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**CITY OF SHARON, PA**  
155 West Connelly Blvd. Sharon, PA 16146

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**FY 2025-2029**  
**FAIR HOUSING PLAN**

**April 2025**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Sharon, PA is an entitlement community under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). In accordance with the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, each entitlement community must certify to "affirmatively further fair housing," (24 CFR 91.255(a) and 24 CFR 91.325 (a)). To "affirmatively further fair housing," the City of Sharon is identifying fair housing goals and actions. These goals and actions will be conducted to coincide with the Five-Year Consolidated Plan.

Previously, the City of Sharon prepared an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in 2015 and a 2020-2024 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. The 2025-2029 Fair Housing Plan is designed to act as a planning tool, providing the City with the necessary framework to strategically "affirmatively further fair housing" over the next five years, and continue to make modifications based on events and activities in the community during this time period.



## Conclusions

The City of Sharon's 2025-2029 Fair Housing Plan has identified the following impediments, along with the goals and strategies to address those impediments.

**IMPEDIMENT #1: FAIR HOUSING EDUCATION AND OUTREACH** – There is a need to continue to educate members of the community concerning their rights and responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act and to raise awareness, especially for low-income households, that all residents of the City of Sharon have a right under federal law to fair housing choice.

**Goal:** Improve the public's knowledge and awareness of the Federal Fair Housing Act, and related laws, regulations, and requirements to affirmatively further fair housing in the area.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**1-A:** Educate Code Office, Fire Dept, and Police Dept staff on providing educational awareness/opportunities for all persons to learn more about their rights and requirements under federal and state fair housing laws.

1. During the update of the City of Sharon Zoning Ordinances, review to affirmatively further fair housing.
2. Fair housing training with local person/organization knowledgeable in the subject.
3. Create procedures to identify and process fair housing situations to connect individuals with appropriate resources.

**1-B:** Continue to promote Fair Housing awareness through the media and with assistance from local/regional social service agencies, by providing educational awareness opportunities for all persons to learn more about their rights and requirements under federal and state fair housing laws. This includes:

1. Continue to make available and distribute literature and informational material concerning Fair Housing issues, an individual's rights, and landlord's responsibilities to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing at the library, schools, and municipal building.
2. Fair housing education with Sharon School District students incorporated into established classes, including history, civics, and government.
3. Direct people to the following sources about Fair Housing information and how to contact and file a fair housing complaint:
  - a. Fair Housing page on the City's website.
  - b. City's 16146 newsletter.

- c. Facebook post on the City's pages that links to the City's Fair Housing page.

**1-C:** Educate the public on local legal services and increase capacity for legal services.

1. Research and make legal services available to the public.
2. Reach out to legal service agencies and discuss challenges, including capacity.

**1-D:** Continue to support Shenango Valley Urban League's Human Relations Commission and Fair Housing monitoring, investigation, and enforcement strategies.

**1-E:** Build relationship with the local real estate and property management agencies to provide information on Fair Housing choices and ways to promote fair housing.

1. Reach out to local agencies for further discussion.

**1-F:** Promote and encourage the life-learning skills provided by local agencies, organizations, and banks.

1. Programs include financial literacy, educational and employment opportunities, housing and homeownership, and life readiness.

**IMPEDIMENT #2: NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND SAFE HOUSING** – A significant amount of households, especially rental households, in the City of Sharon are paying more than 30% of their monthly income on the cost of their housing, which means that these households are considered cost burden. Landlords, tenants, and city officials need to work together to provide decent, safe, and sound rental housing.

**Goal:** Promote and enforce rehabilitation of rental housing to become decent, safe, and sound housing.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**2-A:** Continue to prioritize rental inspection with increased capacity, efficiency, and building relationships with landlords to promote more private investment and tenants to promote safe housing.

1. Continue relationship with Mercer County Tax Claim Bureau with tax sales, especially non-occupiable housing.

**2-B:** Effectively and efficiency increase enforcement of housing violations, whether tenants or landlords, including continuing to work with court system and receiving resources from Mercer County Courthouse.

1. Educate tenants and landlord about their rights to decent, safe, and sound housing.

**2-C:** Educating tenants and landlords on zoning and code ordinances, primarily what is expected during the rental inspection.

1. Provide support to code officers with knowledge of the processes and materials.

**2-D:** Create a county-wide homelessness/housing plan that includes strategies, goals, and actions to provide decent, safe, and sound housing for all.

1. Explore the development/redevelopment of different housing options and neighborhood layouts

**IMPEDIMENT #3: NEED FOR HOUSING REHABILITATION AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE** – There are households that are not able to afford the cost of a house project and/or do not care about the maintenance of the property (land, owner-occupied, renter-occupied).

**Goal:** Promote and encourage neighborhood investment and revitalization with programs and community participation.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**3-A:** Continue to support and encourage housing rehabilitation of existing housing units to become decent, safe, and sound housing that is affordable to lower income households, including managing the Community Development Department’s Housing Rehab program.

1. Direct to citizens the programs available to them, including CDBG, HOME (city applying), and other programs including healthy homes.

**3-B:** Encourage partnerships, especially youth, to maintain their property by providing resources, education, employment and volunteer opportunities with community businesses and organizations.

1. Begin partnership with the school district to strategize.
  - a. Incorporate list of community organizations.
    - i. Review of volunteer hours and encourage/promote students to gain connections.
  - b. Incorporate list of businesses, including hardware/repair.
    - i. Promote educational and employment opportunities with partnerships with businesses, secondary schools, and the school district.
2. Propose lawn care program with school district students.

- a. Partner with Lots to Love program.
  - b. Partner with lawn care businesses.
- 3. Propose snow removal program with school district students.
  - a. CDL certification.
  - b. Partner with City's Street Dept.
  - c. Promote programs to help residents with snow removal.

**3-C:** Continue to use funds and expand resources for housing demolitions and Lots to Love program.

**3-D:** Prioritize and strategize park and recreation investment.

- 1. Create and implement park and recreation plan, including:
  - a. Regional recreation planning.
  - b. Neighborhood parks and trails.
  - c. Safe routes to schools.

**3-E:** Work with Mercer County Council of Governments on improving efficiency and outreach of public transportation, especially low-income areas.

**IMPEDIMENT #4: NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING** – There is a need to have more affordable, accessible housing and public accommodations that is decent, safe, and sound.

**Goal:** Modify housing units and public accommodation to accommodate persons with disabilities to be decent, safe, and sound as well as affordable.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**4-A:** Continue to promote programs that increase housing accessibility through the rehabilitation of existing housing stock by homeowners and landlords who will make handicap improvements, especially programs to assist elderly homeowners for those residents to stay in their homes.

- 1. Direct to citizens the programs available to them, including CDBG, HOME (city applying), and other programs.

**4-B:** Continue to advocate the policies of the ADA, Section 504, and Fair Housing requirements for landlords to make “reasonable accommodation” to their properties so they become accessible to persons who are disabled, as well as educating the disabled on their rights and how to request special accommodations (especially rental units).

1. Coordinate with and utilize resources from fair housing organizations, including Shenango Valley Urban League and Fair Housing Partnership, to help citizens with requests.

**IMPEDIMENT #5: NEED FOR MORE HOMEOWNERSHIP** – There is a need to educate renters on how to invest in homeownership and the benefits of owning a home. The data suggests that the cost of renting a property in Sharon often exceeds a comparable mortgage payment when looking at the percentage of income going towards those payments.

**Goal:** Promote and encourage renters to buy a home instead of continuing to rent.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**5-A:** Research needs of homeownership and resources/programs for homeownership assistance, including reason(s) for high percentage of geographical mobility the county.

1. Survey households on their determination in finding a home in general and in Sharon neighborhoods (location, income, employment, etc.).
2. Create and implement solutions determined from the survey and other resources to help individuals and families to explore more housing options.

**5-B:** Work with agencies to provide resources/programs for homeownership assistance.

**IMPEDIMENT #6: NEED FOR MORE STAFF CAPACITY** – There is a need for the Community and Economic Development Department, Code Department, and Fire Department (NOOP ordinance) to have more staff capacity to meet the departments' demands more efficiently.

**6-A:** Until there comes another sustainable funding source, these departments may continue to struggle to meet capacity demands.

## INTRODUCTION

The City of Sharon, PA is an entitlement community under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). In accordance with the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended, each entitlement community must certify to "affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH)." To "affirmatively further fair housing," the City of Sharon is identifying fair housing goals and actions. These goals and actions will be conducted to coincide with the Five-Year Consolidated Plan.

HUD defines "fair housing choice" as:

*"The ability of persons, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status or handicap, of similar income levels to have available to them the same housing choices."*

The Fair Housing Act was originally passed in 1968 to protect buyers and renters from discrimination from sellers and landlords by making it unlawful to refuse the sale or rental of a property to persons included under the category of a protected class. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination against persons based on their **race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or familial status** in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

HUD-FHEO suggests that communities certifying to AFFH consider the policies surrounding Section 504 Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Fair Housing Act. Section 504 (24 CFR Part 8) prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in any program receiving Federal funds. The American Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C 12131; 47 U.S.C 155 201, 218, and 225) (ADA) prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in all programs and activities sponsored by state and local governments. The Fair Housing Act requires property owners to make reasonable modifications to units and/or public areas in order to allow a disabled tenant to make full use of the unit. Additionally, property owners are required to make reasonable accommodations to rules or procedures to afford a disabled tenant full use of the unit. Regarding local zoning ordinances, the Fair Housing Act prohibits local government from making zoning or land use decisions or implementing land use policies that exclude or discriminate against a person of a protected class.

## Federal and State Law Requirements

Federal laws governing accessibility requirements including the Fair Housing Amendments Act (FHAA) and Fair Housing Act (FHA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504).

**The Fair Housing Act of 1968** Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Fair Housing Act), as amended, prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of dwellings, and in other housing-related transactions, because of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), familial status, national origin, and disability. It also requires that all federal programs relating to housing and urban development be administered in a manner that affirmatively furthers fair housing.

The Fair Housing Act was amended in 1988 (Fair Housing Amendments Act) to include persons with disabilities as a protected class, as well as to include design and construction requirements for housing developed with private or public funds. Specifically, this law requires property owners to make reasonable modifications to units and/or public areas to allow the disabled tenant to make full use of the unit. Additionally, property owners are required to make reasonable accommodations to rules or procedures to afford a disabled tenant full use of the unit. The Act does have a limitation on the number of units covered in this law.

### What Types of Housing Are Covered?

The Fair Housing Act covers most housing. In very limited circumstances, this federal act exempts owner-occupied buildings with no more than four units, single-family houses sold or rented by the owner without the use of an agent, and housing operated by religious organizations and private clubs that limit occupancy to members. Under the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act (see in the section later in the document), these exemptions are modified or not accepted in Pennsylvania law (“Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act”, HUD).

### What Is Prohibited?

#### *In the Sale and Rental of Housing:*

Any of the following actions because of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, familial status, or national origin is illegal discrimination:

- Refuse to rent or sell housing
- Refuse to negotiate for housing
- Otherwise make housing unavailable
- Set different terms, conditions or privileges for sale or rental of a dwelling
- Provide a person different housing services or facilities
- Falsely deny that housing is available for inspection, sale or rental
- Make, print or publish any notice, statement or advertisement with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling that indicates any preference, limitation or discrimination

- Impose different sales prices or rental charges for the sale or rental of a dwelling
- Use different qualification criteria or applications, or sale or rental standards or procedures, such as income standards, application requirements, application fees, credit analyses, sale or rental approval procedures or other requirements
- Evict a tenant or a tenant's guest
- Harass a person
- Fail or delay performance of maintenance or repairs
- Limit privileges, services or facilities of a dwelling
- Discourage the purchase or rental of a dwelling
- Assign a person to a particular building or neighborhood or section of a building or neighborhood
- For profit, persuade, or try to persuade, homeowners to sell their homes by suggesting that people of a particular protected characteristic are about to move into the neighborhood (blockbusting)
- Refuse to provide or discriminate in the terms or conditions of homeowners insurance because of the race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, familial status, or national origin of the owner and/or occupants of a dwelling
- Deny access to or membership in any multiple listing service or real estate brokers' organization ("Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act", HUD).

#### *In Mortgage Lending:*

Any of the following actions because of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, familial status, or national origin is illegal discrimination:

- Refuse to make a mortgage loan or provide other financial assistance for a dwelling
- Refuse to provide information regarding loans
- Impose different terms or conditions on a loan, such as different interest rates, points, or fees
- Discriminate in appraising a dwelling
- Condition the availability of a loan on a person's response to harassment
- Refuse to purchase a loan ("Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act", HUD).

#### *Harassment:*

The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to harass persons because of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, familial status, or national origin.

#### *What Is Sexual Harassment?*

Sexual harassment in housing is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by the Fair Housing Act. Sex discrimination is also prohibited by other federal laws, including the Housing and Community Development Act, Title IX of Education Amendments, and Section 109. There are



two main types of sexual harassment: (1) quid pro quo sexual harassment; and (2) hostile environment sexual harassment.

#### Quid Pro Quo

Quid pro quo harassment is when the housing provider requires a person to submit to an unwelcome request to engage in sexual conduct as a condition of obtaining or maintaining housing or housing-related services (“Sexual Harassment in Housing”, HUD).

#### Hostile Environment

Hostile environment harassment is when the housing provider subjects a person to severe or pervasive unwelcome sexual conduct that interferes with the sale, rental, availability, or terms, conditions, or privileges of housing or housing-related services, including financing (“Sexual Harassment in Housing”, HUD).

#### Other Prohibitions:

In addition, it is illegal discrimination to:

- Threaten, coerce, intimidate or interfere with anyone exercising a fair housing right or assisting others who exercise the right
- Retaliate against a person who has filed a fair housing complaint or assisted in a fair housing investigation (“Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act”, HUD).

