



The City of Morgantown
Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board

2024 Annual Report

Submitted to the
City of Morgantown City Clerk
on January 31, 2025

Upon receipt, the Office of the City Clerk shall distribute this report to City Council, the City Manager, the Chief of Police, and the Chair of the Morgantown Police Civil Service Commission

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Board Purpose

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board was established pursuant to Ordinance 2022-12, which re-codified Article 180.5 entitled “Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board” as Article 178 of the City Code of the City of Morgantown.

It is our purpose to further the exchange of information between community members and the Morgantown Police Department; to support just and equitable policing policies and practices and to make recommendations that protect and serve the life and health and safety of all who live, work and play in the City of Morgantown.

Additional information about the Board – including its powers and duties, governing structure, principles for conducting business, and more – may be found in the establishing Ordinance and published Bylaws found under Related Documents at [this link](#).

Board Membership in 2024

- Richard Burks (Chair) Term to expire July 4, 2025
- Rachel Fetty (Vice-Chair) Term to expire July 4, 2025
- Robert Cohen (Secretary) Term to expire July 4, 2025
- Dady Dadyburjor Term to expire July 4, 2027
- Megan Gandy Term to expire July 4, 2027
- Bryan Church Term to expire July 4, 2026
- Catherine Fonseca Term to expire July 4, 2026

In 2024, the Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) held 11 regular board meetings, 3 special meetings, 1 public forum, and 1 internal training session. Regular meetings were mostly scheduled in a hybrid format: with a public presence at the Morgantown Public Library as well as a virtual option for convenient access for members of the public. Recording the Board meetings was explored, but ultimately decided against considering increased technical work and current efforts to make meetings sufficiently accessible (e.g. meeting in a neutral space, offering a virtual option to join, providing timely meeting minutes).

In 2025, the Board plans to continue meeting regularly in a hybrid format on the 2nd Thursday of each month at the Public Library's Meeting Room B and via Zoom. A link to join virtually will be shared in each agenda.

The Board accomplishes much of its work via three active committees:

1. *Training Committee*, whose purpose is to research and select appropriate opportunities for annual training or continuing education for Board Members relating to matters of community policing and best practices within law enforcement contexts.
2. *Community Outreach Committee*, whose purpose is to identify and facilitate opportunities for the Board to communicate to the public regarding Board activities and scope, as well as opportunities for the Board to hear input from the public regarding policing in the community.
3. *Statistical Data and Reporting Committee*, whose purpose is to publish, in collaboration with the Morgantown Police Department, regular reports of

data relating to Morgantown Police Department operations, including calls for assistance, stops, searches, arrests, charges, and convictions. The committee also oversees the preparation of the Board's annual report and work plan.

Major Activities of the Board in 2024

Hosted a public forum to educate the public about the Board

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) planned and hosted a successful community forum event at the Morgantown Public Library on February 6, 2024. Outreach for the forum included communication with a variety of community organizations, neighborhood associations, media outlets, and the Morgantown Police Department (MPD). Refreshments were provided at the personal expense of Board members.

The event was attended by over 45 people and provided an opportunity for Board members to present the Board's history, powers, achievements, and plans for 2024. A supplemental brochure with that contextual information was supplied to all attendees. The forum fostered open dialogue between the public and the Board, with attendees addressing concerns about the MPD and offering suggestions for improvement. The presence of Chief Eric Powell and other MPD officers was appreciated, and the event was noted for its respectful communication.

Feedback from attendees indicated some community concerns around officer professionalism, police treatment of minoritized or vulnerable members of the community, confusion or dissatisfaction with the process of citizen complaints regarding MPD actions, and a greater need for transparency from the Police Department and City Council concerning matters of public safety. A survey conducted during the forum received 11 responses, and a summary of the results was prepared to share with Chief Powell. This survey serves as a preliminary step toward a broader, more comprehensive community survey, including focus groups and paper surveys. Efforts to fund the larger survey are underway, with a budget proposal under consideration by the City.

