Chapter 15.

Revitalization
Introduction
Over time, many cities experience cycles of both prosperity and decline. Targeted revitalization strategies and additional investment may be required to assist the areas experiencing decline, disinvestment, or stress so that they can become assets that meet the needs of businesses and/or residents. Additionally, as described in Chapter 6, Land Use and Development Quality, Harrisonburg has a limited inventory of vacant land for new development and should identify opportunities for the City to maximize infill development, as well as to reuse and redevelop existing and underutilized land and structures.

Background
Downtown Revitalization, Rehabilitation, and Redevelopment
Downtown Harrisonburg was once the economic center of the City and the region, but now it competes with new commercial and business areas. During the 1960s and 1970s, Urban Renewal was occurring across the country and led to the demolition of neighborhoods and businesses within and surrounding the downtown. This drastically changed the landscape of areas roughly north and east of Court Square. Around the same time, the nation’s Interstate system and development of shopping malls and strip malls drew residents and businesses away from Downtown and into new neighborhoods and new commercial areas. By the mid-1990s, Downtown streets were largely devoid of people, many storefronts...
were shuttered, historic buildings were demolished, and there were few attractions to encourage people to be Downtown. Then in the early 2000s, the City and organizations like Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) began efforts to revitalize downtown, recognizing that a vital city center attracts businesses and tourists, while improving the overall quality of life for all people. Additional information on the contributions of HDR can be found in Chapter 9, Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources and in Chapter 14, Economic Development and Tourism.

In 2005, the City of Harrisonburg adopted its first Downtown Streetscape Plan, which was later updated in 2014. The Downtown Streetscape Plan guides investment in public infrastructure in the downtown area. The City has also completed two phases of streetscape projects in 2010 and 2015, which have largely consisted of sidewalk reconstruction, the addition of curb ramps, replacing traffic signal poles with decorative poles, new pedestrian signals, and new decorative street lighting fixtures. Future streetscape projects are planned.

There has also been increasing investment interest in the Downtown area by the private sector, which is evidenced by a number of major redevelopment and renovation projects, including but not limited to:

- the renovation of the Wetsel Seed Building on Noll Drive, which was converted to a restaurant and residential units known as “City Exchange” (2006);
- the redevelopment of an automobile sales parcel that is located along East Market Street east of the intersection of Mason Street to a five-story mixed use building known as “Urban Exchange” (2008);
- the restoration of a former sewing factory along West Rock Street to residential units now known as “Sancar Flats at West Rock” (2007);
- the renovation of the Wetsel Seed Building on North Liberty Street known as the “Wetsel Complex,” which includes offices, a restaurant, and retail storefronts (2009);
- the renovation of the former Cassco Ice industrial facility along South Liberty Street and West Bruce Street now known as the “Ice House,” which currently is occupied by employees of James Madison University, two restaurants, a brewery, a museum, a yoga studio, and a coffee shop (2015);
- the rehabilitation of the Wine Bros. Building on South Main Street into luxury loft apartments, a duckpin bowling and arcade center, and a cooperative retail space (2016);
- the rehabilitation of the Chesapeake Western Railway Depot that created retail and office space (2016);
- the renovation of 317 South Main creating an incubator type setting for non-profits with The Community Foundation as the anchor (2017); and
- the rehabilitation of the Keezell Building into new retail and residential space (2017).
Harrisonburg offers certain tax incentives to downtown property owners and has created special economic districts and zones to continue to encourage investments downtown, which are described below. Additionally, by supporting the creation of the Downtown Historic District, valuable historic tax credits have been made available to property owners. Additional information on the Downtown Historic District is available in Chapter 9, Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources.

**Central Business District**

The City has established tax incentives to encourage the renovation and/or rehabilitation of older structures downtown. The incentive is offered to owners of property zoned B-1, Central Business District improved with structures that are at least 25 years old. It provides partial exemption of real estate taxes, not to exceed the amount of the increase in assessed value due to the renovation for up to five years.

