

Sharon Neighborhood Revitalization Committee

Task Force 2017

**Public Safety
Blight and Code Enforcement
Vision and Planning**



Task Force Chairs:

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Sharon Neighborhood Revitalization Committee

Public Safety Task Force

Challenges:

- Blight in our city has created a haven for the criminal element – Weapons and Drugs. Quality of Life issues are deeply affected.
- Our Police Force received a high number (28,000) of calls for service in 2016.
- Our Fire Department received a high number of calls for service resulting in 120 fires having to be extinguished in the city in 2016.

Primary Action Plan

1. Creation of **Neighborhood Citizen Captain Program**.
 - Form neighborhood zones with a captain in each
 - Brian Kepple is citizen liaison in charge of this program
 - Each captain will funnel reports on residential occupancy and issues of code violation to Kepple, who will then pass the information along to the city code enforcement director
2. **Neighborhood Sweep Program**.
 - City and volunteer forces will concentrate efforts on a specific street starting on McClure Avenue
 - Troubleshoot individual properties by looking for various code violations with support of police, fire and code
 - A systemic approach will be used to move throughout the city to remedy blight
3. **'Team' approach** to Blight issues –Team work of all city Departments, Employees, Council and our Citizens.

Secondary Action plans – Miscellaneous Thoughts

- Adoption of **the 3 Strike Ordinance** for rental properties.
- Consider a **Neighborhood Camera system** – public Street views, gather a registry of private cameras.
- Continue pursuit of satisfactory **Halfway House** resolution.
- Promote the city's **Recycling Program** – residential and commercial.
- Utilize the **County Fire/Police Team** for special events in the city.
- Monitor and study the **Animal population issues** (Domestic and wildlife)
- Aggressively promote the **Smoke Detector Program**.
- Organize constant **Neighborhood Cleanups** – concentrate on trouble areas.
- Increase communication to citizens through **'Texting' program**.

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Blight and Code Enforcement Task Force

1. Challenge: Lack of pride

Recommendations:

- Foster a sense of ownership and responsibility in residents
- Reach out to young people, from school age children to millennials
- Encourage Sharon City School District to reinstate a recycling program
- City officials should work with landlord groups to address each others' concerns

Actions:

Create a PRIDE committee to help develop and track initiatives in the city and help spread the word and recruit volunteers.

2. Challenge: Poor physical condition of many properties

Recommendations:

- Require landlords who do not reside within 15 miles of their property to have a local agent who does
- Set up an agreement with Mercer County Probation and Parole and juvenile probation for community service at vacant lots, such as cutting grass, litter, brush control, etc.
- Keep following through on code violation citations to the district judge.
- Continue to look for revenue sources to expand staff in code department, increase efficiency and to use technology to battle blight.
- The school can provide a copy of the residency forms families fill out to help keep track of rental tenants.

Actions:

- 1. Increase fines** for code violations, especially repeat offenses
- 2. Enact a Quality of Life Ticket ordinance** that would allow any city employee or official to write a ticket for violations.
- 3. Aggressively seek grant funding** for things that can be used to battle blight (equipment like lawn mowers, cameras, police and fire items).

3. Challenge: Large number of vacant properties

Recommendations:

- When the city condemns a property as uninhabitable, also have the constable post a “no-trespassing” sign. This would make the court the victim in any criminal case of trespassing.
- Work with the county Criminal Justice Advisory Board and Penn State to create map of abandoned properties in the city.

Actions:

1. **Create a Demolition Task Force** to focus the city's efforts to raze blighted buildings. This group would be made up of people with backgrounds in construction, planning or similar area and do things like seek funding, prioritize properties, etc.
2. Require all property owners to carry **insurance** on said property. Make proof of insurance a requirement to get a rental license.
3. Encourage **private investment** for revitalization efforts. We cannot rely solely on government funding or the strings attached to it.

