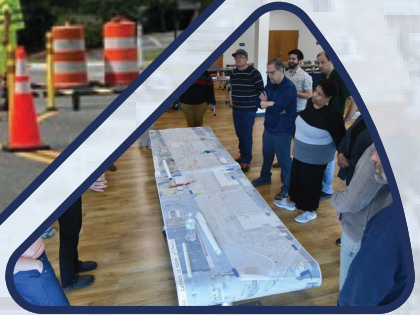


HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Community Connector Partners:

The Northeast Neighborhood Association, The Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project, The City of Harrisonburg, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, and the Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority

COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

-At a glance

This report is a summary of activities in 2025. We will continue to build on these milestones and achievements and look forward to working with community members to make future achievements happen.

- In Harrisonburg, Urban Renewal projects of the 1960s forever changed the Northeast Neighborhood and the north end of downtown - it demolished African American homes and businesses, displaced families, severed a connection with downtown, and turned North Mason Street into a four-lane road with fast-moving traffic.
- In September 2023, Harrisonburg received a \$130,000 Community Connectors Program grant from Smart Growth America with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. We joined 14 other communities in a new nationwide two-year program designed to find strategies for addressing the damage of past infrastructure decisions that negatively impacted neighborhoods and their residents. In our city, we focused on the harms from Urban Renewal.



Photo of participants during the Complete Streets Leadership Academy

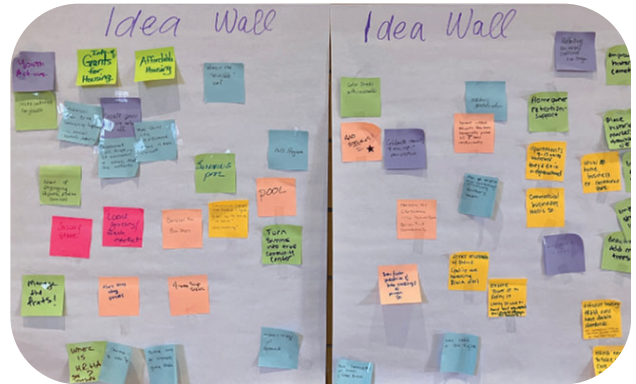


Photo of an idea board used during public engagement sessions

“Rebuilding trust between Northeast Neighborhood residents and the City, repairing past harms, and reconnecting today’s Northeast Neighborhood to the heart of the city are our most important goals. We commit to prioritizing the needs, wants, and desires of Northeast Neighborhood community members as we scope potential future investments in the community.”

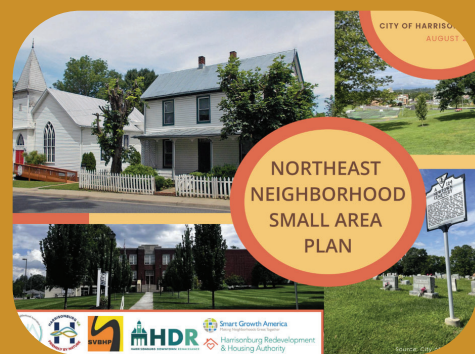
-Vision Statement developed with community member input, Northeast Neighborhood Small Area Plan

KEY 2025 ACHIEVEMENTS



Extensive community engagement was one of our goals. Overall, in 2025, we engaged 144 participants in 6 community meetings, received 101 survey responses, and kept in touch with 232 people who signed up for Community Connectors updates. Our long-term goal is to re-establish connections with community residents and businesses owners and to rebuild trust within the neighborhood with local government.

Working with a consultant, we developed the **Northeast Neighborhood Small Area Plan** completely informed by community members. It offers a vision statement for the future of the Northeast Neighborhood and a series of recommendations to help achieve that vision. Plan recommendations focus on gathering and belonging, reconnection to downtown, safety and security, economic mobility, healthy environments.



As a follow up to the Small Area Plan, we hired the University of Virginia's **Institute for Engagement & Negotiation** to lead facilitated dialogues to ask community members to prioritize the Small Area Plan recommendations that they wish to see implemented first.