**Downtown Economic Revitalization Zone (Central Business District)**

This zone is defined as all parcels of real estate located within the City’s B-1, Central Business District and the City’s Virginia Main Street district. Tax incentives include partial exemption for 5-10 years from real estate taxation for new commercial and residential mixed-use construction exceeding $1 million and containing at least 40 percent retail on the ground floor.

**Downtown Technology Zone**

The zone was created to encourage technology businesses to locate in this limited area of downtown. Incentives include water and sewer connection fee exemption and 3-year BPOL tax exemption for qualified high-technology businesses.

Additional information on the Harrisonburg Downtown Technology Zone can be found in Chapter 14, Economic Development and Tourism.

**Arts and Cultural District**

Harrisonburg’s Arts and Cultural District is an asset that enables the City to both celebrate the tremendous wealth and diversity we currently have in Harrisonburg’s central core and also to offer incentives to encourage additional arts venues and businesses to cluster within the district and strengthen the offerings available for people and tourists to enjoy. The district offers a marketing opportunity and a three-year Business/Professional/Occupational Licenses (BPOL) exemption to help ease the initial tax burden for qualified arts businesses to get a strong foothold in the district.

Additional information on the Arts and Cultural District can be found in Chapter 9, Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources.

**Retail Revitalization Zones**

Harrisonburg has established two Retail Revitalization Zones to promote the continued growth of the retail sector in the City, and in 2018, the U.S. Treasury official designated two areas of the City as
federally designated Opportunity Zones. These zones are described and illustrated in the Economic Development Incentive Zones map in Chapter 14, Economic Development and Tourism.

The Potential Small Area Plans map roughly identifies the boundaries of commercial and mixed-use areas that could be prioritized for study. Some of these areas overlap or are the same as sections of street corridors that have been identified as Corridor Enhancement Areas in Chapter 12, Transportation. Actual boundaries for study will be identified at a future time in further consultation with community members.

Neighborhood Conservation Areas

A number of neighborhoods around the City have experienced stress. Some are suffering from poorly maintained, deteriorating, or vacant homes and spot conversions of single-family homes to apartments, often for students. Other areas contain older deteriorating apartment buildings. Some are affected by encroaching commercial development or undesirable conversion of houses to non-residential uses. Impacts of traffic on highly traveled roadways may also be creating neighborhood stress. The Potential Small Area Plans map roughly identifies the boundaries of neighborhoods that could be prioritized for study. Actual boundaries for study will be identified at a future time in further consultation with community members. This plan recommends that for each of these areas a community-based neighborhood plan be developed to address these and other issues raised by the community. Such plans might include:

- Programs to encourage the rehabilitation and renovation of older houses;
- Programs to facilitate home ownership and improve the quality of rental housing;
- Strategies to reduce land use conflicts, including conflicts between residential areas and adjacent commercial or industrial areas and conflicts created by the expansion of public and institutional uses within neighborhoods;
- Programs to reduce pressures to convert single family houses and lots to other uses;
- Traffic impact analyses addressing commuter traffic on major through roads and industrial truck traffic;
- Recommended infrastructure improvements, including street and sidewalk repairs, traffic calming measures, new sidewalks and trails, and upgraded water and sewer lines;
- Other public investments, such as street tree planting, pocket parks, and community centers;
- Resolution of safety and security issues;
- Programs to encourage the involvement of neighborhood residents in the improvement and maintenance of their neighborhoods (building leadership capacity, encouraging civic involvement); and
- Standards or guidelines for private structures, public landscaping, streets, and utilities in the historic districts to enhance their distinctive design.

Corridor Enhancement Areas

The Gateways and Corridor Enhancement Areas map this chapter, highlights the important local and regional travel routes into and throughout the City, many of which are commercial destinations. Their
quality and character strongly influence the City’s accessibility, attractiveness, and economic vitality. The Plan recommends that a special study of each corridor enhancement area be carried out to address issues such as land use and design quality; streetscape improvements; vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle circulation; access management; development, redevelopment and reuse opportunities; conservation of special features; improvements to utilities and public facilities; and signage. The Potential Small Area Plans map roughly identifies sections of street corridors that could be prioritized for study.

