Letter from the Executive Director

2020: The Best Worst Year?

Who’s ready to bury the word “pivot”?

Who isn’t?! But, we all did it. Shoppers & diners - you changed how you supported local. Downtown businesses - you adapted to safely provide your goods and services. And, our HDR team - we never hit pause on trying to keep community members connected to downtown while trying to help businesses stay open.

When people ask "how is downtown doing?", they are surprised to hear that we had a net gain of businesses last year and we didn’t have the widespread closures that were feared.

This is because our community is resilient. Fans of downtown were committed to supporting small businesses and businesses weren't going to give up. What's more, Harrisonburg has a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, and I am proud that HDR is a big part of that.

We raised money for grants and services. We never let businesses feel in the dark or isolated - our weekly emails told them everything they needed to know from PPE to PPP. We curated a webpage that offered customers updates on e-commerce options, delivery, and adjusted hours. Our blogs and social media spotlights reminded the community about the people behind businesses. We even ran one of our biggest holiday campaigns yet.

Please indulge me as I say THANK YOU to our supporters! I am blown away by the on-going support from our sponsors, partners, and donors. You have been with us every step of the way – your words of encouragement and your contributions keep us going. All of you made 2020 the best worst year ever! I hope you agree after you take a look at our 2020 annual report.

Sincerely,

Andrea L. Dono
Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

Our Mission: To build a downtown destination where businesses thrive and people enjoy memorable experiences

Our How: Businesses assistance programs, destination marketing, special events & beautification projects

Our Why: We believe everyone deserves a special place that they consider the heart of their community

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COVID-19 RESPONSE

Harrisonburg-Rockingham Small Business Taskforce

The week our first local case of COVID-19 was confirmed, area economic development partners began weekly convenings to coordinate our support to local businesses. The Taskforce partners filmed a PSA encouraging people to support local businesses safely (thanks to Appeal Productions!), surveyed business owners to identify needs, surveyed customers to gauge changing consumer behaviors, built a COVID-19 resource page, launched a grant program, and more.

22 grants went to downtown businesses for a total of $68,000+ invested in downtown.

The catalyst for the resilience grant program came from Aaron Ludwig who asked his banker at F&M Bank to help find a way to save small businesses. F&M immediately seeded the grant program with $50,000. Contributions from Atlantic Union Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, individual donors, HDR’s Friendly City Fortune and a grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development helped us raise over $100,000 in grants for Harrisonburg-Rockingham businesses.

The Hartbeat of Main Street Grant Program

$800,000 to 67 businesses across the nation

The Hartford Insurance Company and The National Main Street Center teamed up to award $800,000 to small businesses throughout the U.S. as they adapted to operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. HDR quickly got this opportunity out to downtown businesses & wrote 20 customized letters of support with personalized stories for each applicant.

Only 6 communities in Virginia received a grant.

$17,993 was awarded to 3 downtown Harrisonburg businesses.

Only 1 city received more than 3 awards.

20 Letters of support were written by HDR.

In March at the start of the pandemic, HDR emailed downtown businesses, sometimes multiple times a week, to notify them of grant opportunities and federal assistance programs & resources. HDR also conducted two customer surveys to inform businesses of consumer patterns to help them pivot operations and respond to evolving preferences.

"HDR started sending out sometimes daily emails with updates about things that were happening at a local, state and national level with economic relief for COVID. HDR was a lifeboat that I could hold on to and stay afloat and help the business stay afloat — 8 months later, we're here and we're thriving."

Lauren Penrod, Owner of Lola's Deli
We modified our Bricks & Clicks small business assistance program to provide grants & one-on-one expert guidance to help businesses modify their spaces (“bricks”) for increased public health & improve their online/e-commerce presence (“clicks”) so they could be more nimble in their response to operating during a pandemic.

20 businesses participated. All applicants were accepted!

NONE of the businesses in the program closed.

$45,000 was invested in downtown businesses.

The Virginia Economic Developers Association recognized Bricks & Clicks with a state award noting our 360-degree business support for participating entrepreneurs and the innovative partnerships that made it happen. HDR and the City of Harrisonburg’s Dept. of Economic Development were featured panelists in the VEDA online conference to share our best practices.

The Dept. of Housing and Community Development’s Virginia Main Street also held up our Bricks & Clicks as a model for our statewide downtown revitalization network!