This public forum was just one of the methods undertaken by the Board this year to cultivate engagement with the community. Not only did it serve to strengthen transparency between the CPRAB, MPD, and local residents, but it also helped ensure that the Board's work remains responsive to public concerns and fosters

meaningful areas of focus for the Board to prioritize. Direct actions resulting from the public forum include MPD's publicization of policing statistics, MPD's publicization of its current citizen complaint form, CPRAB's review and revision of the citizen complaint form, and CPRAB's review of the body camera footage policy.

Conducted a case study review with MPD

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) scheduled a special meeting for February 29, 2024, to conduct a case study review with the Morgantown Police Department (MPD) regarding an arrest incident at the downtown Sheetz on August 30, 2021. This meeting involved reviewing written reports, call records, court documents, and bodycam footage alongside Chief Powell and other MPD officials to gain a deeper understanding of MPD procedures, the role of MECCA 911, and arrest standards.

The case study discussion was deemed valuable for enhancing the Board's understanding of MPD protocols and fostering a productive dialogue with the department. Chief Powell highlighted areas such as officer training where the Board's input could be beneficial. This collaborative approach aligns with the Board's goal of building a stronger relationship with the MPD, ensuring that future policing practices reflect both community concerns and professional standards. This review process is crucial for promoting transparency, improving police practices, and strengthening the partnership between the CPRAB and MPD to better serve the community. The case study method is also a valuable tool for cultivating public transparency, as it provides a detailed, open examination of incidents of community concern, ensuring that both the public and the Board have a clear understanding of the actions and procedures involved in specific policing events.

Engaged in annual training for Board members on the topic of community policing

Per the mandate for annual training set out by the Board's establishing ordinance, the Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) held its internal training on

February 15, 2024. The 2-hour training oriented Board members to community policing models and was facilitated by WVU professor Dr. Jim Nolan, a former police lieutenant and expert in police reform and community-oriented policing. With a background in both law enforcement and academic research, Dr. Nolan provided valuable insights into the dynamics of community policing and the importance of collaborative strategies between law enforcement and community stakeholders.

The training was well-received and sparked a discussion among the Board on alternative approaches to policing, such as fostering collaboration between the MPD, business owners, and other community groups to address local issues. The Board also discussed the need for additional brainstorming on how to operationalize public action and participation in public safety, ensuring that the public is equally accountable in making our community safe and to avoid an overreliance on police intervention. As a result, the Board is primed to explore outlined concepts further in future meetings, promoting more community-centered policing strategies that enhance transparency and build stronger relationships between the police and the public.

Developed and launched a three-phase plan for surveying the community on perceptions of public safety and policing in Morgantown.

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) has initiated a three-phase community survey to gather public perceptions on policing and public safety in Morgantown. Board member Dr. Megan Gandy and Dr. Jim Nolan are co-leading the project with significant resource support from the WVU School of Social Work and WVU Center for Resilient Communities, in the form of grant monies and reimbursement for the labor of primary investigators and research assistants. The Board has emphasized the need for scientific rigor in the survey design, ensuring valid and reliable data collection. Following a thorough review and refinement of the final survey design, the Board opted to proceed with the first phase of the project which carried 100% funding support from WVU, while simultaneously requesting funding from City Council for the remainder of the survey project.

The first phase is nearing completion, involving conducting focus groups and individual interviews. This first phase aims to identify relevant and timely questions for a broader survey. Phase 1 has already garnered significant participation, with 36 individuals engaged across 7 focus groups and 10 individual interviews, providing a rich dataset that will inform the second phase. Based on focus group findings from Phase 1, Phase 2 will involve developing a survey to explore key themes raised in the Phase 1 focus groups and gather broader public input on policing and safety. This next phase will encompass a mailed, quantitative survey targeting 700 responses from a randomized selection of Morgantown residents. The larger survey instrument aims to address key issues related to the role of the police, public safety, and community involvement in policing, with the goal of generating actionable insights to improve police practices. Phase 3 will involve reviewing findings from Phases 1 and 2 and a final round of focus groups to develop measurable and actionable recommendations for improving police-community collaboration. An itemized budget for completing Phases 2 and 3 has been submitted by the Board to City Council for consideration in the present fiscal year.

