

THE NEWS VIRGINIAN

Saturday, July 4, 2026

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THE DOWNTOWN MALL AT 50

ROOM TO GROW



LAUREN CMIEL, FOR THE DAILY PROGRESS

People gather on Charlottesville's Downtown Mall during the Downtown Mall Block Party at the 14th annual Tom Tom Festival in Charlottesville on Friday, April 24, 2026.

Charlottesville's Downtown Mall, which just turned 50, is certainly a success story. But there's always space for improvement.

DAVID VELAZQUEZ
The Daily Progress

Charlottesville City Hall says it isn't entirely sure why or when it decided to put them up.

The four fountains on Charlottesville's Downtown Mall, as designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, did not originally include the barriers — an assortment of fencing, bollards and chains — that prohibited pedestrians from participating in any form of fountain fun for years.

But as the Mall's stands of willow oaks grew into their bosques, the Mall grew too, and somewhere along the way, the city quietly put up the barriers.

And just as quietly tore them down on June 3.

"The City Manager made the decision after consultation from our Capital Development Division and Neighborhood Development Services. They were brought down because they seemed to fundamentally alter the original design intent of Lawrence Halprin, the Landscape Architect of the downtown mall, and because as far as we could ascertain, there was no requirement for them," city spokeswoman Afton Schneider told The Daily Progress.

She added that there is no plan to bring back the barriers.

The barriers surrounding the Mall's fountains are just one of the gripes many residents and visitors alike have had over the 50 years the pedestrian thoroughfare has sat in downtown Charlottesville.

The Mall itself is a marvel, to be sure. Of the roughly 200 pedestrian malls erected in America in the mid-20th century, only a fifth remain today, and Charlottesville's remains one of the most recognizable and successful.

But that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement.

The Daily Progress has put together a list of the top five complaints — or rather, areas for improvement — one for each of the five decades the Mall has been around.

The homeless

Charlottesville has wrestled with what to do with its homeless population, and that battle is on display on the Mall.

With most homeless resources — as well as hospitable businesses, residents and visitors — on and around the Mall, a persistent, but never permanent, number of homeless inhabit the Mall throughout

the year.

The city launched a two-year, \$1.2 million pilot program in February that City Manager Sam Sanders says is intended to treat the symptoms of homelessness on the Mall.

City "ambassadors" are scheduled to clean up litter, offer directions to visitors and greet regulars and newcomers alike as they traverse the Mall between noon and 8 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday.

Bathrooms

The city has wrestled for years with how to bring public bathrooms to the Mall. And although progress has been made, there is not a bountiful number of stalls or urinals.

The city agreed in late 2022 to lease the bathrooms at the York Place shopping center, between First Street South and Second Street Southwest, for \$5,000 per month.

The city's only designated public bathrooms on the Mall are open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. A sign posted near them reads, "If the restroom door is closed during operating hours, it is temporarily unavailable due to cleaning."

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CRIME

2 Shenandoah Valley men charged in shooting

Gang-related shooting in Grottoes left a Charlottesville man injured

BRAD ZINN
The News Leader

Two Shenandoah Valley men are under arrest after a Grottoes shooting last week that injured a Charlottesville man.

The shooting took place the night of June 21.

The Rockingham County Sheriff's Office reported that a Staunton man and a Waynesboro man have been jailed in connection with the incident.

The sheriff's office said a verbal dispute that began outside of a restaurant on Dogwood Avenue quickly escalated into a physical altercation among numerous people and that multiple gunshots were fired at a vehicle.

Raymond Nowlin, a 44-year-old resident of Charlottesville, the driver of the vehicle, was struck once by gunfire and taken to the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville with injuries that were not considered life-threatening.

The sheriff's office said the shooting was related to biker gang activity.

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TRAVEL

AA to resume nonstop service from Charlottesville to Chicago

DAILY PROGRESS STAFF

American Airlines is planning to resume twice-daily nonstop service between Charlottesville Albemarle Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport starting Nov. 2.

O'Hare is one of American's largest hubs, offering passengers access to 187 destinations. CHO officials announced the decision Wednesday.

The published schedule includes flights leaving Charlottesville for Chicago at 8:35 a.m. and 6:41 p.m. and flights from Chicago arriving in Charlottesville at 5:11 and 10:55 p.m. The flights also will include first-class service.

American previously offered flights to O'Hare starting in 2011, suspending

If you go

American Airlines booking and details:

www.aa.com

Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport:

www.gocho.com

them in 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

United Airlines offers daily direct flights from CHO to O'Hare, which began in 2017. United suspended the route in 2022 and resumed it in 2023.

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