

Chapter 2.

Vision and Goals



YOUR CITY. YOUR PLAN.



Chapter 2 Vision & Goals

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Introduction

The preparation of the Comprehensive Plan provides an opportunity for the City to explore and articulate its vision for the future – what kind of city it would like to be in the next twenty years and beyond. This vision guides the development of the goals, objectives, and strategies for action that make up the policies of this plan. By achieving and implementing the goals and objectives the City will move toward realizing its vision.

Vision Statement

The City of Harrisonburg presents its vision for the future as follows:

*The City of Harrisonburg –
where citizens are inspired to work together to create a great place to live,
to raise a family, to learn, to work and to prosper.*

What is such a place? It is a city of safe and beautiful neighborhoods, where neighbors socialize and residents can walk safely down the street to worship, to play in the park, to go to school, and to shop and work. Neighborhoods offer many housing choices so all people have an opportunity to live in a decent home that they can afford and that is an asset to the neighborhood.

The City of Harrisonburg will be a great place to learn. It will offer excellent schools for our children to learn all they can to reach their full potential. Our great universities will be truly integrated into city life as centers of learning with cultural offering opportunities for people to experience and participate in the arts and to continue their educations.

This will be a city proud of its assets, both cultural and natural, saving the best of its historic buildings and areas and preserving cherished green spaces. In our ideal city of the future, the air and the water in our streams will be cleaner in 2040 than they are today.

This will also be a city of efficient and effective service delivery. Clean, plentiful water will come from the tap and wastes will be handled efficiently, at low cost, and in an environmentally sound manner. Transportation systems will work for all types of travelers, offering a variety of ways for people to get from here to there, by walking, bicycling, taking public transit, and driving a car. The City of Harrisonburg will explore new technologies to assure the best and least costly services that conserve resources and improve efficiencies.

Economic vitality will allow all to work and to prosper. The City of Harrisonburg will retain its place as the economic hub of the region through the expansion of business opportunities. Such expansions may be achieved not only by new commercial and industrial development, but also by the revitalization of older and historic economic areas. A lively downtown will play a central role in civic life. The commercial and mixed-use areas at city gateways will provide a good impression and welcome visitors and residents alike.

How will this great city be achieved? By engaging everyone in the community to work toward the vision, by tapping into their skills and experiences, and by engendering community spirit and pride.

Vision Context and Framing the Goals

In the course of developing this Comprehensive Plan through community engagement, the work of city staff, and deliberation by Planning Commissioners a number of key themes emerged that contextualize the Vision Statement and can shape the implementation of the goals and objectives outlined in this Plan.

The four considerations below identify some of the opportunities and challenges the City might face as it follows the broad roadmap this Comprehensive Plan lays out. They emphasize the unique or distinctive contexts that shape Harrisonburg today. These considerations and questions can be used as a guide and offer some key questions for community members and leaders to consider as decisions about topics covered by this plan emerge and elements of the Plan are put into action.

1. Harrisonburg as a model small city: opportunities and contexts of its size

- Harrisonburg is a growing small city. How can we ensure we balance the strengths of a smaller community with advantages of resources typically available in a larger city? What are the key qualities or strengths we offer as a smaller city and is there a way to maintain those strengths?
- Can we be a “model” for a better kind of urbanism; one that isn’t simply a mix of small and large city elements, but is something different and superior?
- Are we doing our best to help offer high quality small city life that plays to the advantages of a place our size, and our connections with the natural environment within and surrounding the City?

- One of the ways Harrisonburg is quite unique is the full range of issues – challenges and opportunities – we have for a city of our size: economic, demographic, cultural, environmental, large and small. Are we continuing to do the best job we can engaging across the community and with the full extent of civic, commercial, and technological expertise to address the diversity of issues we face?
- Among the benefits of being a small city are the advantages of access and accessibility in forms: geographically, in terms of travel, transportation and physical proximity within the City; and administratively, by offering a more accessible, smaller-scale government and civic leadership with closer connections to our community members. Are we doing our best to make the City accessible to all by connecting different parts of the physical fabric of the City, as well as continuing to ensure that the political and planning process remains as accessible as it can be?

2. The luck of location: making the best of Harrisonburg’s situation in the Shenandoah Valley

- Harrisonburg boasts a striking location in the scenic Shenandoah Valley; we are close to extensive parks and recreational opportunities and surrounded by a bucolic and rich agricultural setting. Are we continuing to make the most of these connections and advantages? Can we turn the connection between “city” and “country” into something valuable for our community, and develop environmental stewardship in distinct ways?
- As the City develops, how can we be sensitive to its geographical setting to protect its natural assets, and those of our valley context, which in turn helps maintain Harrisonburg’s place as a recreational destination? Can our city be a true asset to the surrounding environment and landscape?
- What does the future of our agricultural market and service center look like, and can we be a leader in offering the conditions for sustainability in this important sector?

3. Deepening the local knowledge economy: the place of education and innovation in Harrisonburg

- Harrisonburg is fortunate to boast a number of institutions of higher and continuing education and a strong city public school system. Are we continuing to keep a critical focus on educational opportunities for all members of our community, especially as high-quality education is known to be one of the main drivers for twenty-first century urban success?
- Are we usefully and productively connecting our institutions of higher education and their people with the City, its residents, organizations, and businesses in the best way? Are all forms of training, skills development, and professional education being supported as our employment needs and the local economy develops? What kind of college town do we want to be?
- How can we make the most out of being a place that boasts a large educational presence, as well as being a regional service and commercial center, and having an important agricultural

market function in the modern age? How can we draw on the opportunities of each, and deepen the connections between these functions, supporting collaboration that enriches our commerce and culture?

