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City moves forward on purchase of permanent homeless shelter property

Research now underway on property usage options, timeline for opening of facility

HARRISONBURG, Va. – The City of Harrisonburg has moved forward on a key goal of the Harrisonburg City Council and its mission to address available housing for all.

The City has officially contracted to purchase 3.72 acres of land and a 6,730-square-foot building being sold by Shenandoah Presbytery at 1111 North Main Street. The property is being purchased with the intention that it becomes the location for Harrisonburg’s permanent low-barrier shelter for adults experiencing homelessness. The City will pay \$700,000 for the property, with additional future costs anticipated for converting the property into a suitable location for the services to be provided. Closing on the purchase of the property will occur within 60 days.

For the Harrisonburg City Council, the purchase is a monumental achievement in a process Council members have worked closely on with the community and homelessness services providers since 2019, when creating a permanent low-barrier shelter was identified in the Harrisonburg 2039 Council Vision Plan. Council members agreed in November 2021 that a portion of the City’s American Rescue Plan Act funds would be used to establish a permanent shelter in the community.

“For more than two years now, City staff and I have met at least monthly with our homelessness service providers so we all can understand and discuss the needs of individuals in our community who are experiencing homelessness and how best we can address those needs,” Mayor Deanna Reed said. “With this purchase, we are making a lasting investment in the health and welfare of those in our community in most need of our support and compassion. I am very proud of our Council, staff and community nonprofits who came together to make this vision a reality.

“Creating this permanent low-barrier shelter attests to the values and beliefs of The Friendly City: that we are a community for all, and that all are embraced, celebrated and accommodated.”

The current low-barrier shelter in Harrisonburg is being operated by the nonprofit Open Doors and is currently temporarily located on the campus of James Madison University. City Council and City staff will continue to work closely with Open Doors leadership to meet low-barrier overnight shelter needs in Harrisonburg.



The City of Harrisonburg has contracted to purchase a property at 1111 North Main Street (above) to serve as the future home for a low-barrier shelter for those experiencing homelessness.

“This is exciting progress toward a permanent facility that will positively impact those experiencing homelessness in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County,” Open Doors Board of Directors President Graham Witt said. “Open Doors, and the individuals we serve, have benefited from a community with uncommon generosity, evidenced by the Shenandoah's Presbytery's mission for this property. Today's announcement is a testament to a committed City Manager's Office, empowered by a motivated City Council, that share a vision. Open Doors appreciates the opportunity and challenges to grow with this vision and look forward to continuing our sheltering services.”

Leadership with Shenandoah Presbytery was dedicated to working closely with City staff throughout the process to support this important community endeavor.

“This property has been a hub for enriching congregations up and down the Valley for many years – we are grateful the City of Harrisonburg will now make it a hub to serve our neighbors in need,” Rev. Bronwen Boswell, General Presbyter & Stated Clerk, Shenandoah Presbytery, said. “In a way we feel our own mission will be living on at the property even after the sale is complete.”

City staff is currently working to advance the next steps for the project, which will include identifying a timeline for retrofitting the Presbytery building for shelter use, negotiating a lease for shelter operations, and developing options for expansion of the building. Mather Architects have been engaged by the City to assist in the project.

More information on this effort will be provided once available.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to 51,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



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