

Dear Mayor Byrd, Members of the City Council, and City Manager Hodgen,

We, the undersigned members of the Harrisonburg Rockingham Green Network, write to encourage the city to move forward with the “performance contracting” approach in order to wisely spend our community’s tax dollars, realize substantial energy and resource savings, and further implement the goals of our city’s comprehensive plan.

Additionally, we strongly encourage the city to fund a “sustainability coordinator” position. A sustainability coordinator, reporting to the city manager, would better enable the city to pursue and implement the goals, objectives and strategies for environmental stewardship and sustainability that the citizens of our community have already identified and described in our city’s comprehensive plan.

The Harrisonburg Rockingham Green Network (HRGN) is comprised of local civic organizations and businesses “organized for the public good for the purpose of creating a sustainable environment for all citizens of Rockingham County and the city of Harrisonburg.” More information about the HRGN can be found at: <http://www.hrgn.org>.

**First, performance contracts for the City’s Public Safety Building and the city’s schools make good sense.** The Energy Services Company that the city has contracted with indicates that substantial financial and energy resource savings are possible. Performance contracting is utilized by both the public and private sector, and is supported and encouraged by both the federal and state government. The reason is simple, performance contracts are 100% self-funding and are completed within existing budgets without raising taxes.

Over 15 years it is estimated that energy efficiency upgrades will save the city about \$3 million, in the case of the Public Safety Building, and \$8 million, in the case of the city’s schools. Further, these energy efficiency upgrades will also reduce the city’s annual CO2 emissions by 3,745 metric tons—the equivalent to taking 700+ cars off the road for a year, every year for 15 years.

More importantly, energy efficiency upgrades, and the associated savings, will help the city meet the goals and objects of our comprehensive plan. According to the Vision Statement of our comprehensive plan:

This will be a city proud of its heritage, ***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 2020 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 citizens by offering many ways for people to get from here to there, and not just by car. ***The city will explore new technologies to assure the best, least costly services that conserve resources. Citizens will contribute to keeping the city working well by conserving water and energy and minimizing or recycling wastes.*** (Chapter 2, Vision & Goals, page 2-1)

In other words, energy efficiency upgrades, which will save tax dollars and significantly reduce energy consumption and pollution, are not only in line with our city's comprehensive plan, they are specifically identified as integral to its guiding vision statement.

**Second, our city needs to create and fund a full time sustainability coordinator position.** This coordinator should report directly to the city manager, and would be responsible for coordinating the city's efforts to achieve and implement the goals, objects, and strategies related to environmental stewardship and sustainability identified and described in the city's comprehensive plan.

**It makes little sense to address issues of energy efficiency on a piecemeal basis.** This is so for three important reasons. First, the above savings are achieved by addressing upgrades in only one city building and the schools. No doubt, there are many more opportunities for such savings. Assigning the task of identifying such opportunities to a dedicated staff member will expedite future savings.

Second, this person could be tasked with exploring all options available, preparing reports for the city manager and council, and making recommendations. This seems a far better way to address similar issues and opportunities in the future. It would also help both the city manager and the council to be more informed on the complexities of these and similar issues. Additionally, having someone work on these issues full time would enable the city to better understand the complexities associated with implementing plans. For example, in the case of "performance contracts" it would enable more research on the details needed to ensure success of such endeavors.

Finally, ***the city's comprehensive plan identifies many goals, objectives and strategies related to environmental stewardship and sustainability, and with each comes the need for expertise, time commitment, coordination across city departments, and collaboration with citizens and local businesses.*** A sustainability coordinator would be in a position to work on these goals, as well as provide the city manager and council with the information they need to make informed decisions about the relative costs and benefits associated with implementing particular plans and policies to meet the goals, objectives, and strategies of the comprehensive plan.

The city's comprehensive plan has clear goals and objectives related to environmental stewardship and sustainability. More importantly, it describes

specific strategies for attaining these goals and objectives. In fact, chapter 9, “Natural Resources” reads like a job description for a sustainability coordinator (see attached appendix). Most notably:

- Strategy 8.1.2 calls for the preparation of an annual or biannual “state of the City’s environment” report. This report will not only enable the city to set priorities, but also facilitate citizen engagement and participation as we all work toward the goals of the comprehensive plan.
- Strategy 8.3.1 calls for the City to “**prepare a set of environmental performance standards for all development including: energy use and efficiency**, air emissions, erosion and sediment control, excessive light emission, and noise exposure, among others. This seems especially relevant and important given the number of proposed and discussed projects that were identified at the recent public hearing on the city budget (April 23, 2013), such as a new school building, parking decks, and a convention center.
- Object 8.5 develops goals for promoting resource conservation among the citizens, and identifies public education campaigns and collaboration with local business as an appropriate strategy.

