

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT



Jim Wood, City Planner

### ***Morgantown Planning Milestones***

- 1944 - City Council adopted first Zoning Ordinance
- 1959 - WV Planning Enabling Act Adopted
- 1961 - City's 1<sup>st</sup> Comprehensive Plan Adopted
- 1970 - Comprehensive Plan updated
- 1979 - 1<sup>st</sup> City Planner hired
- 1999 - Comprehensive Plan updated
- 2004 - Continued progress on rewrite of zoning ordinance

The primary goal of the Planning Department is to promote orderly development to ensure that the health, safety, welfare, and convenience of Morgantown's Citizens will be preserved and enhanced.

To that end, the Planning Department provides staff support to several citizen boards and commissions including the following:

- Planning Commission
- Board of Zoning Appeals
- Downtown Design Review Committee

Additionally, the Planning Department provides support services to other City Departments and outside agencies to accomplish community development objectives.

### **CURRENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

The work program activities of the Planning Department are categorized as long-range, special studies, community development, and current-planning.

#### **Long-range planning**

Long-range planning involves the Comprehensive Plan process, which includes citizen reviews and public meetings leading to the adoption of the Plan. Major updates of the City's Comprehensive Plan generally occur every ten years. The latest update to the City Plan occurred in 1998, so the next major overhaul is scheduled for 2008.

### **Special Studies**

Special studies include both scheduled and unscheduled requests for staff research and analysis of particular topics/projects. Additional requests arise internally from City Council and boards and commissions. These studies can involve interaction with committees and interest groups and eventually foster policy/ordinance formulation and implementation.

### **Community Development**

Community development refers to a wide range of general and specific activities pertaining to community improvement and quality of life matters. Attending meetings of various interest groups and community service organizations, and interactions with other governmental units fall into this category. Meetings with various neighborhood organizations occurred in 2004, especially in light of continued progress toward a new zoning ordinance

### **Current Planning**

Current planning or land use control essentially involves day-to-day interactions with the general public regarding complaints, inquiries, and office operations including review of sign, grading and building permits, and business licenses for zoning compliance.

The Office also administers applications for variances, conditional uses, rezonings, property subdivisions, and site development reviews. Certain applications have a review process governed by State law and City ordinance, which includes public notification/legal advertisement and letters to property owners within 200 feet. The Planning Department prepares agendas, recommendations, staff reports, records meeting attendance, minutes, and follow-up communications.

City Council adopted a new site plan review procedure in 2004, which allows administrative review of smaller projects (less than 12 multi-family units or less than 15,000 square feet of retail or other commercial development). This has lightened the load somewhat on the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals but only marginally. Success with the program indicates the ability, if Council desires, to raise the caps so that more reviews occur in-house. Doing so helps “professionalize” the review process for projects that otherwise meet all the requirements of the zoning ordinance and insures timely delivery of approvals to the development community.

Current planning work activities comprise the majority of staff time (70% or more).

## **OFFICE RESOURCES**

The Department is currently staffed with a Director and a Deputy Director, who also serves as the Departmental Secretary. The Department continues occasionally to accept interns from the WVU Department of Geography and the Department of Landscape Architecture.



Deputy Planner, Lisa Martin

## **PAST YEAR'S ACTIVITIES**

Zoning map amendments considered this year were limited to 1 case. The Board of Zoning Appeals reviewed 15 variance requests (down from 17 in 2003); 33 conditional use requests (up from 26 in 2003); 18 subdivisions; 2 zoning text amendments; 12 major site plan reviews; and 10 internally-reviewed site plans. Development activity increased moderately in 2004.

In terms of the revisions to the zoning ordinance, staff is finalizing the document and the consultant is preparing the draft in amendment format for possible Planning Commission and City Council review in Spring of 2005.

## **OTHER ACTIVITIES:**

A Technical Review Team was created to review minor site plans. This process continues to foster departmental coordination on development review items and provide an opportunity for developers to meet with various Departments (Planning, Engineering, Fire, and Building Inspections) in one forum.

## **MAIN CHALLENGES:**

There remains one significant challenge that continues to tax staff resources - being able to devote time to enforcement of the development standards contained in the zoning ordinance. The most common enforcement issues include illegal signs, field inspections of new development, monitoring of conditional use and variance requests, and responding to citizen complaints about zoning issues. During public input exercises on the new zoning ordinance, "adequate enforcement" consistently came up in citizen comments as a missing ingredient in departmental efforts to regulate development.

## **MAJOR SUCCESSES**

- The Department was instrumental in helping the West Virginia Planning Association rewrite West Virginia's planning enabling law in 2004. Several key provisions will help Morgantown in future planning efforts.
- The City streamlined its development review processes by allowing smaller site

- plans to be reviewed in-house.
- The Department helped produce a state-of-the-art new zoning map for the City.

## **FORECAST OF ACTIVITIES**

In addition to the regular monthly cases for the Planning Commission/BZA:

- Complete the overhaul of the zoning ordinance text to make it more logically ordered, user-friendly, and to incorporate smart growth principles.
- Continue to give educational seminars to community groups on smart growth principles.
- Begin review of current subdivision regulations after the zoning ordinance is completed.
- Continue encouraging cooperation and increase Planning Commission dialogue and interaction with neighborhood groups.

## **SUMMARY**

The past year has been challenging yet productive, in terms of realizing and/or beginning some long range planning goals.