

Chapter 14.

# Economic Development and Tourism



YOUR CITY. YOUR PLAN.



## Chapter 14 Economic Development and Tourism

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### Introduction

A strong economy is essential to the social, cultural, and financial vitality of the City of Harrisonburg. Public and private initiatives help create employment opportunities. Economic development involves public sector collaboration with private entities to promote and improve local economies. Successful economic development requires cooperation among government, businesses, educational institutions, nonprofits, and civic organizations. The promotion of business and industrial investment along with jobs retention and creation supports the City's tax base, increases property values, provides work opportunities for people, helps reduce poverty, and moves the City toward economic stability and self-sufficiency. This chapter focuses on Harrisonburg's economic health and the efforts to maintain and enhance it through economic development and tourism promotion.

### Background

Harrisonburg has many assets that are attractive to businesses including, but not limited to:

- Harrisonburg is centrally located on the East Coast and has easy access to major transportation routes; Interstate 81 runs through Harrisonburg and is a major transportation route providing one-day access to two-thirds of the U.S. population. Additionally, regional and international airports, including Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport, Dulles International Airport, Charlottesville Airport, Richmond Airport, and Roanoke Airport are within 150 miles.

- The Harrisonburg area serves as the major retail and service center in the Shenandoah Valley. The Harrisonburg retail market attracts shoppers from 20+ miles away (including West Virginia) with an estimated market population of 222,000 served.
- There are many cultural and recreational opportunities within and surrounding Harrisonburg, including but not limited to: local universities, which sponsor lectures, concerts, art exhibits, and athletic events; Downtown Harrisonburg which serves as a destination for dining, shopping and a variety of annual events; and Shenandoah National Park, George Washington National Forest; and Massanutten Four-Season Resort are less than 25 miles from Harrisonburg.
- Harrisonburg is home to James Madison University, (JMU) a public coeducational research university; Eastern Mennonite University (EMU), a private liberal arts university; and American National University, a postsecondary education institution.<sup>1</sup> Other higher education and training providers in the area that serve Harrisonburg residents include Blue Ridge Community College, Bridgewater College, Mary Baldwin University, and the Woodrow Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center. There are opportunities for the City and community organizations to partner with colleges and universities with respect to student internships, special projects, and technical assistance on governmental and environmental issues.
- Harrisonburg has a diverse economic base, which has helped insulate it from major hits during times when certain industry sectors have experienced downturns.

### Labor

Harrisonburg benefits from a diverse employment base. The City is primarily supported by non-agricultural employment in the form of manufacturing, trade, tourism, retail trade, and professional services. In 2017, based on data from Emsi, the largest industry sectors by total number of jobs were accommodations and food (5,093), retail (4,836), manufacturing (2,981), healthcare (2,937), educational services (1,334), construction (1,246), wholesale trade (1,198), and professional, scientific and technical services (1,174).

In March 2018, the Virginia Employment Commission reported that the City's total number of employed workers was 24,060 and the total available workforce was 24,997. In February 2018, unemployment in the City measured 3.7%, while the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) measured 3.2% unemployment. The Harrisonburg-Rockingham MSA consistently records unemployment rates that are lower than the Virginia average. Local employers are increasingly reporting that it is getting harder to find skilled workers to fill crucial positions on their payrolls. Workforce development will continue to be an important component of Harrisonburg's overall economic development strategy.

Table 14-1 shows Harrisonburg's unemployment rate compared to that of Rockingham County, the Central Shenandoah Planning District, and Virginia. Economic trends since the Great Recession continue

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<sup>1</sup> Student population growth trends and projections for James Madison University and Eastern Mennonite University is found in Chapter 4, Planning Context.

to be positive, as Total Labor Force, Total Unemployed, Total Employed, and Unemployment Rate have all improved significantly since 2009.

**Table 14-1. Labor and Unemployment Levels in 2009 and 2018**

	Virginia	CSPD*	Rockingham County	Harrisonburg
<b>March, 2009</b>				
Total Labor Force	4,121,181	148,323	42,079	23,147
Number of Unemployed	270,341	10,107	2,491	1,469
Number of Workers Employed	3,850,840	138,216	39,588	21,678
Unemployment Rate	6.6%	6.8%	5.9%	6.3%
<b>March, 2018</b>				
Total Labor Force	4,348,371	145,967	41,245	24,983
Number of Unemployed	144,276	4,734	1,228	933
Number of Workers Employed	4,204,095	141,233	40,017	24,050
Unemployment Rate	3.4%	3.2%	3.0%	3.7%

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, 2009 and 2018. ^ The Central Shenandoah Planning District (CSPD) includes Rockingham County, Augusta County, Highland County, Rockbridge County, Bath County, and the cities and towns within; Average Annual Wages determined by multiplying Average Weekly Wage by 52 weeks per year.

