

**MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**December 11, 2013**

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held a worksession on Wednesday, December 11, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 409 South Main Street.

Members present: Richard Baugh, Gil Colman, MuAwia Da'Mes, Judith Dilts, Deb Fitzgerald, Jefferson Heatwole, and Henry Way.

Members absent: None

Also present: Stacy Turner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Adam Fletcher, City Planner; Alison Banks, Senior Planner.

Chair Fitzgerald said this is a work session for questions and comments regarding the Capital Improvement Program (CIP); therefore, let's begin with discussion on how we would like to proceed.

Dr. Dilts said there are several things I would like to discuss. How we look at the CIP depends upon the depth at which we are supposed to know it. By not knowing the depth of the CIP, is somewhat how we got into the positions we are currently in with the proposed new Municipal Building.

Mrs. Turner added that the City Attorney has stated, and I believe it was in the email to Chair Fitzgerald, regardless of the CIP, the property here (345/409 South Main Street) is in the Comprehensive Plan as Public/Semi-Public and that is enough to say that the Municipal Building is aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, he is not hinging his entire consideration of the Municipal Building on the CIP. I just wanted to add that one aspect.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if saying yes to the CIP over the last several years was the equivalent of saying yes to the Municipal Building. If so, then we should think more about what we are saying yes to when we are giving approval to the various projects.

Mr. Colman said it would be good to know how projects are applied to the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Chair Fitzgerald said one thing we can do during this work session on the CIP is to make our way through the list of priority projects that begin on page four; and decide whether they are aligned with goals within the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Way said Planning Commission had previously discussed the merits of asking, in the future, the compilers of the CIP to include the goal or strategy to which the item was aligned; what was the outcome of that discussion?

Mr. Da'Mes said I believe that it was determined that some of those persons would not know the Comprehensive Plan thoroughly to identify the strategy or goal. But I have been thinking a lot about that question and I know that when the Comprehensive Plan is done, Adam sends it out to each of those individuals for their input; so I believe they do have an understanding of it and it would be a best practice scenario if we had them do that.

Mrs. Turner said it could be done and if someone is not sure where it would fit, they could call and ask Planning staff about it.

Chair Fitzgerald said after we finish our review and move the CIP forward to City Council we can specifically ask that it be included in the next year's CIP.

Mr. Baugh said the CIP is before this body now; if we determine we need to ask staff to provide us with the specific goal or strategy, then I believe they should do so and from that we can make an informed decision.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if Planning Commission would like staff to provide for this current CIP review the specific goal, objective, or strategy for each item. Or, do we want to go ahead with what we have and ask that this information be provided with next year's CIP?

Mr. Way said as for me, I feel let's just deal with what we have before us this year.

There was a consensus of the Planning Commissioners that this should be part of next year's CIP.

Chair Fitzgerald asked Planning Commission how they would like to proceed with the CIP review this evening.

It was determined that Planning Commission would begin with the first project and move forward.

Dr. Dilts asked what are the additional operating expenses included with the requested new software programs within several of the first IT Department requests.

Mrs. Turner said she believes much of the cost is licensing fees for the software every year and for any updates that are put out.

Dr. Dilts asked if there were monetary savings to the City or Citizens for instituting these new software programs.

Mrs. Turner replied there may be; that is something I can ask each Department to give thought to for next year.

Mr. Da'Mes asked if the Citizen-Inquiry Application was purchased software or created in-house.

Mrs. Turner believes it is purchased software; but I will have someone confirm that for you.

Mr. Da'Mes said I would like to get more information from the IT Department on this particular program.

Dr. Dilts suggested that perhaps Planning Commission get a brief conversation with the IT Department in general about this project.

Mrs. Turner said I will pass this on and get that information for you.

Planning Commission continued to question where particular CIP requests were aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Way suggested that to help with these questions in future years, to not only ask Departments to add the specific Comprehensive Plan justification, but to also include those documents that go beyond the Comprehensive Plan. For instance, including the Bike and Pedestrian Plan or the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan, and so forth.

