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City creates list of public properties for sale for residential development

Effort seeks to incentivize development of affordable housing on small parcels

HARRISONBURG, Va. – The City of Harrisonburg is implementing a new process to sell surplus City-owned land to help spur residential development for housing.

A new webpage, www.harrisonburgva.gov/public-land-housing, is now online at the City's website where interested developers can learn more about available properties and apply to purchase them. The effort is in line with the Harrisonburg City Council 2043 Vision Plan which calls for, among other initiatives, developing a comprehensive approach to meeting a spectrum of housing needs through innovative planning and effective partnerships.

While most City-owned property is actively used for essential City services, there are portions of land not currently designated for or required for municipal purposes. That may include remnants of completed public projects or previously planned uses no longer needed, according to City Housing Coordinator Liz Webb.



(Above) One parcel of City-owned land is located between Norwood Street and East Market Street. Parcels for sale for residential development are listed on a new City webpage.

“Our 2021 Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study indicated that surplus City-owned land is a valuable commodity that can still contribute to meeting local needs,” Webb explained. “Returning this publicly owned surplus property to a productive status, when possible, is important for our community and something we hope this process can help accomplish.”

The effort is specifically for properties identified as potentially suitable for new housing based on size, location, existing uses, infrastructure and current zoning. Five initial parcels are currently listed on the website: four are remnants from the widening of Reservoir Street, and a fifth is on Norwood Street. Parcels range in size from 0.4 acres to 0.96 acres.

The 2021 housing study proposed selling small parcels for modest residential purposes and issuing requests for proposals (RFP) for more significantly sized parcels. Larger parcels, such as the 7+ acres adjacent to A Dream Come True Playground on Neff Avenue, offer a significant opportunity, and strategically matching land use to identified community needs is critical, said Webb, who anticipates issuing RFPs for larger parcels later this year.

“But smaller parcels are a chance to foster growth, too, which is why we are not limiting what an applicant can propose,” she added. “Homeownership, rental, houses, apartments – as long as it’s housing.”

City officials will evaluate offers received and make recommendations to City Council for sale. Offers will be evaluated based on factors such as the applicant's level of experience, the feasibility of their project and the offer price. Affordability also will be considered, but market-rate housing is also eligible.

Parcel listings, program guidelines and an application form are online at www.harrisonburgva.gov/public-land-housing. Applications for the four Reservoir Street properties will be accepted through April 25, and for the Norwood Street property through May 27.

Questions should be directed to Webb at 540-432-7701 or liz.webb@harrisonburgva.gov.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 55,990 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.

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