4. Challenge: Education

Recommendations:

- Let citizens know the city does not have resources to take care of abandoned properties in their neighborhood. Concerned citizens should step up and work together to adopt these properties and help their community.
- Work with schools to develop education programs about community standards
- Provide citizens concerned about stray dogs and cats information about new low-cost services at Tails of Hope in Hermitage.
- Continue to provide people information about city programs to help homeowners with rehabilitation projects.

Actions:

1. Include a list of **recommended vendors** in initial letter to property owners regarding a code enforcement violation
2. **Create a Top 10** violations list to inform citizens about common violations online, flyer and in newsletter
3. Code enforcement staff should be a **uniformed** presence in the city

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Planning and Vision Task Force

Prioritized Challenges and Recommendations

1. Challenge: We have excess housing supply and the demand for single family homes seems to be on the decline.
 - Suppressed home values have enabled speculation by under-committed and under-capitalized buyers.
 - Nearly 45% of the homes in Sharon are not owned by the occupants. While conscientious ventures by investors and public authorities are essential to our future, we must plan-for and govern this situation.
 - Many Millennial professionals are paying on college loans instead of mortgages. In addition, young people are unable or unwilling to “put down roots” and seem to prefer multi-unit rental spaces near where they work and play.

Recommendations:

1. A land bank gives Sharon a necessary tool for stabilizing at-risk neighborhoods and a chance at implementing and managing revitalization plans.
2. The city must have a documented revitalization plan that includes neighborhood-by-neighborhood strategies.
3. Smart, multi-unit living spaces within walking distance of an ever-improving downtown.
4. Facilitate open dialog with investors and landlords.
5. Privatizing demolition should be explored.

Actions:

Create a **Land Bank Task Force** which would ascertain the structure and requirements necessary to form a municipal land bank. When forming this task force, the recommended framework of a board of directors should be considered.

2. Challenge: Making Sharon a great place to live, is dependent on improving and communicating its reputation as a great place to visit.

WaterFire, Small Business Saturday, Small Ships Review, and other events (like this year's car show) have given us a truly unique opportunity. "Everybody is watching Sharon".

Recommendations:

1. Arts, music, theatre, etc. are inseparable from Sharon's future.
 - i. Sharon Arts Commission, Random Acts of Artists (RAA) and other organizations should be encouraged and supported.
 - ii. Increase public works-of-art, create a walking map, and invite visitors to see them all.
 - iii. Consider efforts to promote affordable living spaces for artists.
2. Expand the number of events in downtown.
 - i. Downtown businesses should think about sponsoring small collaborative efforts (local wine tastings, beer competitions, etc.) that might allow for organic growth.
 - ii. Random-ish musical events.
 - iii. Farmers market can be promoted and expanded to include entertainment, food truck(s), and other local crafts.
 - iv. Farm to Table/Harvest Fair.
 - v. Ethnic heritage events.
3. Main Street Manager or other position that would promote Sharon, facilitate events, and identify (not write) grants
4. Work to eliminate *potential* negatives (DOC Halfway House, reliance on complex, public-money projects, eyesores, etc.).
5. Look for private foundation grants that could improve access to the Shenango River.
6. Plans for updated streetscapes, additional shopping and dining establishments, places of work, and upscale multi-unit housing should be encouraged.
7. Sharon Historical Museum in downtown.
8. "Events" App for downtown Sharon.

Action:

Create a **Marketing Task Force** that would describe the skill-set needed, time requirements, and cost for a communication/promotion manager who would report on and promote Sharon through various media platforms. These estimates could be used as a sub-set for a "Main Street Manager" grant. This group should also recommend a consistent forward thinking theme and message.

3. Challenge: The concept of traditional neighborhood community is at risk.
- Life-long residents are passing.
 - Rentals (with unpredictable upkeep and generally, transient occupants); empty homes; and possibly even blight now occupy the space of a once healthy neighborhood.
 - Neighborhood pride therefore wanes.

Investors and home owners who show pride in their properties should be encouraged.

Recommendation:

1. Front-of-house placards advertising a “legacy home” or “legacy property” should be considered. They could be sponsored by an independent non-profit organization that could monetize the concept.