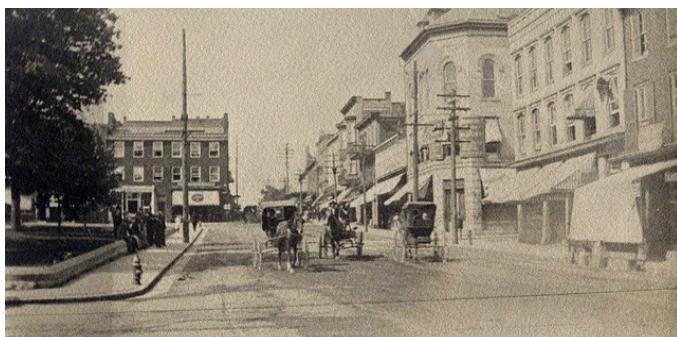


Chapter 9.

Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources



Chapter 9 Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources

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Introduction

With a diverse population, two universities, two historic districts, and a rich heritage the City of Harrisonburg has an abundance of artistic, cultural, and historic assets. The City's cultural enrichment is provided by educational institutions, arts organizations, community and nonprofit organizations, the library system, and local businesses. The City has many quality historic resources recognized particularly in the downtown and in close-by neighborhoods, which provides much of the City's unique architectural character. The City has not made historic preservation a major focus, but interest in preservation

continues to grow. This plan supports expansion of the City's arts, cultural, and historic offerings in an effort to enhance the community's quality of life and the preservation of our distinct and irreplaceable heritage.

Arts & Cultural Attractions

The City boasts a number of arts and cultural attractions, many of which are clustered in the City's Arts and Cultural District. These attractions include, but are not limited to, the Virginia Quilt Museum, the Hardesty-Higgins House, the Explore More Discovery Museum, and multiple private businesses. These venues not only are attractions bringing in visitors from outside of the region, but also provide programming for our local residents.

James Madison University (JMU) provides opportunities for the study and exploration of the visual and performing arts. First and foremost, it is home to the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, which greatly enriches and enlightens the community. The Forbes Center has five performing venues including a 600-seat Concert Hall, a 196-seat Recital Hall, a 450-seat Mainstage Theatre, a 200-seat Earlynn J. Miller Dance Theatre, and a 150-seat Studio Theatre. JMU also has the Sawhill, artWorks, and New Image Galleries, the Madison Art Collection, and the Institute for Visual Studies. JMU's Outdoor Sculpture Invitational features the work of nationally recognized sculptors on a rotating basis, which is open year-round, and is located in front of Duke Hall. JMU's John C. Wells um offers free public shows and hosts school groups and community groups.

Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) rounds out the City's university-based cultural offerings with the Hartzler Library Art Gallery, the EMU Theater, the Hostetter Museum of Natural History, and Brackbill Planetarium.

Special interest cultural groups also exist in our area including a local nonprofit, volunteer-based community theater company, whose members perform three to four times a year at Court Square Theater, and many other performance and visual arts groups. For listings of area attractions, residents and visitors can contact the Arts Council of the Valley and the Harrisonburg Tourism & Visitor Services.

Arts & 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 residents and visitors to enjoy. City Council approved Virginia's first Arts and Cultural District on June 12, 2001. The district has continued to serve as a sense of pride for the area's arts community. A map of the Arts and Cultural District is provided at the end of this chapter.

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. In 2016, City Council expanded the boundaries of the Arts & Cultural District and

approved the removal of the admissions tax within the district for the benefit of both existing and future performance venues. A map illustrating the Arts & Cultural District is available at the end of this chapter.

[**Culinary District**](#)

With the support of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), Harrisonburg Tourism & Visitors Services (HTVS), the Downtown Dining Alliance, Harrisonburg Farmers Market, and other food-related businesses, City Council created Virginia's first culinary district, known as the Downtown Culinary District, in January 2014. This designation allows the district to be promoted, advertised, and marketed in a manner consistent with such a designation, with an emphasis on attracting and retaining businesses and customers that are consistent with the designation. A map illustrating the Culinary District is available at the end of this chapter.

