



October 13, 2026 City Council Meeting

Title

Legislative Agenda Draft—Brian Vandenberg, City Manager's Office

Summary

At the July 28 City Council meeting, staff presented an overview of the City's legislative affairs program. Part of this included a timeline for adopting a legislative agenda outlining Council's priorities for the upcoming session of the General Assembly. Staff have worked internally and in coordination with respective state associations to put together a draft agenda for Council's review at this meeting. Upon receiving and incorporating feedback from Council, staff will finalize the legislative agenda and deliver it to Harrisonburg's state delegation.

Recommendation

No action needed, presentation only.

Fiscal Impact

N/A

Context & Analysis

At the July 28 City Council meeting, staff presented an overview of the City's legislative affairs program. Part of this included a timeline for adopting a legislative agenda outlining Council's priorities for the upcoming General Assembly. Since then, staff have worked internally and in coordination with respective state associations to put together a draft agenda. After Council provides feedback, staff will finalize and publish the agenda to deliver to Harrisonburg's state delegation.

A legislative agenda is a document comprised of priorities for elected leaders to focus on in the lawmaking process. In this case, the legislative agenda in question will be coming from City Council and is intended for the City's state delegation and members of committees relevant to the priorities laid out within the agenda.

There is not a one-size-fits-all design for legislative agendas but they do typically have some of the same elements, including policy principles, legislative priorities, and budget requests. Policy

principles are statements that explain governing philosophies or themes underscored throughout the legislative priorities. These are included to provide legislators with a high-level understanding of community desires so that they can know generally how to vote on legislation that may not be included in the list of priorities. Legislative priorities are key pieces of legislation a locality may want supported, opposed, or created. These priorities will include explanations for why they are important and should be advocated for. Budget requests are for specific programs or projects the City would like to be included as part of the state budget for which there is currently insufficient funding for.

Items in the legislative agenda draft are found below. They contain summaries that will be expanded upon prior to the final publishing of the agenda if supported by Council.

Policy Principles

Protect Local Authority

Virginia is a culturally, economically, and geographically diverse state. State policy should preserve local autonomy so cities, counties, and towns can respond to resident needs in ways that are relevant and cost-efficient. The City supports legislation that enables, rather than unnecessarily requires or prohibits, local action. Protecting local authority over revenue, land use, and other core functions is essential for effective governance.

Fund State Mandates

When the Commonwealth determines it is necessary to require localities to take on a new governmental function, it should provide sustainable funding to implement it. Any new unfunded or underfunded mandate constrains local budgets and makes providing essential services and advancing community priorities more challenging. State policy should fully account for costs related to implementation and ongoing operations.

Legislative Priorities

Public Sector Collective Bargaining

The City is in favor of maintaining the current status on collective bargaining by retaining local governing bodies' authority over establishing collective bargaining units. If this authority is removed from local governing bodies, The City is in favor of providing exemptions to localities that are highly fiscally stressed as determined by the Commission on Local Government. If exemptions are not granted to fiscally stressed localities, the City is in favor of local control to limit the scope of negotiations to salary and benefits.

Revisit "Housing Near Jobs"

The City is in favor of preserving local authority over zoning, including decisions of where and at what density housing may be constructed. Due to geographical and market constraints, if housing growth targets are established by the state, the City is in favor of combining independent cities with their directly adjacent counties to meet a shared growth target.

Support the Urban Public-Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund

On the books since 2000, the Urban Public-Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund is supposed to address the scarcity and costs of developable land in urban areas with grants and loans to local governments for site preparation and redevelopment. This resource should be funded, and the criteria defining non-monetary contribution match should be expansive to consider land, waived fees, and other incentives and in-kind contributions.

Assistance to Local Police Departments (HB 599)

Almost 70 percent of Virginians live in communities served by police departments. The State created a program of financial assistance to local police departments (HB 599) when it imposed an annexation moratorium on cities more than 30 years ago. It has increasingly de-emphasized this funding obligation as a priority but has never compromised on the annexation moratorium. The City calls for the state to honor its commitment to local governments and public safety by funding the program as stipulated in the Code of Virginia.

Children's Services Funding

Local governments administer the Children's Services Act (CSA) program on behalf of the state, and local governments share in the funding responsibilities with the state. Local governments have consistently supported efforts to contain costs for the program, particularly the private day special education program. The City opposes the capping of state funding responsibility for this and any other component of the CSA program, which shifts the funding burden for mandated services onto local governments.

Maintenance Payment Impacts from Roadway Reconfigurations

Revise Code of Virginia 33.2-319 (D)(i) so the last word reads "more" instead of "less". This change would allow the City to continue completing roadway reconfigurations without impact to the maintenance payments that are essential for keeping up the transportation infrastructure in the City. Without this change, or a similar revision to this code section, the City will need to make difficult choices going forward regarding whether to continue making low-cost safety changes or to forego such changes to keep the current level of maintenance payments.

Virginia Fire Program Fund Distribution

The City supports increasing the funding source for aid to localities from the current 1% to 2% on fire-related insurance policies. Virginia's fire services are severely underfunded, and the current distribution formula disparately impacts smaller rural communities that paradoxically need more

support than larger more populated jurisdictions. The City supports the legislature maintaining the current funding to larger jurisdictions using the current formula and concurrently directing additional funding to augment those communities receiving the current minimum level of funding.

Maintain ASAP Funding at the State

The Code of Virginia requires that individuals convicted of DUI enroll in, and successfully complete, an alcohol safety action program. The financial sustainability of the program, originally intended to be funded with client fee revenues, remains an open question. The Commonwealth should provide appropriate funding from its own resources and not shift responsibility for program administration without oversight to localities for this state-mandated program.

Budget Requests

Allocate funding to the City to implement a childcare facilities expansion grant program

Through community input, the City invested in expanding childcare capacity with federal ARPA dollars, adding approximately 200 seats at a cost of around \$3,000 each. With funding from the state, the City can replicate the success of the previous grant program and expand childcare access, routinely one of the highest priorities for residents.

Allocate funding to the City to construct a 5,000,000-gallon water storage tank

In 2025, Harrisonburg was the 2nd fastest growing municipality in Virginia. As the City grows, so does the demand for water. In times of drought or when there are strains on the Water Treatment Plant, stored water can greatly reduce the impact felt by residents and businesses and can protect critical infrastructure. A 5,000,000-gallon tank will support City growth as its long-term water projects come online over the next two decades.

Increase funding to the Virginia Homeless Solutions Program

Cities that predominantly invest in services for unhoused individuals subsidize the cost for surrounding jurisdictions of caring for this vulnerable population. Since opening the Navigation Center, Harrisonburg's unsheltered population has significantly fallen while the percentage of individuals coming from outside of the City to receive services has risen. By increasing funding to the Homeless Solutions Program, Harrisonburg will be able to better serve its residents while the region will have access to more resources to support their homeless residents.