

Chapter 1.

Introduction



YOUR CITY. YOUR PLAN.



Chapter 1 Introduction

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The City of Harrisonburg Comprehensive Plan presents a vision of what kind of community the City would like to be in the future and identifies steps to move toward that vision. The Plan is the central organizing umbrella under which other plans, regulations, and initiatives exist. The Plan establishes the preferred overall long-term vision for our community. The Plan is not a regulatory document but serves as a guide for Harrisonburg and it helps City and community leaders with setting policies and decision-making.

Comprehensive plans deal fundamentally with the physical characteristics of a community. Hence, land use is the core element of a comprehensive plan. However, in order to arrive at an appropriate plan for the use of land, other physical aspects must be addressed, such as environmental features, transportation, water and wastewater facilities, and other public facilities. Additionally, other issues are reviewed by comprehensive plans including, but not limited to, affordable housing, historic resources, employment, and economic development. Components of a comprehensive plan should be well-coordinated and complimentary. Virginia Code Sections 15.2-2223 through 15.2-2232, describes local comprehensive plans.

The Comprehensive Plan contains general recommendations. However, one of the most important and practical purposes of a comprehensive plan is to give guidance to the specific land use regulations adopted by the local government. Such regulations include:

- the Zoning Ordinance,
- the Subdivision Ordinance, and

- other growth management tools (i.e. design standards and guidelines, transportation planning, economic development initiatives, housing programs, and others).

Harrisonburg has a long tradition of public planning and this plan builds on previous comprehensive plans adopted by the City. This plan is adopted to set the groundwork for the City's growth and development policies for the next five years within a long-term planning horizon of 20 to 30 years. Planning Commission and City Council expect to consider revisions to the plan, particularly at its next review in five years. In the meantime, this plan is meant to set the City on a course toward meeting its long-term vision as articulated in Chapter 2.

A Community-Based Comprehensive Plan

In Summer 2016, Planning Commission reviewed the 2011 Comprehensive Plan and determined that it should be updated to reflect the City's latest ideals and to adapt the Plan to the changes that have occurred since May 2011. Like the 2011 Comprehensive Plan update, Planning Commission decided this revision should be conducted by the Commission and city staff. The Commission created four Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committees, where each committee would focus on a different set of topics:

- *Advisory Committee 1 – Land Use & Transportation* – to update chapters on Land Use and Development; Neighborhoods and Housing; and Transportation
- *Advisory Committee 2 – Education & Culture* – to update chapters on Education, Workforce Development, and Lifelong Learning; Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources; and Community Engagement and Collaboration
- *Advisory Committee 3 – Community Facilities* – to update chapters on Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability; Parks and Recreation; Community Infrastructure, Services, Safety, and Health
- *Advisory Committee 4 – Economic Development* – to update chapters on Economic Development and Tourism; and Revitalization

In early 2017, the Commission solicited applications from community members to participate in the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committees and appointed 12 community members to each committee, for a total of 48 committee members. Additionally, the Commission also appointed Planning Commission representatives to participate in each advisory committee. Around this same time, the Commission solicited its first round of public input through Be Heard Harrisonburg (www.BeHeardHarrisonburg.org), an online tool that offers residents an opportunity to provide input through open discussions and surveys, and encouraged community members to submit comments in writing through e-mail or letters.

Planning staff collaborated with other City departments during Spring 2017 to update quantitative and qualitative data that make up the Background sections of each chapter for Planning Commission and

Advisory Committees to review. Throughout the Summer and Fall of 2017, Planning Commission and Advisory Committees worked on updating the Plan’s goals, objectives, and strategies. Advisory Committees 2, 3, and 4 each met twice, and Advisory Committee 1 met three times.