### Income Trends

Across all industries, the City's 2017 average weekly wage (\$692) was below the averages for the state (\$1,047), the Central Shenandoah Planning District (\$743), and Rockingham County (\$796). However, the City's wage figures were slightly higher than in 2016 (\$661). The highest paid trades in the City, according to the Virginia Employment Commission, were Management of Companies (\$1,208), Finance and Insurance (\$1,121), Information (\$1,005), Professional/Technical Services (\$980), and Manufacturing (\$926). The sectors with the lowest average weekly wages were Educational Services (\$563), Retail Trade (\$508), and Accommodation and Food Services (\$308).

In comparing the Median Household Income (MHI) in Harrisonburg to that of Virginia and Rockingham County during 2009 and then in 2016, the demonstrated trend is an increase in the City, County, and State

medians of 19, 20, and 15 percent, respectively. While percentage-wise Harrisonburg’s MHI has shown tremendous growth, there remains a consistent gap between Harrisonburg’s and Virginia’s MHIs. The gap between Harrisonburg and Rockingham County MHIs also remained fairly consistent. It is important to note, however, that college students (many with little or no income) who reside in Harrisonburg, are included in the MHI calculation. A 2016 study by the Weldon Cooper Center revealed that when taking college students out of the calculations, the poverty rate in Harrisonburg decreased from 33 percent to 15 percent. This example of data influence could be expected with the MHI as well. Additional information is available in Chapter 4, Planning Context.

**Table 14-2. Average Weekly Wage, 2009 and 2017**

	Virginia	CSPD <sup>^</sup>	Rockingham County	Harrisonburg
<b>2009</b>				
Average Weekly Wage	\$899	\$639	\$649	\$678
Average Annual Wages*	\$46,748	\$33,228	\$33,748	\$35,256
<b>2017</b>				
Average Weekly Wage	\$1,047	\$743	\$796	\$692
Average Annual Wages*	\$54,444	\$38,636	\$41,392	\$35,984

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, 2009 and 2017; <sup>^</sup> The Central Shenandoah Planning District (CSPD) includes Rockingham County, Augusta County, Highland County, Rockbridge County, Bath County, and the cities and towns within; Average Annual Wages determined by multiplying Average Weekly Wage by 52 weeks per year.

**Table 14-3. Median Household Income, 2009 and 2016**

	Virginia	Rockingham County	Harrisonburg
<b>2009</b>			
Median Household Income	\$59,372	\$47,965	\$34,967
<b>2016</b>			
Median Household Income	\$68,127	\$57,655	\$41,636

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009 and 2016.

## Business Investment

Harrisonburg's economic base is quite diverse, which has helped insulate it from major hits during times when certain industry sectors have experienced downturns.

### *Industrial*

Table 14-3 lists major employers within the City's industrial sector, along with a description of their major products or services. Over the past several decades, the Harrisonburg-Rockingham MSA has experienced economic transition as both jurisdictions have seen significant growth. As the City's inventory of undeveloped land diminishes, the probability increases for new, larger manufacturing and industrial development activity to locate within Rockingham County or elsewhere in the region. However, since nearly 75 percent of all new investment and job creation is generated by expansions of existing businesses, Harrisonburg continues to place strong emphasis on keeping its industrial partners happy and armed with the resources they need to continue to grow and thrive.