[**Arts Council of the Valley**](#)

In 2000, the City helped establish the Arts Council of the Valley (ACV), a non-profit cultural organization that was originally established to provide cultural and operational leadership for the 250-seat Court Square Theater. Over the years, the ACV has expanded its scope of programs and services, and now operates two downtown cultural venues: the historic Smith House with its Darrin-Mchone Art Gallery and Court Square Theater. In 2009, ACV, HDR, and other partners saw an opportunity to expand the biannual downtown "Art and Gallery Walk" into what is now known as "First Fridays." First Fridays is a free public event that occurs every first Friday of the month and involves over 30 participating venues throughout downtown.

In support of its mission, the Arts Council of the Valley: 1) produces and promotes quality visual and performing arts programs in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham area; 2) provides grants to support educational and community-based cultural initiatives; 3) cultivates and nurtures emerging arts organizations for limited periods; and 4) participates in the revitalization of downtown Harrisonburg's Arts and Cultural district.

ACV's core operating funds are provided by grants from the City, Rockingham County, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Each year, the ACV generates additional revenue through fundraising activities and other program-based sources.

[**Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance**](#)

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) leads an ongoing, comprehensive downtown management program. One of many things HDR does is produce about a dozen annual events – from Valley Fourth to Taste of Downtown – and solidifies JMU students' relationship with the downtown during freshman orientation through Block Party in the Burg. The organization also manages the citywide events application process and gives expert planning advice to event applicants to encourage safe and successful event planning. HDR has a vigorous marketing campaign and partners with the Harrisonburg Tourism and Visitor Services (HTVS), a division of the City's Department of Economic Development, to attract visitors, shoppers, and diners to spend time downtown and support local businesses. When

people plan weekend or daytrips, they are seeking heritage and history, culture, and art experiences, unique places, and one-of-a-kind businesses that they do not have where they live. They find a concentration of those amenities in Downtown Harrisonburg as it is a destination for travelers.

Additional information on the mission and activities of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), Harrisonburg Tourism and Visitor Services, and the Department of Economic Development is found in Chapter 14, Economic Development.

[Massanutten Regional Library](#)

The Massanutten Regional Library (MRL) is a private, non-profit organization supported jointly by the City of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and Page County. Public libraries play an important role in strengthening places and community quality of life. MRL provides cultural and enrichment programs for the community also displays local art and exhibits.

Additional information about Massanutten Regional Library and its offerings is available in Chapter 8, Education, Workforce Development, and Lifelong Learning.

[Historic Resources](#)

[Background](#)

Harrisonburg is fortunate that, while many historic resources have been lost, many historic properties still remain to tell the story of the City's rich history and to enrich the lives of its community members. Beginning in 1958, a number of properties have been documented through historic site surveys, providing the City with an invaluable inventory of historic resources. The *Plan Background Information Supplement from the 2004 Comprehensive Plan* contains a five-page brief history of the City as well as listings of the City's historic resources surveyed. Harrisonburg also has two nationally recognized historic districts. A historic district is a group of buildings, properties, or sites that have been designated by the U.S. National Park Service as historically or architecturally significant.

The Harrisonburg-Rockingham County Historical Society, located in the Town of Dayton, located about 5 miles southwest of the City along Route 42 (John Wayland Highway), provides a wealth of information relating to Harrisonburg's history.

[Historic Preservation Efforts](#)

The City of Harrisonburg has surveyed its historic resources and celebrates its heritage to tell the story of the community's history and to educate its residents and visitors about our past. Protecting and sharing our resources are important to enriching the lives of residents and boosting community pride, but also has an important economic impact. Harrisonburg's arts, cultural amenities, and historic and heritage assets are part of the City's diversified economic base and an important driver of tourism spending. A cultural-heritage traveler is defined by the US Department of Commerce's National Travel and Tourism Office as having participated in one or more of the following activities: Art Gallery/Museum, Concert/Play/Musical, Cultural/Ethnic Heritage Sites, American Indian Communities,

Historical Locations, and National Parks/Monuments. The State of the American Traveler Survey in 2008 found that more than 70% of travelers visited the following types of cultural heritage attractions: historic attractions; state, local, or national parks; art galleries and museums; music or performance venues; or ethnic or ecological heritage sites. More information on the impact of tourism on Harrisonburg's economy can be found in Chapter 14, Economic Development and Tourism.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VA DHR) administers two programs designed to recognize historic resources and to encourage their continued preservation: the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is managed by the U.S. National Park Service and its list of structures, sites, objects, and districts. The Virginia Landmarks Register is the state's official list of properties important to Virginia's history.

