

City of Morgantown
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Annual Report
for
Program Year 2020



December 31, 2020

Commission Address:

**Morgantown City Hall
389 Spruce Street
Morgantown, WV 26505**

Human Rights Commission Annual Report for 2020 and Priorities for 2021

The year 2020 has been one of the most difficult years in the nation's history. In February the COVID-19 virus became a pandemic and rapidly spread throughout the country. By the second week in March, schools in WV were closing. WVU students left campus for spring break and were asked to quarantine themselves at home for the remainder of the spring semester. The economy began to suffer. Some persons were laid off. Some were forced to stop paying rents. Most commercial service businesses struggled. Some small businesses closed. Social distancing, face masks, and ventilation have become essential for any interpersonal interaction, and on-line classes have become a prominent means for maintaining education process at nearly all levels except for the very young.

In this environment, inconsistencies in adequate compensation for "essential workers" became more evident. Criminal justice tragedies such as the police-inflicted deaths of Breonna Taylor in Louisville and George Floyd in Minneapolis put people on the streets protesting unjust policing. Major week-long demonstrations occurred in 1,200 U.S. cities – including for four days in Morgantown during the last week in May. Demonstrations on one day involved over 1,000 persons and was recorded by a national video organization to demonstrate that even small cities were taking action. Overall, it seems that some people in their own insecurities with the pandemic were more able to be sensitive to the plight of others.

The Morgantown Human Rights Commission continued its monthly meetings via Zoom telecommunications from March through December but still was able to accomplish many of its priorities for the year. A revised Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan for the City was adopted by resolution in March, and Council planned to have an ordinance on plan provisions adopted in the fall. This has not yet happened, and the Commission will be following up on this important request in 2021. In spite of a year marked by three Commissioners moving from the area, the Commission has made several important steps forward and completed several accomplishments as noted below.

Specific accomplishments of the Commission during 2020 in relation to its set priorities for the year:

Of the twenty tasks projected for completion for the challenging year, the Commission was able to fully complete seven – even though it was able to make important progress on three others.

1. Replacing four Welcome to Morgantown banners as well as rack cards located throughout the City.
2. Support 2020 Census as needed.
3. Complete assisting BOPARC, Public Library, and Woodburn Community Building in developing policies for anti-bullying enforcement.
4. Advocate for adding specific LGBTQ liaisons with City Police Department.
5. Prepare for City submission the 2020 Municipal Equality Index survey.
6. Organize and implement the International Human Rights Day Observance and Awards.
7. Support the City housing study as invited to do so.

New accomplishments and other progress:

1. The City Council's adoption of an amended Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan as prepared by the Commission.
2. Preparation of a seventh consecutive submission for the City to the national Municipal Equality Index Program.
3. Revising the Welcome Statement and banners/brochure to be consistent with the City Human Rights Ordinance.
4. Establishing with support of the Interim City Manager an LGBTQ Liaison position with the Police Department.
5. Drafting a collaborative Resolution on Affirming and Strengthening Community Policing adopted by City Council.
6. Participating in planning or a proposed ordinance for establishment of a Police Advisory and Review Board.
7. Supporting the establishment of a "Black Lives Matter" crosswalk in Greenmont.
8. Preparing/submitting a Letter to the Editor supporting the charitable service of immigrant persons in the City.
9. Updating the Commission's complaint process to address the issue of jurisdiction determination.

10. Attending the ACLU Lobby Day at the State Legislature in support of Employment/Housing Non-Discrimination.
11. Nomination of Commission member to be 2020 recipient of WVU Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award.
12. Providing Commission representative to work with the City Manager Search Committee.
13. Generating letters to WVU Athletics advocating for retirement of jerseys of outstanding Black athletes.
14. Conducting displays at the CCSJ Martin Luther King Jr. Day and WVU "I belong" diversity observance events.
15. Providing technical assistance and advocacy for implementation of anti-bullying ordinance at City centers.
16. Working to locate an Inclusive City mural on a downtown structure in the central city.
17. Conducting an International Human Rights Day Awards Program in conjunction with the City Council.
18. Establishing at MAC an educational poster/flag exhibit entitled "RECOVER BETTER – Stand up for Human Rights".
19. Continued search at WVU for sponsor for annual WVU-Community Human Rights Film Program.
20. Generated digitized Human Rights Commission Orientation Packet.

Commission Priorities for 2021

1. Present to City Council the Land Acknowledgement and Indigenous People's Day Resolutions for adoption.
2. Support adoption of ordinance to implement and provide accountability for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan.
3. Support City Council adoption of ordinance to establish a Police Advisory and Review Board.
4. Advocate for access for local opportunities for federal and State funding for accessible housing in City.
5. Advocate for City Council adoption of Resolution for supporting Universal Design to be included in State Code.
6. Advocate for City Council re-establishing Employment/Housing Non-Discrimination as State Legislative priority.
7. Update Commission Legislative Docket.
8. Prepare Municipal Equality Index report for City submission to the national Human Rights Campaign.
9. Support establishment of Minority Liaisons Coordinating Council.
10. Meet with new City Manager.
11. Meet with new Chief of Police.
12. Implement digital Human Rights Commission Orientation Packet in Commission training.
13. Re-evaluated the viability of the "Open to All" campaign.
14. Conduct International Human Rights Day Observance and Awards program.
15. Re-establish December educational poster/flag/film exhibit at the Morgantown Arts Center (MAC).
16. Participate in Morgantown Pride and Friendsgiving Events.
17. Establish access to the Commission via Instagram.
18. Continue search for WVU program sponsor for Annual Human Rights Film Program.
19. Advocate for community representation in planning for possible violent protests/demonstrations/rallies.
20. Organize forum on hate crimes prevention.
21. Complete "Welcome to Morgantown" service information on web site.
22. Complete the immigration information and referral guide.
23. Advocate for adding a specific LGBTQ liaison with the City Manager's Office.
24. Support human rights by local organizations such as the Community Coalition for Social Justice, NAACP, ACLU, League of Women Voters, PFLAG, PRIDE, and several WVU centers for minorities.
25. Move Commission educational materials, files, and equipment to City Clerk's Office.

Commission Membership in 2020

Jacob Powers, Chair
 Amy Chandler
 Kristen Cooper, Secretary
 Jan Derry (Past Chair)
 Ramsey Kinsella
 Jena Martin
 Ash Orr, Vice-Chair

Tim Hairston – Liaison w/ State HRC
 Don Spencer – Volunteer Resource Associate
 Diana Denise McIntosh - PFLAG Liaison
 Rozzi Lauderback – Morgantown Pride Liaison
 Gage Fortney - Volunteer
 Drew Bucy – Previous Member
 Kate Levine-Freedman – Previous Member