**Table 14-3. Harrisonburg Industrial Base, 2018**

<b>Business</b>	<b>Products</b>
LSC Communications	Adhesive-Bond Soft Cover Books
Montebello Packaging	Aluminum & Plastic Tubing
Cargill, Inc.	Poultry Feeds
Christian Light Publications, Inc.	Book Publishing
Comsonics, Inc.	Cable TV Equipment
Daniel's	Printing & Advertising
Eddie Edwards Signs, Inc.	Sign Production
Excel Steel Works, Inc.	HVAC Installation and Maintenance
Frazier Quarry, Inc.	Crushed Stone
Friendship Industries, Inc.	Contract Packaging
Georges, Inc.	Poultry Processing
Glass & Metals, LLC	Storefronts
Graham Packaging	Plastic Bottles

Reddy Ice	Ice Manufacturing
Rockingham Co-Op Farm Bureau	Prepared Feeds
Southern States Cooperative, Inc.	Prepared Feeds
Superior Concrete, Inc.	Ready-Mix Concrete
Suter's Handcrafted Furniture	Handcrafted Furniture
Valley Building Supplies	Precast Concrete & Building Components
Walker Manufacturing, Company	Exhaust Systems
Shenandoah Valley Organics	Organic Chicken Processing
Packaging Corporation of America	Corrugated Packaging Materials
Special Fleet Services	Customized Truck Assembly
Truck Enterprises, Inc.	Truck and Trailer Services
Manheim Auto Auction	Dealer Auto Auction
Neilsen Builders, Inc.	Industrial and Commercial Contractor
Blauch Brothers, Inc.	Mechanical Contractor

Source: Harrisonburg Economic Development, 2018

*Retail and Retail Revitalization Zones*

The City adopted a Retail Revitalization Zone ordinance in 2012 to offer incentives for redevelopment of larger retail developments that included an investment of at least \$1 million. The focal points were the East Market Street corridor east of Interstate 81 and the South Main Street corridor. The South Main Street corridor comprises of “the motor mile” along South Main Street/Route 11 south of Port Republic Road and the East Market Street corridor comprises of areas along East Market/Route 33 from Interstate 81 to east city limits. Tax incentives include partial exemption for 5-10 years from real estate taxation for new commercial construction. New or expanding existing Revitalization Zones should be carefully considered as to not dilute the impact of incentives in existing zones.

East Market Street redevelopment has been a tremendous economic success. Case studies include transforming the vacant Kmart store into Hobby Lobby and Gabe’s, redeveloping the vacant Shoney’s restaurant and Best Western hotel site into Krispy Kreme and Olive Garden, and a new shopping center at the East Market Street/Country Club Road intersection that includes an ALDI grocery store as an anchor. The Valley Mall has also made significant infrastructure improvements and has attracted new retail

tenants that have helped to increase shopper traffic within the Mall. Recent openings by Ulta, Sephora, and H&M have been well received by regional shoppers.

The South Main Street retail corridor holds tremendous redevelopment potential. In 2016, the Dick Myers auto dealership embarked on a major expansion and also added a new Fiat franchise. The Retail Revitalization Zone was expanded to incorporate this property and approximately five additional City blocks to encourage future redevelopment. Educating property owners of the tools available for redevelopment will be a priority for the Economic Development staff.

Related, in 2018, the US Treasury officially designated two areas of the City as federally designated Opportunity Zones.<sup>2</sup> One zone is north of downtown, bounded roughly by North Main Street, Mason Street, Route 33 East and the east city limits, and the second zone is roughly bounded by South Main Street, West Market Street, South High Street, and south city limits. Opportunity Zones provide tax incentives for investment into these areas.

Brick-and-mortar retail is facing significant challenges nationally as on-line shopping continues to grab a larger share of consumer expenditures. A 2017 retail study commissioned by the City, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), Rockingham County, JMU, and the Small Business Development Center stated that the City has no significant retail sales leakages to other jurisdictions in the state, however, local businesses face serious competition from online retailers. Harrisonburg will continue to monitor how it can best support its retail sector.

The Retail Revitalization Zones and Opportunity Zones are illustrated in the Economic Development Incentive Zones map at the end of this chapter.

*Downtown Technology Zone*

Table 14-4 shows recent “success stories” in Harrisonburg economic development, while Table 14- 5 illustrates companies who have invested in the Harrisonburg Downtown Technology Zone. The Downtown Technology zone was created to encourage technology businesses to locate in this limited area of downtown. Incentives include water and sewer connection fee exemption and 3-year business, professional, and occupational license (BPOL) tax exemption for qualified high-technology businesses.

