**MORGANTOWN COMMUNITY HOUSING FORUM**

A Fair Housing Community Forum was conducted on Friday, August 19, 2022, at the former Woodburn Elementary School in Morgantown, West Virginia. Because the Forum was attended by two (2) individuals, one (1) community stakeholder representative and one (1) City resident, the Fairmont-Morgantown Housing Authority conducted a brief housing survey disseminated electronically via the internet and social media. A total of thirteen (13) responses were garnered from the City of Morgantown/Monongalia County.

1. **When asked whether they knew what protections in renting and/or purchasing a home are offered under the Fair Housing Act, Forum participants and survey respondents**:

* Of the 13 responses to this survey question, five (5) respondents indicated they were aware of the protections offered under the Fair Housing Act; eight (8) respondents did not know the protections offered by the Act.
* Additionally, forum participants indicated the average citizen in the City of Morgantown and Monongalia County are not aware of their housing rights, nor were these citizens knowledgeable of where to get educated about them.

Therefore, survey and forum results indicate that the average community member in the City of Morgantown and/or Monongalia County still requires education about what the Fair Housing Act is and what protections are offered for those who are renting and buying housing.

1. **Survey respondents and Forum participants were asked to indicate whether they had ever experienced housing discrimination based on race, national origin, sex/gender/sexual orientation, color, religion, familial status/composition, or disability**:

* None of the 13 survey respondents indicated ever experiencing discrimination in the sale or rental of housing due to race, national origin, sex/gender/sexual orientation, color, religion, familial status/composition, or disability
* Neither of the two (2) Forum participants indicated experiencing housing

discrimination.

1. **When survey respondents and Forum participants were asked if they have a choice where they want to live**:

* Of the 13 respondents, 10 individuals, or 76.92% of survey respondents, live where they choose to live.
* Of the three (3) survey respondents who indicated they do not live where they choose to live, lack of income, being low-income, and being behind of mortgage payments were cited as reasons limiting one’s housing choice.
* According to the City of Morgantown’s 2019 Assessments of Impediment (AI) for fiscal year 2019-2023, 59.58% of renter-occupied households exceeded utilizing 30% of their income on housing costs.
* Additionally, 2019 housing Fair Market Rates in the City of Morgantown and/or Monongalia County are $355 more than HUD’s Fair Market Rates.
* Lastly, Morgantown has identified in its 2019 AI, 45.2% of housing in Morgantown was built prior to 1960. Thus, the older housing does not include accessibility features; however, 15.1% of Morgantown’s residents are categorized as disabled. There is also a lack of developable sites to construct new, accessible, affordable housing.

Compounding the lack of affordable, safe, accessible housing, the median income in 2017 in the City of Morgantown is $37,900; and the median income in Monongalia County was $49,624. Median income in the state of West Virginia is $44,061. The median value and cost to purchase a single-family home in Morgantown is over $159,500. Thus, housing choice is limited for low and extremely low-income individuals who seek to purchase; and nearly 60% of renter-occupied households are cost overburdened because these households utilize 30% of their income on housing costs.

Forum participants suggested that lots where dilapidated structured are demolished could be the sites of smaller, single-family homes for veterans and seniors. The participants supported collaboration between the City of Morgantown, housing builders/developers and housing manufacturers.

1. **When survey respondents and Forum participants were asked to identify barriers to living in the community of their choice:**

* Housing prices are too high.
* Limited budget means limited housing choice.
* Individual/family income exceeds HUD guidelines making it harder to find affordable housing for purchase.
* Individual receives alimony income instead of disability income, thus limiting choices of affordable housing.
* Income limits affordability.

Forum participants further sought to elaborate on this issue, sharing young people just starting to get established in the City of Morgantown and/or Monongalia County require more resources that make housing affordable. The participants indicated there is a lack of quality, safe, affordable housing options.

Another possible barrier identified from the Forum is the stigma associated with utilizing federal and/or state government assistance programs. This stigma prevents lower income persons, who may benefit from federal and/or state government assistance programs, from feeling a “sense of community” or a position of inclusiveness in their community.

1. **When asked if income is a barrier to one’s housing choice, survey respondents**

**and Forum participants**:

* Nine (9) of the 13 survey respondents, or 69.23%, indicated income is a barrier to housing choice.
* Both Forum participants indicated the need for more free programs for Morgantown renters, including advising renters of general tenant and landlords’ rights and responsibilities identified in West Virginia state code, in addition to the protections afforded by the Fair Housing Act.

1. **When asked if they have ever exchanged any favors/acts in exchange for rent or a**

**security deposit:**

* All thirteen (13) respondents to the survey indicated they had never exchanged any favors/acts in exchange for rent or a security deposit.
* While the two (2) Forum participants also indicated they had not exchanged any favors/acts in exchange for rent or a security deposit, the participants indicated that additional education and information is needed to inform renters of their rights, teach tenants basic home repair skills, and advise landlords what they can or cannot ask of a tenant in the way of unfair security deposit amounts and other information.

1. **When asked if they or one (1) of the members of their household(s) have a mental or physical disability:**

* Ten (10) of the thirteen (13) survey respondents indicated no members of their household have a mental or physical disability. Three (3) survey respondents indicated one (1) or more members their households have a mental or physical disability.
* Of the two (2) Forum participants, one (1) individual indicated one (1) or more members of their household had a physical or mental disability. This Forum participant reiterated the need for disability-specific transportation options that offer better hours and better drop off accessibility options.
* Additionally, Forum participants indicated that public transportation schedules are not reliable in the Morgantown area because sidewalks are not fully accessible to those in a wheelchair or with other mobility impairments, and public transportation’s hours of operation are not long enough to allow transit outside of the hours of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

1. **When asked if their house or apartment is accessible to them**:

* 92.31% of survey respondents, or twelve (12) of thirteen (13) respondents, indicated their houses or apartments are accessible.
* One (1) of the Forum participants had a family member with a physical or mental disability.