Listing on the National Register and Virginia Landmarks Register brings no regulatory requirements for property owners, but makes the properties eligible for state and federal tax credits for rehabilitation of historic structures within the district. Listing of properties in a register requires state and federal agencies to avoid actions that might harm historic structures within the district, and properties within historic districts tend to appreciate in value at a faster rate than other properties, providing benefits to historic property owners and to the community's tax base. The City does not administer any local historic districts.

[**Harrisonburg Downtown Historic District**](#)

The Harrisonburg Downtown Historic District, located primarily along Main Street between Kratzer Avenue and Grace Street, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005 and was expanded in 2017 to include five buildings on Old South High Street. The district encompasses approximately 104-acres and embraces the historic commercial and institutional core of the City. Many historic rehabilitation projects in downtown were made possible by the historic district status and eligibility for state and federal historic tax credits. Additional historic tax credit projects continue to be underway today and could only be made financially possible with this incentive.

It should be acknowledged that much of the economic resurgence that began in downtown in the early 2000s and that continues to this day is due in large part to the coordinating efforts of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR). In 2003, City Council voted to establish HDR as downtown's revitalization organization, which has used the Main Street Approach to lead the public-private effort in support of a roughly 40-block district. Additional information on HDR's efforts is available in Chapter 14, Economic Development and Tourism, and Chapter 15, Revitalization.

[**Old Town Historic District**](#)

The Old Town Historic District, located near downtown Harrisonburg, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2008. The district is a medium density, predominately residential neighborhood. The northern boundary of the district is Water Street; the eastern boundary is defined by Ott Street except where Franklin Street runs past Ott Street to include contributing buildings further east on Franklin Street. The southern boundary is defined as the north side of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Way, and the western boundary is defined by South Main Street, excluding all buildings that front South Main Street, as they are included in the previously listed Downtown Harrisonburg Historic District.

Old Town is comprised of numerous intact examples of Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Spanish Revival, Tudor Revival, Craftsman, Cottage, American Four Square, Bungalow, Bauhaus, Italianate, Modern Movement, and Modified Ranch architecture. While the district is predominately single-family detached units, there are also multi-family dwellings, apartment buildings, and a few sporadic commercial buildings throughout the district.

[**Other Historic Resources**](#)

Table 9-1 provides a current listing of buildings and properties currently on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Additional information about these properties is available in the *Plan Background Information Supplement from the 2004 Comprehensive Plan*.

Table 9-1. Buildings and Properties listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places

Building/Property Name and Location	Date Listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register	Date listed on the National Register of Historic Places
Earman, George House, 1982 Willow Hill Drive	September 1981	July 1982
Hockman House, NW corner of East Market Street and Broad Street	January 1981	July 1982
Joshua Wilton House, 412 South Main Street	October 1978	May 1979
Lucy F. Simms School, 620 Simms Avenue	December 2003	February 2004
Newtown Cemetery, roughly bounded by Kelley Street, Hill Street, Sterling Street, and row of houses along Gay Street	December 2014	February 2015
Rockingham County Courthouse, Court Square	July 1982	September 1982
Thomas Harrison House, 30 West Bruce Street	June 1973	July 1973
Whitesel Brothers Building, 131 West Grace Street	March 2005	May 2005

Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources Goals, Objectives and Strategies

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.

Objective 8.1 To incorporate art in public spaces, neighborhoods, and gateways.

Strategy 8.1.1 To continue supporting the City's Arts & Cultural District.