The success of Bricks & Clicks is made possible by our program partners – the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center and the City of Harrisonburg Economic Development.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Bricks & Clicks Testimonials

"I am so humbly grateful to the Bricks & Clicks program. The funds have helped me pivot my business to include retail hair care products for the black and brown community, upgrade my appointment setting and sales recording capabilities, and make my shop safe and sanitary to comply with COVID-19 guidelines. Your encouragement and belief in my business created renewed enthusiasm and excitement in my shop."

Diane Madden
Dinamic Cuts & Styles

"I cannot express my gratitude for working with us to build a more sustainable business as e-commerce is clearly the way of the world, and to help us market our business. The Bricks and Clicks program was a driver in challenging me, when I felt sort of like waving the white flag of defeat, to keep fighting to build a business to survive such a tremendously difficult time in 2020!"

Tina Miller
Walkabout Outfitter

"The front end cashiers are always telling me how grateful people are that we are offering this online service. The success of Co-Go means less people in the store, which in turn helps to keep our shoppers feeling safer."

Lindsey Denny
Friendly City Food Co-op
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Downtown Business Development

Despite all of the challenges and uncertainty small businesses faced in 2020, downtown Harrisonburg survived the chaos and even gained some great new establishments.

- **12** new downtown businesses opened
- **7** downtown businesses closed
- **4** downtown businesses expanded their spaces and/or operations

Merge Coffee Company opened their first location three years ago across from EMU. In 2020, they brought new life to the intersection of Liberty St. and Main St. and expanded their business with a new location in Downtown Harrisonburg.

Built in 1945, this historic downtown building on W. Gay Street was originally Big L Tire until they moved to their new location on N. Main Street. This former garage space was successfully renovated and reopened as Magpie Diner and The Perch co-working space, along with Chestnut Ridge Coffee Roasters.

HDR engaged in on-going advocacy to protect downtown’s historic Denton Building on Court Square from being acquired for the use of court infrastructure expansion and possible demolition. We hosted a community presentation that drew 200+ concerned residents and teamed up with Dr. Carole Nash, Archaeologist and Associate Professor at JMU’s School of Integrated Science. We shared lessons learned about the impacts past demolitions have had on downtown that continue to be felt today and to keep the community informed.

Did You Know?
HDR created the #EverydayHVA campaign to encourage people to continue supporting downtown businesses by shopping their e-commerce sites and purchasing gift cards.

Participants were encouraged to email HDR copies of their receipt(s) showing $25 or more in purchases at downtown businesses. Each receipt submission equalled a chance to win one of four weekly $25 gift card prizes to the downtown business of each winner’s choosing.

269 receipts were submitted.

42% said the campaign made them think more about the importance of supporting local.

At least $6,725 was spent at downtown businesses during the campaign.

Half of the winners spent 50% more than the value of the gift card.
COVID-19 Business Directory
At the start of the pandemic, people still wanted to support downtown businesses but didn't know how. Some temporarily closed, others had new hours - so one of our first actions was to connect customers to businesses by curating a new online directory that made it easy to find which were open, their new hours, who offered delivery, take-out, or quick pick ups, and who offered e-commerce. Our directory format was replicated by countless communities near & far.

"We've given our COVID-19 Downtown directory a major facelift - the information is now much more streamlined to make it easier to shop online, buy gift cards, and continue to support our downtown businesses."
Downtown Storytelling

"Friendly Faces of the Friendly City"

Local blogger and Harrisonburg enthusiast, Katie Mitchell, wrote a series of 17 pieces sharing the stories of both Harrisonburg residents and downtown business owners. The "Friendly Faces of the Friendly City" series garnered a lot of attention and gave us some of our most popular posts and webpages.

- **6,419** Website pageviews
- **40,105** Reached on Facebook
- **254** Facebook shares

Our most-viewed page on the HDR website in 2020 was a "Friendly Faces of the Friendly City" blog

"Friendly Faces Of The Friendly City: Cy Khochareun"

Cy Khochareun, the owner of Beyond, tells his story of immigrating from Laos to Thailand, and eventually the United States where he went from picking apples on a farm outside of Harrisonburg to opening Beyond, Taste of Thai, Cy’s Electronics, and the Oriental Food Market.

Business Spotlights

We ran a social media spotlight series to showcase businesses and owner stories to reintroduce them to the community and highlight what they offer to promote supporting local.