The draft chapters which includes Background sections and goals, objectives, and strategies were presented to the public in Fall 2017 through a series of four public workshops and a public comment period that occurred October 9, 2017 through November 28, 2017. For each workshop, Planning Commission wanted to collect feedback on specific information; therefore, the evenings were divided by topic and chapter. The workshops were facilitated by James Madison University’s Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue (JMU CAD) and the schedule occurred as follows:

- Thursday, October 19, 2017, 6pm-8pm at Lucy F. Simms Continuing Education Center – Education & Culture
- Monday, October 23, 2017, 6pm-8pm at Thomas Harrison Middle School – Community Facilities
- Monday, October 30, 2017, 6pm-8pm at Thomas Harrison Middle School – Economic Development
- Monday, November 13, 2017, 6pm-8:30pm at Thomas Harrison Middle School – Land Use & Transportation

Planning Commission reviewed and discussed comments received during the workshops and public comment period at their December 12, 2017 and January 10, 2018 regular meetings, as well as, at a special work session on December 5, 2017. City departments and other partner agencies then spent February through May 2018 updating data and incorporating, where appropriate, comments and recommendations received from the public. Planning Commission and planning staff worked on selecting priority Objective Statements for the Priority List presented in Chapter 3, Implementation.

On August 10, 2018, a public comment period began when the public was notified through e-newsletters and a press release that updated draft chapters and priority Objective Statements were available for review on the city website. An open house was hosted on Wednesday, August 15, 2018 in the City Hall Atrium from 6pm-8pm during which staff and Planning Commissioners were available to answer questions and discuss the Comprehensive Plan. The public comment period ended on August 29, 2018. At a regular meeting on September 12, 2018, Planning Commissioners reviewed and discussed the public comments received.

On October 10, 2018, a public hearing was held at Planning Commission’s regular meeting and the Commission voted to recommend adopting the Comprehensive Plan. City Council held a public hearing on November 13, 2018 and voted to adopt the Comprehensive Plan on November 27, 2018.

Plan Organization

Comprehensive Plan chapters are listed below:

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2	Vision and Goals
Chapter 3	Implementation
Chapter 4	Planning Context
Chapter 5	Community Engagement and Collaboration
Chapter 6	Land Use and Development Quality
Chapter 7	Neighborhoods and Housing
Chapter 8	Education, Workforce Development, Lifelong Learning
Chapter 9	Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources
Chapter 10	Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship
Chapter 11	Parks and Recreation
Chapter 12	Transportation
Chapter 13	Community Infrastructure, Services, Safety, and Health
Chapter 14	Economic Development and Tourism
Chapter 15	Revitalization
Chapter 16	Goal, Objective, and Strategy Statements

The order in which the plan elements are presented does not imply any priority or order of importance. It is important for users of the plan to recognize that many elements are interrelated.

[Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies](#)

Chapter 2 presents the plan’s vision statement and introduces the long-term goals. Chapters 5 through 15 contain the objective and strategy statements associated with each goal.

Provided below are descriptions of the purpose of the vision, goal, objective, and strategy statements.



Figure 1-1. Vision, Goals, Objective, and Strategy Statements

Vision Statement – *Why We Do This*

The vision statement is a description of the ideal desired state of the community in the long-term future.

Goal Statements – *What We Want*

Goals are overarching statements describing the direction that a community wants to go. Goals describe a *desired end state* for a particular community resource or feature and should reflect the values of the community. Goal statements are qualitative in nature.

Objective Statements – *How We Might Achieve It*

Objectives are statements describing how goals could be reached. They may describe definable or measurable benchmarks for a goal.

Strategy Statements – *The Actions We Could Take*

Strategies describe *possible* approaches and methods for attaining objectives. Strategies may be implemented by the City government or by other entities. Often, strategies are implemented through partnerships between multiple entities that might include the City, other local, state, and federal agencies, local businesses, the development community, faith-based and community organizations, and individuals. Strategies begin to answer the question, "How can we accomplish our objectives?" Strategies might include creating or implementing projects, programs, policies, or regulations.

- *Projects* are single-event efforts that have a clear beginning and end.
- *Programs and Policies* are defined as ongoing implementation efforts.

- *Regulations* are provisions that are adopted ordinances or other regulatory documents that might require or prohibit particular matters or actions. New regulations can be adopted, and existing regulations can be amended or removed.

It must be noted that during the implementation phase (after Comprehensive Plan adoption) the community is not limited to implementing only the strategies defined in the Comprehensive Plan nor must those strategies be utilized. There will be instances when new, unforeseen opportunities arise that would support particular objectives, but the opportunity was not identified as a potential strategy in the Comprehensive Plan. Likewise, the community might also find that an identified strategy is no longer feasible or appropriate due to changes in the community.