

Housing Advisory Commission

Monthly Meeting: Morgantown Public Safety Building Conference
Room, 300 Spruce Street

Wednesday, March 22, 2023, 8:30 AM

Attending: Patrick Brooks, Lisa Darden, Bill Kawecki, Arthur Trusler, and
Brian Walker

Changes within WVU Student Legal Services

Patrick Brooks introduced himself as the new managing attorney for West Virginia University (WVU) Student Legal Services (SLS), replacing Gail Lipscomb who left the position in January. The office has once again moved, this time back into the basement of Elizabeth Moore Hall.

Patrick previously worked in the Wyoming County prosecutor's office prior to taking a position at WVU working in Conduct. He also holds a valid West Virginia realtor's license and occasionally sells properties in the area.

SLS now has an online intake form to speed data collection. The part-time attorney position ended in January and has been replaced by a full-time paralegal. The office website has received an update to reflect current staffing.

Patrick states that housing issues are tapering off now, as leases for 2023 are coming to an end in the coming months. What we've seen this winter have been issues related to a cold blast the area suffered in the last days of 2022. Brian Walker said that ruptured pipes in three different off-campus Greek houses displaced more than 40 students for four weeks until their houses could be repaired and then inspected by

City Code Enforcement. WVU placed the affected students in the Evansdale Residential Complex (ERC) Lyon Tower. This tower has been mostly unoccupied for the past two academic years.

New leadership for HAC

Brian Walker announced to the group that he intends to retire from WVU effective June 30, 2023, at which time he will step off the Housing Advisory Commission. Beyond that date, Arthur Trusler will be the lone chair of the commission.

The viability, mission and objective of the Housing Advisory Commission

In a discussion led by Bill Kawecki, the group talked about the lack of meetings and agenda items over the last couple of years, since the departure of Chris Fletcher from the City. He stated that we need to reexamine the composition of the commission; the group decided that the current composition makes sense, but members need to feel valued and have a sense of purpose.

Lisa Darden stated that there are lots of developers interested in the City, and they need input from us. The Fairmont-Morgantown Housing Authority (FMHA) cannot develop affordable housing because property in Morgantown has become too expensive. About 85 percent of housing vouchers are used in Morgantown due to the area's expense. During the pandemic, Section 8 waitlists were completely exhausted due to the effectiveness of the Mountaineer Rental Assistance Program. However, since the program ended, the waitlist is beginning to build again.

Lisa suggested that Rickie Yeager could provide the commission an overview of development in the city during the April 2023 meeting. Developers tend to go where property is less expensive.

As the only organization in the area that promotes fair housing, the FMHA will nominate Vickie Ashcraft as a member to satisfy the membership recommendation.

New Business

Brian updated the group regarding New Student Orientation (NSO) at WVU. The dates for Summer 2023 NSO are June 8 and 9; 12-16; 20, 22, and 23; and 26-30. WVU has returned to having July NSO sessions on July 10 and 14, and the usual August session takes place on August 10.

WVU continues to see declines in recruitment and retention. Brian will address recruitment further during the April HAC meeting.

Next Meeting: April 26