**Table 14-4. Investment Activity, 2013 – 2017, Harrisonburg**

<b>Company Name</b>	<b>Business Description</b>	<b>Month Announced</b>	<b>New or Expansion</b>	<b>New Jobs</b>	<b>Investment (MM\$)</b>
Shenandoah Valley Organics	Organic Poultry Processing	3/20/18	E	TBD	TBD

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, “Opportunity Zones,” <http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/index.php/component/content/article/346.html>



Blue Sprocket Media Group	Vinyl record manufacturing	10/29/17	N	6	.75
Ariake U.S.A., Inc.	Manufactures stocks, bases, and seasonings	10/12/17	E	22	17
Friendship Industries, Inc.	Contract packaging and document destruction	10/10/17	E	50	3
Packaging Corporation of America	Corrugated packaging manufacturing	10/1/17	E	0	.5
George's Inc	Chicken processing facility	6/15/17	E	0	.4
Cargill Turkey Production LLC	Turkey hatchery expansion	6/1/17	E	0	4
The Chiedo Cos.	Business IT and network support provider expanding to provide cybersecurity services	1/9/2017	E	11	0
Jenzabar	Software developer for higher education	9/27/2016	E	30	1
T&E Meats	Meat processing	9/1/2016	E	7	0.6
American Tire Distributors	Distribution Center for Automobile Tires	5/31/2016	E	0	1.62
Rocco Building Supplies	Warehouse for building supply wholesale company	1/15/2016	E	0	1.8
Serco Inc.	Analyzing and classifying patent applications.	12/29/2015	E	25	0
Wolfe Street Brewing Company	Craft brewing company	11/30/2015	N	8	0.1
TSSI Tactical and Survival Specialties Inc.	HQ: Tactical gear and equipment manufacturing and supply	11/6/2015	E	0	0.4

Axon Ghost Sentinel, Inc.	Cyber security services and solutions	6/30/2015	E	29	1.5
Anthem, Inc.	Data center	2/28/2015	E	0	0.8377
Serco Inc.	Records management and patent processing	11/19/2014	E	40	0
Special Fleet Service	Commercial truck body fabrication	9/1/2014	E	45	1.2
Approved Colleges LLC	Marketing services focused in online education	1/1/2014	E	40	1.5
DBT-Data	Data processing and preparation; data center	1/1/2014	E	35	38
Shenandoah Processing LLC	Organic poultry processing	12/1/2013	N	102	2.205
Ariake USA, Inc.	Manufactures stocks, bouillons, and natural meat flavorings	4/1/2013	E	4	6.2

Source: Harrisonburg Economic Development and Virginia Economic Development Partnership

Table 14- 5. Harrisonburg Downtown Technology Zone Companies, July 2017

Companies
Rosetta Stone
Gravity Group
Immerge Technologies
Digico
Convergent AI
Jenzabar
Chiedo Labs
High Speed Link

The Resource Network
Vision Technology Group
MLC Advertising
Venture Interactive
Estland Design
ITdecisions
Chiedo IT
Chiedo Cyber

Source: Harrisonburg Economic Development

### *Harrisonburg Technology Park*

The City developed the Harrisonburg Technology Park, to attract and encourage the development of technology-related businesses. The park is located at 1400 Technology Drive in the northern section of the City. The park is one of only 13 Virginia Technology Zones, a designation that allows the City to provide incentives to targeted businesses for up to 10 years. The Harrisonburg incentive package includes a three-year exemption from business, professional, and occupational license taxes and fees, exemption from water and sewer availability and connection fees, and below-market land prices.

### *Small Businesses*

The vast majority of the approximately 2,200 businesses in the City have fewer than 100 employees. These small businesses are as crucial to the economic health of the City as our large employers. Small businesses in the retail and service sectors also play a role in the overall quality of life that residents of the city enjoy.

Recognizing that many early-stage businesses are not “bankable” for several years, the City’s Department of Economic Development seeks to fill that void by offering loans with reasonable interest rates and collateral requirements to enable entrepreneurs to establish their ventures. The Harrisonburg Business Loan Program offers up to \$25,000 over 5 years for these startup ventures. This financing tool has been very successful and continues to be an important resource to help the city’s small business community.

In conjunction with partners at the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce, the City’s Department of Economic Development continues to identify ways in which to support growth of our small businesses and, thus, job opportunities for city residents.

## Economic Development

The stated mission of the City's Department of Economic Development is "to increase the number of higher-paying job opportunities available in Harrisonburg by attracting new businesses to this community and assisting existing firms to expand locally."