#### Advertising:

##### What Is Prohibited?

In nearly all housing, including private housing, public housing, and housing that receives federal funding, the Fair Housing Act prohibits the making, printing and publishing of advertisements that indicate a preference, limitation or discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, familial status, or national origin. This applies to publishers, such as newspapers, including people and entities who place real estate advertisements in newspapers and websites. It also applies where the advertisement itself violates the Act, even if the property being advertised may be exempt from the provisions of the Act. Other federal civil rights laws may also prohibit discriminatory advertising practices.

Examples of advertising that may violate the Act include phrases such as “no children,” which indicates discrimination on the basis of familial status, or “no wheelchairs,” which indicates disability discrimination (“Advertising and Marketing”, HUD).

##### What Type of Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing May Be Required?

Federal law requires that applicants for participation in HUD’s subsidized and unsubsidized housing programs pursue affirmative fair housing marketing policies. This is to help ensure that individuals of similar income levels in the same housing market area have a like range of

housing choices available to them regardless of their race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, familial status, or national origin.

#### *Additional Protections for Persons with Disabilities:*

Housing providers must make reasonable accommodations and allow reasonable modifications that may be necessary to allow persons with disabilities to enjoy their housing. A *reasonable accommodation* is a change, exception, or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice, or service that may be necessary for a person with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use spaces, or to fulfill their program obligations. Please note that the ADA often refers to these types of accommodations as “modifications.” Under the Fair Housing Act, a *reasonable modification* is a structural change made to existing premises, occupied or to be occupied by a person with a disability, in order to afford such person full enjoyment of the premises. Both privately owned and publicly assisted multifamily housing built for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, regardless of whether it is for sale or rental, must meet the design and construction requirements of the Fair Housing Act (“Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications”, HUD).

[The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (42 U.S.C 12131; 47 U.S.C 155, 201, 218, and 225) (ADA) prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in all programs and activities sponsored by state and local governments, including housing programs (Title II), as well as public accommodations (Title III). Under **Title II**, State and local governments must provide people with disabilities with an equal opportunity to benefit from all their programs, services, and activities. Under **Title II**, certain federally funded housing providers, including federally funded homeless shelters, must provide reasonable accommodation and modification. Under **Title III**, businesses must provide people with disabilities with an equal opportunity to access the goods or services that they offer. Under **Title III**, portions of private housing open to the public, such as rental or leasing offices, and other on-site locations used by the public (common areas), must be accessible to persons with disabilities. ADA does not apply to private residences being rented out. The accessibility of public facilities like the City of Sharon Municipal Building and the library should be reviewed and modifications completed, if necessary. Other titles include **Title I** for employment which applies to employers that have 15 or more employees. The employer must provide people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from the employment-related opportunities available to others. This includes things like recruitment, hiring, promotions, training, pay, and social activities. Under **Title IV**, telephone companies must provide services to allow callers with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate (“What is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)”, ADA National Network).

[Architectural Barriers Act \(ABA\)](#) (42 U.S.C. §§4151-4157) requires that buildings or facilities that were designed, built, or altered with federal dollars or leased by federal agencies after August 1968 be accessible. Facilities that predate the law usually are not covered, but alterations or agreements started after the law took effect can activate coverage of the law.

HUD ABA regulations require compliance with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (“Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968”, U.S. Access Board).

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) (24 CFR Part 8) prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in any program receiving Federal funds, including hospitals, nursing homes, mental health centers, and human service programs. Specifically, Section 504 concerns the design and construction of housing to ensure that a portion of all housing developed with Federal funds is accessible to those with mobility, visual, and hearing impairments. Section 504 forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services. For purposes of employment, qualified individuals with disabilities are persons who, with reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job for which they have applied or have been hired to perform (“Your Rights Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act”, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights).

#### [City of Sharon Section 504 Plan](#)

In 2018, the City of Sharon adopted a resolution approving the Section 504 Plan Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan for the City of Sharon. The City of Sharon designated a person (Section 504 Officer) to oversee the City of Sharon compliance efforts under Section 504. The officer has a thorough working knowledge of federal accessibility requirements and will take the lead in evaluating the municipality’s facilities, programs, and practices, and in drafting the transition plan if one is needed. The Plan follows Section 504 requirements in addition to using the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards. The 504 plan is reviewed annually for applicable properties and any improvements will be made within the timeframe of the regulation.

#### [HUD Office of Multifamily Housing Programs](#)

The Office of Multifamily Housing Programs operates a Multifamily Housing Complaint Line for residents of HUD-insured and -assisted properties and other community members to report complaints with a property's management concerning matters such as poor maintenance, dangers to health and safety, mismanagement, and fraud: 1-800-MULTI-70 (1-800-685-8470).

[The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission \(PHRC\)](#) enforces state laws that prohibit discrimination. In general, Pennsylvania law prohibits discrimination based on race; color; religious creed; ancestry; age (**40 and over**); sex; national origin; familial status (only in housing); disability; the use, handling, or training of support or guide animals for disability; or retaliation. The PHRC can help you file discrimination complaints in education, employment, housing & commercial property, and public accommodation.

[The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act \(PHRA\)](#) prohibits discrimination in all housing transactions including but not limited to sales, rental, finance, and providing reasonable

accommodations or modifications to housing or commercial properties based on the basis of race; color; sex; religion; national origin; ancestry; age (40 and over); pregnancy; familial status; handicap or disability; the use of a support animal or because the user is a handler or trainer of such support animals.

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act was created in 1955 and amended in 1997; the Act prohibits certain discriminatory practices because of race, color, religious creed, ancestry, age, or national origin by employers, employment agencies, labor organizations, etc. In 2023, PHRC released new regulations, more clearly explaining the definitions of 'sex', 'religious creed', and 'race.' This Act additionally created the PHRC and defined its powers; PHRC's mission is to "not only seek to end and prevent discrimination through enforcement of laws, but through education Pennsylvanians on their legal rights and responsibilities" (PHRC; PHRA).

The following types of housing do not have to comply with some portions of the Fair Housing Act:

- The federal Fair Housing Act exempts buildings with four or fewer units where the owner lives in one of the units and the owner does not use the services of a real estate professional. This is commonly referred to as the "Mrs. Murphy's exemption." This exemption does not exist under the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act. The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act exempts **only** buildings with two units where the owner lives in one of the units.
- In Pennsylvania, if you own the property, the property is your primary residence, and there are only two units in the building, you may choose who you want to live in the other unit, even if such choice would show a preference or limitation based on a protected class. You still must be careful, however, that you do not make discriminatory statements or advertise in a discriminatory manner as these types of speech are not protected by the First Amendment and do violate the Fair Housing Act. In addition, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 prohibits all discrimination in the sale or rental of property based on race or color, therefore Mrs. Murphy's exemption may not be used to discriminate based on race or color.
- The federal Fair Housing Act exempts single-family housing sold or rented without the use of a broker, when the private individual owner does not own more than three such single-family homes at one time. The Pennsylvania Human Relations Act does **not** contain this exemption so sellers in Pennsylvania may not discriminate against for-sale-by-owner transactions.
- Housing operated by religious organizations and private clubs may limit occupancy to members as long as they do not discriminate against their membership.

- Housing for Older Persons that meet certain requirements under the Housing for Older Persons Act (HOPA) may refuse to rent to families with children **if**:
  - The HUD Secretary has determined that the housing is specifically designed for and occupied by elderly persons under a Federal, State, or local government program;
  - The housing is occupied **solely** by persons who are 62 or older; **or**
  - At least 80 percent of the occupied units have at least one resident who is 55 or older **and** the housing adheres to a policy that demonstrates an intent to house persons who are 55 or older.

As a landlord, you cannot arbitrarily decide that you want to rent only to people 55 and up. Properties must meet all the requirements of the Housing for Older Persons Act to avoid liability for discriminating against families with children.

There is **never** an exemption for discriminatory statements or discriminatory advertising. There are no exemptions to the advertising provision of the Fair Housing Act which stipulates that you cannot make, print, or publish a discriminatory statement. The **Civil Rights Act of 1866** prohibits all discrimination in the sale or rental of property based on race or color. This law contains no exemptions so even properties exempt under federal or state law are still prohibited from discriminating based on race or color (“Exemptions to the Fair Housing Act”, Housing Equality Center).

As it relates to local zoning ordinances, the Fair Housing Act prohibits local government from making zoning or land use decisions or implementing land use policies that exclude or discriminate against persons of a protected class (“Fair Housing Guide for Local Governments”, Housing Equality Center).

[Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act \(PFEOA\)](#), created in 1961 by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and amended in 1992, prohibits discriminatory practices in educational institutions based on race, color, sex, religion, ancestry, national origin, handicap or disability, record of handicap or disability, or relationship or association with an individual with a handicap or disability, use of a guide or support animal, and/or handling or training of support of guide animals (“Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act”, PA General Assembly).

## [Age Discrimination](#)

### [Age Discrimination Act of 1975](#)

Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (Age Act), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of age in HHS-funded programs and activities.

Under the Age Act, recipients may not exclude, deny, or limit services to, or otherwise discriminate against, persons on the basis of age.

The Age Act does not cover:

- Employment discrimination – enforced by the EEOC

- Certain age distinctions in federal, state, or local statutes and ordinances
- An action that reasonably takes age into account as a factor that is necessary to the normal operation or achievement of a statutory objective of a program (“Age Discrimination”, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services).

#### Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)

Age discrimination involves treating an applicant or employee less favorably because of his or her age. The ADEA forbids age discrimination against people who are age 40 or older. The law prohibits discrimination in any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoffs, training, benefits, and any other term or condition of employment. The ADEA applies to private employers with 20 or more employees, state and local governments, employment agencies, labor organizations and the federal government (“Age Discrimination”, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission).

**Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** is a federal law that, in part, provides housing protections for people applying for or living in units subsidized by the federal government and who have experienced domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, to help keep them safe and reduce their likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

VAWA’s housing protections, in part, are available to someone who has previously or is currently experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking. The survivor does NOT have to be married to, related to, or living with the perpetrator to be protected by VAWA. It does not matter how long ago the survivor experienced violence. A survivor’s immigration status in itself does not impact a survivor’s right to VAWA’s housing protections.

VAWA's housing protections, in part, apply to a survivor if they are applying for or living in shelter, transitional housing, or permanent housing that is subsidized by a federal homeless assistance program or federal affordable housing program.

**VAWA protects survivors, regardless of their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation AND regardless of the sex, gender identity or sexual orientation of the person who caused harm.**

VAWA’s housing safeguards apply to survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking. These forms of violence (collectively called “VAWA violence/abuse”) are defined at <https://www.hud.gov/vawa#close>.

If VAWA rights have been violated, you can file a complaint with HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) (“Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)”, HUD).

#### AWARE, Inc

AWARE has served Mercer County PA since 1976 and works with our allies in law enforcement, health care, education, business and faith communities to share common cause eliminating the impact of domestic and sexual violence on the lives of women, children and families. If someone needs help, they can call 888-981-1457 24/7.

## Landlord and Tenant

[Pennsylvania Landlord and Tenant Act](#) (68 P.S. §§ 250.101–250.60) protects both tenants and landlords by establishing basic rules for renting residential property. The act governs the rights and responsibilities that both housing providers and tenants have regarding a rental transaction. These policies help to guard both landlords and tenants against unfair practices and outline rules to regulate the rental of residential properties. Topics covered include lease provisions, limitations of security deposits, tenant’s right to privacy, eviction process, unenforceable lease provisions, and implied warranty of habitability (“Consumer Guide to Tenants and Landlord Rights”, Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General).

[Implied Warranty of Habitability](#) Landlords renting residential real estate have a legal duty to provide their tenants a living space that is safe, sanitary and reasonably comfortable, called “warranty of habitability.” The warranty of habitability cannot be waived in a lease, because it is a legal duty imposed on the landlord as a matter of law.

The warranty of habitability only covers serious problems such as but not limited to: Lack of adequate heat in the winter or ability to cool the property in the summer, inadequate or unsafe electrical service, lack of drinkable water, malfunctioning sewage system, and serious leaks or other structural problems resulting in unsafe, unsanitary conditions or vermin infestation. Tired looking, worn out but still usable floors, walls, doors/windows, cabinets, appliances and fixtures are not covered by the warranty of habitability.

Even though a landlord cannot make a tenant waive the warranty of habitability, it is usually of limited benefit as it cannot be used by a tenant to ask a judge to order a landlord to make repairs. For these reasons, tenants can contact the local building code enforcement office. Code enforcement officers do have the authority to order landlords to make repairs for violations of the local building code; however, this comes with its own challenges.

The warranty of habitability gives the tenant(s) three options if the landlord fails to make necessary repairs in a reasonable time: End the lease and move with no further duty to pay rent, make the repairs themselves and deduct the cost of the repairs from their future rent (keep receipts and invoices), or withhold all or part of the rent until the landlord fixes the problem. Once the landlord is notified of the problem(s) they should be promptly fixed. However, if they are not fixed, the tenant(s) will then have to decide whether to use one of the three options, understanding that they will likely be sued for alleged rent owed and not paid and the Magisterial District Judge may not give adequate time to present the warranty of habitability defense (“Warranty of Habitability”, PA Law Help).

### [Significant Common Health Hazards Other Than Lead – Asbestos, Mold and Radon](#)

Under the implied warranty of habitability, every tenant has a right to live in a rental that meets basic health and safety standards, which may include significant health hazards like asbestos,

mold and radon. Implied warrant of habitability can be challenging to defend, and legal advice is highly recommended.