Strategy 8.1.2 To adopt a "percent-for-art" program, which would establish a City policy to require the City of Harrisonburg to commit for public art at least 1 percent of the cost of new construction or major renovation of public

buildings, as identified in the City's annual Capital Improvement Program.

Strategy 8.1.3 To create a Public Art Commission to oversee the "percent-for-art" program (Strategy 8.1.2) in partnership with the Arts Council of the Valley. The Public Art Commission may be chartered to have other responsibilities.

Strategy 8.1.4 To evaluate whether funding (local government contributions and other funding sources) to matches other arts councils and organizations in Virginia and to help find ways to increase it.

Goal 9. To create places of distinction that celebrate the arts, capture the imagination, and reflect the rich tapestry of our past and present.

Objective 9.1 To support placemaking projects that enhance the public realm with creative expressions.

Strategy 9.1.1 To support community gateway treatments and/or other signage, green space, public art, and other expressions that reinforce the City's brand and look so that all features are coordinated and tie in with the overall narrative of the place.

Strategy 9.1.2 To incorporate art into the planning process of public facilities and utilize creative and artistic approaches to public realm amenities and infrastructure like benches, cross walks, gateways, park elements, alley ways, trash cans, bike racks, and others.

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.

Objective 10.1 To identify and employ tools that recognize historic resources and encourage historic preservation.

Strategy 10.1.1 To form a City Council-appointed taskforce to research and make recommendations to the City on best practices and tools concerning historic resources.

Strategy 10.1.2 To commission/create an inventory of the historic resources in the City.

Strategy 10.1.3 To support adding properties and district listings on the state and federal registers of historic places.

Strategy 10.1.4 To expand the downtown historic district to include additional historic structures that would benefit from rehabilitation and historic tax credits.

Strategy 10.1.5 To continue disseminating information to property owners regarding federal and state rehabilitation tax incentives.

Strategy 10.1.6 To create an urban design manual that establishes general design principals that depict the attributes and the character of neighborhoods and areas in the City to preserve and enhance the character and quality of each neighborhood or area.¹ Repeated in Chapter 15, Revitalization as Strategy 18.4.3.

Objective 10.2 To increase educational opportunities for people to learn about Harrisonburg's rich multicultural history, historic resources, and historic preservation projects.

Strategy 10.2.1 To work with the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society to establish a location or exhibit in downtown Harrisonburg dedicated to the history of the City.

Strategy 10.2.2 To create additional walking tour brochures, a smart phone walking tour, installing additional historic markers, and to establish interactive displays representing the City's history and facing the future by illustrating the City's evolution, demographics, and intercultural influences overtime.

Strategy 10.2.3 To create a dedicated webpage on the City website that provides information on historic resources and sites and lists relevant publications and resources.

Strategy 10.2.4 To continue offering historical publications and information on historic resources and sites in the City at the Visitor Center operated by Harrisonburg Tourism and Visitor Services.

Objective 10.3 To preserve City-owned historic resources.

Strategy 10.3.1 To ensure that City of Harrisonburg development and redevelopment projects respect older and historic resources and reflect the historic character of the City and site context.

¹ For examples, see City of Roanoke, Urban Design Manual and Residential Pattern Book: <https://www.roanokeva.gov/1302/Urban-Design-Manual> and <https://www.roanokeva.gov/1281/Residential-Pattern-Book>.

Strategy 10.3.2 To commission a feasibility study for the adaptive reuse of the Municipal Building.