To that end, the department has set the following goals and underlying strategic objectives.

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Goal:      | Increase technology-related job opportunities in the City  |
| Objective: | Attract expansion investments from Washington, DC metro area information technology and/or telecommunication firms   |
| Goal:      | Attract jobs that pay above-average wages  |
| Objective: | Assist in the attraction and creation of jobs in Harrisonburg that pay greater than \$17.20 per hour (the City's average weekly wage in 2017)  |
| Goal:      | Attract capital-intensive operations to the City   |
| Objective: | Increase the machinery and tools tax base located within City limits   |
| Goal:      | Improve the overall business climate within the City   |
| Objective: | Strive to make Harrisonburg the best place in Virginia in which to operate a business  |
| Goal:      | Pursue regional cooperation in economic development efforts  |
| Objective: | Work in cooperation with other Shenandoah Valley jurisdictions to market the Valley as a strong business region. By pooling marketing resources, the goal is to increase the number of business prospects in the pipeline. |

Financing options are available to existing and prospective Harrisonburg firms through:

- Harrisonburg Economic Development Authority (EDA) – a 7-member board authorized to issue bonds for up to 100 percent of project costs for manufacturing operations.
- Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA) – a 5-member board authorized to finance projects in the central business district of downtown Harrisonburg.
- Virginia Economic Development Loan Fund (EDLF) – provides fixed-asset financing to new and expanding manufacturing and other companies that a) create new jobs or save at-risk jobs and b) sell 50 percent or more of their products outside of Virginia. Funds can be used for acquisition of land and buildings, construction or improvements to facilities, and the purchase of machinery and equipment.
- Harrisonburg Business Loan Program – this program offers up to \$25,000 over 5 years to eligible startup ventures.

### *Shenandoah Valley Partnership*

The Shenandoah Valley Partnership (SVP) is a regional partnership that addresses economic development in the central Shenandoah Valley region. The Partnership includes the Cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, and Waynesboro, and the Counties of Augusta, Highland, Page, Rockbridge, Rockingham, and Shenandoah. James Madison University plays a particularly active role in the Partnership and provides on-campus office space.

The Partnership's Board of Directors is made up of approximately 20 members, split evenly among public and private sector interests. The Executive Committee of the Board provides leadership in regional activities and offers direction to the Shenandoah Valley Partnership's staff.

### *Shenandoah Valley Technology Council (SVTC)*

The Shenandoah Valley Technology Council (SVTC) was established in 1997 through a grant written by the office of Research and Program Innovation at James Madison University. The SVTC provides informational programs and networking opportunities to its members, which include business, government, and education leaders. Standing committees include Planning and Operations, Regional Technology Workforce Development, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship.

### *Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board (SVWDB)*

The Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board (SVWDB) is a resource for job seekers and employers in the Central Shenandoah Valley. The SVWDB is a valuable partner in workforce training, job displacement services, and in delivering information about job opportunities and service provider information in the Valley.

### *Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR)*

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) grew out of an effort initiated by City Council in April 2002 to evaluate a proposal to create a pedestrian mall in downtown Harrisonburg. Although the pedestrian mall concept did not move forward, the effort created a 26-member advisory committee representing property owners, organizational representatives, and City officials who in 2003, presented a proposal to City Council to create HDR. HDR would work in partnership with the community to develop a comprehensive vision and master plan to revitalize downtown Harrisonburg into a prosperous and vibrant City Center. It would follow the Main Street Four-Point Approach, a downtown revitalization methodology created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center. That same year, Council adopted a resolution supporting HDR's efforts to apply for selection to participate in the Virginia Main Street Affiliate Program.

HDR's mission has since broadened in scope. Its board of directors and advisory board include representatives of City government, non-profits, and the universities, as well as individual property and business owners and professionals. On account of the coordinating efforts of HDR, working closely with the City of Harrisonburg, community members, partner organizations, and local businesses on downtown projects and initiatives, historic Downtown Harrisonburg began experiencing an economic resurgence in the early 2000s that continues to this day.

