

A hand-drawn bridge structure is superimposed over a city skyline. A hand is shown in the foreground, holding a black marker and drawing the bridge's railing. A businessman in a dark suit, holding a black umbrella and a briefcase, is walking across the bridge. The background features a city skyline with various skyscrapers under a cloudy sky.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE
***Strengthening Council &
Manager Relations***

COMMUNICATIONS – Manager’s Memo

- Quick breakdown of ongoing & upcoming projects/events
- Provided weekly by email to all Council members
- Completed after weekly director/leadership meeting
- Provide Council with basic information on projects they may get asked about by public so they can respond adequately
- Provide points of contact, if necessary and desired, for Council to obtain more information on projects

MANAGER-COUNCIL REPORT



Jan. 10, 2023 – Manager’s Report

Ongoing/Upcoming City Projects and Events

Busy year for HFD

- Chief Tobia reports that HFD responded to 6,350 calls for service in 2022, which was a large increase in calls for service when compared to the prior year. Part of this is due to residents being more active in 2022 vs. a pandemic-impacted 2021, however this is still an increase over pre-pandemic years.

HFD conducts interviews for Deputy Chief of Support Services

- HFD held panel interviews last week with three candidates for the open Deputy Chief of Support Services position. The next round of interviews for the position will take place soon.

Designs moving forward on homeless services center

- The City is beginning to receive early designs for the new homeless services center, with the anticipation that a site plan will soon be ready. Once materials are ready, we will present the design to our community.

Baker Tilly to meet with ELT next week

- Representatives with Baker Tilly will attend next week’s ELT meeting to discuss the latest on the City’s Classification & Compensation Study. Conversations are ongoing about the formulation of a pay plan, with the anticipation that staff will bring more information to City Council for your consideration on this matter in the coming months.

Starting to see impacts of East Market Street work

- VDOT closed a lane of traffic early this week as part of the ongoing work to East Market Street between Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Linda Lane. This will allow VDOT to prepare for bridge construction work that will take place over the railroad tracks and at I-81. This will be a very impactful project for some time to come.

One communications professional starts, another hopefully soon to join

- The new Outreach and Communications Specialist for Public Works, Brittany Clem, started work Monday. A former member of the Parks & Rec team, we’re happy to have her back with the City. Also, interviews are taking place this week to fill the open Marketing and Social Media Specialist position with Tourism.

Work starting this week at Smithland

- Crews will be out at Smithland Athletic Complex this week beginning preliminary work related to light installation at the facility. This is the early stages of a project that will take some time to complete.

Next LAUNCH HARRISONBURG class scheduled

- The next round of LAUNCH HARRISONBURG – an Economic Development program that equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the insights, relationships, and tools needed to turn business ideas into action and turn a passion into a sustainable and thriving business – is scheduled to begin on March 20.

Valley TechCon returning

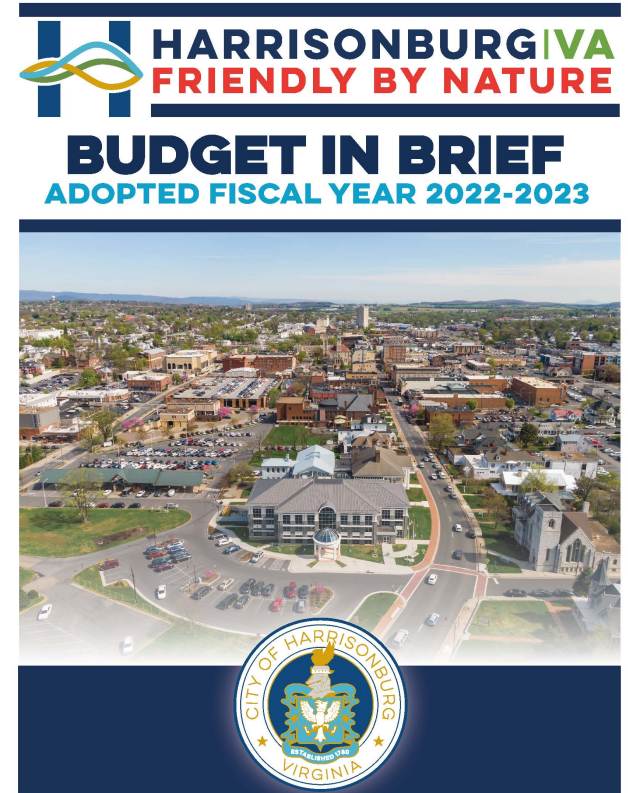
- Economic Development is excited for the return of Valley TechCon, scheduled to be held May 25 after a hiatus related to the pandemic. The conference brings together technology enthusiasts, practitioners, researchers, and business leaders to facilitate idea sharing, collaboration, and innovation.

Parks & Rec orders new electric vehicle

- Parks & Rec has placed an order for a new Ford F150 EV as the City continues to grow its electric vehicle fleet. However, arrival time for these vehicles continues to lag due to market impacts.

