

**A leader with vision.
A leader who listens.
A city that works.
Let it shine.**

Dave Schankweiler's 2021 Agenda for Harrisburg

A CITY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE



**Dave
FOR HBG**

Let's write a better story for Harrisburg.

Harrisburg is a city with plenty of grit and spirit. History has proven it. Our diverse citizens are homegrown and hail from nearly every corner of Pennsylvania and increasingly around the world. Visitors quickly discover ours is more than one famous Capitol dome—we're a welcoming, open and inclusive city.

Our story began as a rugged trading post on the banks of the Susquehanna that blossomed into a thriving town. At crucial points in the Civil War, Harrisburg even played an essential role in preserving the Republic.

By the early 1900s, Harrisburg faced a public health crisis and citizens responded by pioneering the City Beautiful movement—a majestic system of paved streets, lush public parks and a cutting-edge water system. Its success inspired sustainable urban innovation long before greenspace was cool.

Forward movement continued with the arrival of the steel industry accompanied by hundreds of family-sustaining jobs and a booming downtown scene. But by the 1950s, the post-War movement from cities to the suburbs began a long, painful outward migration that reversed years of progress.

When Hurricane Agnes pummeled the capital city in 1972, it left it—according to headlines, “Battered, lashed, flooded and paralyzed.” Harrisburg's drift was underway, but its citizens never gave up on the vision of our beautiful city. Tragically in the decades that followed, grassroots movements to right Harrisburg's course sputtered almost as fast as they started. By the early 2000s, the city faced a disaster of its own making when a rudderless City Hall was dragged to the edge of financial ruin. The economic shell game was over. A season of reckoning had arrived.

The story of Harrisburg's recent past is one of heroic citizen-led action and dedicated city workers. But leadership was inconsistent at best. In many ways, it's a city brimming with talent but missing a unifying vision.

That's why I am running for mayor. Because we need leadership that plans, executes and delivers.

That's why I have a vision to make Harrisburg a leading capital city.

That's why I haven't given up. Because you haven't quit either.

This doesn't happen without you. We must do this together. We can fix Harrisburg. Let's avoid retreating to the same political, racial, cultural and economic corners that have kept our city divided and broken. Let's show the nation a city where differences are debated with civility, kindness and respect for each other. Let's commit to leaving Harrisburg better than we found it.

In over thirty years as a businessman and volunteer in the City of Harrisburg, I've worked alongside many extraordinary people—folks who've cared more for their neighbor's wellbeing than their own ambitions. I've seen walls fall when personal agendas give way to shared ideals. I've seen parts of this city at its very worst and its very best. It's time to channel that same spirit in a citywide call to action.

Yes, we have problems. High crime, blighted neighborhoods, vanishing businesses and a recovering school system has robbed too many of their potential and promise. We've also seen the selling off of valuable city assets with little return. This must end. These are unavoidable truths. We also know that practical, solvable problems have been passed from one mayor to the next in a cycle that will only continue if we do nothing. It's time for action.



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A CITY THAT WORKS PLATFORM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Prioritizes the city's response to rising crime
- Offers a post-Covid plan for economic development and job creation
- Renews the focus on student safety and opportunity
- Restores vital cooperation between the Mayor, City Council and other government officials
- Establishes a responsive process for resident ideas, strategy and action

MAYORAL LEADERSHIP FROM THE FIRST DAY IN OFFICE:

Confronting the Public Safety Emergency with Action

Harrisburg can't move forward without aggressive, unified action to reverse rising violent crime rates, especially in neighborhoods where predominantly black and brown citizens live. As mayor, I'll gather Harrisburg City Council, public safety officials, business, school, church, non-profit and neighborhood leaders to participate in a **Citywide Action Summit on Violence Prevention**. The goal of the Summit is to develop a unified strategy to understand the root causes of crime, review manpower and resource needs, and launch an action plan that enlists every citizen in a movement to end violence on city streets. I'll also work cooperatively with City Council to then hold a **Special Session on Violence** to consider the Summit's recommendations to provide a framework for action.