HDR utilizes the Main Street Approach, which offers community-based revitalization initiatives using Transformation Strategies organized around four points:

- *Economic Vitality* deals with business recruitment, assistance, and retention programs to strengthen the existing businesses and attract new ones that are a good fit for the district.
- *Design* encourages historic preservation, building improvements, as well as beautification and infrastructure improvements throughout downtown so that the area looks attractive, feels safe, and functions well.
- *Promotion* uses special events and business promotions to bring people downtown so that they are exposed to the many businesses and amenities so they can form positive attitudes about the community. It also stresses the need to develop and market a cohesive brand or message that excites people to be downtown and support local businesses.
- *Organization* focuses on creating a sustainable, well-run organization that creates and nurtures public and private partnerships to collaborate on initiatives and to maintain a strong volunteer base so that it is a true community-driven organization.

Many historic rehabilitation projects in Downtown Harrisonburg were made possible by the historic district status and eligibility for state and federal historic tax credits. Additional historic tax credit projects continue to be underway today and could only be made financially possible with this incentive.

Additional information on the mission and activities of HDR is included in Chapter 9, Arts, Culture & Historic Resources and Chapter 15, Revitalization.

### Tourism

Tourism overall is an important contributor to the local economy. According to Harrisonburg Tourism and Visitor Services (HTVS) and the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), in 2016, tourism revenue for Harrisonburg reached \$118,605,915, a 4 percent change over 2015. Local tourism-supported jobs totaled 1,152 while local tourism-related taxes were \$9,722,194. The average (artisan) visitor spending in 2014 was \$260 per person, per day.

HTVS is a division of the Department of Economic Development. The mission of HTVS is to position Harrisonburg as a premier travel destination by promoting and developing creative tourism marketing initiatives that stimulate economic growth in the City. HTVS partners with local businesses, media, travel writers, group tour operators, meeting and event planners, film scouts, and regional and state tourism partners to increase tourism in our region.

HTVS's local partners include Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, Merchants of Historic Downtown Harrisonburg, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce, Rockingham County Economic Development and Tourism, and the Arts Council of the Valley. Regional organizations include the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership, Blue Ridge Parkway Association, Shenandoah National Park, Shenandoah Valley Travel Association, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation, and destination marketing organizations throughout the Shenandoah Valley. State affiliations include Virginia Restaurant, Lodging and Travel

Association, Virginia Association of Destinations Marketing Organizations, Virginia Green Travel Alliance, and Virginia Tourism Corporation. Multi state marketing and public relations include the Virginia/Maryland Civil War Trails, and the Mid Atlantic Tourism and Public Relations Alliance.

HTVS's goals include:

- To build a distinct presence in the tourism marketplace by establishing a recognizable and easily marketable "brand" for Harrisonburg.
- To continually develop new tourism products to promote the City of Harrisonburg.
- To increase awareness of tourism marketing opportunities to our local businesses.
- To enhance the visitor's experience.
- To develop sports, history, culinary, arts, agricultural, and educational group travel opportunities.

HTVS receives funding from the City's general fund.

#### *Visitor Center*

HTVS operates The Hardesty-Higgins House Visitor Center (HHHVC), a state certified regional visitor center. HHHVC provides space for rack cards, brochures, and various other print publications. Businesses can display posters as well as event and special promotion flyers. Businesses within the City are encouraged to display retail merchandise, antiques, art, and provide live demonstrations to promote retail business in the City of Harrisonburg. HHHVC operates Monday-Sunday 9am-5pm and is closed only for major holidays. Visitors are greeted by experienced travel specialists.

#### *Services & Outreach*

##### *Welcome Packages*

HTVS provides welcome packages for groups, event planners, residents planning weddings and family reunions, and special events. Packages are assembled depending on the visitor's interests. Packages include sports, recreation, arts, entertainment, history, heritage, family fun, shopping/dining/lodging, or all of the above.

##### *Annual Collateral Materials*

HTVS produces an annual visitor guide, which is distributed nationwide. A digital version is also available at [www.VisitHarrisonburgVA.com](http://www.VisitHarrisonburgVA.com). This visitor guide is the sole comprehensive tourism piece for Harrisonburg. Approximately 100,000 guides are printed each year. At no charge, visitors are also provided a Downtown and City/County Concierge map and Civil War and various amenity brochures produced in-house.

##### *Consumer Outreach*

HTVS attends various events, trade shows, and participates in Virginia Tourism Consumer Outreach Programs, AAA shows, and Welcome Center Blitz's throughout the year.