Again, there was a consensus among Planning Commission to have that information included in next year's CIP.

Dr. Dilts asked why one certain item within the Police Department requests was marked as "mandated" under justification, yet it was only given a priority 2 for the project. Also, one project has no justification.

Mrs. Turner said we can ask the Departments to further explain what is meant when that project is termed mandated and to provide justifications.

Dr. Dilts asked for more information regarding a replacement generator for fire station 1. HFD has stated that the alternative to the replacement is to continue making costly repairs to the current generator; at what point are the repairs as expensive as the new generator.

Chair Fitzgerald noted to Planning Commission that these items within public safety (police and fire) are aligned with Goal 13 of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Colman discussed the fact that the Park View area has always had low water pressure, which will hopefully be resolved with the proposed new water tank in the area; but perhaps the low pressure is a reason why a new fire station 5 in Park View has always been only a priority 3.

Mrs. Turner said we can provide more information regarding that.

Dr. Dilts asked why the traffic light intervention system does not talk about removing hazards. It seems to me that is part of what it is doing, eliminating a crash at an intersection. If we are looking at priorities, I would be really tempted to make this a priority 1.

Mrs. Turner said priority 1's are those items that are generally mandated by some State or other authority, these are not.

Dr. Dilts also asked for an explanation of the system upgrade project for HRECC; what is a P25 Protocol upgrade?

Chair Fitzgerald said that moves us forward to General Properties with two requests, both are priority 2, they are the Regional Jail Expansion and Renovation of the old Municipal Building.

Mr. Way said the Regional Jail Expansion is justified as "Mandated," yet it has a priority 2.

Mr. Baugh said this is in here because you could have the possibility of a big expansion at some point. It has been somewhat of a moving target that has been included throughout the years.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were questions regarding the renovation of the Old Municipal Building.

Mr. Way said to be clear this is different from the New Municipal Building project?

Mr. Baugh replied yes.

Moving forward, Planning Commission began a review of Public Works projects where it was pointed out that the Bridge Preventive Maintenance Program was justified as "Mandated" and prioritized as a 2.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if Planning Commission wanted to continue through each of the projects one-by-one or were there specific questions on some that could be looked at individually.

Mr. Way said I have a concern regarding the Martin Luther King Jr Way widening project from South Main Street to Ott Street. I feel it has the potential to decrease pedestrian safety and does not promote alternative forms of transportation.

Mrs. Turner said we can express your concerns to Public Works.

Mr. Way said the Chicago Avenue project also stood out for me with the same concerns. These are more neighborhood and pedestrian oriented routes. How does widening the street and intersection fit in with pedestrian safety and the broader picture of a walkable Harrisonburg?

Dr. Dilts agreed and said it is an important concern and we should get further information on this particular widening project.

Mrs. Turner asked if what the Commission wanted to know was what makes Public Works fall on the side of widening this road.

Staff read a brief review of the CIP minutes from Dec 2012 describing the need for the Cantrell Avenue/Martin Luther King Jr. Way widening and the needed improvements at this intersection (South Mason Street and Cantrell Avenue). This would be a cooperative effort with JMU. Planning Commission asked if Public Works could provide an update as to where the City and JMU are with this project.

Mr. Colman asked about the Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail project. No specific locations for new trails, sidewalks, etc. are provided; would it be possible to get an idea from Public Works as to what project is next on the list; possibly the next few?

Mrs. Turner responded that she would ask Public Works for an update or proposed list of projects within this request.

Mr. Da'Mes asked where is the proposed Reservoir Street expansion shown in the CIP.

Mr. Way also asked about the round-about at the intersection of Carlton and Reservoir Streets.

Mrs. Turner said I believe it is not shown because it has already begun; but I will ask to make certain.

Mr. Way questioned why the Reservoir Street sidewalk was marked a priority 2 and put off to a start date of 2017. This is a much needed sidewalk, people are constantly walking this area and a sidewalk is definitely needed here before 2017.

Mrs. Turner replied we will ask Public Works if the sidewalk can come earlier than 2017.

