

Harrisonburg sizzles with coordinated, communitywide revitalization strategies

HARRISONBURG Downtown Renaissance (HDR) was formed to unify, strengthen and direct the revitalization efforts for downtown Harrisonburg. In 2003, the newly formed group hired Frazier Associates to develop a revitalization plan to improve the appearance and function of downtown, spark economic investment, increase tourism and enhance civic pride. The plan created a comprehensive vision to revitalize downtown into a prosperous, culturally vibrant city center.

The effort to develop a coordinated strategy began with a survey and analysis of the entire downtown planning area, approximately 30 blocks. The results of that study delineated four distinct downtown sub areas -- the Downtown Core, the Garden District, the Rail/Industrial District, and the Post Urban Renewal District. Recommended improvements and key redevelopment goals were tailored to each of the four districts to build on their inherent strengths.

In 2004, Harrisonburg was accepted as a Virginia Main Street community. Frazier Associates, as the provider of design assistance for the Main Street program, immediately began working with property owners on façade improvements within the Downtown Core.

That same year, Downtown Harrisonburg was recognized as a national and state historic district, to better attract private sector developers. The historic district designation sparked the investment of millions

of dollars from the private sector, launching redevelopment projects such as the adaptive use of the City Produce Exchange Building, which is being converted into loft-style apartments, professional office space and an upscale restaurant. These projects are made economically feasible by the availability of rehabilitation tax credits, which allow the owner to recoup up to 45 percent of eligible investments to the property.


more. To be successful, a downtown organization really needs to think about community character and how to reinforce it. What we're trying to do here, with the assistance of Frazier Associates, is to attract people in from outside with improved wayfinding, to enhance our gateways so there is a real sense of arrival, and once they're here encourage them to stay by making the streetscape more inviting."

Like Harrisonburg, communities

across the state are increasingly committed to their downtowns, their historic neighborhoods, their entrance corridors and civic design in general. Projects like wayfinding, corridor enhancements, streetscape improvements, new contextual development -- all of these directly relate to enhancing community character. Civic design is now being implemented in a coordinated, high-impact way.

Frazier Associates specializes in design services related to

community revitalization. The firm celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. "As I think about the last 20 years I'm most proud of what all the communities we serve have accomplished," said Kathy Frazier. "From the beginning, our mission has been to knit communities together by supporting local efforts like those in Harrisonburg; it's really gratifying to see what can be achieved with good vision and teamwork."

Frazier Associates Architects provides community design and revitalization services, including architecture, planning, historic preservation, landscape architecture and wayfinding. 



Although it may be another year before the wayfinding is installed, HDR requested downtown celebratory banners to immediately convey progress within the core.

Harrisonburg continued to build on the momentum, and in 2006 contracted for a major streetscape improvement, which will upgrade gateways, landscaping, sidewalks, lighting and relocate utilities. Capitalizing on the substantial growth and traffic at the city's edges, Harrisonburg also asked Frazier Associates to create a wayfinding system to draw people toward downtown.

As HDR's Eddie Bumbaugh readily confesses, "Downtown revitalization requires multiple strategies. It's not exclusively about the historic downtown commercial district any-