# City of Harrisonburg

## Legislative Agenda

2027

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# Policy Principles

The City of Harrisonburg's 2027 Legislative Agenda is not an exhaustive listing of positions on all potential issues. Rather, it is a concise statement of priorities for state representatives to focus on. As the General Assembly commences, many bills will come forward that are not reflected in this document. Though the City will maintain a dialogue throughout the session, representatives should be aware of and advocate for the following Policy Principles on all legislation, even in the absence of a stated position.

## Protect Local Authority

Virginia is a culturally, economically, and geographically diverse state. State policy should preserve local autonomy so cities, counties, and towns can respond to resident needs in ways that are relevant and cost-efficient. The City supports legislation that enables, rather than unnecessarily requires or prohibits, local action. Protecting local authority over revenue, land use, and other core functions is essential for effective governance.

Local elected officials are directly accountable to residents and businesses and are best positioned to balance community needs, service expectations, fiscal capacity, and local conditions. Statewide standards may be appropriate when there is a clear statewide interest; however, when this is the case, the Commonwealth should establish clear policy objectives and allow localities to determine the most effective means of achieving them.

## Fund State Mandates

When the Commonwealth determines it is necessary to require localities to take on a new governmental function, it should provide sustainable funding to implement it. Any new unfunded or underfunded mandate constrains local budgets and makes providing essential services and advancing community priorities more challenging. State policy should fully account for costs related to implementation and ongoing operations.

Before imposing new requirements, the Commonwealth should demonstrate that statewide action is necessary, consider if the intended outcome can be achieved with local flexibility and incentives, and consult with affected local governments. When a mandate is warranted, requirements should be practical, timelines reasonable, compliance expectations clear, and funding from the state provided. This approach balances achieving the Commonwealth's priorities and acknowledging localities' fiscal realities.

# Legislative Priorities

**Priority**
Public Sector Collective Bargaining

**Position**
The City is in favor of maintaining the current status on collective bargaining by retaining local governing bodies' authority over establishing collective bargaining units. If the State mandates collective bargaining, the City calls for protecting local governing approval over agreements with a budget impact, and for the State to fund administration and arbitration costs related to collective bargaining.

Local governing bodies are responsible for setting tax rates, adopting budgets, and establishing policy objectives. In addition, chief administrative officers are responsible for setting organizational culture and maintaining adequate staffing. Collective bargaining agreements create significant financial obligations at residents' expense and erode managerial oversight. Preserving local approval authority ensures that negotiated agreements are considered alongside the City's full fiscal capacity, service commitments, and long-term obligations.

**Priority**
Revisit "Housing Near Jobs"

**Position**
The City is in favor of preserving local authority over zoning, including decisions of where and at what density housing may be constructed. Due to geographical and market constraints, if housing growth targets are established by the State, the City is in favor of combining independent cities with their directly adjacent counties to meet a shared growth target. The City is in favor of the State providing grants or additional funding to localities to further their own affordable and workforce housing initiatives.

Housing needs and development capacity vary substantially among Virginia communities. Independent cities are particularly affected by growth targets because their boundaries limit the land available for new development, while housing and employment markets frequently extend across jurisdictional lines. Additionally, housing requires more than land. New development must be supported by water and sewer, transportation, public safety, parks and recreation, and schools. These investments require substantial capital funding and long-term operating commitments that do not align with statewide targets.

# Legislative Priorities

**Priority**
Support the Urban Public-Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund

**Position**
On the books since 2000, the Urban Public-Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund is supposed to address the scarcity and costs of developable land in urban areas with grants and loans to local governments for site preparation and redevelopment. In order to promote small business growth, this resource should be funded, and the criteria defining the non-monetary contribution match should be expansive to consider land, waived fees, and other incentives and in-kind contributions.

Redevelopment of urban property often involves site assembly, demolition, environmental remediation, utility upgrades, and other upfront costs that make viable projects difficult to finance. These costs can leave properties vacant or underused and can limit opportunities for business expansion or housing. A fully capitalized fund would help local governments bridge early-stage viability gaps to leverage private investment in redevelopment areas.

**Priority**
Assistance to Local Police Departments (HB 599)

**Position**
Almost 70 percent of Virginians live in communities served by police departments. The State created a program of financial assistance to local police departments (HB 599) when it imposed an annexation moratorium on cities more than 30 years ago. It has increasingly deemphasized this funding obligation as a priority but has never compromised on the annexation moratorium. The City calls for the State to honor its commitment to local governments and public safety by funding the program as stipulated in the Code of Virginia.

Local police departments face continuing demands for competitive compensation, recruitment and retention, training, equipment, technology, behavioral-health response, and community-safety initiatives. Reliable HB 599 funding recognizes the essential public safety role these departments provide and helps localities sustain those services. Full funding would also provide greater predictability for local budget planning and allow cities to direct resources to emerging public safety needs.

# Legislative Priorities

**Priority**
Children's Services Funding

**Position**
Local governments administer the Children's Services Act (CSA) program on behalf of the State, and share in the funding responsibilities with the State. Local governments have consistently supported efforts to contain costs for the program, particularly the private day special education program. The City opposes the capping of State funding responsibility for this and any other component of the CSA program, which shifts the funding burden for mandated services onto local governments.

CSA costs are driven by the individual needs of children and families and by legally required services that local governments cannot simply reduce or defer when State funding is insufficient. In private day special education, placements and services are determined through the individualized education program process, which may restrict the number of sites available to serve a student, leading to disproportionately high costs for care that the Commonwealth expects localities to cover.