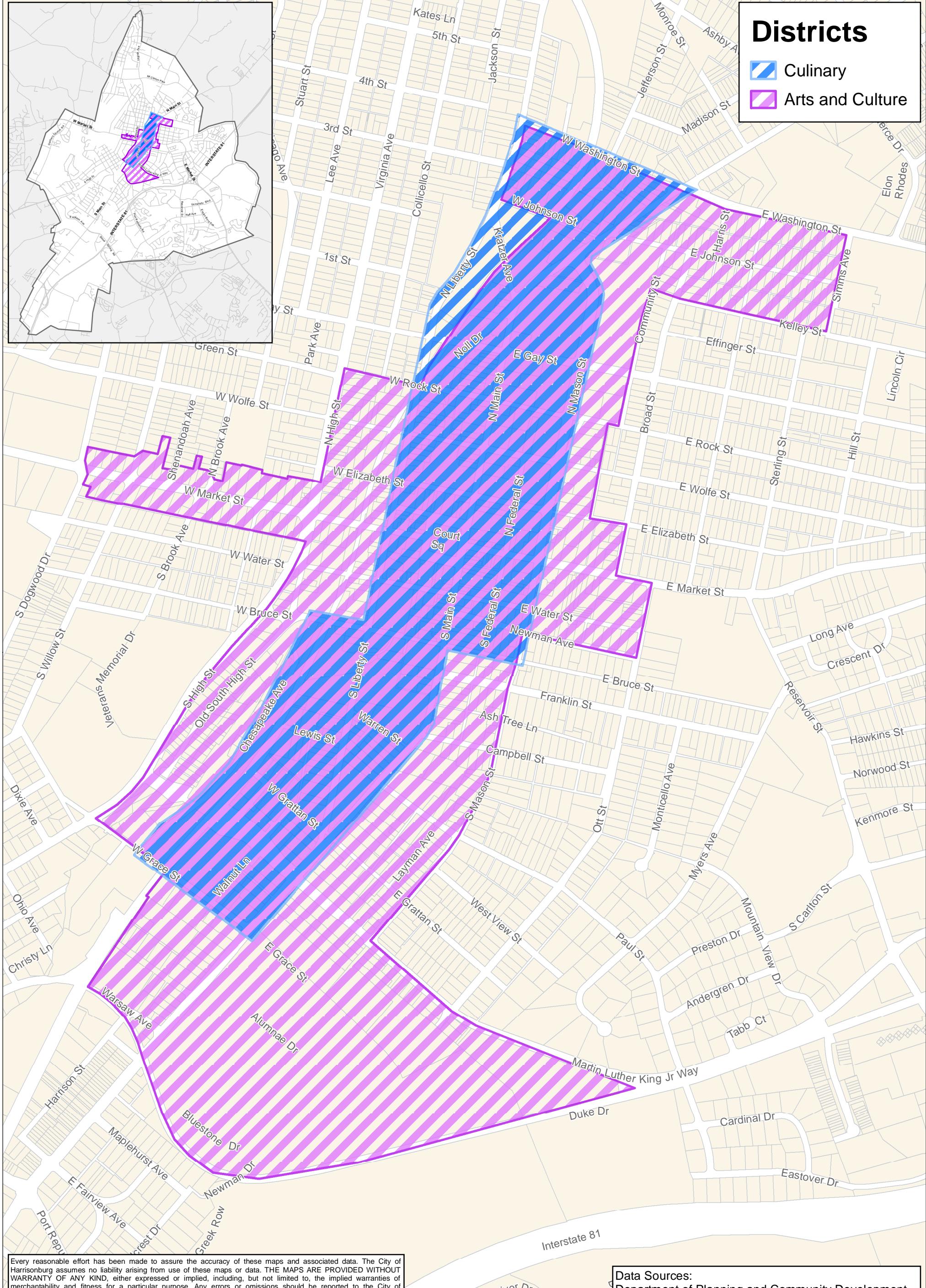
Chapter Resources

2004 Comprehensive Plan Background Information Supplement, Historic Resources, Memorandum dated March 24, 2003, <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/yourplan>

Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Historic Registers Homepage,
<http://dhr.virginia.gov/registers/register.htm>

