

City Creates Culinary District

Harrisonburg First In Va. To Adopt Designation

By PRESTON KNIGHT

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HARRISONBURG — The city has given the rest of Virginia some food for thought: creating a downtown culinary district.

City Council approved establishing the district Tuesday night, making Harrisonburg the first city or town in the state with such a designation, said Eddie Bumbaugh, executive director of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance.

In 2001, the city became the first locality in Virginia to create an arts and cultural district, which includes downtown. The districts will complement each other, Bumbaugh said, and separating the two will give the proper amount of exposure to both.

Along with Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, Harrisonburg Tourism & Visitor Services, the Downtown Dining Alliance and Harrisonburg Farmers Market are among other entities in favor of the culinary designation.

It's largely a marketing effort seeking to attract and retain businesses and customers. Brenda Black, the city's tourism manager, plans to pitch story ideas to food magazines and travel writers.

"It shows the cohesiveness of downtown," she said. "It's very marketable for us."

The district does not have incentives as the arts designation permits.

Qualified businesses are awarded tax incentives for promoting the arts. For example, they are exempt from paying the business, professional and occupational license tax for the first three years following the certification as a qualified arts organization.

The tax is a percentage based on total revenues generated in a year.

The culinary district runs from West Grace to West Washington streets and, for the most part, from North Liberty to North Mason streets. The area has more than 45 restaurants and food-related businesses, Bumbaugh said. He read about a New Jersey town's success with its culinary district and wanted to see Harrisonburg do the same.

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