### Revitalization Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

**Goal 18.** To enhance and revitalize existing residential and commercial areas.

**Objective 18.1** To maximize the economic potential of new infill development, and the reuse, and redevelopment of existing and underutilized structures and properties.

**Strategy 18.1.1** To continue to promote available State and Federal historic tax credits, and local tax incentives such as those available in the B-1, Central Business District, the Downtown Economic Revitalization Zone, and the Retail Revitalization Zones.

**Strategy 18.1.2** To review land use policies and regulations, and if appropriate amend them to allow for more infill development.

**Objective 18.2** To continue downtown revitalization as a high priority public-private initiative, the cornerstone of the City’s commerce and government, tourism, historic preservation, and civic pride enhancement efforts.

**Strategy 18.2.1** To continue to promote Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) as the designated downtown revitalization organization charged with leading a public-private effort that focuses on the economic development, destination marketing, and beautification of the downtown district.

**Strategy 18.2.2** To evaluate and possibly expand the boundaries of incentive zones, federal and state historic designation boundaries, and the size of the B-1, Central Business District to increase investment potential and to spur investment in the adjacent neighborhoods.

**Strategy 18.2.3** To develop a downtown master plan that defines its geographic boundaries and addresses the entire area comprehensively from economic development strategies from parking to beautification.

**Strategy 18.2.4** To monitor the need for additional parking in downtown as new development occurs and to continue surveying and studying downtown parking to identify needs and strategies.
Strategy 18.2.5 To explore public-private partnership financing models that would encourage the development of a larger-capacity, mixed-use parking facility in downtown to facilitate realizing the highest potential for downtown infill development and targeted business attraction.

Strategy 18.2.6 To develop a pedestrian-scale wayfinding program and install directional signs that are clear, consistent, and strategically placed to identify downtown retail and business destinations, as well as, linkages to trails and surrounding destinations.

Strategy 18.2.7 To support targeted economic development activities that seek to bring technology and business start-ups downtown.

Strategy 18.2.8 To explore with existing businesses and property owners the feasibility of creating a Business Improvement District and/or Tax Incremental Financing District for downtown.

Objective 18.3 To examine the extent to which changes in the retail sector are related to retail growth versus retail relocation, to seek to minimize long-term retail vacancies, and to initiate programs to redevelop and revitalize abandoned older retail areas.

Strategy 18.3.1 To actively market older shopping centers with high vacancies including consideration of conversion to other uses.

Strategy 18.3.2 To encourage new, small businesses to locate in abandoned retail spaces where low rent opportunities can assist with business development, while also supporting revitalization of those spaces.

Objective 18.4 To identify residential neighborhoods under stress and seek to stabilize, improve the maintenance of, and collaborate alongside residents to enhance the neighborhood’s unique character and revitalize these neighborhoods. See Chapter 6, Land Use and Development Quality’s Goal 4 and Chapter 7, Neighborhoods and Housing’s Goals 5 and 6 for related objectives and strategies.

Strategy 18.4.1 To identify residential neighborhoods in need of community-based neighborhood/small area plans, prepare plans in collaboration with property owners, residents, and business owners, and to implement recommendations. Repeated in Chapter 7, Neighborhoods and Housing as Strategy 5.1.1.

Strategy 18.4.2 To utilize Mixed Use areas identified in the Land Use Guide to provide housing options and as an economic development strategy to strengthen neighborhoods and the City’s economy.
Strategy 18.4.3 To create a residential pattern book, as a guide to preserve and enhance the character and quality of the City’s residential neighborhoods. ¹ Repeated in Chapter 9, Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources as Strategy 10.1.6.

Chapter Resources


Harrisonburg Downtown Streetscape Plan, [https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/downtown-streetscape-plan](https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/downtown-streetscape-plan)

Harrisonburg Downtown Parking Study, 2016


This map roughly identifies boundaries of neighborhoods, commercial and mixed use areas, and sections of street corridors that could be further prioritized for future study. Refer to Chapter 11, Transportation, and Chapter 15, Revitalization for more information.

Data Sources:
Department of Planning and Community Development
Gateways and Corridor Enhancement Areas
Comprehensive Plan

Map created: September 30, 2018