### Marketing and Branding

HTVS works cooperatively with partners both locally and regionally in the Shenandoah Valley. HTVS follows national tourism trends to offer partner buy-downs, creating attractive packages, and innovative tourism products to represent the City. HTVS reviews branding, advertising, campaigns, and slogans annually to be progressive and competitive with current trends and markets.

### Public Relations

HTVS hosts familiarization tours for group tour operators, tourism professionals, and media. HTVS produces an annual press kit and works with travel writers and bloggers offering story ideas and itineraries to promote Harrisonburg as a premier travel destination. Requests for stories are submitted on demand through partnerships with Virginia Tourism Media Relations, Help a Reporter Out (HARO), the Mid-Atlantic Tourism Public Relations Alliance (MATPRA), and national publications.

### Social Media

HTVS engages consumers and journalists through social media on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram. HTVS also develops destination, cycling, history, craft beer, food culture, and trends in the industry videos for its YouTube and marketing purposes.

### Film Scouts

HTVS works in collaboration with the Virginia Film Office to attract commercial and motion picture opportunities both locally and throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### Domestic Tours and International Sales

HTVS produces visual media to highlight travel in the region and tours in the City. HTVS offers multiple itineraries for all ages, including students and senior travelers, as well as sports, culinary, art, agriculture, and outdoor adventure enthusiasts. HTVS works to increase awareness within the motor coach industry and through its partnership with Capital Region USA to increase international travel to the region.

### Conferences/Special Events

The City is also host to multiple small meetings and statewide conferences. Request for proposals for special events are carefully scanned and sent to hotel properties, parks and recreation facilities, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, James Madison University, Eastern Mennonite University and various locations throughout the City. HTVS works cooperatively with these organizations to bring meeting, conference and special event business to the City.

### Research and Statistics

HTVS measures the return on investment from marketing campaigns, analyzing web traffic, visitor spending, group travel, conference inquiries, and visitor traffic counts from large scale events. Revenues generated from meals/retail/lodging are reviewed annually.

### Trends and Trails

HTVS participates in numerous committees and trails to enhance tourism growth in the area. Some examples include: Celebrate Shenandoah, Wilderness Road: Virginia Heritage Migration Route, Fields of



Gold farm trail, Bike the Valley, Shenandoah Valley Kids Trail, Crossroads of Culture Artisan Trail, Shenandoah Beerwerks Trail, The Shenandoah Spirits Trail, and Virginia Civil War Trails.

## Economic Development and Tourism Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal 16. To maintain economic leadership in the Shenandoah Valley by offering opportunities for all people, businesses, and industries that enhances the City's ability to expand its economic base and provide good employment for all people.

Objective 16.1 To increase the number of higher-paying jobs available in Harrisonburg.

Strategy 16.1.1 To improve the quality of life of people in Harrisonburg by attracting new businesses and people/employees, while also considering how new businesses may, in turn, improve the City's quality of life.

Strategy 16.1.2 To promote and market Harrisonburg as a business friendly, highly competitive and attractive city in the Shenandoah Valley for business recruitment and expansion and a high quality of life.

Objective 16.2 To attract new businesses and assist existing businesses to expand locally.

Strategy 16.2.1 To review land use policies and regulations and, if appropriate, amend them to provide for the availability of sites for businesses to locate and expand.

Strategy 16.2.2 To protect the City's limited availability of properly zoned, job producing industrial land.

Strategy 16.2.3 To continue to improve thriving commercial areas such as downtown, the East Market Street corridor, and the South Main Street corridor with business expansion efforts, visual improvements, and the reuse, redevelopment, and development of underutilized properties.

Strategy 16.2.4 To improve the City's transportation system as a way to preserve the City's competitiveness for attracting new businesses. See Chapter 12, Transportation's Goal 13 for related objectives and strategies.

Strategy 16.2.5 To regularly update and disseminate market trends and information and apply market data to economic development initiatives and programs.

Strategy 16.2.6 To quantify the impact of the regional college-aged student population on the local economy and adjust household income and poverty level to improve potential for business recruitment and investment.

Objective 16.3 To create a well-prepared and successful workforce by providing educational programs for workforce development, training, apprenticeship, and retraining to

meet demands of business and industry. See Chapter 8, Education, Workforce Development, and Lifelong Learning's Objective 7.3 for related strategies.