Asbestos is a generic term used to describe a variety of natural mineral fibers. From the early 1930s until the 1970s, manufacturers added asbestos to products for strength, heat insulation, and fire resistance. Asbestos also resists corrosion and is a poor conductor of electricity. Because few products contained all these properties, asbestos was widely used in the construction of homes, schools, and other buildings. Most people are exposed to small amounts of asbestos in their daily lives. However, if materials containing asbestos are disturbed—for example sawed, scraped, or sanded into a powder—asbestos fibers are more likely to become airborne and inhaled into the lungs. The EPA and DEP do not regulate the removal of ACM from single family residences or apartments with four or less units unless they are part of an installation. There is no state law where landlords are legally required to inform tenants of the presence of asbestos. However, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) outlines federal requirements for landlords of older buildings. OSHA requires all owners of buildings constructed before 1981 to locate any existing asbestos and follow certain safety guidelines when doing renovations or repairs. If a tenant believes there are damaged asbestos-containing materials in the rental and it was built before 1981, the landlord is required to work with a licensed asbestos professional to test the product and determine if it needs to be removed (“Asbestos Program for Contractors Working in Pennsylvania”, PA Dept of Environmental Protection).

Mold is usually not a problem indoors, unless mold spores land on a wet or damp spot and begin growing. Molds have the potential to cause health problems, including producing allergens and irritants. Inhaling or touching mold or mold spores may cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. Allergic responses include hay fever-type symptoms, such as sneezing, runny nose, red eyes, and skin rash. Currently, there are no EPA regulations or standards for airborne mold contaminants. In most cases, if visible mold growth is present, sampling is unnecessary. Since no EPA or other federal limits have been set for mold or mold spores, sampling cannot be used to check a building's compliance with federal mold standards. Surface sampling may be useful to determine if an area has been adequately cleaned or remediated. Cleanup depends on several factors, including but not limited to the size of the mold problem and type of mold damage. There is currently no federal law covering a landlord's responsibilities when it comes to mold. Also, Pennsylvania doesn't have any laws that specifically address a landlord's duties or liability when it comes to mold prevention and remediation. However, tenants who believe they have been harmed by the presence of high concentrations of mold in their apartment can try to recover damages from their landlord in court to compensate them for their loss. If a judge or jury agrees that the landlord negligently created a mold problem or allowed one to continue at a property, the landlord could be on the hook for any harm (“A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home”, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).



Radon is a radioactive gas, which comes from the natural decay of uranium that is found in nearly all soils. It is odorless, colorless gas and it typically moves up through the ground to the air above and into your home through cracks and other holes in the foundation. Your home traps radon inside, where it can build up. Any home may have a radon problem. This means new and old homes, well-sealed and drafty homes, and homes with or without basements. The EPA recommends homes be fixed if the radon level is 4 pCi/L or more. Because there is no safe level of exposure to radon, the EPA also recommends consider fixing their homes between 2 pCi/L and 4 pCi/L (“A Citizen’s Guide to Radon”, EPA). Radon levels is determined through American National Standards Institute/American Association of Radon Scientists (ANSI/AARST) radon testing standards and do-it-yourself testing kits. There is available science-based data to determine whether a site is located in an area that has average documented radon levels at or above 4.0 pCi/L. A reputable source of radon test database is the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Radon Test Data (“Departmental Policy for Addressing Radon in the Environmental Review Process”, HUD). Only a few states have specific laws regarding landlord radon disclosures or tenant education. Regardless of the state’s law requirements, if the rental property is in an area known to have radon problems, but don’t test, warn tenants, or take action, legal action may be taken against the property owner for harm the tenant(s) suffer (“A Radon Guide for Tenants”, Environmental Law Institute).

[Utility Service Tenants Rights Act and Discontinuance of Services to Leased Premises Acts](#) (68 P.S. §§ 399.1 – 399.19; 66 PA. C.S. §§ 1521-1533) The Utility Service Tenants’ Rights and the Discontinuance of Services to Leased Premises Acts are intended to prevent loss of utility services and undue hardship to tenants when the service is stopped by request of a landlord or because a landlord has not paid utility bills. They apply **where the landlord is the one responsible for the payment of the utility bills**. Municipally owned, rural electric and regulated public utilities are each covered by one of these laws. The utility is required to notify the tenants and the landlord in advance of a shut-off resulting because the landlord has not paid the bill. The tenants are to be provided with at least 30 days written notice of the planned shut-off. The utility must also notify any local agencies that might help the tenants if there is a shut-off. No matter who is responsible for paying for the utilities, a utility company cannot cut off service without proper notice. Generally, PUC regulated utilities which provide heat related services are **not permitted to terminate service to low-income individuals**, whose household income is 250% of the federal poverty level or below, **between December 1 and March 31**, often called the winter moratorium. Where there is a seriously ill person in the household, or if a serious medical condition will worsen without utility service, a regulated utility may not stop service as long as the customer provides a **medical certification** signed by a physician or physician’s assistant of these facts within three days. Postponement of termination may be for up to 30 days. These medical certifications may be renewed for an additional two 30-day periods (“Utilities”, Housing Equality Center).

### Civil Rights Obligations of Public Entities and Recipients of Federal Financial Assistance

Federal laws prohibit discrimination in housing and community development programs and activities because of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), national origin, familial status, and disability. These obligations extend to recipients of HUD financial assistance, including subrecipients, as well as the operations of state and local governments and their agencies, and certain private organizations operating housing and community development services, programs, or activities (“Non-Discrimination in Housing and Community Development Programs”, HUD).

### Section 109 of the HCD Act of 1974, Title I

In addition to its responsibility for enforcing other Federal statutes prohibiting discrimination in housing, HUD has a statutory obligation under Section 109 to ensure that individuals are not subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, religion, or sex by recipients of CDBG funds. Section 109 charges HUD with enforcing the right of individuals to live in CDBG-funded housing free from such discrimination (“Section 109 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974”, HUD).

### Source of Income as Protected Class

Source of income is currently not a state or federally protected class. There are several municipalities in Pennsylvania that have added source of income as a protected class in their local jurisdictions. Sharon does not have source of income as a protected class; however, all housing providers have a responsibility to ensure that their policies and practices do not have a discriminatory effect on members of protected classes (“Fair Housing Review: Source of Income”, Housing Equality Center of PA). A landlord that refuses to accept qualified housing vouchers to pay rent, can constitute “source of income discrimination” (“Source of Income Protections for Housing Choice Voucher Holders”, HUD).

## BACKGROUND DATA

To perform an analysis of fair housing in the City of Sharon, the demographic, housing, economic, and social characteristics of the city were evaluated as a basis for determining and identifying if there are any existing impediments to fair housing choice.

The City of Sharon, PA is located along the Shenango River in Mercer County, mid-way between Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Erie and near Interstates 79, 80, and 376 along the Ohio border. Sharon was settled in 1795 and was a significant industrial center of the Mideast/Great Lakes regions until early 1980s. It, like many once formidable manufacturing areas, has suffered sharply during the economic shift into a post-industrial era. The city began such decline when Sharon Steel began implementing massive layoffs in the 1980s. Agriculture continued to play a central role in the area, along with forestry and mining, and the rich history of the city and county is promising given the increased popularity of heritage-based tourism.

The City of Sharon is part of the Shenango Valley which also includes two other cities (Hermitage and Farrell), four boroughs (Sharpsville, West Middlesex, Wheatland, and Clark), three townships (Pymatuning, South Pymatuning, and Shenango), and two other municipalities along the PA/OH border (Brookfield/Masury and Hubbard). Recently, the borough of Wheatland consolidated with the City of Hermitage. Hermitage, Farrell, Sharpsville, West Middlesex, Wheatland, and Brookfield/Masury are within a 10-minute drive from each other, with a high percentage of Sharon residents being employed outside of Sharon. These communities intersect daily and what happens in one municipality can affect the others in many ways.

To better understand the City of Sharon, data was used from a variety of sources, including the 2016-2020 American Community Survey.

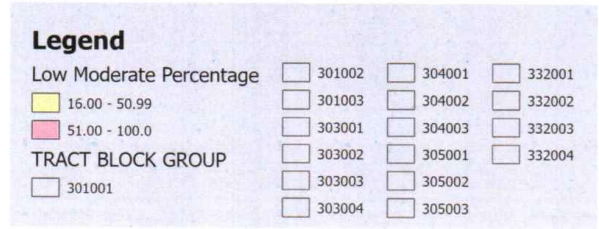
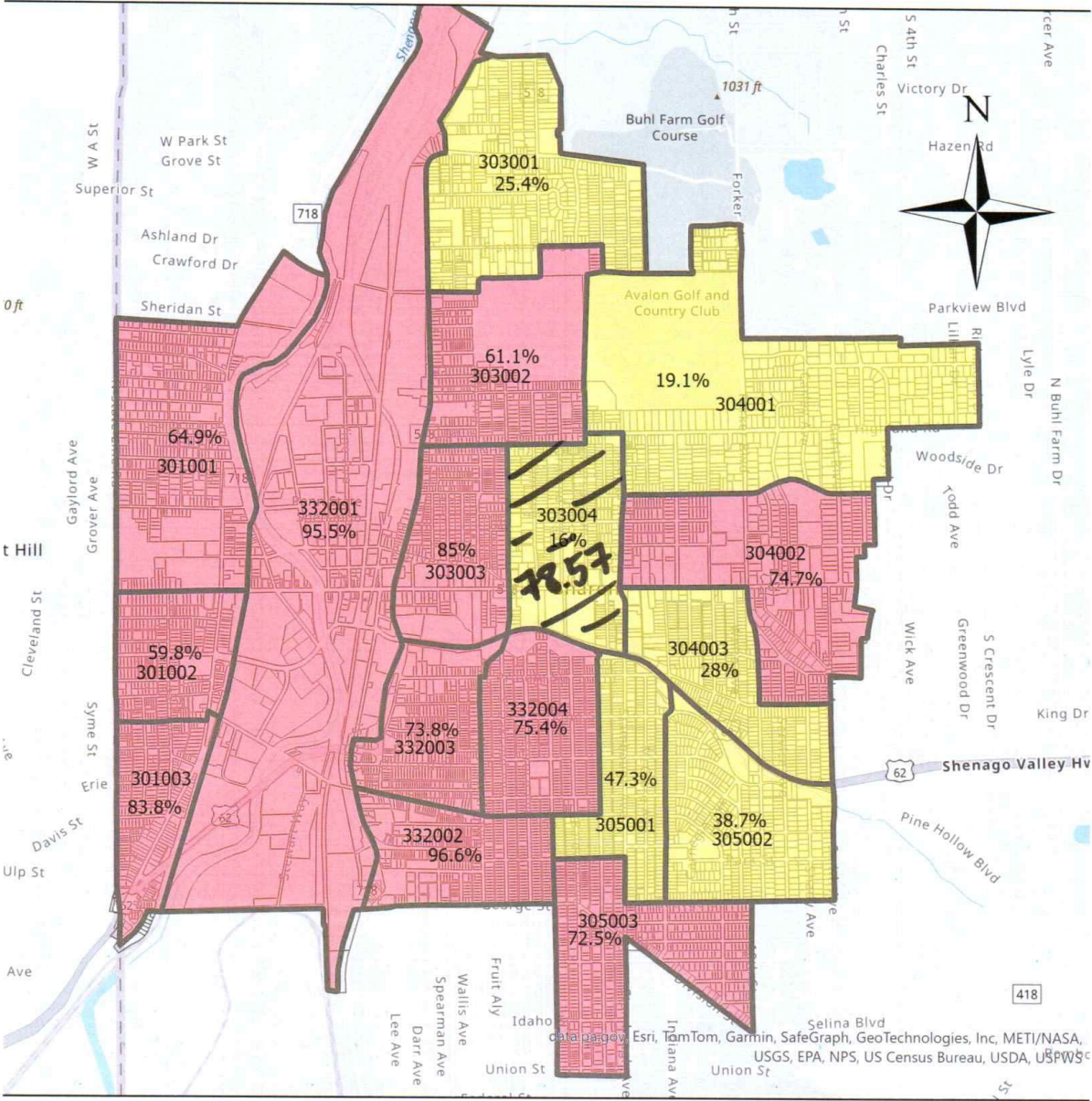
The table below (Table 1) was created to compare the census tracts with their associated neighborhoods. The Census Tracts are divided into block groups, as shown in Figure 1. The tracts and block groups were created based on similar socioeconomic characteristics, landmarks (streets, rivers, etc.), and population. There are eight different neighborhoods represented in the Common Neighborhoods Map (Figure 2) with sub-neighborhoods corresponding with the block groups. Citizens and city employees divided the map into neighborhoods that were familiar to citizens based on location and landmarks (i.e. schools).