In the end, for these goals, and many others related to environmental stewardship and sustainability identified throughout the comprehensive plan to be achieved, it will take coordination among many different city departments and collaboration with citizens and local businesses. This is why we believe that a sustainability coordinator should not be associated, or housed in any one department.

The citizens and city staff of our community worked hard to develop a comprehensive plan for our community. In doing so, they clearly identified energy efficiency and environmental sustainability as visionary goals. The only question left is how are we going to bring this vision to life, and achieve the goals we have set for our community and ourselves. We believe the city council and the city manager are in the best position to lead the way to a visionary future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**HRGN Member Organizations:**

Climate Action Alliance of the Valley

Friendly City Food Co-op

The Gaines Group

Harrisonburg Farmers Market

Northend Greenway

The Shenandoah Group, Virginia Chapter Sierra Club

Valley 25 X '25

Voluntary Gas Tax

## **Appendix: Chapter Nine, “Natural Resources” Goals, Objectives, and Strategies:**

Goal 8: To preserve and enhance the City’s natural resources and encourage development that is compatible with nature.

- Objective 8.1: To keep abreast of environmental issues facing the City and to monitor the City’s environmental health.
  - Strategy 8.1.1 To tap local expertise as available to keep abreast of environmental issues facing the City and to monitor the City’s environmental health.
  - Strategy 8.1.2 To prepare an annual or biannual “state of the City’s environment” report using compiled data collected by the City, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and other sources and describing and recommending programs to address environmental issues.
- Objective 8.2: To develop water and air quality improvement programs to comply with federal and state standards, programs and requirements.
  - Strategy 8.2.1 To continue to implement the City’s MS4 Phase II storm water management program dealing with improving the quality of storm water runoff.
  - Strategy 8.2.2 To continue working with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and other partner organizations that implement best management practices to improve stormwater and water quality.
  - Strategy 8.2.3 To collaborate with Rockingham County and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in developing an air quality improvement plan, should the region be declared to be nonattainment for ozone pollution.
- **Objective 8.3: To create a set of environmental performance standards for public and private development and redevelopment projects.**
  - Strategy 8.3.1 Using state standards where applicable, to prepare a set of environmental performance standards for all development which may include such issues as:
    - Pollutant discharges into water resources
    - Air emissions
    - Erosion and sediment control
    - Noise exposure limits
    - Excessive light emissions
    - Energy use and efficiency
    - Protection of environmental features: floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, sinkholes, tree cover

Sufficient funding will need to be secured to establish this new program

- Strategy 8.3.2 To ensure coordination with state agencies on project

- compliance with state environmental standards.
  - Strategy 8.3.3 **To consider adoption of local environmental performance standards as either policies or regulations after public input.**
- Objective 8.4: To preserve and expand green spaces and tree planting in the City.
  - Strategy 8.4.1 To consider adopting open space preservation requirements or incentives for new development.
  - Strategy 8.4.2 To purchase and accept donations of land for the implementation of the Blacks Run Greenway and other planned greenway and park projects.
  - Strategy 8.4.3 To include streetscape improvement plans in downtown, neighborhood conservation area, business revitalization area, and corridor enhancement plans.
  - Strategy 8.4.4 To implement landscape improvement demonstration projects at City gateways and other appropriate locations.
  - Strategy 8.4.5 To consider adding street tree planting and other landscape requirements for new development and redevelopment in the City's land use codes.
  - Strategy 8.4.6 To prepare and implement landscape plans for City public facility development projects.
  - Strategy 8.4.7 To provide proper maintenance of City trees to ensure tree health and to minimize damage to utility lines.
  - Strategy 8.4.8 To implement stream riparian buffer and planting projects in partnership with public and private entities when possible.
- **Objective 8.5: To promote resource conservation.**
  - Strategy 8.5.1 To promote recycling through:
    - Continued public education campaigns
    - Adoption of regulations requiring businesses to sort their recyclable solid waste and make it available for collection
    - Giving City purchasing preference to recycled paper To promote water conservation through:
      - Public education campaigns
      - Collaboration with local hardware and building supply stores to promote water conserving fixtures and appliances.
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