**Priority**
Maintenance Payment Impacts from Roadway Reconfigurations

**Position**
Revise Code of Virginia 33.2-319 (D)(i) so the last word reads "more" instead of "less". This change would allow the City to continue completing roadway reconfigurations without impact to the maintenance payments that are essential for keeping up the transportation infrastructure in the City. Without this change, or a similar revision to this code section, the City will need to make difficult choices going forward regarding whether to continue making low-cost safety changes or to forego such changes to keep the current level of maintenance payments.

To improve safety on streets in the City, many four-lane roadways have been evaluated and identified as benefiting from a reconfiguration that provides turn lanes and bicycle lanes. The City has successfully implemented many such reconfigurations, which have been seen to achieve desired safety benefits. State Code dictates that maintenance payments are reduced if these reconfigurations exceed 3% of the City's moving-lane-miles, which is less than those that currently exist or are planned for.

# Legislative Priorities

**Priority**
Virginia Fire Program Fund Distribution

**Position**
The City supports increasing the funding source for aid to localities from the current 1% to 2% on fire-related insurance policies. Virginia's fire services are severely underfunded, and the current distribution formula disparately impacts smaller rural communities that paradoxically need more support than larger, more populated jurisdictions. The City supports the legislature maintaining the current funding to larger jurisdictions using the current formula and concurrently directing additional funding to augment those communities receiving the current minimum level of funding.

Fire and emergency medical services are essential statewide public safety functions, but the cost of maintaining them continues to grow. Smaller and rural communities often have limited tax bases, higher response area demands, and greater reliance on volunteer personnel, making minimum level distributions insufficient to address their needs. Increasing the assessment would provide a dedicated, insurance-supported revenue source that can strengthen fire service capacity across the Commonwealth while preserving the current allocation level for larger jurisdictions.

**Priority**
Maintain ASAP Funding at the State

**Position**
The Code of Virginia requires that individuals convicted of DUI enroll in, and successfully complete, an alcohol safety action program. The financial sustainability of the program, originally intended to be funded with client fee revenues, remains an open question. The Commonwealth should provide appropriate funding from its own resources and not shift responsibility for program administration without oversight to localities for this State-mandated program.

ASAPs operate at the intersection of public safety, courts, behavioral health services, and driver licensing requirements. Stable State funding helps ensure that ASAPs are administered consistently across the Commonwealth. Shifting these responsibilities to local governments creates uneven administrative capacity and places localities in the position of subsidizing a statewide criminal justice and highway safety requirement at the expense of locally determined human service priorities.

# Legislative Priorities

**Priority**
English Learner Education

**Position**
Harrisonburg City Public Schools has one of the highest rates of English Learners in the Commonwealth. The City supports increased State funding for English Learner education that reflects the full cost of required instructional staffing, assessment, interpretation, translation, family engagement, and student-support services. Any expansion of required English Learner staffing standards or service requirements should be accompanied by sufficient, recurring state funding to cover the full local cost of compliance.

When State funding does not reflect local needs, school divisions must rely more heavily on local revenues to provide required services. This diverts resources from other educational obligations, including staffing, special education, transportation, facilities, and instructional programs. A more responsive State funding structure would help school divisions meet English Learner needs while maintaining their ability to fulfill the full range of responsibilities required of public schools.

**Priority**
Data Center Accountability

**Position**
The City supports the provisions of Executive Order 22 related to data center accountability. While the City has taken steps to curtail by-right zoning for data centers, the executive order would quickly benefit localities across the Commonwealth that are struggling with outdated zoning ordinances they cannot change with existing applications, and would improve water quality, electric rates, and noise pollution for all Virginians.

Local governments need clear, enforceable standards and timely information to evaluate and manage data center impacts. Executive Order 22's focus would help ensure that data center growth does not shift infrastructure and environmental costs to residents.

# Budget Requests

| Amount | Project | Justification |
|---|---|---|
| $1,000,000 | Childcare Facilities Expansion Program | Through community input, the City invested in expanding childcare capacity with federal ARPA dollars, adding approximately 200 seats at a cost of around $3,000 each. With funding from the State, the City can replicate the success of the previous grant program and expand childcare access, routinely one of the highest priorities for residents. |
| $5,000,000 | Water Storage Tank | In 2025, Harrisonburg was the 2nd fastest growing municipality in Virginia. As the City grows, so does the demand for water. In times of drought or when there are strains on the Water Treatment Plant, stored water can greatly reduce the impact felt by residents and businesses and can protect critical infrastructure. A 5,000,000-gallon tank will support City growth as its long-term water projects come online over the next two decades. |
| $5,000,000 | Stormwater Infrastructure | The City has plans to improve overburdened stormwater infrastructure in neighborhoods that result in flooding for many residents. The City has secured $1.75 million dollars from FEMA to carry out initial project phases but will need to identify other funding sources to complete the work in its entirety. State funding will significantly improve the quality of life and property values of these historically underinvested neighborhoods. |
| Increase | Virginia Homeless Solutions Program | Since opening the Navigation Center, Harrisonburg's unsheltered population has significantly fallen while the percentage of individuals coming from outside of the City to receive services has risen. By increasing funding to the Homeless Solutions Program, Harrisonburg will be able to better serve its residents while the region will have access to more resources to support their homeless residents. |