**Table 1. Census Tracts and Corresponding Neighborhoods**

<b>Census Tract</b>	<b>Block Group</b>	<b>Common Neighborhood Description</b>	<b>Specific Neighborhoods</b>
<b>030100</b>	301001	West Hill	West Hill Elementary
<b>030100</b>	301002	West Hill	Lorain to State St
<b>030100</b>	301003	West Hill	Ohio (State) to Lorain
<b>030300</b>	303001	North Sharon	Thornton
<b>030300</b>	303002	East Hill	Oakwood Cemetery
<b>030300</b>	303003	East Hill	Avenues
<b>030300</b>	303004	East Hill	N Oakland to Euclid
<b>030400</b>	304001	Case Ave	Highland
<b>030400</b>	304002	Case Ave	Case Ave Elementary
<b>030400</b>	304003	Case Ave	62 to State St
<b>030500</b>	305001	Wengler	The Neck to Pine Run
<b>030500</b>	305002	Wengler	George St to 62
<b>030500</b>	305003	Musser & Wengler	The Neck & Wengler
<b>033200</b>	332001	Downtown/Industrial 1 & 2	Downtown/Industrial 1&2
<b>033200</b>	332002	Musser	George St to Budd
<b>033200</b>	332003	Musser	Budd/New Castle/62

Source: HUD and Neighborhood Zone Map

# City of Sharon, PA Low to Moderate Income Percentage



**Figure 1. City of Sharon Low Mod Income Percentage 2016-2020**



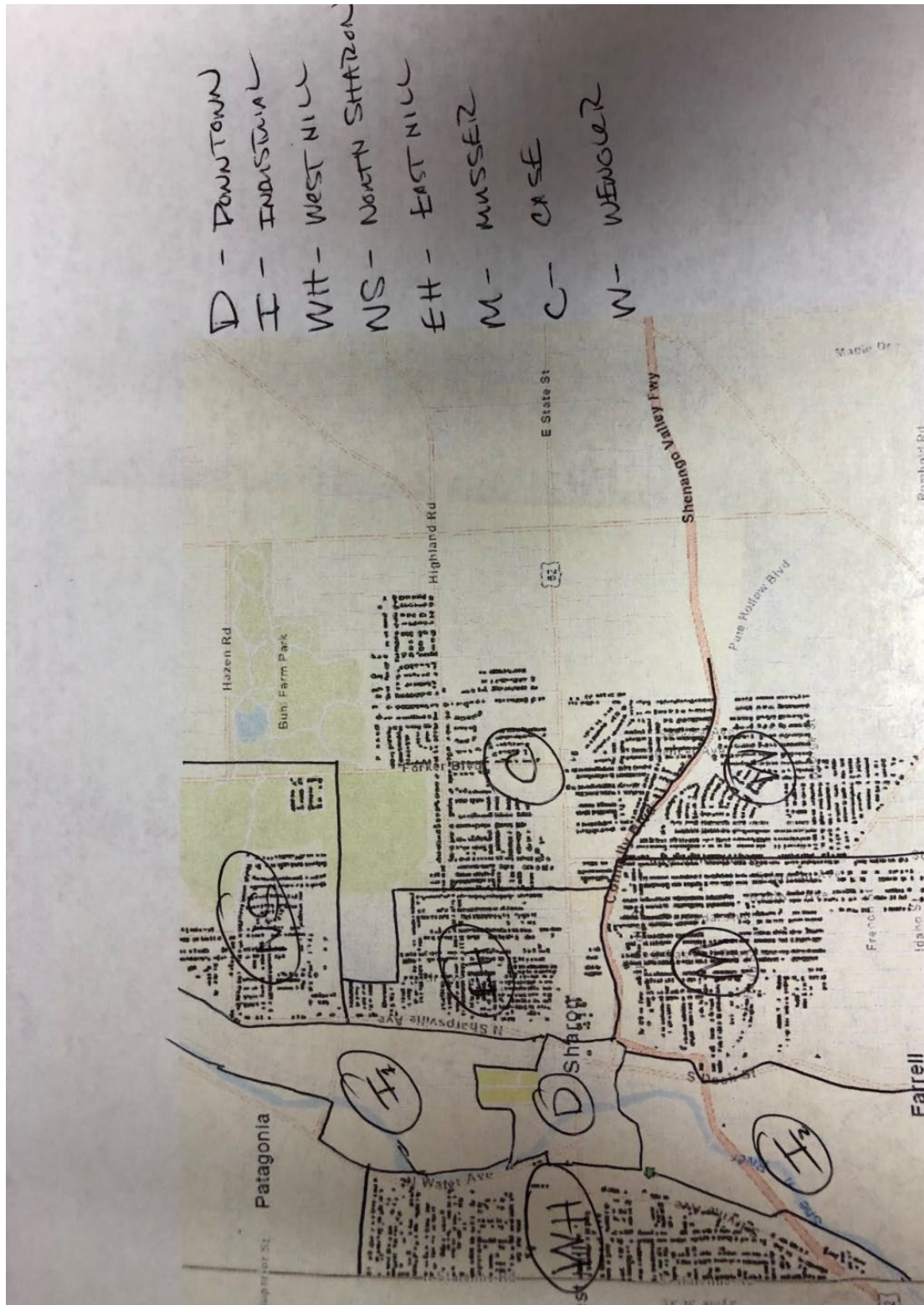


Figure 2. Common Neighborhood Map

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Income and Poverty

#### Household Median Income

According to the 2016-2020 American Community Survey (ACS) data, most households (41.6%) had an income of under \$25,000 with the next highest range between \$10,000 to \$24,999 and a median income of \$31,777. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of low- and moderate-income in each census tract block group. The general poverty status was that 73.1% of the population were at or above the poverty level; therefore, 26.9% of the population are in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau).

### Households, Neighborhoods, and Tenure

#### MCHA Waiting List and Tenancy (Housing Needs):

The Mercer County Housing Authority (MCHA) is the leading agency providing public housing assistance and Section 8 vouchers in the City of Sharon. The goals of the City and MCHA are complementary. The MCHA compiled their public housing and Section 8 housing tenant profile for their Sharon properties. There were 715 families on the public housing waiting list, with 448 people who desired one-bedroom units. The income range of these families/individuals is \$0 to \$20,000, with a majority between \$0 to \$15,000. MCHA sees a continuous need in Mercer County (including Sharon) for one-bedroom units of affordable housing. The data from MCHA on current tenants includes two properties where the tenants are primarily elderly and/or disabled persons. These properties include one- to two- bedroom units with most tenants being female and had an overall higher income than their other three properties. The other three properties have most tenants who are families with minors, two- to three-bedrooms, and a high majority of extremely low income. The City of Sharon may want to pursue a dialogue with MCHA on employment opportunities and home ownership programs with their residents.

### Housing Characteristics

#### *Housing Units, Occupancy/Vacancy & Housing Tenure*

The total housing units were 7,546, with 82.3% of them occupied. Most housing units are single households spread throughout the city with some medium density sprinkled in the community. The city has been challenged with existing vacant properties, with the majority having code violations which add to the blight of the neighborhoods. Most vacant houses are in Census Tract 332003 (Musser). Of the occupied housing units, 52.1% were owner-occupied and 47.9% were renter-occupied (2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau).

#### *Basic Conditions of Residential Structures in Sharon*

Addressing blight, and therefore efforts to bring Sharon out of poverty, has been a priority in Sharon for several years and there are many organizations and efforts working to revitalize Sharon.

### Definition of Blight:

Under state law, a uniform definition of blight passed in November 2019. The criteria included:

1. Public nuisance/attractive nuisance
2. Condemned/unfit for occupancy
3. Fire hazard
4. Unimproved land with accumulation of trash or debris
5. Vacant and not rehabbed within a year of notice of violation
6. Unimproved land with demolition lien and no payments made for 12 months
7. Unimproved land with liens more than 150% of its market value
8. Declared abandoned by owner (2019 Act 79, Pennsylvania General Assembly)

In review of this data the Sharon Blight Task Force members noted specific cases of blight are due to:

- Elderly homeowners who are unable to keep up with home
- Deceased property owner and property is not maintained by the heir(s)
- Absentee owners (live outside of the area)
- Owners/landlords choose not to maintain property
- Fire damage

In September 2018, the largest crowd-sourced data collection event in Pennsylvania's history took place in Sharon where property condition data was collected. Below is the table (Table 2) that illustrates the distribution of property conditions in Sharon in 2018. Since 2018, there have been successful efforts to remediate these properties with demolition. Therefore, it may be prudent to update the data to best represent the current condition of the properties.

**Table 2. Property Condition Rating**

	Property Condition Rating				
	Sample Size	Good	Fair	Poor	Abandoned
Number	5,304	3381	1129	344	350
% of Total	100%	64%	23%	6.50%	6.60%

(Sharon GIS Mapping Initiative, City of Sharon)

### *Environmental Justice and Environmentally Healthy Neighborhoods*

Sadly, too many families in America are forced to make the decision between a home they can afford and one that is healthy for their family. There is a lot of emerging scientific evidence that



links health concerns like asthma, lead poisoning, and unintentional injuries to substandard housing.

In October 2024, HUD created the Environmental Justice Strategic Plan 2025-2028, which the goals, objectives, and priority actions align with the Executive Order (E.O.) 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All* (April 2023). To fully implement the executive order, this strategic plan identified a set of goals and objectives to integrate environmental justice into the Department's programs, policies, and activities. The goals and objectives will strive to advance safe and equitable communities nationwide. They will also consider funding opportunities "focused on building a more resilient, climate-ready, and energy efficient nation and ensure HUD appropriately leverages them to address environmental justice concerns, improve public health, reduce pollution, and revitalize communities" (2025-2028 HUD Strategic Plan to Advance Environmental Justice. HUD). The City of Sharon has reviewed the strategic plan and will incorporate outreach and education about environmental justice, including lead hazards. The City of Sharon rehabilitation program follows regulations to promote safe, decent, and sanitary housing as a means for preventing disease and injury. The City of Sharon provides resources like "Eight Healthy Homes Principles" to lead citizens to a healthier home. The City also has HUD's training manual, "The Healthy Homes Program Guidance Manual," when inspecting homes that have applied for a rehabilitation project.

#### HUD Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes

Under the Office of Lead Hazard Control and Healthy Homes, HUD promotes safe, decent, and sanitary housing as a means for preventing disease and injury with their Healthy Homes Initiative. In determining decent, safe, and sound housing conditions one needs to look at the environmental quality of these units. Lead-based paint (LBP) is one of the most significant environmental factors that affect residential units. HUD conducted a survey of lead and allergens, where they estimated "38 million permanently occupied housing units (40% of all housing units) in the United States contain some lead-based paint that was applied before the residential use of lead-based paint was banned in 1978" ("General Information about Lead – FAQ", EPA). Lead-based paint in residential housing can cause severe health risks for children six years old and under because after they are in contact with an item with lead-based paint dust they put their hands in their mouths. The children are also growing and tend to absorb more lead than adults ("Learn About Lead", EPA).

#### Lead Disclosure Rule

In response to the Residential Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Act of 1992, also known as Title X, HUD and EPA were directed to require the disclosure of known information of lead-based paint and lead-based hazards before the sale or lease of most housing built before 1978.

## What is Required?

Before agreement of a contract for housing sale or lease, sellers and landlords must:

- Give an EPA-approved information pamphlet on identifying and controlling lead-based paint hazards, including the EPA document, “Protect Your Family From Lead In Your Home” pamphlet.
- Disclose any known information concerning lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards, including location of hazards and condition of surfaces.
- Provide any records and reports on lead-based paint and/or lead-based paint hazards which are available to the seller or landlord, including common areas in multi-unit buildings.
- Include an attachment to the contract or lease, or appropriate language included in the lease, which includes a Lead Warning Statement and confirms that the seller or landlord has complied with all notification requirements, where all parties must sign and date the attachment.
- Sellers must provide homebuyers with a 10-day period to conduct a paint inspection or risk assessment for lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards. Parties may mutually agree, in writing, to lengthen or shorten the time period for inspection. Homebuyers may waive this inspection opportunity.

## Types of Housing Covered?

Most private housing, public housing, federally owned housing, and housing receiving Federal assistance are affected by this rule.

## What Can You Do?

If you did not receive the Disclosure of Information on Lead-Based Paint and/or Lead-Based Paint Hazards form when you bought or leased pre-1978 housing, contact **1-800-424-LEAD (5323)** (“The Lead Disclosure Rule”, HUD).

### City of Sharon Programs

The City complies with Title 24 Part 35: Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention in Residential Structures (current rule). To meet the requirements of the new LBP regulations the City of Sharon takes the following actions regarding housing rehabilitation:

- Applicants for rehabilitation funding receive the required LBP information and understand their responsibilities.
- Staff will properly determine whether proposed projects are exempt from some or all LBP requirements.

- The level of Federal rehabilitation assistance is properly calculated and the applicable LBP requirements determined.
- Properly qualified personnel perform risk management, paint testing, lead hazard reduction, and clearance services when required.
- Required lead hazard reduction work and protective measures are incorporated into project rehabilitation specifications.
- Risk assessment, paint testing, lead hazard reduction, and clearance work are performed in accordance with the applicable.
- Standards established in 24CFR Part 35, Subpart R.
- Required notices regarding LBP paint evaluation, presumption, and hazard reduction are provided to occupants and documented.
- Program documents establish the rental property owner's responsibility to perform and document ongoing LBP maintenance activities, when applicable.
- Program staff monitors owner compliance with ongoing LBP maintenance activities.

The City of Sharon began lead remediation projects in 2008. Of the about 350 home rehabilitations performed through the City of Sharon Home Rehabilitation program, about 55 were lead remediation projects.

#### Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction Grant Program

Lawrence County Community Action Partnership manages this program with the purpose to maximize the number of children under the age of six protected from lead poisoning. The Healthy Homes Supplemental funding is intended to enhance the lead-based paint hazard control activities by comprehensively identifying and addressing other housing hazards that affect occupant health. Their service areas include Lawrence, **Mercer**, Delaware, & Butler counties.

The City of Sharon provides information for citizens about Lawrence County's lead hazard control program to abate the lead from their homes. The people who usually contact the City of Sharon are renters who have children age six and under where their child(ren) have elevated blood lead levels. The program requires a 10% match from the landlord and landlords decide that they don't want to invest in the program to remediate the issue. Therefore, either the tenant and their family move out or stay in the home because they have nowhere else to go.

#### Sharon Board of Health and Lead-Free Certification

The City of Sharon has a Board of Health who enforce the laws of the Commonwealth and the rules, regulations and orders of the State Department of Health. The Board shall undertake to prevent or diminish the introduction or further spread of infectious or contagious diseases and otherwise shall protect and increase the public health by regulating communication with places of infection or contagion, by isolating carriers of infection or contagion or persons who have been exposed to any infectious or contagious disease, by abating or removing all nuisances which the Board deems prejudicial to the public health and by enforcing the vaccination laws.

This may be the avenue for a local lead-free/lead-safe certification, similar to PA municipalities like Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Norristown.

#### City of Sharon Rehabilitation Program and Radon Requirements

As of April 2024, HUD issued a notice to clarify that radon must be considered in the contamination analysis for environmental review records in applicable HUD housing rehabilitation projects. According to a radon test database, the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) National Environmental Public Health Tracking Radon Test Data, Mercer County, PA is an area with a radon level above 4 pCi/L determined by recent data. Therefore, radon testing for each project is conducted to determine the radon level for the site. If the radon level is determined to be at or above 4 pCi/L, the environmental review record must include a mitigation plan to implement the project.

