



Department of Planning & Community Development Report to Town Council

April 8th, 2025

Good evening, Members of Town Council,

My apologies for not being in attendance at tonight's meeting, as I am in DC for an affordable housing conference. I want to express my gratitude for the support I have received from the Council and the community as I transition into this role. Over the past few weeks, we have made significant progress on key planning initiatives, and I look forward to continuing this momentum in the months ahead. Here are some updates on key long-term initiatives we are actively working towards.

Downtown Revitalization

- We are working with RVARC to scope a strategic planning project specifically focused on economic development. We expect this project to kick off in May or June.
- We plan to pursue funding, once available in the fall, to do a downtown master plan.

Housing Development & Revitalization

- We are seeking funding to assess housing needs in Town. Following a successful housing needs assessment, we will then apply for another grant to explore strategies to expand housing opportunities in the upper-level of downtown buildings.

Building & Site Redevelopment

- An inventory of properties in town is planned for May to identify redevelopment opportunities throughout town.
- We are continuing conversations with the Jefferson School developers and plan to assist them with securing funding for the project. The primary funding opportunity will be available this fall.
- We are continuing conversations with CSX, Amtrak, and the C&O Historical Society about the potential relocation of the Amtrak station.

Community Identity & Branding

- Efforts are underway to explore opportunities for branding. For those not in attendance at March's community gathering, a branding expert gave a wonderful presentation on the benefits of branding for the town. I believe this is an important next step for strengthening Clifton Forge's identity and branding to support tourism, local businesses, and community engagement. If Council agrees with pursuing this effort, we will be submitting a grant to help financially support this effort.

Upcoming Grants

- In addition to the grants already mentioned, we are looking at a grant from DCR to build a restroom along the Sensory Trail near the Community Garden area. This grant is due in early May. I am seeking Council's approval to move forward with the grant application process.
 - There is a 25% matching requirement which can include in-kind donations/time. The max grant amount is \$250,000.
 - Another option if a restroom at this location is not of interest is to make the stairs from the trail up to Lowell heading to Memorial Park accessible (possibly a graded ramp). If we are approved for the grant funding, we will need to put the funds towards whichever project is outlined in the application.
 - More information on the grant can be found here:
<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/document/2025-RTP-Application-Manual.pdf>

Needs Assessments

- I have met with SERCAP (Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project) about a few potential needs assessment opportunities. We have the opportunity to work with them on either a lodging needs assessment or a business needs assessment. Our recommendation at this time is to do a business needs assessment to understand what businesses would be most supported by the local market at this time.

Ongoing Communication

- I would like to launch a monthly newsletter update to share with residents about our department's initiatives, key events, reminders, and if you all are interested, notes from Council. I will plan to reach out soon about this.

- Beginning in April, I will hold regular drop-in hours to meet with residents and stakeholders to discuss long-term planning priorities and gather input. These will be on Mondays from 2:30-4pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maria Saxton
Director of Planning & Community Development
Town of Clifton Forge