The community survey project is a critical step in comprehensively promoting community engagement and input in public safety. It not only helps inform the CPRAB's work but also fosters greater accountability and collaboration between the Morgantown Police Department and the residents it serves.

Established protocols for receiving and responding to citizen emails with the Board.

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) has implemented a new procedure to efficiently manage and respond to emails sent to the Board. Under this system, a designated Board member will check emails on a weekly basis and determine whether the email requires discussion at a meeting or can be answered directly. If the email involves policy questions or suggestions, it will be brought to the full Board for discussion; if it is a factual query, a response can be drafted without a meeting. Substantive emails will be addressed by the full Board, while non-substantive emails will be handled by the Board designee, with any responses

circulated to other Board members for review before being sent out. This streamlined process ensures that the Board can efficiently address public inquiries while maintaining thorough consideration of policy-related matters. This new procedure helps ensure timely and organized communication, enhancing the Board's responsiveness to public concerns and optimizing efficient handling of routine inquiries.

Attended all neighborhood association meetings to promote understanding of the Board's purpose and scope and facilitate buy-in for community survey.

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) took proactive steps to engage with Morgantown's neighborhoods by attending meetings of all active neighborhood associations to promote understanding of the Board's purpose and gather input on community perceptions of the Morgantown Police Department. Representatives from the Board attended meetings in areas such as Suncrest, South Park, Woodburn, Greenmont, First Ward, Jerome Park, and Wiles Hill. During these meetings, Board members outlined the Board's history and responsibilities, as well as encouraged participation in the focus groups for the community survey project.

In addition to in-person outreach, the Board is in the process of creating social media pages to enhance virtual communication with neighborhood groups, fostering further engagement with the community. These efforts are designed to ensure broad community involvement in the Board's initiatives and to build support for the ongoing community survey on public safety and policing.

This outreach not only facilitated greater awareness of the Board's work but also helped cultivate a stronger relationship between the Board and local residents, encouraging active participation in shaping public safety policies.

Revised the MPD's civilian complaint form in order to enhance user experience and accessibility.

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) undertook a comprehensive review and revision of the Morgantown Police Department's (MPD) citizen complaint form and instructions to enhance usage of these methods for community input. Board members identified several areas for improvement, including clearer guidance on how complaints can be filed, concerns about requests for Social Security numbers and witness information, and the potential discouraging effect of legal language regarding false reporting. Concern was also expressed about the present difficulty in finding the complaint form and instructions on the MPD website. A workgroup was formed to propose revisions, including simplifying the language, enabling the electronic submission of the form, and adding a commendation feature to allow citizens to recognize positive police actions.

In developing its recommendations, the workgroup also studied complaint forms from other cities with similar makeup as Morgantown. After several drafts and discussions, the Board reached a consensus on a new version of the form and instructions, which will include the ability to submit complaints and commendations online. The final draft was approved by the Board, and was submitted to MPD leadership, including Chief Powell, the City Manager, and the City Attorney.

This revision process reflects the Board's commitment to improving community engagement with the police and ensuring that citizens can easily provide both feedback and recognition for police performance. These improvements to the current form aim to make the complaint process more transparent, accessible, and supportive of both citizens and the police in maintaining a professional and responsive police force.

Review of Body Camera policy

The Civilian Review and Board reviewed the Morgantown Police Department's (MPD) General Order 311, which outlines the use of mobile and officer-worn

recording equipment. While the policy provides extensive guidance on when body cameras should be used, concerns were raised that it did not cover all scenarios where officer-civilian encounters should be recorded. The Board suggested that all non-incident interactions with civilians should be captured on video to enhance transparency and accountability. Additionally, questions were raised regarding the reported lack of mobile video recording in MPD vehicles and potential structural barriers that might limit the department's ability to expand video recording. At the next regular meeting with Chief Powell, the Board intends to express these concerns and seek clarification on these matters and recommendations.