#### Education

##### Sharon City School District (K-12<sup>th</sup> Grade)

Schools in each district are designated as Title I, non-Title I, and Title I eligible. The process of Title I dollars goes through a multi-stage allocation process. According to Matsudaira, Hosek, and Walsh (2012), based on the Census counts, those dollars first go to the different counties with the highest number of poor school-age children. Then the state government allocates the funds to local districts like charter schools within that county based on their poverty level. This ranking system is based on the percentage of poor students, which is measured by those who enroll in the free lunch program or kids receiving public assistance. Then the district targets Title I funds to poor schools. Those eligible to receive district funds receive them, with more aid going to poorer schools. The district is made up of three elementary schools (K-6<sup>th</sup> grade), a middle school (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade), and a high school (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade). In the Sharon City School District, all students receive free or reduced lunch.

The Sharon City School District is currently working on their comprehensive plan which is updated every three years. The plan includes review of the school district's level of performance through the Future Ready PA Index, which analyzes strengths and challenges and provides strategies and goals for implementation. For the analysis of the fair housing plan, the priority statements and their goals will be utilized in this plan's strategies and goals.

*Priority Statement #1: Grade 3 Performance in Math and ELA*

*Priority Statement #2: Attendance*

*Priority Statement #3: Partner with local businesses, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the District*

*Priority Statement #4: Tier 2 and 3 Academic and Behavior Interventions at the High School (2025-2028 Sharon City School District Comprehensive Plan, Sharon City School District).*

### *Colleges and Universities*

#### *Penn State Shenango*

Penn State University (PSU) has many colleges throughout the state, including the Shenango Campus in downtown Sharon. This campus offers career paths that can be utilized in the local area like Administration of Justice, Business, Human Development & Family Studies, Arts & Sciences, Health Care, and Project & Supply Chain Management. Additionally, the Sharon City School District utilizes the dual credit program where high school students can obtain college credits. Partnerships, either to be established or expanded, between the Sharon City School District, PSU Career Department, and local employers would benefit the community.

#### *Laurel Technical Institute (LTI)*

Laurel Technical Institute has three local campuses in addition to two business institutes near Morgantown, WV and Uniontown, PA. The Sharon campus is in downtown Sharon that offers careers paths in Accounting & Business Administration and Health Care. There is another campus in Hermitage, PA that offers careers in Cosmetology and various trades including Electrical Technician and Welding & Fabrication. There is no partnership between LTI and the Sharon City School District. Partnerships, either to be established or expanded, between the Sharon City School District, LTI, and local employers would benefit the community.

#### *Butler County Community College (BC3)*

Butler County Community College (BC3) is a community college located in Hermitage. BC3 offers career programs like Business, Humanities & Social Science, Nursing & Allied Health, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) that can be utilized in the area. BC3's professional team is committed to providing training, certifications, and advancement opportunities to meet business, industry, and public safety needs on a local and regional level. Workforce Development offers training to businesses, companies, and organizations on a customized, contracted basis as well as a scheduled, open-enrollment professional education programs. There is no partnership between BC3 and the Sharon City School District. Partnerships, either to be established or expanded, between the Sharon City School District, BC3 Workforce Development, and local employers would benefit the community.

#### *Other Local Colleges & Universities*

There are numerous local colleges and universities throughout Ohio and Pennsylvania where a student can attend and obtain advanced degrees. Discussion with Sharon City School District guidance counselors can determine the partnerships between the other local colleges and universities to reach students career goals. After graduating, students should benefit from their college investment by obtaining networking opportunities to be prepared to embark on the next chapter in their lives.

#### *Alternatives to College/University*

There are numerous skilled labor entities throughout Ohio and Pennsylvania where a student can attend and obtain advanced degrees or certifications. Discussion with Sharon City School

District guidance counselors can determine the partnerships between the skilled labor entities to reach students career goals. After graduating, students should benefit from their career investment by obtaining networking opportunities to be prepared to embark on the next chapter in their lives.

## Employment

### Occupation

According to Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, most occupations in Sharon were service (30%), management/business/science/arts (26%), and production/transportation/material moving (20%). Most industries in Sharon were educational services/health care/social assistance (29%) with manufacturing, retail trade, and arts/entertainment/recreation/food services making up another 40% (2016-2020 CHAS Sharon Pa, U.S. Census Bureau). Mercer County performs an employment profile through the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA), a bureau within the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. CWIA's mission is to provide objective and timely workforce and economic statistics and analysis to help businesses, job seekers, and policymakers to make informed decisions. According to the CWIA 2023 data, the top industries include health care and social assistance (19.6%), manufacturing (19.2%), and retail trade (13.4%), which is comparative to the CHAS data. Accommodation and Food Services (9.1%) and Educational Services (7.9%) were the next tier of industries. Community and Social Service occupation wages increased by 1.5 times from entry level to average wage in the county with an average wage at \$50,520. Educational Instruction & Library occupation wages increased by 2 times from entry level to average wage in the county with an average wage at \$663,630. Healthcare Practitioners & Technicians occupations have a much higher wage increase potential than Healthcare Support occupations. Sales and Related occupations increased by 1.75 times from entry level to average wage in the county with an average wage at \$40,570 (September 2023 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Mercer County Profile, PA Dept of Labor & Industry Center for Workforce Information & Analysis).

### Employment Planning

#### *Youth Engagement*

The City of Sharon and Sharon City School District both have a common objective in their draft of comprehensive plans to encourage and engage students in employment planning, especially developing connections for these young adults to stay in the area.

#### *Career Opportunities and Resources*

Job-seekers not only need accessibility to career opportunities, but also the resources that provide the appropriate skills in order to gain and maintain employment. Awareness and implementation of the programs available is key to their success, for the employee and the employer. There are programs out there that provide those services, but partnerships within different agencies will increase the number of people who need to access those programs.

### *West Central Job Partnership/PA CareerLink*

The West Central Job Partnership (WCJP) Workforce Development Area (WDA) includes Lawrence and Mercer Counties where access to resources and services are available, including the PA CareerLink center. PA CareerLink is part of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry's initiative where job-seekers find sustaining jobs and employers find the skilled candidates that they need. They use a user-friendly, premiere job-matching system to connect job-seekers and employers. WCJP provides annual reports on employment data and statistics, including the percentage of industry in the area. Understanding the types of industry and employment opportunities provides information to encourage current and future job-seekers on what is available to them.

### *Mercer County Community of Practice & Employment Coalition*

As part of the County of Mercer Mental Health and Intellectual Disability Department, this coalition provides support to our local individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism and their families in our community. These individuals are provided with direct access and resources to various employment opportunities with local businesses. Continued partnerships with the coalition, businesses, and the municipalities will benefit the entire community in workforce and community development.

## *Transportation*

### *Commuting to Work*

Most of the work population drove a car/truck/van alone with an average commute of 17 minutes. Since the Shenango Valley is in a condensed area (where it doesn't take long to get to the different municipalities), these individuals have jobs in these other municipalities, especially Hermitage. Additionally, Sharon is adjacent to the Ohio border, so individuals could be employed in Ohio, primarily around Youngstown. The City of Sharon's draft of the comprehensive plan includes data from the Census, Onthemap, which estimates that Sharon employed 4,781 people in 2021. Additionally, 3,998 people work in Sharon and live elsewhere, 4,463 people live in Sharon and work elsewhere, and only 783 people live and work in Sharon.

### *Shenango Valley Shuttle Service*

The Shenango Valley Shuttle Service (SVSS) is a fixed route bus service that serves Farrell, Hermitage, Sharon, Sharpsville, and Wheatland with four fixed routes and one flexible courthouse route that runs to the Mercer County Courthouse once daily with optional service to Grove City upon request. For 30 years, SVSS has provided a low-cost transportation alternative for Mercer County. The full fare is \$1.25 for all routes, except the courthouse route which is \$2.00. There are five routes throughout the county, including the courthouse route. A consistent challenge is the bus not operating outside of a 9am to 5pm employment hours and enough bus times. There has been previous discussion of these barriers. Awareness and use of the service needs to be evaluated and then solutions determined.



### *Mercer County Community Transit*

Mercer County Community Transit (MCCT) is a door-to-door advanced registration program that serves all persons of Mercer County. State and federal grants along with the Mercer County Area Agency on Aging funds the transit system. Discounted service is available to Senior Citizens ages 60 or older and qualified disabled residents. Fares are based on type of trip and destination and all shuttles are equipped for paratransit.

### *Private Vehicle Investment and Maintenance*

Mercer County Community Federal Credit Union (MCCFCU) partners with local dealerships to help their members save time and money when searching for their next vehicle. The credit union also offers Mechanical Repair Coverage against unexpected repair costs. They do business in accordance with the Federal Fair Housing Law and Equal Credit Opportunity Act.

The knowledge and skills of vehicle investment and maintenance are beneficial to most of the population. Vehicle investment, including car buying, and vehicle maintenance are mostly taught (if offered) at home. Those students that go through a driver's education program may be introduced to the appropriate knowledge to maintain the vehicle, but the program is more focused on the actual driving instruction. Further investigation and possible implementation of expanding these programs may be initiated in driver's education and other programs.

### *Roadway and Alley Plan*

The maintenance of the roadways, including alleys, is an overwhelming challenge in the city. The number of roadways and alleys that require road replacement is significant, and the cost of these projects increases. The primary forms of funding for these projects include the State's Multimodal Transportation Fund and CDBG to supplement it. The comprehensive plan includes developing a plan for roadways and alleys.

### *Active Transportation Investment*

#### *Pedestrian Plan*

The layout of the City of Sharon provides an avenue to becoming a sufficient walkable community. Unfortunately, like the roadways, the public walkways are insufficient and present a hazard with costly improvements. The city ordinance requires the property owner to maintain the sidewalks and walkways; however, most of the owners can't afford those repairs. These walkways also include areas to and from the structure. Otherwise, the property owners don't have it as a priority or do not care to repair the area. During road improvements, there are ADA requirements if using certain funding to repair certain public walkways but most of the walkways are left in the same condition. The comprehensive plan includes developing a plan for public walkways, which may include private investment of property owners.

#### *Safe Pathways to School*

The Sharon community, especially the underserved neighborhoods, need safe and accessible pathways to school. Active travel is the only way that some children and youth can get to



school, especially in a walking school district like Sharon City School District. That environment for walking and biking is not the same everywhere. Underserved neighborhoods need to be a priority for these improvements, where children walking and bicycling have a safe route to school while also increasing health and physical activity. PA WalkWorks is an initiative between the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Downtown Center that supports the development and adoption of Active Transportation Plans in communities across the Commonwealth. Its mission is to increase access to and opportunities for physical activity, such as walking, biking, using a wheelchair or other micromobility device, and riding public transit. Through PA WalkWorks and other funding organizations, the City should invest in the children in these neighborhoods to provide a higher quality of life. Along with the roadway and pedestrian plans, this is another challenge faced by the City that requires capacity and funding for implementation.

#### *Bicycle Transportation*

The supply of bicycle lanes/routes in a community provides a separate mode of travel for citizens. In the last five to ten years, the City of Sharon implemented a bike lane project with safety candlesticks that runs from Downtown Sharon to Buhl Park on Sharpsville Avenue. This project should have been part of a larger-scale project, but it is currently a separate project with no plan for expansion or development throughout the city.

#### *Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the federal law which protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of their race, color, or national origin in programs that receive federal financial assistance. In certain situations, failure to ensure that persons who have limited English proficiency can effectively participate in, or benefit from, federally assisted programs may violate Title VI's prohibition against national origin discrimination. Persons who, as a result of national origin, do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited ability to speak, read, write, or understand English may be entitled to language assistance under Title VI to receive a particular service, benefit, or encounter.

Executive Order 13166 (issued in the Federal Register 65 FR 50121 on August 16, 2000) mandates improved access to federally assisted program and activities for individuals who, as a result of national origin, are limited in their English proficiency. The order also requires a Language Access Plan for the program or activity if a qualifying population is determined. To determine if there is an affected population of beneficiaries having limited English proficiency, all grantees receiving federal financial assistance must conduct the four-factor analysis as outlined below.

In compliance with Section 601 of Title VI the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (LEP Statutory Authority) and Executive Order 13166, the City of Sharon has conducted the Four Factor Analysis for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) persons for the federally funded program listed above.

Based on the Four-Factor Analysis, the City of Sharon is not required to develop a Language Access Plan. However, the Grantee will make all reasonable attempts to accommodate language access needs of residents requesting oral translation during citizen participation, income surveys and/or direct assistance intake activities including but not inclusive of public hearings, public notices, advertisements, income surveys and direct assistance intake documents. The certification is a separate document.

## Disability

### Overview of Disability

Twenty-five percent of the population had some kind of disability and 94.5% of the population have health insurance. Most individuals who were 65 years and older had a disability with 99% of them receiving public insurance alone or in combination with other insurance. About 28% of individuals who were between 35 and 64 had a disability. Below in Table 4 are the percentage of people with the categorized disability types (2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau).

**Table 3. Disability Types**

Disability Type						
	Hearing difficulty	Vision difficulty	Cognitive difficulty	Ambulatory difficulty	Self-care difficulty	Independent living difficulty
<b>Total</b>	5.5%	5.2%	11.9%	11.7%	3.9%	10.8%

### Federal and State Laws: Disability and Accessibility

Fair housing laws recognize the barriers persons with disabilities face to secure housing. If understood and implemented, these mandates can expand housing choices and opportunities for persons with disabilities.

According to the PA Human Relations Act, the terms “handicap” or “disability,” with respect to a person, means:

1. A physical or mental impairment which sustainability limits one or more of such person’s major life’s activities,
2. A record of having such an impairment, or
3. Being regarded as having such an impairment, such term does not include current, illegal use of or addiction to a controlled substance

(16 Pa. Code Section 44.4 Definitions, Commonwealth of PA)

Fair housing laws prohibit discrimination against people based on their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status or disability. For persons with disabilities, fair housing laws

make it illegal to fail to make an **reasonable accommodation** and **reasonable modification** to allow full use of the housing.

