

Housing Advisory Commission Minutes

Monthly Meeting: Via Zoom

(<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/92216643920>)

Wednesday, June 24, 2020, 8:30 AM

Attending: Katrina Bonfili, Lisa Darden, Chris Fletcher, Bill Kawecki, Gail Lipscomb, Alexis McMillen, Sara Pardey, Ken Tennant, Arthur Trusler, Brian Walker, and John Whitmore

Call to order

Federal Housing Funding Related to COVID-19: Chris Fletcher

Morgantown is still waiting for its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, which amounts to \$251,330. The city is also waiting for regulations to be published and to know what these funds can be used for. Our field office is in Pittsburgh, but there is not much direction at this time. CDBG is extremely broad and there is much red tape. However, missteps in appropriation aren't received well. Annually, we receive about \$405,000 for various projects that are housing related.

CHAP/Fair Housing position on HAC: Alexis McMillen

Brian said he will formally ask for the Community Housing Action Partnership's (CHAP) inclusion in the commission. Our charter calls for a representative from the Fair Housing Action Network, which unfortunately no longer exists. Lisa Darden mentioned that the Fairmont-Morgantown Housing Authority staff is trying to get training for fair housing. Bill Kawecki asks that we make the bylaws less specific in terms of organizations and more specific in the types of representation that we need for the Housing Advisory Commission to represent the housing and community needs.

CHAP has existed since 2012. There is a great need for CHAP, but it's struggling. Alexis is CHAP's first employee, and her position is changing and is limited to eight to 25 hours per month. CHAP did not merge with the Coalition for Homelessness, which was dissolved in early 2019. Its funds were donated to CHAP to continue the mission. The organization has since brought on Amy Chandler, a full-time VISTA member. CHAP had been an all-volunteer board prior to Alexis's arrival. Unfortunately, there is no public housing in Morgantown and no nonprofits doing housing development. In some communities, affordable housing is a scary term, and there are differences in what is affordable. We need expertise and need to inform and educate. The

options of what CHAP can be and can do are open. Gail Lipscomb asked if there are any ideas or programs, now that things are closed, about the homeless/vagrant population downtown? It's seemingly more evident now, because there are relatively few people downtown. Alexis says it's a difficult issue at present and the city needs a unified front and to demonstrate best practices. The encampment downtown, called Diamond Village, is seen as a safe harbor by inhabitants, as it's outside as opposed to Barlett or other traditional homeless shelters. There is a self-initiated neighborhood watch in Greenmont now. The collaborative group brought together and facilitated by the West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness (WVCEH) and the Monongalia County Commission to implement the Home for the Holidays housing initiative has not met in some time. There is not enough of a centralized effort in order to deal with the homeless/vagrant people. It's a "housing first" rhetoric; even people who have habits need housing first before tackling addiction or other problems.

New Business

Brian discussed move in procedures for WVU residence halls and University Apartments. Residence hall move in takes place between August 8 and 15, with strict protocols enforced. These include a limit on how many people are allowed to move in at a given time. PPE must be used. All rooms are either singles or doubles this year, and space has been reserved for quarantine if students test positive for coronavirus. All faculty, staff, and students are to be tested before the semester begins. Other than being in the residence halls, students should not be in other campus buildings until they receive their test results (and they are negative). University Apartments will have two-week move-in that must be scheduled in advance with property managers. One problem that has arisen off-campus lies with move-in dates. Some larger properties have mid-August move-in. As it can take three to five days, if not longer, to get test results back, the August 19 first day of classes start date might be a big issue for students who do not have their test results.

Most landlords and property managers have seen a decline in leases signed for fall 2020. Arthur Trusler (Bel-Cross Properties) is currently at 81 percent. He has seen some owners reduce rent and deposits. Some owners are in a position to negotiate than others on price. That said, sales in the area are up, as more people are buying single-family homes. From March through June, cheaper houses (under \$300K) have moved. Alexis stated that for the last three months, Monongalia County's average transaction price was \$312K, and average list price was \$340K. These are more emotional buyers and not an influx of students and parents buying. Interest rates are lower, but loan qualification has tightened up considerably. Houses that are moving tend to be nicer ones. Older housing stock, particularly rentals, aren't moving because of the risk factor.

Next Meeting

July 22, 2020

Adjournment