

MEMO TO: The Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council

FROM: The City Manager

SUBJECT: Housing Inspection Program

DATE: April 25, 2008

Over the past year, the City's Housing Inspection Program (includes both Building and Fire Codes) has received considerable attention. Reports have been prepared; presentations to City Council have been made; and a Town Meeting was conducted to solicit ideas and suggestions from concerned interests involved in the program. As a result of these activities, a number of initiatives have been identified that can be put in place to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. What follows are specific courses of action that can be implemented:

1. Review of all pertinent City Ordinances: In the late 1970's, the City adopted its first housing inspection ordinance. Since that time, there have been amendments and modifications made in its implementation. During this time, the State has also adopted a State Building Code that in some instances conflicts with the City laws. In the immediate future, all relative City Codes can be reviewed and amended as necessary to be consistent with the State Code—eliminate any confusion or misunderstanding.
2. Appoint an Advisory Committee to Assist with the Housing Inspection Program: In the immediate future, the City Manager could appoint a Housing Inspection Advisory Committee to review current practices; recommend changes (ordinances and administrative

practices); and assist in community awareness of the program. The Committee could include Tenants (coordinate with WVU Student Government); WVU Housing Office; Property Owners Association; Neighborhood Associations; Sunnyside Up; and City Administration (Building and Fire Representatives).

3. Assure that the Housing Inspection Program is Adequately Staffed: The Program staff has recently been increased to four Housing Inspectors; two Code Compliance Officers; one Fire Marshall; two Fire Inspectors; and one, part time Secretary (this position may have to be made full time). Funding is also committed for a new Staff City Engineer for Building and Housing Assistance. This staffing level will be closely monitored to assure adequate support is in place to realize the maximum benefits of the program.

4. Coordinate all Housing Inspection Program Inspections: Housing and Fire Code inspections will be conducted jointly after reasonable notice to property owners and tenants (seven to ten days). In this way, conflicting Housing and Fire Code issues can be resolved on site and property owners and tenants can be more actively involved in assuring properties are in compliance with City Codes.

5. Employ Inspection Checklists: With the assistance of the Advisory Committee, Housing Inspection Program checklists can be updated, reviewed by City Council, be made available to all interested parties; and posted on the City's Web Site (models from other Cities can be studied). The lists can also be provided in advance to property owners and tenants when routine inspections are scheduled.

6. Public Information: Assisted by the Advisory Committee, a number of initiatives can be developed. They include: four workshops could be organized in the next year targeted for specific groups with pertinent information (topics: Exterior Code Maintenance; Building Codes; Fire Codes; Tenant Responsibilities; Seasonal Issues—groups: Property Owners (to include owner occupied); Tenants; WVU Officials; and Neighborhood Associations); pamphlets (Property Owners; Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities; General Information);

promote and participate in Housing Fairs; Channel 15 presentations, announcements, reminders; and City Web Site information (addresses of registered units; occupancy allowed; property owner information; and date of compliance—also general information about codes, tenants' rights and responsibilities, and how to access the program).

7. Improve Data Bases: In the near term, the City's and WVU's data bases need to be carefully reviewed to see if they can be interfaced to assure all student occupied rental units are registered, certified, and not over occupied. In the mid term, it may be possible to develop a common data base to be shared by both organizations through an intergovernmental agreement.

8. Housing Inspection Program Conference: The City could organize a Housing Inspection Program Conference. All interested parties would be invited to participate—Tenants; WVU Student Government; WVU Officials; Property Owners Association; Neighborhood Associations; Sunnyside Up; the Media; and City Administration. Special presentations could be made; questions and suggestions discussed; and a general, open forum presented. This meeting could be held on an annual basis—perhaps in a suitable room at the Morgantown River Front Event Center.

9. Technology: Significant benefits may be realized with new technologies. Laptop computers, mobile printers, and wireless, broad band communications could greatly improve productivity and timely reporting/compliance with City Codes. New computer programs are also possible (New World Systems Logos Program currently being researched).