COMMUNICATIONS – Individual Meetings

- City began having individual meetings with Council members in 2022 to discuss upcoming budget presentation
- Individual meetings allows members to ask questions they may be hesitant to ask in front of public meeting
- Meetings resulted in more thorough understanding of proposed budget and more informed debate at Council
- This method could be used for any high-profile or complicated matter to ensure members are prepared for upcoming meetings and staff has an opportunity to begin working on answers to potential questions before meetings



COMMUNICATIONS – Candidates & Council-Elect

- Once candidate filing deadline closes, a link to vital City documents is provided to registered Council candidates and an offer to meet with the City Manager is extended
- This helps inform potential future Council members and heads off misunderstandings that some who are new to local government may have as they run for office
- After the election, a Council Member Orientation meeting is held with select City staff, and an information packet covering the City's Vision and Values, a brief explanation of each Department and a primer on Department heads is given to new Council members



The screenshot shows the website for the City of Harrisonburg, Virginia. The header features the city logo and navigation links for City Services, Residents, Business, Things to Do, and At-A-Glance. A search bar is prominently displayed. The main content area is titled 'City Council Candidate Vital Documents' and includes a 'Last Updated: September 7, 2022' notice. A large image of a city council chamber is featured. To the right, there is a 'CONTACT INFO' section listing staff members like Ande Banka, Chris Brown, and Pam Ulmer. Below the image, there is a list of documents with descriptions and file sizes, such as 'City of Harrisonburg Governmental Structure and Vision' and 'International City/County Management Association (ICMA) - Council-Manager Form of Government [1.24MB]'. A 'RELATED LINKS' section is also visible on the right side.

COMMUNICATIONS – Lessons Learned From Crisis

- Following a natural gas explosion that leveled a strip of businesses in Harrisonburg, gaining national attention, we had to navigate how best to inform Council members who wanted to visit the scene
- This led to multiple conversations about how to accommodate Council members during a crisis and keep them updated on events – while keeping them away from an active scene if necessary
- It's important to keep Council informed – they often get questions we don't and can be vital tools in getting information into the hands of residents



WEAKNESSES – Page Topic 1



- How well we communicate is foundational to any relationship.
- Establishing and Maintaining Trust
- Councilmember to Councilmember relationships.
- Manager and Councilmembers relationships.
- If the Trust between Manager and Councilmembers is low, it is almost impossible for that organization to thrive.

WEAKNESSES – Page Topic 2

- The manager in local government is responsible for identifying weaknesses and mitigating the impact of those weaknesses.
- Most weaknesses can be overcome; however, if trust is lost and not re-established, everything else will suffer.
- Trust must be established and maintained in order to have enough relational capital to effectively carry out our tasks.
- Trust is at the core of how resilient any local government will be when controversial and sensitive issues occur.
- Managers must be precise and reliable with our work. How our work is presented and delivered is critical.
- Not taking criticism or even the decisions of elected officials personally is key. It builds trust between the elected officials and manager.



RELATIONSHIPS – Benefits

- Focusing only on high-quality work, at the expense of relationships, makes leaders much less effective
- Trusting & positive relationships improve outcomes for the organization
- Tale of Two Cities?

RELATIONSHIPS – Building Positive Relationships

- **Be intentional** about building positive relationships and fostering trust
 - Recognize council members are unique individuals with different histories, mindsets, needs, and communication styles
 - Show a genuine interest in learning about each one
 - Share about yourself
 - Take the initiative to regularly engage with them on a personal level
 - “Show up” for them as a colleague at events that matter to them
 - Check in with them regularly
 - Determine what level of engagement the council member would prefer – more formal meetings, informal lunches, infrequent chats, etc.
 - When communicating with them, make them feel seen, heard, and recognized (*i.e.*, valued)
 - Complete all the tasks you say you will complete
 - Help them solve problems
 - Anticipate their questions and concerns and proactively address them
 - Be candid, transparent, and authentic
 - Honest feedback in a useful way



STYLE – Why it Matters

- More effective communication
- Avoid/manage conflict
- Address expectations
- Foster positive relationships
- Improve acceptance of the message



STYLE – Why it Matters

Understanding the communication styles of both the speaker and the audience increases the likelihood the communication will be successful.



STYLE – Types of *Business Communication Styles*

- Personal
- Functional
- Intuitive
- Analytical

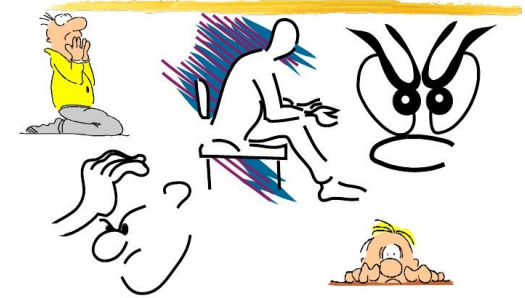


STYLE – Written Versus Verbal Communication

- Do emails have a “tone”?
- Importance of facial expressions/gestures/other nonverbal cues



Body Language



STYLE – Take Aways

- Be Flexible.
- Endeavor to understand your style (online tests are available) as well as the styles of your board/council members. Ask what information the audience wants.
- Less can be more.
- Whatever the style, be a good listener including nonverbal communication.
- It is not personal.
- Incorporate communication elements for all styles.
- When you are not sure, stick to the facts.