Reasonable accommodation is a change in rules, policies, or procedures of a housing provider that is needed by a person with a disability to fully use or enjoy the dwelling or common areas (24 CFR 100.204(a)). Requests for service or assistance animals should be treated like all other requests for reasonable accommodation.

Reasonable modification is a change in the physical structure of a dwelling that allows a person with a disability to fully use and enjoy the dwelling. The change can be to the interior of a housing unit or to common or other public spaces, including parking areas, of rental housing covered by the FHA (“Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications”, HUD).

Who pays for the modification is based on a few scenarios: 1) If the property was developed, even in part, with certain types of federal funds<sup>1</sup>, the landlord must pay for the modifications unless doing so would impose undue financial and administrative burdens on the operation of the housing facility; 2) If a multi-family unit (4 or more units) buildings was designed for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, it was required to meet certain accessibility requirements under the FHA and the owners are financially responsible for all expenses necessary to bring the property into compliance with the law; and 3) If the property did not receive federal financial assistance and meets the minimum accessibility requirements, then the tenant can be required to pay for the modification to the unit.

The accessibility requirements under FHA apply to all ground floor or elevator accessed units all buildings with four or more units built for first occupancy after March 13, 1991. Under ADA, a facility must be able to be approached, entered, and used by individuals with disabilities.

Americans know that race-based discrimination is illegal from the Fair Housing Act, but only slightly more than half of Americans know that it is illegal for landlords to refuse to make reasonable accommodations and permit reasonable modification to a housing unit.

Determining what is a “reasonable” accommodation and modification can be difficult and is judged on a case-by-case basis (“Fair Housing Guide to Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications”, Housing Equality Center of PA).

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Financial Assistance Defined: HOME, CDBG (including Section 108 loans), Section 202 and 811 Supportive Housing for the Elderly or Persons with Disabilities, McKinney-Vento Supportive Housing, USDA Rural Development Section 514, 515, 538, Public Housing Authorities, and privately owned development with federal project-based rental assistance (DO NOT include LIHTC, tax-exempt bonds, Housing Choice Vouchers, Shelter Plus Care Assistance, or other tenant-based rental assistance).

## Planning, Zoning, and Property Maintenance Codes

### Segregation/Integration and Community Opposition

There are individuals who live in the sought-after neighborhoods that create community opposition from others based on their income and disability (amongst other things) believing they will create a nuisance. The higher percentage of minority and low-income neighborhoods should be treated equally as these sought-after neighborhoods. It is vital for the City of Sharon to continue to engage these public stakeholders and implement actionable items in their planning, zoning, and codified ordinances to benefit their communities.

### City of Sharon Zoning Ordinance

The City of Sharon is currently updating their zoning ordinance with the assistance of a consultant. The last update was in 2006 that was prepared by Mercer County Regional Planning Commission.

In June 2024, an amendment was added to Section 309.16 to clarify that certain group homes or community homes must be permitted in zoning districts where single family dwellings are permitted.

There are some minor changes that should be considered and knowledge that should be reviewed, including:

- Under Article 2, add an objective that states that the City will “affirmatively further fair housing” in accordance with the Fair Housing Act, as amended.
- Simple and clear definitions of housing types that are in accordance with the Fair Housing Act.

Handicap Parking Sign Procedure: When an individual wants to have a handicap parking sign, they need to have a signed letter from their doctor stating the patient needs a handicap parking sign in front of their home. The City then asks that the doctor include the address of the resident in the letter. This is helpful to the Street Department when they need to install the sign up. The letter certifies this person has a disability, and the City does not need to know any specific health details for that is against HIPAA. Also, once the doctor signs the letter, their staff will typically fax it over to the City at 724-983-1961.

The potential changes will be reviewed with the City and the Mercer County Regional Planning Commission.

### City of Sharon Code Ordinances 2024 International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC)

In 1976, the City of Sharon created a chapter of the City Enforcement Ordinances of the City of Sharon, PA. The City established the Office of Code Enforcement (aka Code Office) that has the responsibility for administering and enforcing the provisions of the Building and Housing Code and the Fire Prevention Code of the City. The ordinances are updated as needed and approved by the city council. There were no concerns with the 2024 IPMC and fair housing. Ordinances to reference include walking surfaces, including ramps, are to be in sound condition and good

repair (IPMC Section 305.4), accessibility to a facility (IPMC Section 310), and occupancy limitations (IPMC Section 404). Overall, the IPMC requires occupiable structures to be in good repair.

#### *Housing Problems and Cost Burden*

According to HUD, a household is considered to have a housing problem if a household has one of the following four housing problems: 1) lacks complete kitchen facilities; 2) lacks complete plumbing facilities; 3) more than 1 person per room (overcrowding); or 4) cost burden is greater than 30%. The housing problems reported to the City of Sharon Code Office deal with housing utility quality and can affect their cost burden. The housing problems dealt with in the Code Office are poor quality electrical, heating, plumbing, and overall property maintenance not the “lack” of these facilities (“CHAS Background”, HUD Office of Policy Development and Research).

According to the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, renters had more housing problems than owners. The most common housing problem for both tenures was cost burden of 30% or more. Most of the cost burden for both tenures was incomes 0-30% HUD Area Family Median Income (HAFMI), especially for renters (2016-2020 CHAS, U.S. Census Bureau).

#### *Rental Inspections and Requirements*

The City of Sharon, through the Fire Department who manages the Non-Owner-Occupied Properties (NOOP) ordinance, continue to prioritize rental inspections and making sure landlords are providing their tenants with affordable, safe, and healthy homes. The process of rental inspections and the requirements of landlords are in the City of Sharon Code Ordinances under NOOP.

During an inspection, the common violations were electrical violations (mostly converting them to GFCI’s and other outlets), smoke detectors (do not or not in all required areas), property maintenance (yard and trash/debris), and exterior maintenance where painting is needed. Depending on the scope of the project, the owner is given a reasonable time to paint exterior, especially during months of inclement weather. Generally, owners do not comply with this because it is not enforced properly, owners do not have funds, or they do not care.

Sadly, there are severe cases of violations that require a lot of research, time, and resources and should have been taken care of by the landlord with their tenant. These severe cases include sewage back-up/leak and/or other plumbing issues, no electricity, no heat, no hot water, hoarding/trash, and mold. Unfortunately, when a tenant reports mold to the Code Office the Code Office does not have authority or knowledge to identify nor has no contact for identification or remediation. Additionally, the Code Office has run into lack of enforcement of out-of-state landlords. The process is even more difficult with out-of-state landlords because the local courts have so much reach.

### *Owner-Occupied Housing Problems*

In addition to the large amount of housing concerns with rental properties, homeowners lack the education or desire to maintain their property. Furthermore, lack of investment from other residents and/or lack of funds could amount to this ongoing problem that is one of the most important issues in the city. When residents don't see the power of maintaining their property, the neighborhood suffers. Currently, the Sharon Beautification Commission, a city commission run by volunteers dedicated to the beautification and revitalization of the city, coordinates beautification events including litter clean-up throughout the neighborhoods. Further education and engagement with the community could be a vital piece to revitalization of the neighborhoods.

### *Financial Characteristics*

#### *Taxes and Essential Municipal Services*

Real estate taxes are based on land and structure. The County is in charge of this assessment, and it has been over forty years since the last comprehensive assessment was completed. The County is performing an assessment that will come into effect in 2027. Properties are reassessed if there was an addition (including decks, front porches, and garages) or demolition of the structure.

The Sharon City School District has a higher rate and has increased over the years to cover expenditures like teacher salaries including benefits, special education programs, and third party cyber/charter schools.

Municipal services can affect how individuals and families budget their money. The City of Sharon uses Tri-County Services for their garbage/recycling service. The current rate is \$129 per quarter (every three months) for the totes, or a household can purchase garbage tags that attach to each bag for \$66 per quarter, which was a 125% increase from the previous contract. The City has an ordinance that all households are required to have garbage service. The City of Sharon Sewer Authority charges \$40/month for their services. The City of Sharon uses Penn Power for their electric service, National Fuel for their gas energy service, and AQUA PA for their water service and is based on the amount of usage. These services provide a variety of assistance programs to help budget monthly payments, pay winter heating bills, catch up on past-due payments, or avoid service disconnection, but the customer must be aware of those programs to initiate them.

#### *Monthly Costs*

About 41% of the households made an income of under \$25,000 with a median income of \$31,777. Generally, owner-occupied households had a higher income than renters as about one-quarter of owners made between \$25,000 and \$49,999 while 59.5% of renters made under \$25,000. Generally, owners made about 2.5 times more than renters.

About 38% of households pay \$500 to \$799 in monthly housing costs, with a median of \$609. The owners paid about \$90 more than renters in monthly costs. Although owners paid

somewhat more than renters in monthly costs, a larger percentage of renters' household income went to these costs (2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau).

#### *Mortgage Cost vs Gross Rent*

The data suggests that the cost of renting a property in Sharon often exceeds a comparable mortgage payment when looking at the percentage of income going towards those payments. The challenges of pursuing homeownership and the resources (including funding) should be understood and shared with the appropriate entities. Interested households could start on a path toward homeownership with homeownership assistance programs. There are organizations in Mercer County who provide mortgage/rental assistance and homeownership programs including the Shenango Valley Urban League and Community Action Partnership of Mercer County. Support for these programs is important for potential homebuyers. Additionally, the City is working through political issues and misconceptions with stakeholders as well as capacity issues to fully activate their land bank. This is an opportunity for vacant properties to become occupied with homeowners (2016-2020 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau).

#### *Real Estate Practices*

##### *Newspaper Ads*

Under Federal Law, no advertising with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling unit may indicate any preference, limitation, or discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin. Under the Fair Housing Act Amendments, descriptions are listed regarding the use of words, photographs, symbols or other approaches that are considered discriminatory ("Part 109 Fair Housing Advertising", HUD).

Real estate advertisements are periodically reviewed for several real estate publications, including *The Sharon Herald* and *Homes of Mercer County – Guide by Realtors published by the Realtors*. There were no signs of discriminatory advertising in publications reviewed.

##### *Private Financing and Real Estate Entities*

Along with the monitoring of real estate advertisement review, the City will outreach and expand collaboration with local financial institutions, private housing developers, local realtors, and property management entities.

#### *Neighborhood Revitalization*

##### *Community Organizations*

A Neighborhood Revitalization Task Force was convened in 2016 and was the driving force behind the groundwork for other organizations. To fight blight and promote community investment, the City of Sharon assembled a Blight Task Force in early 2020 to develop a comprehensive plan to implement effective strategies to address blight. The Task Force includes representatives from the City of Sharon, the Sharon City School District, residents, landlords, and other stakeholders. Of the five top tier strategies from the blight plan (Table 4), some strategies made improvements while overall all need to be continued. The remediation

strategy, demolition of unsafe structures, was the highest priority and has been successful since its implementation. The City of Sharon coordinates with the Mercer County Tax Claim Bureau to update them on planned demolition properties. To achieve the land bank strategy, the challenge of capacity and policy needs to be addressed. Engagement with financial institutions and non-profits for financing should be a strategy implemented in the fair housing plan. The private development tax incentives have not been initiated.

**Table 4. Sharon Blight Task Force Top Tier Strategies**

<b>Prevention</b>
Coordinate with Mercer County Tax Claim Bureau to Disqualify Negligent & Tax Delinquent Property Owners from Bidding at Sale
<b>Remediation</b>
Prioritize and Demolish Unsafe Structures and Prepare for Reinvestment
<b>Redevelopment</b>
Utilize Land Bank to Acquire, Manage, and Market Vacant Properties
Work with Banks and Non-Profits to Provide Financing for Home Rehabs/Down Payments
Adopt Tax Abatement and Other Programs Authorized by State Law that Provide Incentives for Private Development

(2020 City of Sharon Blight Strategy Plan, City of Sharon)

Below are agencies, groups, organizations, and others of the jurisdiction's consultations with housing, social services agencies, and other entities:

**Table 5. Housing & Social Service Agencies, Groups, and Organizations**

<b>Agency/Group/Organization</b>	<b>Services/Type</b>
Mercer County Housing Authority	Housing, PHA, Fair Housing
Shenango Valley Urban League	Housing, Fair Housing, Business & Civil Leaders, Homeless, Economic Development, Anti-poverty Strategy
Community Action Partnership of Mercer County	Housing, Youth, Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, Persons with HIV/AIDS, Domestic Violence, Homeless, Health, Education, Employment, Victims
Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission	Fair Housing
HUD Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity	Fair Housing
Fair Housing Partnership	Fair Housing
Western PA CoC (PA-601)	Homeless, Continuum of Care
AWARE, Inc.	Domestic Violence, Victims
Community Counseling Center	Persons with Disabilities, Homeless, Health
Sharon Board of Health	Health
PA Department of Health	Health, Lead-Based Paint Strategy
Mercer County Regional Planning	Regional & Planning Organization, Business &



Commission Sharon Planning Commission	Civil Leaders
F.H. Buhl Club	Youth, Business and Civic Leaders
Prince of Peace Center	Housing, Youth, Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, Domestic Violence, Homeless, Health, Education, Employment, Victims
Salvation Army	Housing, Youth, Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, Homeless, Health, Education, Employment
Mercer County Food Bank	Health (Food)

### *Investment in Specific Neighborhoods and Downtown*

#### *Demolitions and Lots to Lot program*

Since the increased budget and implementation of demolition of unsafe, deteriorated structures, there have been about 400 structures removed primarily in low-mod areas in the city. This project will continue and include an increase in secondary structures and further evaluation of primary structures. The evaluation will include the prospect of rehabilitation versus demolition.

