

Housing Advisory Commission Minutes

Monthly Meeting: Via Zoom

Wednesday, January 27, 2021, 8:30 AM

Attending: Amy Chandler, Lisa Darden, Andy Dotson, Jessica Duyka, Rachel Fetty, Jennifer Hagerty, Bill Kawecki, Ken Tennant, Arthur Trusler, Brian Walker, and John Whitmore

Call to Order

Introducing Deputy Fire Marshal Andrew Dotson, the new ex-officio member of board representing the Fire Department: Ken Tennant

Ken Tennant stated there has been a major reorganization within the fire department and in the city. It's a change in ways of conducting business. Lt. Quinn is now in charge of commercial inspection. Andy Dotson is going to be program leader and is a 15-year veteran of the Morgantown Fire Department (MFD) and was formerly in charge of the public education program for MFD. MFD has averaged 12,000 contacts per year with its education programs, smoke alarm installations, and child seat installations. In 2018, MFD improved its rating to class 2, an excellent rating, and was close to being a class 1. Fire prevention and inspections programs helped MFD's ranking. Ken stated he is now moving to the investigation side of MFD. When it became a law enforcement agency in 2015, there are many things MFD is now required to do due to the law enforcement function. City units are moving to a new records management system soon, which Ken will attend to. He will discuss arson statistics during next month's meeting.

Proposing an amendment to the City's Administrative code 160.03, 160.4, 160.06, and 160.07: Amy Chandler

Amy Chandler would like to bring new focus to the Housing Advisory Commission (HAC) and asked about bylaws for the commission. Bill Kawecki stated that bylaws exist, but they do not appear on the city's site. There are defined categories of membership in our establishing code, but in some cases we have no one participating, such as the WVU Student Government Association (SGA) representative. Amy asked if we should eliminate these, but Arthur Trusler argued

in favor of keeping the student position, as it would be helpful to have a student representation on HAC since much housing in town is student rental. Arthur said a number of seats have proven difficult to fill, and the Fair Housing Action Network (FHAN) no longer exists, but we need someone to advocate for fair housing needs.. Rachel Fetty stated she hoped the city would have a position appear, as it used to have more involvement in terms of fair housing training. A loss of funding and substantial changes at HUD devastated fair housing training. Lisa Darden said the Fairmont-Morgantown Housing Authority's (FMHA) HUD grant has been stalled.

FMHA has not hired a fair housing representative and she doesn't know what those parameters will be. Arthur stated that we need a member devoted to fair housing. Amy mentioned Chris Fletcher's recommendation of having a builder/developer as a member, as well as a city housing director. Rachel responded that we need to reach out to the city manager and hopes the next person who goes into the city planner position can do this. HAC does not have department head presence. Code Enforcement and the Planning Division are being consolidated under a single department head. Arthur said the housing director would be a new paid position, rather than having a volunteer. Bill stated the city has a new manager, and the emphasis on affordable housing continues and is a priority. A. Kim Haws, Morgantown's new city manager, has a background in planning.

Forming a committee to review the housing study and to compile recommendations for the city

Rachel stated that we have HAC and volunteers on CHAP represented on the Unsheltered Homelessness Committee. With declining revenues due to COVID, it's a difficult time in terms of city budgeting. Kim Haws is interested in these kinds of issues, not just corporate development. John Whitmore said changes are coming to Code Enforcement and the planning division, along with hiring a housing director. The Morgantown Land Reuse and Preservation Agency (LRaPA) sets up priorities for the city and can work with HAC on the research and development ends. There is an ongoing consolidation of development services, and hiring a zoning enforcement official was planned before the pandemic. For example, we are going through building permits in the field rather than in the office. The consolidation will increase efficiencies and cut time and red tape.

However, with budgets so tight, new hires are probably not going to happen. Amy asked if someone could be designated to be in this role? John said it needs to be someone who is heavily involved with statistical analysis and should be a stand-alone position. Can we assign to a current employee? Possibly, but one can only do so much. Rachel said have struggled over the last few years with a defined housing initiative. The problem now is human power and time. We have time to come up with strategies and plans. Bill said that, even with the current challenges, we are in a position to make recommendations and plan. We should identify needs and begin to implement plans.

Amy said we need to match objectives with what's on paper, including updating the bylaws and getting the right people to work on the group and having the HAC to set goals of what we want to accomplish in the next year. Since the housing study came out a year ago, we have our marching orders but nothing is coming from the HAC itself. She doesn't know why this commission hasn't taken up some of these issues. However, Rachel says we have. If we want to amend the establishing ordinance, we need to decide how to reword it and move it to a committee as a whole which could be as soon as February and make those changes as to who is appointed. Brian pulled up article 160: [Article-160-Housing-Advisory-Commission-PDF \(morgantownwv.gov\)](#) and put the link in the Zoom chat function.

Our membership criteria needs to be reworked and reworded. Rachel suggested adding another member at large for a total of two in order to get more input from residents. She says we are dealing with a lack of human power and work hours and it would be helpful to have more input from residents rather than less. The reality is that board and commission members we are relying on are people who are already stretched thin. Bill stated we have members who bring their own expertise. We decided to go forward with what we have. Rachel will nominate Amy to the HAC. Amy stated that Alexis McMillen has stepped away from the HAC. We agreed to run an amendment by Ryan Simonton to make the following changes: One member for fair housing, and one member who is a builder. John suggested striking SGA from the description and replacing it with a student who lives within Morgantown city limits. Rachel will take these matters to Ryan.

Appointing a HAC member to act as liaison with the Unsheltered Homelessness Commission

A few members of HAC are also Unsheltered Homelessness Commission (UHC) members. Rachel will volunteer as liaison until Amy is an official HAC member. Lisa Darden seconds Rachel's nomination. Amy is forming a subcommittee to make recommendations from the housing study to city council. Rachel suggests we move this to the February agenda and reach out to A. Kim Haws regarding hiring a housing director. Committee makeup will be Rachel, Lisa, and eventually Amy. Rachel moved to create a subcommittee to review the housing study and approach administration to create initiatives.

New Business

Arthur discussed federal COVID rental assistance for tenants who are behind on their rent. It is left up to local and state agencies to disburse these funds of \$25 billion. For West Virginia, the Mountaineer Rental Assistance Program will disburse, but Arthur says he's never received any information or response. Those payments were to go directly to the landlord. Lisa said FMHA will participate in the program and is working with the West Virginia Housing Development fund. She will report during the next meeting on the details. A lot of money needs to be spent by September. Lisa will share more information to get the message out to landlords and it will likely roll out by the first of March. Lisa will ask Crystal to attend the next meeting to discuss this program more. FMHA was selected to take applications, process checks, and the like. United Way is also offering rental assistance. You can direct tenants to those folks. Food insecurity and rental assistance. 304-292-0101. Funding from WV Center on Homelessness. AC another possible funding source is the CDBG CARES funding from the WV Housing Development office. The deadline is March 12 for rental and utility assistance.

Arthur says Jim Craig is interested in remaining with the group as the representative from the landlord association. Brian said that Jim hasn't attended a meeting for more than a year.

John Whitmore said the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) is working on a plan with the county and the cities of Morgantown, Westover, and Star City are cooperating on a plan to begin later this year and will be finalized in early 2022.