YEAR ONE PLAN OF ACTION:

I. SETTING A NEW TONE:

Creating a Responsive, Reliable Administration

- Build an accessible mayoral cabinet reflecting the creativity, imagination, diversity and talents of our citizens.
- Restore a cooperative relationship between the Office of Mayor and Harrisburg City Council. Open communication and honest, civil debate will deliver accountability and results for citizens.
- Communicate to residents in a manner that is clear, concise and visionary. From the city website to town halls, it should be easy to understand what government is doing and why. During pandemics, security threats and periods of economic uncertainty, the mayor must be a credible and accessible voice to the citizens.
- Establish a financial task force of accounting, finance and government professionals to recommend ways to repair, stabilize and modernize Harrisburg's fiscal house.
- Restore a positive working relationship with the Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority to exit Act 47 and return self-governance to the city.
- Rebuild relationships with state, county, regional officials and courts.
- Design a plan for new, non-tax revenue generation drawn from the successful examples of other midsize and capital cities. Harrisburg needs an injection of fiscal creativity.

“I’m in this because I love this city. I love the people of this city. But I’m heartbroken by what’s happening on our streets. And I would hate for us to lose this generation because we did nothing. I believe we can turn this city around. There’s plenty of opportunity. Let’s do something new.”

2. DELIVERING JUSTICE:

Making Streets Safer on Every Block

- Establish the **Unified Neighborhood Council** to help city officials, businesses, education systems, faith communities, non-profits and neighborhood leaders coordinate plans for community safety. The working group will be tasked with coordinating the public outcomes of the **Citywide Action Summit on Violence Prevention**. All voices, every available resource, for all neighborhoods.
- Promote policing policies that build a reputation for being racially and culturally competent in protecting an increasingly diverse community.
- Jumpstart public safety reforms by adopting proven community policing solutions utilized in other cities that reflect the culture of Harrisburg. The strategy will focus on violence, race relations, staffing levels, talent recruitment, boosting morale and improving the overall culture for dedicated police professionals.
- Provide a transparent plan to resolve longstanding delays in abandoned building demolition, blight removal, persistent trash, noise levels and criminal activity. Responsible city departments will work cooperatively with impacted residents and non-profits to develop a block-by-block timetable for action to rebuild neighborhoods.
- Establish clear, understandable and accountable communications to citizens on public safety strategies and emergency response.

3. RESCUING A GENERATION:

Supporting Student Focused, Performing Schools

- Lead the conversation on public school excellence. While the Office of Mayor has no direct authority over public schools, the mayor must be an active voice in transforming access to high-quality schools—the centerpiece of a revitalized Harrisburg.
- Partner with Harrisburg School District to prioritize student safety by repairing sidewalks and other safety features near Harrisburg public schools to create the safest possible student experience.
- Convene a culturally and racially diverse task force of business, school, community college and university and regional professionals to aggressively connect job trends and training to confront Harrisburg's unemployment crisis.
- Promote Harrisburg University's historic reduced-rated option for graduates of Harrisburg schools.

4. BUILDING THE INCLUSIVE CITY:

Delivering Housing That's Stable, Affordable and Safe

- Establish the **Mayor's Commission on Housing and Home Ownership** to review national success models in affordable housing options from renting to home ownership. The commission will be responsible for providing a realistic, understandable plan of action on affordable housing and the associated challenge of chronic homelessness.
- Task the Harrisburg Redevelopment Authority and the city's building and housing office with maintaining a comprehensive, online map that identifies blighted areas, vacant lots and available real estate. A refocused HRA would embrace a vision aimed at reversing the anemic record on affordable new home construction in all parts of the city.
- Take immediate action to refocus the city's Office of Codes Enforcement to hold slum and absentee landlords to account.
- Design and launch a city-based, low-interest loan program to finance necessary home repairs, rehab homes and make critical code updates to slow and prevent future blight. The program would prioritize the critical needs for Harrisburg's senior homeowners.
- Team up with industry professionals to develop an aging-in-place plan for older citizens. The plan will balance the ongoing need for personal home safety while developing strategies to make access to healthy food and healthcare more accessible to Harrisburg neighborhoods.

