



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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July 1, 2026

**TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

SUBJECT: *Consider a request from Sean Ryan and Lisa Lopez-Ryan for a special use permit to allow short-term rental at 453 West Water Street*

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING
COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON: June 10, 2026**

Vice Chair Porter read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Soffel said the applicant is requesting a special use permit (SUP) per Section 10-3-40(8) to allow a short-term rental (STR) in the R-2, Residential District. The +/- 10,297-square foot property is addressed as 453 West Water Street and is identified as tax map parcel 36-S-12. If approved, the applicant plans to operate a short-term rental on the property.

In 2019, the City adopted regulations associated with short-term transient lodging, commonly referred to as Airbnb's. These regulations were amended in September 2020 to create the by right "homestay" use. To operate a homestay, the property must be the operator's primary residence, may host up to four guests, may operate up to 90 nights per calendar year, and guests must stay within the main dwelling unit (as opposed to staying in a separate building on the property). If the operator wants to operate outside of what is permitted by right as a homestay, they must apply for an SUP to operate an STR.

On the property is a duplex (two connected dwellings) and an accessory structure. The property owner has stated that they will be the STR operator and will reside in one of the dwellings. They will operate the STR in the accessory structure on the property, offer two accommodation spaces, and host no more than four (4) guests at one time. One off-street parking space is required for each dwelling and for each accommodation space, for a total of four (4) off-street parking spaces. The driveway can accommodate the required spaces.

As explained within the submitted application materials, the applicant would operate the STR in the existing accessory structure (formerly a detached garage) that was renovated without required permits, prior to the applicant's ownership of the property. The applicant is in the process of applying for a building permit to bring the accessory structure into compliance and to obtain a

certificate of occupancy. The applicant has been informed that a certificate of occupancy is required prior to beginning STR operations.

Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Neighborhood Residential and states:

These areas are typically older residential neighborhoods, which contain a mixture of densities and a mixture of housing types, but should have more single-family detached homes than other types of housing. This type of land use highlights those neighborhoods in which existing conditions dictate the need for careful consideration of the types and densities of future residential development. Infill development and redevelopment must be designed so as to be compatible with the desired character of the neighborhood.

The proposed SUP does not add additional dwelling units or increase density.

Transportation and Traffic

A traffic impact analysis (TIA) was not required for the SUP request.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

Staff has no concerns with the requested special use permit regarding water and sewer matters.

Housing

The City's Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study (Housing Study) places the subject property within Market Type D, which notes that "[m]arket type D has lower market activity as well as lower access to amenities. This could be because the areas are stable residential neighborhoods or because the area is less developed and therefore has fewer sales and fewer amenities. Strategies that would be appropriate in the latter case include concurrent development of the housing and economic opportunities through mixed-use developments to build commerce and housing centers across the City.

Public Schools

If the special use permit is approved, no additional dwelling units would be added to the property; therefore, the student generation is zero.

Conclusion

After review of this request, staff believes it shares similar characteristics to other applications for STRs that have received approval. Staff recommends approval of the SUP with the following conditions:

1. All STR accommodations shall be within the accessory structure (detached garage) described in the application.
2. There shall be no more than 2 STR guestrooms or accommodation spaces.
3. The number of STR guests at one time shall be limited to four.
4. Minimum off-street parking spaces do not need to be delineated and can be accommodated utilizing the driveway or other areas on the property.

5. Prior to operation, the operator shall submit to City staff a completed Short-Term Rental Pre-Operation Form. Furthermore, the operator shall maintain compliance with the items identified in the Pre-Operation Form when short-term rental guests are present.
6. If in the opinion of Planning Commission or City Council, the short-term rental becomes a nuisance, the special use permit can be recalled for further review, which could lead to the need for additional conditions, restrictions, or the revocation of the permit.

Ms. Soffel asked if there were any questions for staff.

Councilmember Dent said I think it said that they had two sinks, a kitchen and a bathroom, I did not see anything about the kitchenette and the whole debate about stoves.

Ms. Soffel said there is no stove or oven which is the thing that would make it a kitchen.

Vice Chair Porter asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he invited the applicant or applicant's representative to speak to their request.

Lisa Lopez-Ryan, the applicant, came forward to speak to the request. She said I have been here for almost a year now. The dwelling that we are looking at seems perfect for something like an Airbnb. I am currently working for a bed and breakfast here in Harrisonburg and I talk to a lot of people traveling through and traveling to Harrisonburg. It just seems like a good thing to do for the City. Any questions for me?

Councilmember Dent said I believe that staff said that this short-term rental was set up before you bought the property.

Ms. Lopez-Ryan said the detached garage is roughly 500 square feet. Part of it was finished and turned into what they called a media room. It has AC and heat, floors, walls, lighting. At the time there is no record of what they did to it but since it is already partially finished, we decided to do the whole thing and use all 500 square feet of it for this short-term rental.

Vice Chair Porter asked if there were any more questions for the applicant. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and invited anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Kettler said to the degree there is sometimes a concern with a short-term rental getting rid of existing housing stock, I do not think that applies to this particular unit.

Councilmember Dent said it is not officially a dwelling unit, it is an accessory structure.

Commissioner Kettler said motion to approve the special use permit with the suggested conditions.

Councilmember Dent seconded the motion.

Vice Chair Porter called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Seitz	Aye
Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the special use permit request passed (5-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on July 14, 2026.