and job density.  
238           e) Frank – Sidewalks, too. Sidewalks may not take a lot of people off the road, but anything  
239           you can do helps.  
240           f) Thomas – There needs to be a balance between long term vision and planning, and fixing  
241           congestion issues now. If you're always dealing with what is the problem now, you will  
242           always be playing catch-up. You have to have the vision for what is down the  
243           pipeline, projects being planned for 20 years out. Consider a goal to increase public  
244           transportation or increase trips by walking and biking. Average citizen might not  
245           understand the balance, but there need to be one.  
246           g) Daniel – Transportation issues are difficult to fix because there is never enough money to  
247           fund the projects. In DC, when Springfield exchange was done, it took so long to do that  
248           the improvements became obsolete when the project was completed. Wants to fix things  
249           now but has to also plan for the future. The hot points identified now could move in 5  
250           years due to changes, or other improvements.  
251           h) Kevin – looking at future land use goals, not just transportation.  
252           i) Thomas – Regarding the University, looking at how much congestion is due to students  
253           commuting to school. As a citizen, he chooses parts of town he'd travel to or avoid based  
254           on time of year or time of day, based on university schedule. Maybe look at  
255           transportation dollars differently. The university is such a major part of the transportation  
256           issue.  
257           j) Daniel – Assumes there is a bad point elsewhere in the City that was fixed when the  
258           Southeast Connector opened because people changed their routine. If you were to try to  
259           fix that one small bad point, you may have wasted a lot of money.  
260           k) Frank – part of it is mindset and tolerance level. You could keep widening Reservoir  
261           Street until you have no stops along it, or do you just live with it. He now plans his  
262           commutes based on time of days or choose an alternative route.  
263           l) Thomas – Does the City track peak hours?  
264           i) Tom – Yes we do. We build sequencing into the traffic signals based on peak hours  
265           and peak direction of travel.  
266           m) Thanh – To summarize, the group would prioritize projects by  
267           i) Looking at long term planning versus short term fixes, to carefully evaluate  
268           opportunities

- 269 ii) Safety, such as accident information
- 270 iii) Areas with congestion
- 271 iv) What is the cost benefit, look at population densities and where people are moving
- 272 v) Sidewalk safety (not really a priority factor)
- 273 n) Frank – sometimes you have to build where you want people to go.

274

275 11) Thanh – Have we missed anything?

276 a) Frank – How much PR, publicity goes on from a public transportation standpoint? If  
277 you're a student you're probably getting that information. But other people coming to  
278 town or dependent on public transportation or who might be willing to take transit with  
279 awareness.

280 i) Thanh – Will relay that question to transit. In other focus group meetings, Avery from  
281 transit offered bus riding education programs to community organizations.

282 ii) Kevin – We have a Ride Share Program, grant funded by Department of Rail &  
283 Public Transportation. The program promotes any types of non single occupancy  
284 vehicle choices in transportation. Trying to incorporate more transit PR.

285 iii) Thanh – Are there ideas to promote public transit that we can relay to Kevin's office  
286 or to Transit?

287 (1) Frank – More awareness. Most people aren't in the automatic mindset to catch the  
288 bus.

289 (2) Kevin – Envisions the Ride Share Program helping people become more aware of  
290 transit. Sending employer human resources departments bus schedules and the  
291 bike comfort map that Harrisonburg made. Great resource that could be provided.

292 b) Thomas – Is there any incentive programs – for employers or schools to reduce the  
293 number of car trips going to that location? Parents dropping off one kid at the school or  
294 business employees all driving to work. Are there municipalities out there who reduce the  
295 demand on our infrastructure by working with employers through incentives? Maybe  
296 that's money better spent then on infrastructure.

297 i) Thanh – Doesn't know of any.

298 ii) Tom – The city has the Safe Routes to School program that encourages parents to  
299 walk their kids to school. If a new business comes into the city the developer is  
300 required to build sidewalks, connector roads for interconnectivity, etc. We don't have  
301 the level of your idea.

302 c) Thomas – Suggests the city consider a cost share program to provide infrastructure to  
303 connect housing developments. Looking at big college housing units that are not  
304 integrated. Understands that they are private businesses and private developments, but  
305 there are opportunities there to connect them. There could be path connection The  
306 Overlook to the back of The Overlook to Hunters Ridge. What financial incentive can the  
307 city offer to the neighbors to reduce demand on our infrastructure?

308 i) Jim – Would love to take a \$2 million project, instead of building \$2 million worth of  
309 roadway, but to break it out into multiple smaller funds, and take it to private  
310 developers to build interconnectivity and paths. But part of the education process  
311 goes beyond educating our own people. We need to educate the people who provide  
312 the funding to the City. The strings that come attached to the dollars the City received  
313 require that it only be spent for roads for motor vehicles. Federal highway funds can't  
314 easily be used for building paths. As we update the Bike/Ped Plan to show these

315 projects, we can add a narrative about bicycle and pedestrian plan to change the  
316 mindset.

317 ii) Kevin – There may be opportunity to incentivize building those internal connections  
318 by allowing them to reduce other required road improvements. Or to reduce the  
319 number of parking spaces they are required to build in exchange for building  
320 interconnectivity with neighbors. Incentivize transit and alternative forms of  
321 transportation.

322

323 12) Thanh – summarized next steps for the Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan.

324 a) Thank you for coming out today.

DRAFT