-HARRISBURG DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE 9.8K like this · Nonprofit Organization

-Sep 8, 2020 · Water Street Vintage & Bohemian, a downtown business with a loyal customer base, all began as one man’s way of connecting to a time long since passed. Mike Harlow, owner of Water Street Vintage, grew up in Harrisonburg in the 60s and 70s—a time he sees as easier, when everyone...

-HARRISBURG DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE 9.8K like this · Nonprofit Organization

-Nov 2, 2020 · Benny Serrette’s is famous for their pies, serving up slices over a foot long. However, long before they became known as, “Home of the Virginia Slices,” Benny’s started as a one-man business. Years ago, a man named Benedicto, nicknamed “Benny,” became famous for the pizza pies he...
In 2020, HDR partnered with the Friendly City Merchants and the City of Harrisonburg’s Economic Development Dept. to produce a commercial for WHSV & social media that encourages supporting small businesses during the holiday season. The majority of businesses surveyed in January said that many customers reported making a concerted effort to buy local for the holidays.
Community Champion of the Year Award

The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce recognized HDR’s Executive Director, Andrea Dono, for her contributions to our community with a 2020 Community Champion of the Year award!

The National Main Street Center asked Andrea to be a panelist in a webinar to share our COVID small business response strategies, which positioned our organization as a leader in this nationwide network of downtown revitalization programs.

Did You Know?

HDR was one of 8 recipients of a $10,000 Grills Fund for Main Street Revitalization grant from the National Main Street Center. Only accredited Main Street America communities were eligible for this very competitive nationwide grant. The Truist Foundation also awarded HDR a $10,000 grant to contribute to Bricks & Clicks!
We partnered with 4 local veterans organizations to highlight the stories of area Veterans and honor their service despite being unable to hold an in-person parade.

JMU’s student Veterans Association placed 7,033 flags on the quad, we worked with JMU to have the Star-Spangled Banner play from the Wilson Chimes at 11 am on November 11.

**EVENTS & PROGRAMMING**

**Sofapalooza**
Sofapalooza was a nine-part virtual concert series hosted by HDR on our YouTube channel. It not only spread some joy, love, and music through the downtown community during a hard time, but raised funds to support local musicians and small businesses.

Over 11K video views
$5,470 granted to downtown businesses
$1,500 paid to local musicians

**Bingo is Life**
HDR partnered with brothers/entertainers, Chris and Mike Howdyshell, to put on a free community bingo event for a sold out crowd of 270 people in Court Square Theater. We gave away over $1,000 in prizes at this one-of-a-kind celebration of the creativity of the Friendly City.

**Veterans Day**
We partnered with 4 local veterans organizations to highlight the stories of area Veterans and honor their service despite being unable to hold an in-person parade.

Over 16K social media impressions
JMU’s student Veterans Association placed 7,033 flags on the quad, we worked with JMU to have the Star-Spangled Banner play from the Wilson Chimes at 11 am on November 11.
Friends of Downtown

Thank you to our almost 200 Friends of Downtown! Individual donations from community members and downtown businesses are among our biggest votes of confidence. We are so grateful for your continued support!

Media Partners

Thank you to our media partners Harrisonburg Radio Group, iHeartMedia, and WHSV.

2020 Sponsors & In-kind Partners

GIFTS OF $10,000+
- City of Harrisonburg
- Glo Fiber
- James Madison University
- Matchbox Realty & Management Services

GIFTS OF $1000 - $3000
- Brad Cohen Homes
- Digital Minerva
- Excel Heating & Cooling
- Excel Steel Works
- Farmers & Merchants Bank
- The Frame Factory
- The Gaines Group Architects
- HUGO KOHL Jewelry Boutique & Workshop
- Larson Wealth Management
- Mint Construction
- Pendleton Community Bank
- Riner Rentals

GIFTS OF $500 - $999
- Appeal Productions
- The Friendly City Food Co-op
- Flora Pettit PC
- The Harrisonburg Homes Team
- Massanutten Resort
- Nest Realty

GIFTS OF $499 and Under
- Brother’s Craft Brewing
- Crab Action
- Daniel J. Neher
- Generate Impact
- Pale Fire Brewing Co.
- The Razor’s Edge
- Ruby’s Arcade
- Spotless Specialty Cleaning and Restoration

Grants & Loans

PPP Loan- (Forgiven) $46,600
Truist Foundation $10,000 for Bricks and Clicks
Virginia Main Street $20,000 for Resilience Grants
National Main Street Center – Grills Fund for Main Street Revitalization $10,000 for Bricks and Clicks