Hosted the **"Complete Streets Leadership Academy"** with 20 people, including Northeast Neighborhood residents and business owners, to learn concepts around ways to transform N Mason Street into a safer road. This included a series of virtual training and a hands-on, day-long workshop that allowed community members to design a temporary improvement to N Mason Street to make it safer for walking, biking, and driving. The workshop concluded with a public engagement session where people could offer feedback on N Mason Street reconfiguration ideas





Following the Academy, we used the participants' design and community input to implement a temporary installation to create more pedestrian and cycling space and slower auto traffic through the **North Mason Street Demonstration Project**. This allowed people to experience the road in a new way for the month of July and to experiment with design changes before making anything permanent. Traffic counts and surveys were used to analyze option for what N. Mason Street could look like in the future.

We invited residents to experience Mason Street in a new way during the **North Mason Street Block(s) Party** along the closed portion of the road in July. Four hundred attendees enjoyed a street festival featuring Black- and brown-owned vendors, community booths, children's activities, music, a local history trail, free tours of the Ida M. Francis Home, and a hands-on mosaic project designed by a local artist who created mosaics reflecting Newtown history.



We hired historians to conduct deep-dive research into **Urban Renewal history and impacts**. The team scoured city council minutes, analyzed records, searched for documents, and so much more. A full history based on the located documents presents the most complete account of this period in time that our city has ever had. A full report was released in July 2025 with a call for additional research efforts to uncover lost documents. Interesting facts include 181 buildings were demolished to clear roughly 40 acres, 215 households (710 people) were displaced (most were African American and most were renters), and a third phase impacting 27 additional acres was planned but thwarted due to well-organized opposite of about 100 residents who were mostly African America.

In November, we held a community meeting to gather input on an up-coming **public art project at the Spraygrounds Park** at Ralph Sampson Park. Attendees offered feedback on the proposed project and shared topics and themes that could guide the art. We also began planning for a 2026 community civic fair to get residents involved in implementing aspects of the Small Area Plan. This image is the design that was selected.



ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

We are committed to the ongoing improvements of the Northeast Neighborhood and have several projects underway related to the Community Connectors topic areas:

North Mason Corridor Street Study

Harrisonburg Public Works with the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission are conducting a study of permanent N Mason Street changes based on the demonstration project and a spring 2025 open house for public input on design options. The study will be complete the summer of 2026 and then funding will be solicited for potential construction after 2030.

Tower Street and Sterling Street Sidewalk Projects

Tower Street and Sterling Street Sidewalk Projects – Harrisonburg Public Works added new curb ramps and new crosswalks to connect the sidewalk along Old Furnace Rd and added new sidewalk on Tower Street in 2025. A replacement sidewalk will be constructed on Sterling Street between Johnson Street and Kelley Street in 2026.

Local History

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance is working with the Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project and area historians to install 25 historical markers throughout Downtown Harrisonburg by the end of 2026.

Lucy F. Simms School Rehabilitation and Preservation Project

Thanks to an African American Civil Rights Grant, Harrisonburg Parks & Recreation will be upgrading the building's HVAC system and will be refurbishing the historic windows in 2026.

Hill Street to N Mason Street Drainage Improvements Study Phase 1

Harrisonburg Public Works received Community Development Block Grant funding to delve into a drainage improvement study for Hill Street to Mason Street. The recommendations were shared at a community meeting in April 2026.

Gay Street Reconfiguration and Pedestrian Improvements

Harrisonburg Public Works held an open house April 2024 to get public input on lane configuration changes of Gay Street between Broad and Liberty Streets. Construction will begin in 2028 and will include crosswalks, bike lanes, new turn lanes and curb ramps.

Spraygrounds Public Art

We selected an artist this spring and will install the public art sculpture at the Spraygrounds Park in the fall of 2026. This project is funded by private donors and is a partnership with the Northeast Neighborhood Association, The City of Harrisonburg, and the Arts Council of the Valley.

Ralph Sampson Park Improvements

Harrisonburg Parks & Recreation will be resurfacing the basketball courts in 2026

THANK YOU!

The Community Connectors partners would like to thank everyone who has been involved with this initiative and participated in public engagement sessions and surveys. From identifying places and people in historical photos to sharing concerns and input and being willing to relive some painful memories around Urban Renewal, community members are at the heart of this initiative. Your feedback shaped this effort and will continue to shape the community's future.



Want to learn more or find future opportunities to have a hands-on role in realizing the community's vision for the Northeast Neighborhood? Please visit our website. <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/community-connectors>

