



**City of Harrisonburg Department of Public Utilities  
Public Involvement Plan**

## **I. Background and Demographics**

Founded in 1779, the City of Harrisonburg is an independent city located in the central Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia. It is the county seat of Rockingham County and encompasses 17.3 square miles, serving a population of approximately 54,000. Harrisonburg is located right along Interstate 81 and is only two hours away from both Richmond, Virginia and Washington, D.C. Harrisonburg is home to two university campuses – James Madison University and Eastern Mennonite University – as well as numerous other businesses, non-profit organizations, and a vibrant downtown.

As the 12<sup>th</sup> largest city in Virginia, Harrisonburg is home to diverse people from all backgrounds. The city's overall demographic profile, according to the 2022 U.S. Census data, shows that 63.7% of the population identifies as White, 21.2% as Hispanic, and 9.5% as Black. The median income in Harrisonburg was \$56,050 in 2022 and approximately 28.5% of the population lives in poverty. Harrisonburg is a refugee-resettlement community and a home to many immigrants as 15.8% of the 2021 population identified as foreign-born. Due to its large college student population, the median age in Harrisonburg is low at less than 26 years.

The Department of Public Utilities is responsible for providing water and sewer services to residences and businesses in the City of Harrisonburg and some in neighboring Rockingham County. Currently, the department manages 3 raw surface water sources, a class 1 multi-media filtration plant, 294 miles of waterlines, 186 miles of sewer pipes while serving approximately 18,000 accounts.

## **II. Public Notice of Department Actions**

Actions undergoing public participation, including times and locations of public meetings and hearings, and open public comment periods will be posted on Public Utilities' website. Each notice on the website will identify at least one point of contact and include telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the contacts. In addition, the notice is e-mailed to all individuals who request it.

Methods of notice shall accommodate those with impaired vision or hearing and those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in accordance with PU's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan.

For all appropriate department actions that undergo public notice, PU will provide basic background information on the pending action to the affected community and use available

resources to get information about community needs, such as:

- Methods to effectively inform residents.
- Identification of needs and services for community members with LEP.
- Identification of needs of community members with disabilities.
- Locations and times for public meetings suitable to meet the needs of the community.

The public notice will clearly state the department action; public comment period dates; and time, date, and location of public meetings/hearings. The following language will be added to all public notices:

*Individuals needing language assistance or accommodations for effective participation at the meeting should contact Micaela Smith, Non-Discrimination Coordinator (Micaela.Smith@harrisonburgva.gov) by [insert date two weeks in advance of the meeting/hearing date] to request language, mobility, visual, hearing, translation, and/or other assistance.*

*The City of Harrisonburg Department of Public Utilities (Public Utilities) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, or sex in the administration of its programs or activities, as required by applicable laws and regulations.*

### **III. Public Meetings/Hearings Role of Public Utilities**

In preparation for a public meeting/hearing, PU takes the following actions:

- A. Department staff work with the City Manager's Office, the Director of Communications, and other City staff as appropriate to identify the time and location of the meeting. Meeting locations will include places with public transportation access that are easily recognizable to most residents. Potential meeting locations include public schools, government buildings, parks, and other public locations.
- B. Within the confines of the decision-making process, PU provides the community with information regarding department actions and decisions via engagement with community leaders, public officials, and concerned citizens.
- C. Written information will be made available for persons without Internet access when requested.
- D. Public Notices are written in languages identified by the LEP Plan. When required, notices will be placed in legal notice sections or other sections of local publications. For a list of local media contacts, please reach out to:

**Michael Parks**  
**Director of Communications**  
**409 S Main St., Harrisonburg, VA 22801**  
**540-432-7701**  
**Michael.parks@harrisonburgva.gov**

- E. As outlined in PU’s LEP Plan, PU will take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access by persons with LEP, and to provide an interpreter when the need for an interpreter is adequately justified as outlined in PU’s LEP Plan.
- F. PU will ensure that meeting facilities can accommodate individuals with disabilities in accordance with PU’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Plan.
- G. Informational Sessions, Townhalls, and Open Houses – PU may hold an informational meeting in conjunction or separately from a public hearing.
  - a. The purpose of an informational meeting is typically to inform the residents in and around an affected community of the scope and nature of the project in a timely, interactive manner and explain the permitting/licensing process. An informational meeting may be held prior to a public hearing or may be held when a public hearing is not required.
  - b. Informational meetings may also be held to explain enforcement-related matters, remediation projects, or other PU activities that are of concern to the public.
  - c. PU will develop an agenda and/or a specific statement of the purpose of the meeting.

H. Fact Sheet and Project Summary

- a. When appropriate, PU will provide a plain language summary of the major aspects of the proposed project, including the purpose and location of the proposed activity and affected source, and any anticipated environmental impacts, and any controls or work practices that will limit those impacts.
  - i. PU will follow the steps set forth in its LEP Plan to ensure meaningful access and to determine whether to translate fact sheets and project summaries. For a list of contacts for translation services, contact:

**Amy Snider**  
**Deputy City Manager**  
**409 S Main St., Harrisonburg, VA 22801**  
**540-432-7701**  
**[Amy.snider@harrisonburgva.gov](mailto:Amy.snider@harrisonburgva.gov)**

- b. Document Availability
  - i. PU will take every effort to make information available to residents in affected communities in a timely and efficient manner by posting all relevant information on Public Utilities’ website:  
<https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/public-utilities>

#### **IV. Role of the Community**

PU recognizes community engagement, including co-planning and co-sponsoring of events, is critical to successful public participation. To the extent practical and given the statutory and regulatory framework of individual programs, PU will develop public participation plans in coordination with affected communities. When appropriate and permitted by statute, PU will partner with community organizations to plan events, including townhalls, open houses, informational sessions, public meetings, and public hearings. Groups involved will share responsibility for the events and will be responsible for determining event logistics, such as where, when, and how events will be conducted. It is the intention of PU that local community members will take leadership roles in these events, including serving as translators, facilitators, and panelists.

#### **V. Continuous Improvement**

It is the policy of PU to continually improve public involvement in PU programs and activities. As part of that process, PU will train staff on the integration of public engagement into their job responsibilities. Because of the differences in the details among the variety of PU programs, this policy provides a broad overview of things to consider as part of the process and does not describe how such improvements are to be made or a specific process to facilitate public involvement. Rather, each PU program will continually identify and implement public engagement improvements in the administration of its programs, as necessary. In doing so, program managers will consider, at a minimum, the following:

- Incorporating the continuous improvement of public involvement in PU programs and activities as part of their internal training sessions.
- Identifying opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of public involvement, including the timing and nature of the public notice and input.
- Facilitating public understanding of issues before PU, including notice of pending decisions, the factors that PU considers in reaching a decision, the technical information that PU has before it in the decision-making process, and the basis of the decision when it is made.
- Advancing the public's understanding of, and ability to work within, PU's organizational structure and decision-making processes.
- Improving the technical means by which PU conveys and receives information, including use of the Internet.

In order to implement this policy, the PU Director and Deputy Directors will meet with the PU Non-Compliance Coordinator to improve public involvement for covered programs.

#### **VI. Contact and Update Responsibility**

Any questions or concerns regarding this policy and procedure should be directed to the Public Utilities Non-Discrimination Coordinator, Micaela Smith, at [Micaela.smith@harrisonburgva.gov](mailto:Micaela.smith@harrisonburgva.gov).