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City begins update of Comprehensive Zoning, Subdivision ordinances

HARRISONBURG, Va. – An update to two key City of Harrisonburg ordinances is underway, as City staff works to make the documents more streamlined, clear and user-friendly.

Harrisonburg City Council received a briefing from City staff and consultants Kendig Keast Collaborative on Tuesday, Aug. 25, regarding the Comprehensive Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances Update Project. The ordinances regulate a number of topics such as: where different types of housing can be constructed, where different types of businesses can operate, where buildings and structures can be located on a property, the number of parking spaces there are, and how properties are divided to create two new parcels or to create whole neighborhoods.

Along with other regulations and design standards for City streets, these regulations impact how residents live in and get around the community.

“This project is very significant and one that will have long-lasting impact on our City,” Thanh Dang, assistant director of the Department of Community Development, said. “Zoning and subdivision ordinances affect how communities physically develop, look, and function.”

The existing Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances were last thoroughly evaluated and comprehensively re-written in 1997 and 1996, respectively. While many changes, both major and minor, have been made to the text of the ordinances since then, including the addition of districts and overlays to the Zoning Ordinance, City staff recognized that a significant overhaul of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances is needed. Additionally, new ways of thinking about planning and zoning combined with new techniques and principles for implementing adopted plans offer ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of City planning and zoning.

The adoption of the new Comprehensive Plan in November 2018 also affords the opportunity for taking a holistic approach to developing a new Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance.

“We are excited to be working with Kendig Keast Collaborative to evaluate and modernize the City’s approach to land use regulation to reflect current development practices and trends, and to create a more user-friendly code,” Dang said. “Updating the ordinances will help to implement the City’s 2018 Comprehensive Plan, helping turn general goals into reality.”

City Council and staff discussed establishing stakeholder groups and an Ordinance Advisory Committee at Tuesday’s meeting. Planned are eight stakeholder groups that will meet with Kendig Keast Collaborative in Fall 2020 to discuss current issues, opportunities, needs and priorities as they relate to how the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances govern the City’s physical and economic development. The Ordinance Advisory Committee will meet throughout the project to review drafts and advise in the development of the new ordinances.

To stay up to date on the project, community members can:

- Visit www.harrisonburgva.gov/zoning-subdivision-ordinances-update, and
- Email Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov with subject “Join Ordinance Updates Email List” to receive future email updates and announcements about the project.

The project is anticipated to take about 18-months to complete.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



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