Mr. Colman questioned the funding for the Northend Greenway Project; I was under the impression that all the funding for this project was already in place. Is that not the case for this project?

Mrs. Turner said it looks as if \$1,200,000 has been received for this project already.

Mr. Colman asked if this \$600,000 grant was the money from VDOT.

Mrs. Turner said it may be VDOT money and money that was privately raised; I am not completely certain. However, the project shows that an additional 1.2 million is needed.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were any further questions regarding Public Works projects. Hearing none, she said we will begin discussing Parks and Recreation.

There were no questions or concerns regarding Parks and Recreation projects and Planning Commission moved on to questions regarding Parking Services.

Mr. Way said I have three questions regarding the Water Street Parking Deck. First, will this be part of a public/private partnership or simply a City funded initiative?

Mrs. Turner responded by noting that the project was not projected until 2017 and in the description it says "consider redevelopment as part of a PPEA or public private partnership".

Mr. Baugh said in other words no decision has been made on this and when the time comes we will be happy to put everything on the table as need be.

Mr. Way asked if it were planned as a mixed use type of development.

Mr. Baugh said that appears to be the standing assumption.

Mr. Way said final question, are there any thoughts about parking while this development is under way.

Mr. Baugh replied it would have to be thought about. The development of the parking lot along Bruce and Water Streets may help with the redevelopment of the Water Street Parking Deck.

Planning Commission had no questions or concerns within the Water and Sewer Funds and moved on to Transportation Funds.

Mr. Da'Mes asked if we could focus more funds on creating walkable paths to schools in neighborhoods rather than expending the money to purchase new school buses.

Mrs. Turner said I would like to point out one thing; these funds are not to purchase new school buses to add to our existing, these funds are to purchase new school buses to replace our existing older buses. A discussion followed on policies regarding whether bus service should be provided to children within a certain distance of the school. Mrs. Turner stated I think the question is do we want to reduce the number of school buses we have and tell families and children that they need to walk. We will have this question addressed as to reducing the school bus service in certain scenarios.

Mr. Way noted that Transit Buses (page 97) did not have a justification.

Chair Fitzgerald asked if there were any questions or concerns regarding projects for the Steam Plant. Hearing none, she asked if there were any concerns regarding the CIP in general. There were none.

For the remainder of the meeting there was discussion among Planning Commission regarding the relationship between Planning Commission and City Council. Members of the Planning Commission expressed concern as to why there was not a way to have reasonable conversation with the City Council in order to help move the City forward and perhaps a meeting or work session would be helpful. Mr. Baugh said he believed he was speaking for a healthy majority of the City Council in saying that City Council's perspective on this is that there is a good working relationship.

There was a lengthy discussion concerning the proposed City code amendment regarding State Code Section 2232 and the policy of what public buildings should come to Planning Commission for review. It was noted that the City Attorney is currently undertaking a review of this policy. Mr. Way suggested to wait, and once the City Attorney comes back with a new policy, or suggestions, on what the Planning Commission's role is in the review of public buildings, that would be a good time to have a joint session between Planning Commission and City Council.

Mr. Baugh agreed that if we are going to have something asking Planning Commission to weigh-in on some draft protocols on Section 2232, then a joint session may open up the opportunity to have some helpful and direct dialogue between the two bodies.

There was a general consensus among Planning Commission that this would be a good opportunity to have a joint worksession.

Mr. Fletcher said there are two public hearings scheduled for January; the R-7 rezoning, which was tabled from tonight and a special use request for a child day care center in R-1. There is a preliminary plat for a subdivision off of Cantrell Avenue and possibly an amendment to a SUP. The Planning Commission Annual Report will be ready for review in January as well.

Mr. Baugh said at City Council last night every recommendation from Planning Commission was upheld at City Council – a preliminary plat, the alley closing, SUP on Broad Street, and several ordinance amendments.

The meeting was ended at 9:30 pm.

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Chair Deb Fitzgerald

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Secretary, Alison Banks