1. **When asked if their disability determines their choice of housing:**

* Eleven (11) responses were received to this question, with nine (9) respondents, or 81.82% of people who answered this question, indicating their disability did not determine their housing choice.
* Two (2) respondents, or 18.18% of respondents, indicated their disability determined their choice of housing.
* One (1) Forum participant concurred that her son’s physical or mental disability influenced the family’s choice of housing.

1. **When asked if they can get to where they need to go from their current residence (e.g., school, work, stores, healthcare and/or community resources):**

* Of the thirteen respondents who answered this question, 92.31%, or twelve (12)

respondents answered that they could get to where they needed to go in the community from their current residences. One (1) respondent, or 7.69%. indicated that they could not get to where they needed to go from their current residence.

* Again, the two (2) Forum participants emphasized that there are accessibility issues with the city’s sidewalks, especially for those with mobility issues; and transportation schedules need to be more reliable, especially in the connecting trips between Morgantown and Fairmont.

1. **When asked if their neighborhoods were family friendly:**

* Twelve (12) survey respondents of the thirteen (13) polled answered this question.
* Nine (9) survey respondents, or 75%, indicated their neighborhoods were family friendly. One (1) respondent indicated their neighborhood was not family friendly.
* When these respondents were asked to state why their neighborhoods were not family friendly, one (1) respondent indicated that, again, sidewalks and accessible bus stops were not safe. However, another respondent indicated their neighborhood was family friendly, describing it as stable family environment.
* The two (2) Forum participants indicated their neighborhoods, for the most part, were family friendly.

In conclusion, a recurrent theme was that there is a lack of affordable, habitable, safe housing, as well as more programs for renters to access this housing. The community specifically indicated that collaborating with city officials, builders, and developers to utilize recently demolished properties’ lots to create small, single-family homes for veterans, seniors, etc. would be a good approach to solving the lack of housing in the City of Morgantown. In addition, expanding the routes of public transportation, as well as extending the hours of operation, would assist residents to access jobs that allow a “living wage.” A higher rate of pay and more transportation options outside of the hours 8:00 am to 4:00 pm or 9:00 am to 5:00 pm would assist residents to afford better housing options.

Again, the existing housing in Morgantown suggests most of the hosing was built over 50 years ago (44.6%). There is a lack of accessible units and developable sites for accessible units. Additionally, 15.1% of the City’s population are reported as being disabled mentally or physically.

The 2019 Assessment of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice report indicated a goal of the City was to enforce ADA and Fair Housing requirements for landlords to increase the availability of accessible units. Secondly, the City of Morgantown was to promote programs to assist elderly and disabled homeowners to make accessibility improvements to their properties to remain in their homes as they age. However, the cost of monthly housing costs has continued to rise, while wages have remained mostly unchanged.

While the AI report indicated that the City of Morgantown has built 14% of it’s housing stock since 2000 to meet the tremendous demands for accessible, affordable housing, the number of building permits has remained steady for single-family homes between the years of 2018 and 2019. There was a “undefined change” in the number of multi-family housing units constructed. Thus, most of the new construction has been multi-family units as per the 2019 AI report.

The City of Morgantown clearly needs more development of safe, affordable, accessible housing that will accommodate not only the University students, but the City’s workforce and elderly/disabled residents. Additionally, with most of the housing stock being built before 1960, renovating existing structures to provide tenants with reasonable accommodations and/or modifications could be an expensive endeavor for landlords and/or property owners.

According the 2021 Year in Review report available on the city’s website, the City of Morgantown is investing in downtown. This includes renovations to a historical hotel and the development of 9.5 continuous acres of property to connect the Richmond Avenue vicinity of the Woodburn to downtown. According to this report, this collaborative effort was initiated in 2020. The development of this acreage would include market rate housing, student housing, and workforce housing, Furthermore, according to the 2021 Year in Review report, the land will allow for connectivity into Whitemore Park as well as improved connectivity for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic into the downtown area and the WVU campus.

A status report on this project was requested for 2022 fiscal year from Rickie Yeager of the City of Morgantown’s Development Services Department was contacted. According to Mr. Yeager, the Woodburn connectivity project has been

The exploration of incentives for landlords/property owners to further the development, renovation, and construction of affordable, accessible, safe housing for the 15.1% of the City’s disabled population is crucial. Also, in-fill housing constructed on the sites of previous demolitions is as important as the development, renovation, and construction of new mixed-income housing units.

According to the 2019 AI, most housing vacancies were in the middle of the City. Thus, disabled individuals, being very dependent on the public transit system, are likely largely concentrated in housing units along the bus route. The AI identified the need for satellite services for community resources and transportation to allow disabled and/or elderly residents to reside anywhere in Monongalia county, instead of being concentrated along current bus routes.

Lastly, the median income for the City of Morgantown was $37,900 in 2017. The median cost of a single-family home in the City was over $159,500. The monthly cost of rent for apartments has steadily increased to the point that over 56.7% of all renter households in Morgantown with incomes less than 50% of the median income are considered cost overburdened. This significantly lowers housing choice to those low and extremely low-income individuals. Therefore, there is a great disparity in the amount and cost of housing available and the number of residents who can afford to access it.