5. GROWING OPPORTUNITY

Leading a Post-Covid Business Plan for a Thriving Harrisburg

- Establish a permanent **Office of Minority Entrepreneurship & Small Business Growth** to help mentor, grow, retain and attract city businesses—especially minority and women-owned businesses. The office will be accountable for creating an easy-to-understand path to help entrepreneurial dreams become sustainable realities. With the goal of fast-tracking the best ideas, we'll modernize and reform the licensing and code system with an audacious goal of 30-day approvals. Harrisburg will become a city of dreamers again.
- Pursue public and private funding to create a low interest revolving loan fund for new and early-stage business growth.
- Design a five-member task force to review obstacles to job creation while identifying strategic opportunities for Harrisburg business and residents in areas like healthcare, senior living, manufacturing, technology and education.
- Create direct, immediate access for prospective new businesses to the mayor and senior officials. This would prevent cumbersome rules and policies from interfering with new business development. The goal is to bring family-supporting jobs to every neighborhood—not just downtown. The mayor will be the champion for new businesses in Harrisburg.
- Boost the homegrown educational advantage of Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) and harness the vast strategic resources of Harrisburg University—our own research-focused institution. The strategy is to connect city entrepreneurs with emerging opportunities in science and technology.

6.

DELIVERING HIGH HOPES:

Creating a Blueprint for Thriving Neighborhoods

- Charge the new **Unified Neighborhood Council** to bring ongoing ideas for developing entertainment and cultural opportunities, business and retail strategies and recreational greenspace for each of Harrisburg's 24 neighborhoods. The group would design a year-one **Neighborhood Action Agenda** with clear, achievable goals, deadlines and ongoing citizen input. Bold action but no pipe dreams.
- Revitalize the Harrisburg Parks Partnership to make sure current and future city-owned green space is serving the changing needs of families and visitors. The Partnership would be tasked with delivering year-round recreational, environmental and educational programming for every member of our community, emphasizing opportunities for youth and families.
- Respect neighborhood sensibilities when revitalizing historic parks and community gathering spaces.
- Expand Harrisburg event offerings to include neighborhood street fairs, festivals and food truck offerings throughout the year to celebrate the diversity, pride and community spirit represented in each neighborhood and culture.
- Create an incentive-based strategy to combat chronic trash and blight problems on city streets. Residents and landlords demonstrating a commitment to rapid cleanup and maintenance would be eligible for fine amnesty.
- Prioritize emergency street repairs while executing an accelerated plan to address chronically poor street conditions and parking concerns.
- Work cooperatively with Capital Area Transit (CAT) to ensure routes are consistent with the changing needs of city residents, workers and visitors.
- Coordinate communication between nonprofit, governmental and faith-based organizations whose mission includes helping those experiencing homelessness, mental health problems, addiction and recovery and post-incarceration reentry transition challenges. The critical aim of increased cooperation is to provide a stronger, unified response to Harrisburg's biggest challenges.

“Here’s my challenge to you. Let’s do this together. Let’s fix Harrisburg. Let’s avoid retreating to the same political, racial, cultural and economic corners that have kept our city divided and broken. Let’s show the nation a city where differences are debated with civility, kindness and respect for each other. Let’s commit to leaving Harrisburg better than we found it.” — Dave Schankweiler

If you're ready to make Harrisburg an energetic model for inclusion—a place where dreamers come to grow their best ideas—then join me.

If you want a city where everyone is respected—residents, business owners and visitors—then join me in delivering a vision to revive a fighting spirit of community action.

If you're ready to work with me for safe streets, responsible, reliable city government, student-focused and parent-involved schools, affordable housing, smart economic development and thriving neighborhoods—then join our movement to make Harrisburg **a city that works for everyone.**

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