The City of Sharon, in partnership with the Community Action Partnership of Mercer County, developed a vacant lot maintenance strategy known as Lots to Love funded through the PA Neighborhood Assistance Program, with First National Bank and UPMC Health Plan as sponsors. The goal of this pilot project is to identify a variety of solutions to maintain and productively re-purpose vacant lots. This program started in a highly dense demolition area and has expanded to eligible properties throughout the city. This program provides a solution for a blighted lot to become a side lot that becomes an asset to the neighborhood. Currently, the vacant lots not available for the Lots to Love program are becoming a huge challenge to be maintained by the City.

#### *Housing Rehabilitation Program/Roof Repair Program/Minor Repair Program*

Since the 1980's, the City of Sharon has historically provided emergency housing rehabilitation services and full housing rehabilitations to income qualified homeowners, including lead remediation. In 2020, the City's rehabilitation program includes a roof repair program and minor repair program. Emergency rehabilitation is being considered as part of the program again, especially during the winter season with households in need of furnace repairs or replacement. Since 1999, the housing rehabilitation program has rehabbed about 350 homes in Sharon.

#### *Disability and Housing Rehabilitation*

The City's housing rehabilitation program prioritizes households with persons with disabilities and the elderly along with immediate safety concerns.

### *HOME and LIHTC Programs*

The City of Sharon is not a HOME or ESG entitlement; however, the City is applying for HOME funds for housing rehabilitation through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) on a competitive basis. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program was created under the Tax Reform Act of 1986 and is intended to attract private investment to develop affordable rental housing for low- moderate-income households. There are currently no known projects, proposed projects, or planned projects in the City of Sharon that will be using LITHC funds.

### *Housing Development*

The City of Sharon has not had any housing development since 2014; the last development was part of HUD's Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) in Census Tract 301 (West Hill). The NSP provides grants to every state, certain local communities, and other organizations to purchase foreclosed or abandoned homes and to rehabilitate, resell, or redevelop these homes to stabilize neighborhoods and stem the decline of house values of neighboring homes. The program is being considered for future projects; however, administration of the program would be a challenge with the addition of applying for the HOME program. The City is working towards rehabilitation of homes and demolition of blighted properties. New housing development may not be a priority now, but a focus on the rehabilitation and marketing of vacant housing may provide an alternative.

### *Parks and Recreation*

The City of Sharon has a limited number of neighborhood parks in the area. A component of fair housing is quality of life, which includes available recreational space. Quality of life is a focus area in the city's draft of the comprehensive plan with an action item to invest more in neighborhood parks and parklets. The Census Tract 304/Case Ave neighborhood has always utilized Buhl Park in Hermitage that borders Sharon. The Sharon Beautification Commission with other community partners has revitalized the Bicentennial Park in downtown Sharon (Tract 332001) that is along the Shenango River. There is a green space known as Wengler Park located in Census Tract 305002/Wengler neighborhood, which is across the street from a softball field. There is also a baseball field in Census Tract/North Sharon neighborhood. There are playgrounds in each of the three elementary schools and some apartments have playgrounds or green space. Partnerships identified in the comprehensive plan will need to work together towards recreation opportunities, including a regional plan of organized recreation opportunities between the municipalities.

### *Trails*

The Shenango River Watchers (SRW), a non-profit environmental organization, maintains the Shenango River Trail and Shenango Trail. Most of the access of the Shenango River Trail and Shenango Trail are towards the northern area of the county with aspirations to expand both the water and land trails to the City of Sharon and surrounding areas. The Mercer County Trails

Association (MCTA) is the lead organization overseeing and advocating for new trails and connections in Mercer County. Partnerships between the City, SRW, MCTA, and Visit Mercer County (the county's tourism agency), would benefit the area to improve and expand recreational resources, which aligns with the city's comprehensive plan. Neighborhood pathways will be discussed later in the document.

### Community Participation

#### Sharon's Citizen Participation Plan

The City of Sharon created a Citizen Participation Plan that outlines how the residents of Sharon can participate in the City's CDBG Program and offer suggestions on future CDBG program priorities. This plan was reviewed for any concerns regarding fair housing. The Participation Plan is well-written and states that individuals who are non-English speakers and/or disabled can be accommodated through the city's LEP plan.

#### Citizen's Participation in Community Meetings

Although low- and moderate-income persons, residents of slum and blighted neighborhoods, residents of predominantly low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, members of minority groups, residents of comprehensive neighborhood revitalization areas, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and all persons directly or indirectly impacted or affected by the Community Development Block Grant Program are encouraged to submit their views and proposals regarding the CDBG Program, there is a lack of representation in those low- and moderate-income persons during the city council meetings. Unfortunately, the meetings have low attendance, and it is unknown why members of the community do not attend these meetings. The City of Sharon, especially the Code Office, does receive numerous phone calls and in-person conversations with residents throughout the day. As an alternative for citizens attending council meetings, it is important that the City (especially the Code and Community Development Departments) are engaging with citizens in the community.

## ADDRESSING FAIR HOUSING COMPLAINTS

### Remedies under the law:

When an individual believes that they have been harmed by an unlawful discriminatory housing practice, the three alternative legal options are available:

1. **Private Suit:** The individual may institute a private lawsuit in federal, state, or local court. The statute of limitations is two (2) years from the alleged discriminatory practice. Unlimited damages may be sought.
2. **Federal/HUD:** The federal government provides that a complaint may be filed with the Office of Housing & Urban Development. HUD is authorized to investigate and conciliate complaints but can refer complaints to states or localities that have fair housing laws which provide substantially equivalent rights and remedies. HUD may order a respondent to pay damages, civil penalties, and attorney's fees if discrimination can be found.
3. **PA State/PHRC:** A complaint may be filed with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) within 180 days of the alleged discriminatory action. Currently, the PHRC is the substantially equivalent agency to HUD which means that individual cases may be referred to the Commission by HUD. If discrimination is found the Commission may order an award for actual damages, damages for humiliation and embarrassment, and assess a civil penalty.

(fairhousingrights.org, Fair Housing Rights Center in Southeastern Pennsylvania)

### City of Sharon Code Office

In partnership with the Community and Economic Development Department, the Code Office should create procedures and practices in identifying and processing fair housing situations. The Code Office works directly with these individuals and families and the citizens may not be aware of all their fair housing rights. With appropriate procedures in place, the Code Office can address these concerns to connect individuals and families with the applicable resources.

### Shenango Valley Urban League

The Shenango Valley Urban League (SVUL) oversees the Human Relations Commission for the cities of Sharon, Farrell, and Hermitage. The mission of the SVUL is to ensure the equal access and opportunity for African Americans in need, as well as to empower individuals to cultivate and exercise their full human potential. While SVUL does not receive many fair housing complaints, all complaints are considered to be legitimate complaints and are treated as such. The Shenango Valley Urban League provides information to individuals looking to learn more about how to file complaints and the overall complaint process. Complaints that are not resolved by the SVUL are referred to by the complainant to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission or HUD.

**Contact Information:****601 Indiana Ave Farrell, PA 16121****Phone: 724-981-5310****Mon – Fri 8am to 4pm**

[Disability Rights of Pennsylvania](#) (DRP) is an independent, statewide, non-profit corporation designated as the federally-mandated protection and advocacy agency in Pennsylvania. DRP works to advance and protect the civil rights of adults and children with a wide range of disabilities to ensure that they can live in their communities with the services they need, receive a full and inclusive education, live free of discrimination and abuse and neglect, and have control and self-determination over their supports and services.

**Live Intake system: 1-800-692-7443****[Pennsylvania Human Relation Commission](#)**

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC) is tasked to enforce state laws that prohibit discrimination: the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act and the Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act.

PHRC investigates employment and housing discrimination complaints on behalf of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), respectively. The State Governor appoints eleven commissioners (confirmed by the Senate) to act as public liaisons, establish policies, and resolve cases not settled voluntarily. The commission is independent and nonpartisan, with the chairperson appointed by the governor and vice-chairperson, secretary, and assistant secretary elected by the commissioners every year. The commission holds monthly meetings, which are open to the public, to address issues of discrimination or civil tension.

The PHRC organizes the PA Interagency Task Force on Community Activities and Relations, a group of state agencies unified in preventing and stopping civil tension stemming from conflicts between ethnic and cultural groups. In addition, the PHRC offers hotlines to report bias and hate crimes, as well as an online way of filing a complaint regarding discrimination; the current law protects citizens in matters of employment, education, public accommodations, housing, and commercial property (“Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission”, Commonwealth of PA).

**Contact information for the Pittsburgh Regional Office: 412-565-5395****General inquiries (Harrisburg Regional Office): 717-787-4410**

### [Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity \(HUD-FHEO\)](#)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity (FHEO) receives complaints regarding alleged violations of the Fair Housing Act.

**Contact information for the Region III Office in Philadelphia, PA: 215-861-7646.**

**General inquiries 1-800-669-9777. There is also a form to report housing discrimination.**

### [Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh \(FHP\)](#)

The Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating equal housing choice in southwestern Pennsylvania. FHP assists individuals in the area who believe they have experienced housing discrimination. They also assist persons with disabilities with preparing requests for reasonable accommodation and modification so that they may have full access to housing. If a person feels they have been discriminated against in their rental, sales, mortgage, or homeowner's insurance process, FHP can fight for them up to and including litigation when needed. All services are free of charge for victims of discrimination.

**Fair Housing Partnership has three important roles:**

- Fair housing advocate and enforcer of fair housing laws
- Providing education and outreach to the community regarding the Fair Housing Act
- Training housing providers and government officials on their obligations under the Fair Housing Act ([fhp.org](http://fhp.org), Fair Housing Partnership)

**Contact information for the FHP in Pittsburgh: 412-391-2535**

### [Housing Equality Center of PA](#)

Since 1956, the Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania has been working to ensure that all Pennsylvanians have equal access to the housing of their choice regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, familial status, or disability. They assist housing professionals and consumers to understand their rights and responsibilities under fair housing laws and help consumers to obtain a remedy when they experience housing discrimination. They provide Counseling and Enforcement Support Services to help people who have experience housing discrimination, conduct Fair Housing Testing Investigations to determine if housing providers are complying with fair housing laws, and offer Education and Training Programs to increase knowledge of fair housing rights and responsibilities.

**Contact information:**

**P.O. Box 558  
Fort Washington, PA 19034  
267-419-8918**

**866-540-FAIR**

[info@equalhousing.org](mailto:info@equalhousing.org)

## Legal Representation

### Northwestern Legal Services

Northwestern Legal Services (NWLS) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal aid to eligible clients in northwestern Pennsylvania. They offer resources in a variety of civil legal matters to low-income residents, including public benefits, family law, housing, healthcare, education, and employment.

Below is a list of legal aid cases handled by Northwestern Legal Services and their private attorney (pro bono) partners. Some of these types of legal cases are limited to advice-only representation, while others are offered direct representation or a clinic method of service.

1. **EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT** such as school enrollment, suspensions, and expulsions, expungement of criminal records, etc.
2. **HEALTH LAW ISSUES** Medicare, bill collection, nursing home issues, advance directives/living, health care wills, power of attorney, etc.
3. **FAMILY LAW** such as custody and visitation matters, contempt, some no-fault divorce, PFA, child support for petitioners, etc.
4. **HOUSING LAW** landlord issues including evictions, lockouts, seizure of property, security deposits, public housing, subsidized housing and section 8 matters, mortgage foreclosure, etc.
5. **PUBLIC BENEFITS** such as cash assistance, subsidized child care, SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, medical assistance, etc.
6. **SOCIAL SECURITY** such as SSI denial, termination, and overpayment, Social Security disability terminations and overpayments, as well as other miscellaneous social security issues.
7. **UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION** including denial, termination, and overpayment of UC benefits.
8. **CONSUMER LAW** including debt collection, creditor harassment, some bankruptcy, and utility termination
9. **OTHER AREAS OF REPRESENTATION** including suspension of driving privileges, wills, and power of attorney.

### Contact information:

**Address: 3110 Highland Road, Suite 203, Hermitage, PA 16148**

**Telephone: (724) 346-6112 or (800) 753-5708**

**New Clients Call: (814) 452-6957 or (800) 665-6957**

**Fax: (724) 346-6332**

### *Fair Housing Law Center*

The Fair Housing Law Center provides advocacy and litigation services on behalf of individuals who were denied housing because of their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, familial status or disability; educates community members about illegal acts affecting themselves or others under the Fair Housing Act.

### *Housing Advocacy Services*

#### **Assistance with Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications**

The program staff has assisted individuals with disabilities in requesting and receiving needed reasonable accommodations and modifications. With their help, most clients obtain these requests without filing a complaint with HUD or PHRC.

#### **Assistance and Legal Representation Before HUD and PHRC**

When someone's rights have been violated by a housing provider, this program is there to guide and represent the individual through the legal process. Staffed with attorneys and paralegals, this allows the program not only to file complaints with HUD and PHRC, but to fully represent the individual at all stages of the process, free of charge.

#### **Legal Representation Before State and Federal Court**

When the action taken against the victim is so severe that a complaint is filed with the local, state or federal court, this program provides free legal representation, in these cases, to anyone living in the service area.

#### **Contact Information:**

**10 West Cherry Avenue**

**Washington, PA 15301**

**Phone: (724) 225.6170**

**Fax: (724) 250.1078**

**Toll Free Hotline: 1.877.725.4472**



## PREVIOUS ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING

### Summary of 2015-2019 Impediments and Accomplishments

The following impediments below were identified in the City's 2015 Analysis of Impediments and the City's progress was recorded in the 2018 CAPER:

#### **Impediment 1: Fair Housing Education and Outreach**

The City of Sharon appointed a fair housing officer within the Community Development Department. Along with a public notice published regarding fair housing, the city follows the requirements for posting fair housing rights and adopts an annual fair housing resolution. Additionally, fair housing materials are accessible in the Community Development Department.

#### **Impediment 2: Need for Affordable Rental Housing Units**

The City has contracted with the Community Action Partnership of Mercer County to provide education to citizens regarding homebuyer education and rental housing assistance. Sharon staff has relationships with the Mercer County Housing Authority and directs citizens in need of affordable housing to contact the agency; many of the living units were built in collaboration during the past years.