Major Challenges facing the Board in 2024

Delays to Pursuing Statistical Data from MPD

As part of its mandate, the Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) is tasked with collecting and reporting statistical data relating to the operations of the Morgantown Police Department. Per Section 178.06(b) of our establishing Ordinance, "No less than annually, the Board shall collect and report statistical data relating to the operations of the Morgantown Police Department..." This is a key responsibility that allows the Board to ascertain enforcement or crime patterns as well as provide the community with essential information to support transparency and accountability in policing.

As noted in the previous annual report, the Board has already compiled a proposed list of data points to be included in the annual statistical reporting. To move forward with this process, the Board was instructed by Chief Powell to meet with the department's statistical technician to query the MPD's database and determine which of the proposed data points could feasibly be extracted. During initial discussions, Chief Powell indicated his agreement and cooperation to a coordinated effort between the Board and MPD's statistical team.

Only one preliminary meeting took place in 2024 between the Board's statistics committee and relevant MPD personnel. Due to a variety of reasons—both internal and external to the Board—the statistics committee has faced some challenges in coordinating follow-up meetings with MPD personnel to make substantive progress in data reporting. However, efforts are now underway to schedule a working meeting with MPD and the Board's statistical committee. We are hopeful that this meeting will take place by February and that continued engagement with MPD might allow the Board to begin the process of compiling and publishing the required statistics in compliance with the ordinance by the end of 2025.

Communication and Coordination Challenges with MPD

A significant challenge for the Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) this year has been a lack of consistent communication and timely follow-up from

the Morgantown Police Department (MPD). While the Board has made repeated efforts to engage with MPD personnel on matters of interest—such as discussing the department's body camera policy, scheduling a time to meet jointly, or requesting statistical data—these efforts have often been met with delays or difficulty in obtaining responses. This limited responsiveness hinders the Board's ability to effectively collaborate on policy revisions, efficiently progress in our annual priorities, and fulfill certain mandates. Ensuring more consistent communication would help to strengthen the coordination between the Board and MPD, ultimately allowing us to more effectively serve the needs of the community.

Vacancies in Board Membership

The Civilian Police Review and Advisory Board (CPRAB) currently holds two vacancies. With only seven appointed members, the Board's capacity to effectively carry out its mission has been increasingly stretched. This challenge is expected to grow in 2025 as the scope of our activities expands, requiring more comprehensive engagement, oversight, and advocacy to address the evolving needs of the community and ensure continued progress toward just policing practices.

The CPRAB has spent the past year actively campaigning to recruit new board candidates for the City Council to interview and appoint. Despite a few direct candidate referrals and knowledge of other candidates applying to these vacancies, City Council has not seen fit to appoint any of the interviewed candidates. The Board encourages City Council to consider the Board's current and forthcoming vacancies when screening candidates.

Board Priorities for 2025

The following are priorities that will guide Board activities in the upcoming year, in no particular order:

1. Systematically assess community perceptions of policing and safety in Morgantown by collecting survey data per the board-approved research plan, contingent on adequate funding.
2. Coordinate with MPD and other City officials to discuss Board recommendations for the MPD citizen complaint process; publish the revised complaint and commendation forms.
3. Publish the inaugural statistical report relating to operations and activities of MPD.
4. Seek outlets of engagement with the public to enhance the local community's understanding of the board's purpose and scope.
5. Establish a regular meeting between the board and the Chief of MPD on a quarterly basis.
6. Coordinate and hold an internal training for the Board, relating to the topic of community policing and as required by section 178(d) of the ordinance and section F of Article VIII of the bylaws.
7. Recruit potential members to fill the two Board vacancies.
8. Review and make recommendations for MPD's body camera policy and/or adherence.