10. Establish a Gold Star Rental Unit Designation: It may be possible to establish a rating program on a voluntary basis. Assisted by the Advisory Committee, such a program could have the following elements—Property Owners volunteer to participate in the program; unit would be inspected on an annual basis; unit must be in full compliance with all codes; satisfactory tenant evaluation included; special fee for cost of service; and the Gold Star rating awarded for successful participation (list of Gold Star units publicized through all City

and potentially WVU media).

11. Reorganize Inspection Schedules: Over a period of time in phased developments, change from an anniversary based schedule (number of years from date of registration) to periodic schedules for geographic areas of the City (all units in the same part of town inspected during the same time period).

12. Lot Line to Lot Line Inspection Standards: As noted in earlier reports, time for City inspections was eroded with the rapid growth of rental units, increased frequency of key inspections, and the need for follow-up inspections. The result of this was that key safety issues were prioritized over other inspection elements. Since then, additional staff has been put in place to support full compliance with all codes. This lot line to lot line standard will be maintained regardless of additional growth or frequency of inspections. As a matter of policy, the City will assure that additional productivity practices, tools, personnel, and resources are made available to protect this standard.

13. Compliance Principles: The City will fully employ all Municipal/State codes and lobby for additional ones as applicable to assure safe, attractive, affordable housing for all City residents. The principles of this strategy include: work with Property Owners and Tenants to prevent code violations in the first place; give reasonable time to correct violations (usually twenty days); cite violations not corrected; condemn buildings not brought into compliance after other attempted remedies have been exhausted; and demolish buildings not in compliance with City Codes as the law allows. With regard to vacant buildings, the City will assure that they are in compliance with interior, safety codes and all exterior maintenance codes or be demolished as the law allows.. Registration of vacant buildings as per City and State Codes will be required.

14. Review Housing Inspection Program Fees: With the assistance of the Advisory Committee, the City could review all inspection fees and recommend to City Council new rates consistent with supporting the services. Survey of such fees in other Cities could be

part of this study.

15. Home Rule: The City can continue to seek Home Rule Authority to augment existing City and State Codes authorizations.

I hope you find these courses of action helpful. If you have any questions about them or require additional information, please let me know. As well, the City will remain open to any additional ideas or suggestions to improve services that may be made.

Dan Boroff, City Manager

Zimbra

bsypolt@cityofmorgantown.org

Re: Housing Advisory Committee

From : Bethany Sypolt <bsypolt@cityofmorgantown.org>

Thu, Nov 21, 2013 11:36 AM

Subject : Re: Housing Advisory Committee**To :** Cheryl (Ann) Skinner <cskinner@cityofmorgantown.org>

Thank you! That does help!

Bethany D. Sypolt | Deputy City Clerk | City of Morgantown
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From: "Cheryl (Ann) Skinner" <cskinner@cityofmorgantown.org>**To:** "Bethany Sypolt" <bsypolt@cityofmorgantown.org>**Sent:** Thursday, November 21, 2013 11:17:35 AM**Subject:** Housing Advisory Committee

Bethany,

I haven't talked to Mike yet but I will give you what I know concerning this group. It was formed by Dan Boroff approximately 5 yrs ago. The purpose was to bring together people from council, most depts of the city (ie. code, planning, engineering, pd, fd,) Sunnyside -up, WVU, neighborhood associations and landlords to discuss issues facing the citizens/tenants of Morgantown and things that could be done to help rectify these issues. We meet every 3rd Wed. at the public safety building. At the present, Brian Walker with WVU Off-Campus Housing and Arthur Tresler, Bel-Cross Properties are the co-chairs of the committee.

Hope this helps!

Ann

Email listing as of 11/21/2013:

Brian Walker
Don Corwin
Arthur Tresler
Chris Fletcher
Bill Kaweck
Glenn Kelly
Ann Skinner

Chief Preston
City Manager
J R Robinson
Mike Stone
Tom Arnold
Tammy Michael
Ruth Donaldson
Jim Craig
Carrie Showalter
David Mckain
Jason Quinn
Ken Tennant
Bill Burton
Linda Herbst

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