- Harrisonburg and this part of Virginia are known for a spirit of practical, down-to-earth entrepreneurialism. Are decisions about the built environment of the City, and the policies and legal frameworks that shape the City, continuing to support that practical, problem-solving spirit, balancing the public good with the opportunities for private inventiveness and enterprise?
- There are many opportunities in Harrisonburg for community members to get meaningfully involved in City initiatives, policymaking, and planning. Are we continuing to nurture the opportunities for the fusion of new ideas with local expertise, and public and private resources?

4. Growing our own way: maintaining Harrisonburg's distinctiveness and community fabric as we change

- Harrisonburg's population has grown robustly in recent decades and looks set to continue to grow. Are we making smart land use choices as undeveloped land becomes more limited and are we finding creative ways to balance density with livability in a small-city setting?
- As the City grows, and infill and redevelopment become more common, are we working to ensure the City maintains existing senses of neighborhood community and distinctiveness? What are the roles of neighborhoods in a small city like Harrisonburg in the twenty-first century?
- Are we supporting the affordability and desirability of housing opportunities across a range of prices and characteristics that ensures the City is a truly diverse community? How can we foster a community that is diverse without being segregated? Are we using the opportunities and advantages the smaller scale Harrisonburg presents to support a more connected community? How does a small city make the most of the international connections the growing diversity in our community offers?
- One of the successes of Harrisonburg has been its ability to maintain a focus on the place as a community that people want to live in, while developing its attraction as a destination that people want to visit. We have become a destination in terms of an exciting downtown, a regional service center, a retail and professional hub, and college cluster, among other things. How do we continue maintaining that balance between "community" and "destination" in the decisions we make?
- People and businesses come to Harrisonburg for many different reasons. Our downtown, however, is a particular and distinctive draw. Are we doing the best we can to support and promote this unique asset and key element of our sense of place, protecting its history, supporting its culture, and opening its future? Can some of the principles and factors that have

helped downtown and its popularity be applied elsewhere in the City, to ensure the whole city experiences the benefits and contributes to the success and sense of place of Harrisonburg?

- Are the main drivers of the growth in Harrisonburg – including, but not limited to, the growth of James Madison University, the growing immigrant population, and the popularity and investment in downtown – being usefully connected? Can more be done to foster integration and partnerships between various drivers, to ensure that we are not somehow less than the sum of our dynamic parts?
- Are the decisions we are making today helping make Harrisonburg the city our children will be proud of and wish to make their home?

Goals for Achieving the Vision (Goal Statements)

The City of Harrisonburg sets the following goals for the next twenty years and beyond. These goals will inspire us to action - to devise the measures and policies necessary to make this City a great place to live, to raise a family, to learn, to work and to prosper.

- Goal 1. To keep the Comprehensive Plan vital and useful by regularly reviewing its recommendations and the progress toward meeting them.
- Goal 2. To coordinate and collaborate with surrounding jurisdictions, institutions of higher education, faith-based organizations, non-profit organizations, and other community organizations to meet the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Goal 3. To reach out to and to engage all segments of the population, as well as, businesses, and industries to work collaboratively in planning, developing, and promoting the City as a great place to live and work.
- Goal 4. To improve the quality of land use and development patterns.
- Goal 5. To strengthen existing neighborhoods and promote the development of new neighborhoods that are quiet, safe, beautiful, walkable, enhance social interaction, and offer a balanced range of housing choices.
- Goal 6. To meet the current and future needs of residents for affordable housing.
- Goal 7. To provide a wide, accessible, and equitably distributed range of educational opportunities for all.
- Goal 8. To have a wide and equitably distributed range of art, and cultural opportunities that reflects our diversity and engages our community members and visitors.
- Goal 9. To create places of distinction that celebrate the arts, capture the imagination, and reflect the rich tapestry of our past and present.

- Goal 10. To recognize and promote the value of the City's diverse historic resources and the many benefits that come from protecting irreplaceable assets that embody Harrisonburg's history.
- Goal 11. To preserve and enhance the City's natural environment for future generations through education and policies that encourage development that is compatible with nature and builds community resiliency and social responsibility within the community.
- Goal 12. To meet the needs of people by providing comprehensive recreation and self-development opportunities, both physical and mental, by developing and maintaining a safe, welcoming, well-distributed, and accessible parks and recreation system that also supports community well-being, economic sustainability, and environmental sustainability.
- Goal 13. To develop and maintain a safe and convenient transportation system serving all modes of travel, including driving, walking, biking, and taking public transportation.
- Goal 14. To support the City with community facilities, infrastructure, and services, which allow for sustainable growth and are accessible, equitable, efficient, cost-effective, and sensitive to the environment.
- Goal 15. To enhance the quality of life of our community by protecting and enhancing health, safety and welfare through public safety, fire suppression, emergency medical services, preventative health care services, and community education.
- Goal 16. To maintain economic leadership in the Shenandoah Valley by offering opportunities for all people, businesses, and industries that enhances the City's ability to expand its economic base and provide good employment for all people.
- Goal 17. To grow the hospitality and tourism industry by encouraging more visits and longer visits among target markets.
- Goal 18. To enhance and revitalize existing residential and commercial areas.