#### **Impediment 3: Need for Affordable Housing for Sale**

The City has contracted with Community Action Partnership of Mercer County to provide education to citizens regarding homebuyer education and rental housing assistance. Sharon staff has relationships with the Mercer County Housing Authority and directs citizens in need of affordable housing to contact the agency; many of the living units were built in collaboration during the past years.

#### **Impediment 4: Need for Accessible Housing**

The need for accessible housing is primarily addressed through the Sharon Home Rehabilitation Program, in which individuals with disabilities are given primary consideration for home rehabilitation. The City of Sharon partnered with both Mercer County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) and Lawrence County Social Services, Inc. (LCSS) for the ACCESS Mercer County Program that used funds for six ACCESS projects completed for homeowners and additional projects for individuals with mental and physical disabilities.

## Summary of 2020-2024 Impediments and Accomplishments

The City of Sharon's 2020-2024 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice has identified the following impediments, along with the goals and strategies to address those impediments.

### **IMPEDIMENT #1: FAIR HOUSING EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

City of Sharon Code Office staff were provided with access to materials for fair housing rights. City of Sharon zoning ordinance was updated in regard where group homes are to be permitted wherever single-family homes are. Materials concerned fair housing were available and distributed to the public. The City's website now contains a fair housing page, including filing a fair housing complaint. Any agencies monitoring, investigating, and enforcement fair housing concerns were supported by the City of Sharon. Fair housing education and other activities were funded by the city administered by the local social service agency.

### **IMPEDIMENT #2: NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND SAFE RENTAL HOUSING**

The City of Sharon prioritized the rental license process by hiring an inspector and administrator and updating the ordinance. Throughout the rental license process, tenants and landlords are provided knowledge on the process and directed to the zoning and code ordinances. Tenant and landlord counseling was funded by the city administered by the local social service agency.

### **IMPEDIMENT #3: NEED FOR HOUSING REHABILITATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT**

The Sharon rehabilitation program continues to be a priority for the City and completes 15-20 rehabilitation projects per year. To supplement this program, the City has applied for homeowner housing rehabilitation projects in the Federal Home Loan Bank Affordable Housing Program (denied 2024 funds) and applying for the Department of Community & Economic Development HOME program for 2025 funds. The City's Community Development website page has been updated to include lead and healthy homes resources. The City continues to use funds for housing demolitions and the Lots to Love program.

### **IMPEDIMENT #4: NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING**

The Sharon rehabilitation program continues prioritize individuals and families with accessibility barriers in their homes. To supplement this program, the City has applied for homeowner housing rehabilitation projects in the Federal Home Loan Bank Affordable Housing Program (denied 2024 funds) and applying for the Department of Community & Economic Development HOME program for 2025 funds with prioritizing individuals and families with accessibility barriers. The City continues to promote programs to increase housing accessibility, including the elderly population. The City continues to monitor and initially investigate ADA, Section 504, and fair housing requirements and provide people with the appropriate agencies and resources.

**IMPEDIMENT #5: NEED FOR AWARENESS OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS**

The City has built relationships with local organizations who provide services to its citizens, especially low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The City and the Sharon City School District have begun drafting goals and strategies in their comprehensive plans to implement educational and employment opportunities. The City provides funding to the public transportation system in the county, but there is still improvements towards efficiency.

**IMPEDIMENT #6: NEED FOR RACIAL DIVERSITY**

Initially, broad research has been conducted for racial disparity throughout the city. The next step is surveying individuals and families in determining barriers to homeownership and implementing programs that provide a path to homeownership.

**IMPEDIMENT #7: NEED FOR MORE HOMEOWNERSHIP**

Housing counseling activities were funded to support the local social service agency programs. The next step is surveying individuals and families in determining barriers to homeownership and implementing programs that provide a path to homeownership.

**IMPEDIMENT #8: NEED FOR MORE STAFF CAPACITY**

Although the Code Department has strived to increase staff capacity, there is still a challenge to gain and maintain staff capacity. The Community and Economic Development still has staff capacity challenges, especially with requests for new and expansion of funding programs.

## 2025-2029 FAIR HOUSING PLAN

The City of Sharon's 2025-2029 Fair Housing Plan has identified the following impediments, along with the goals and strategies to address those impediments.

**IMPEDIMENT #1: FAIR HOUSING EDUCATION AND OUTREACH** – There is a need to continue to educate members of the community concerning their rights and responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act and to raise awareness, especially for low-income households, that all residents of the City of Sharon have a right under federal law to fair housing choice.

**Goal:** Improve the public's knowledge and awareness of the Federal Fair Housing Act, and related laws, regulations, and requirements to affirmatively further fair housing in the area.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**1-A:** Educate Code Office, Fire Dept, and Police Dept staff on providing educational awareness/opportunities for all persons to learn more about their rights and requirements under federal and state fair housing laws.

4. During the update of the City of Sharon Zoning Ordinances, review to affirmatively further fair housing.
5. Fair housing training with local person/organization knowledgeable in the subject.
6. Create procedures to identify and process fair housing situations to connect individuals with appropriate resources.

**1-B:** Continue to promote Fair Housing awareness through the media and with assistance from local/regional social service agencies, by providing educational awareness opportunities for all persons to learn more about their rights and requirements under federal and state fair housing laws. This includes:

4. Continue to make available and distribute literature and informational material concerning Fair Housing issues, an individual's rights, and landlord's responsibilities to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing at the library, schools, and municipal building.
5. Fair housing education with Sharon School District students incorporated into established classes, including history, civics, and government.
6. Direct people to the following sources about Fair Housing information and how to contact and file a fair housing complaint:
  - a. Fair Housing page on the City's website.
  - b. City's 16146 newsletter.
  - c. Facebook post on the City's pages that links to the City's Fair Housing page.

**1-C:** Educate the public on local legal services and increase capacity for legal services.

3. Research and make legal services available to the public.
4. Reach out to legal service agencies and discuss challenges, including capacity.

**1-D:** Continue to support Shenango Valley Urban League's Human Relations Commission and Fair Housing monitoring, investigation, and enforcement strategies.

**1-E:** Build relationship with the local real estate and property management agencies to provide information on Fair Housing choices and ways to promote fair housing.

2. Reach out to local agencies for further discussion.

**1-F:** Promote and encourage the life-learning skills provided by local agencies, organizations, and banks.

2. Programs include financial literacy, educational and employment opportunities, housing and homeownership, and life readiness.

**IMPEDIMENT #2: NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND SAFE HOUSING** – A significant amount of households, especially rental households, in the City of Sharon are paying more than 30% of their monthly income on the cost of their housing, which means that these households are considered cost burden. Landlords, tenants, and city officials need to work together to provide decent, safe, and sound rental housing.

**Goal:** Promote and enforce rehabilitation of rental housing to become decent, safe, and sound housing.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**2-A:** Continue to prioritize rental inspection with increased capacity, efficiency, and building relationships with landlords to promote more private investment and tenants to promote safe housing.

2. Continue relationship with Mercer County Tax Claim Bureau with tax sales, especially non-occupiable housing.

**2-B:** Effectively and efficiency increase enforcement of housing violations, whether tenants or landlords, including continuing to work with court system and receiving resources from Mercer County Courthouse.

2. Educate tenants and landlord about their rights to decent, safe, and sound housing.

**2-C:** Educating tenants and landlords on zoning and code ordinances, primarily what is expected during the rental inspection.

2. Provide support to code officers with knowledge of the processes and materials.

**2-D:** Create a county-wide homelessness/housing plan that includes strategies, goals, and actions to provide decent, safe, and sound housing for all.

**IMPEDIMENT #3: NEED FOR HOUSING REHABILITATION AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE –**

There are households that are not able to afford the cost of a house project and/or do not care about the maintenance of the property (land, owner-occupied, renter-occupied).

**Goal:** Promote and encourage neighborhood investment and revitalization with programs and community participation.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**3-A:** Continue to support and encourage housing rehabilitation of existing housing units to become decent, safe, and sound housing that is affordable to lower income households, including managing the Community Development Department's Housing Rehab program.

2. Direct to citizens the programs available to them, including CDBG, HOME (city applying), and other programs including healthy homes.

**3-B:** Encourage partnerships, especially youth, to maintain their property by providing resources, education, employment and volunteer opportunities with community businesses and organizations.

4. Begin partnership with the school district to strategize.
  - a. Incorporate list of community organizations.
    - i. Review of volunteer hours and encourage/promote students to gain connections.
  - b. Incorporate list of businesses, including hardware/repair.
    - i. Promote educational and employment opportunities with partnerships with businesses, secondary schools, and the school district.
5. Propose lawn care program with school district students.
  - a. Partner with Lots to Love program.
  - b. Partner with lawn care businesses.
6. Propose snow removal program with school district students.
  - a. CDL certification.
  - b. Partner with City's Street Dept.
  - c. Promote programs to help residents with snow removal.

**3-C:** Continue to use funds and expand resources for housing demolitions and Lots to Love program.

**3-D:** Prioritize and strategize park and recreation investment.

2. Create and implement park and recreation plan, including:
  - a. Regional recreation planning.

- b. Neighborhood parks and trails.
- c. Safe routes to schools.

**3-E:** Work with Mercer County Council of Governments on improving efficiency and outreach of public transportation, especially low-income areas.

**IMPEDIMENT #4: NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING** – There is a need to have more affordable, accessible housing and public accommodations that is decent, safe, and sound.

**Goal:** Modify housing units and public accommodation to accommodate persons with disabilities to be decent, safe, and sound as well as affordable.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**4-A:** Continue to promote programs that increase housing accessibility through the rehabilitation of existing housing stock by homeowners and landlords who will make handicap improvements, especially programs to assist elderly homeowners for those residents to stay in their homes.

- 2. Direct to citizens the programs available to them, including CDBG, HOME (city applying), and other programs.

**4-B:** Continue to advocate the policies of the ADA, Section 504, and Fair Housing requirements for landlords to make “reasonable accommodation” to their properties so they become accessible to persons who are disabled, as well as educating the disabled on their rights and how to request special accommodations (especially rental units).

- 2. Coordinate with and utilize resources from fair housing organizations, including Shenango Valley Urban League and Fair Housing Partnership, to help citizens with requests.

**IMPEDIMENT #5: NEED FOR MORE HOMEOWNERSHIP** – There is a need to educate renters on how to invest in homeownership and the benefits of owning a home. The data suggests that the cost of renting a property in Sharon often exceeds a comparable mortgage payment when looking at the percentage of income going towards those payments.

**Goal:** Promote and encourage renters to buy a home instead of continuing to rent.

**Strategies:** To reach this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**5-A:** Research needs of homeownership and resources/programs for homeownership assistance, including reason(s) for high percentage of geographical mobility the county.

- 3. Survey households on their determination in finding a home in general and in Sharon neighborhoods (location, income, employment, etc.).
- 4. Create and implement solutions determined from the survey and other resources to help individuals and families to explore more housing options.

**5-B:** Work with agencies to provide resources/programs for homeownership assistance.

**IMPEDIMENT #6: NEED FOR MORE STAFF CAPACITY** – There is a need for the Community and Economic Development Department, Code Department, and Fire Department to have more staff capacity to meet the departments' demands more efficiently.

**6-A:** Hire and train employees for these departments to meet capacity demands.



## CERTIFICATION

Signature Page:

I hereby certify that this FY 2025-2029 Fair Housing Analysis is in compliance with the intent and directives of the Community Development Block Grant Program regulations.

X

Robert Fiscus, City Manager, City of Sharon,...

Date

## Appendix I: Sources

(in order)

“Housing Discrimination Under the Fair Housing Act”, HUD -

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/fair\\_housing\\_act\\_overview](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/fair_housing_act_overview)

“Sexual Harassment in Housing”, HUD -

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/sexual\\_harassment](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/sexual_harassment)

“Advertising and Marketing”, HUD -

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/advertising\\_and\\_marketing](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/advertising_and_marketing)

“Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications”, HUD -

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<https://adata.org/learn-about-ada#:~:text=The%20ADA%20gives%20civil%20rights,origin%2C%20age%2C%20and%20religion.>

“Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968”, U.S. Access Board - [https://www.access-](https://www.access-board.gov/about/law/aba.html#:~:text=Architectural%20Barriers%20Act%20(ABA)%20of%201968&text=The%20law%20requires%20that%20buildings,August%2012%2C%201968%20be%20accessible.)

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“Your Rights Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act”, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights -

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf>

PHRC; PHRA - <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/phrc/about-phrc.html>

“Exemptions to the Fair Housing Act”, Housing Equality Center -

<https://www.equalhousing.org/fair-housing-topics/exemptions-to-the-fair-housing-act/>

“Fair Housing Guide for Local Governments”, Housing Equality Center -

<https://www.equalhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Fair-Housing-Guide-for-Local-Governments.pdf>

“Pennsylvania Fair Educational Opportunities Act”, PA General Assembly -

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/US/PDF/1992/0/0187..PDF>

“Age Discrimination”, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services - <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/age-discrimination/index.html>

“Age Discrimination”, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission - <https://www.eeoc.gov/age-discrimination>

“Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)”, HUD - <https://www.hud.gov/vawa#openModal>

“Consumer Guide to Tenants and Landlord Rights”, Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General - <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/OAG-Consumer-Guide-Tenant-Landlord-Rights-v.13-web-version.pdf>

“Warranty of Habitability”, PA Law Help - <https://www.palawhelp.org/resource/warranty-of-habitability>

“Asbestos Program for Contractors Working in Pennsylvania”, PA Dept of Environmental Protection) - <https://greenport.pa.gov/elibrary/PDFProvider.ashx?action=PDFStream&docID=1418836&checksum=&revision=3&docName=ASBESTOS+PROGRAM+FOR+CONTRACTORS+WORKING+IN+PENNSYLVANIA&nativeExt=pdf&PromptToSave=False&Size=220270&ViewerMode=2&overlay=0>

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