Strategy 16.3.1 To promote the awareness of programs offered by and information available from organizations such as the Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board (SVWDB), the SVWDB Valley Workforce Center, and the Valley Career Hub online site.

Strategy 16.3.2 To explore programs and initiatives that offer skilled trades training for people in the City.

Strategy 16.3.3 To connect employers with education providers so that they can work together to develop training, apprenticeship, and other programs to train and educate people to fill the needs of employers while also helping to improve opportunities for individual people.

Strategy 16.3.4 To actively promote the Virginia Jobs Investment Program.

Strategy 16.3.5 To collaborate with service providers to help people in the City overcome barriers to employment such as basic education and training, transportation, childcare, and other obstacles.

Strategy 16.3.6 To strengthen the availability and quality of childcare and early childhood education for the current workforce and as an investment in the workforce of the future.

Objective 16.4 To increase technology-related job opportunities in the City.

Strategy 16.4.1 To promote the benefits of the City's two technology zones.

Strategy 16.4.2 To grow technology zone incentives and marketing to attract expansion investments from information technology, telecommunication, and cyber security companies from the Washington, D.C. metro area as well as among local and regional companies.

Strategy 16.4.3 To collaborate with James Madison Innovations and the James Madison University Center for Entrepreneurship to attract start-up technology companies.

Strategy 16.4.4 To identify training and education opportunities to retain immigrants and veterans living in our community by providing them with skills that can be transferred to technology job opportunities.

Objective 16.5 To attract capital-intensive operations to the City to increase the machinery and tools tax base.

Strategy 16.5.1 To market available industrial land in the city.

Strategy 16.5.2 To work with property owners to develop shovel-ready sites and shell buildings.

Strategy 16.5.3 To promote Harrisonburg to manufacturing businesses in partnership with the Shenandoah Valley Partnership.

Objective 16.6 To promote entrepreneurial activity across all segments of the population, by providing support and incentives to attract businesses to start in the City.

Strategy 16.6.1 To identify barriers to entry for new businesses and barriers to growth for existing businesses, and rectify common obstacles.

Strategy 16.6.2 To help entrepreneurs identify locations/sites where they can successfully start and grow their businesses.

Strategy 16.6.3 To continue the Entrepreneurial Spark speaker series to inspire and connect potential entrepreneurs with successful entrepreneurs.

Strategy 16.6.4 To connect businesses with the Small Business Development Center in order to assist them with improving their web presence.

Strategy 16.6.5 To encourage small home-based business initiatives by assisting businesses with navigating state and local regulations and amending local regulations to allow more small home-based businesses where possible and appropriate.

Strategy 16.6.6 To develop a campaign to promote economic development incentives and commit to annual budgeting for effective programs like the City's Business Loan Program.

Strategy 16.6.7 To identify opportunities to support entrepreneurial activities for Harrisonburg's diverse ethnic and immigrant communities.

Strategy 16.6.8 To expand partnerships with educational institutions and economic development organizations in the region to foster business creation, regional initiatives, business growth, apprenticeships, and employment pipelines. See Chapter 5, Community Engagement and Collaboration's Goal 2 for related objectives and strategies.

Strategy 16.6.9 To increase awareness of tourism marketing opportunities and to provide assistance to local businesses.

Goal 17. To grow the hospitality and tourism industry by encouraging more visits and longer visits among target markets.

Objective 17.1 To build a distinct presence in the regional tourism marketplace to increase tourism in Harrisonburg.

Strategy 17.1.1 To craft a City brand based on Harrisonburg’s unique market position and assets for coordinated, cohesive, and compelling marketing initiatives and to engage businesses and other stakeholders on brand adoption and usage.

Strategy 17.1.2 To increase the availability of interpretation of arts, culture, and history through local walking, biking, and driving tours. Consider partnerships with local community organizations and local universities to develop tour programming.

Strategy 17.1.3 To develop and market City-based assets such as the designated Culinary District, Arts and Cultural District, historic sites, breweries, city parks and trails, conference centers, and annual events and programming. Market these events destinations to both tourists and City residents. See Chapter 9, Arts, Cultural, and Historic Resources’ Goals 8, 9, and 10 for related objectives and strategies.

Strategy 17.1.4 To launch a public awareness campaign that educates the local population, local employers/businesses, and tourism/economic development partners about amenities and attractions.

## Chapter Resources

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