Districts

- Culinary
- Arts and Culture

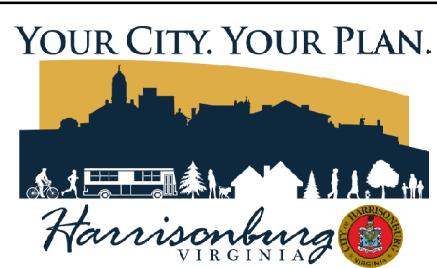


Existing Downtown Special Districts Comprehensive Plan

Map created: September 30, 2018



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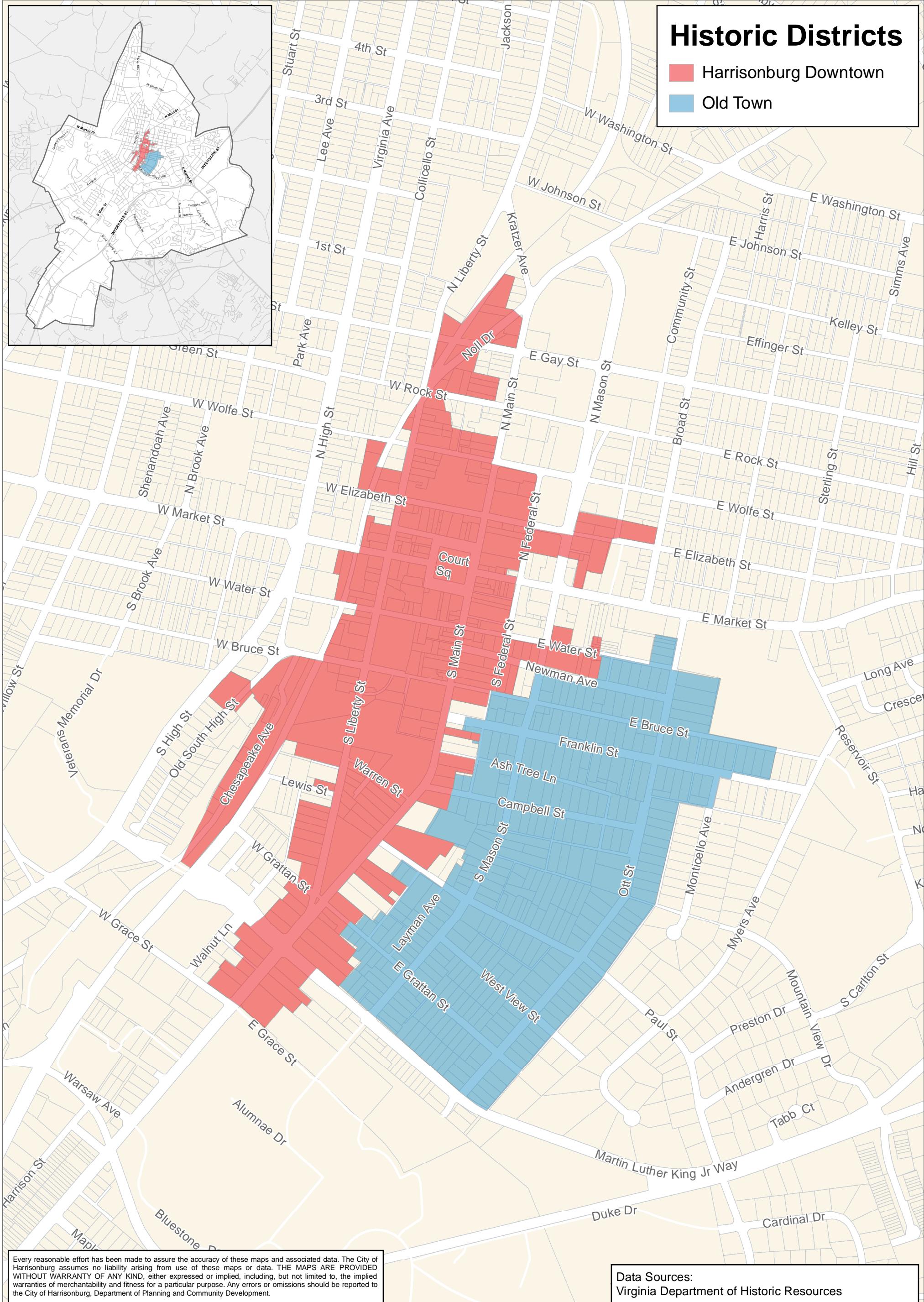


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Historic Districts

Harrisonburg Downtown

Old Town



Existing Historic Districts Comprehensive Plan

Map created: September 30, 2018



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