

# City of Sharon

## FY 2020-2024 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice

### Summary

#### Background

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 "affirmatively further fair housing." In order to "affirmatively further fair housing," each entitlement community must conduct a Fair Housing Analysis which identifies any impediments to fair housing choice.

The HUD Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) Office has advised Federal entitlement communities to update their Analysis of Impediments (AI) to Fair Housing Choice to coincide with their Five Year Consolidated Plan, and then every five years thereafter. In addition, each year the City, as part of its Annual Action Plan, must sign certifications (24 CFR 91.255(a) and 24 CFR 91.325 (a)) that the City will affirmatively further fair housing.

The City of Sharon previously prepared an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice in 2015. The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice will outline progress that has been made since the previous Analysis of Impediments, explore the continuation of these impediments where necessary, and identify any new impediments to fair housing choice. Furthermore, this Analysis of Impediments will bring the City into sequence with the FY 2020-2024 Five Year Consolidated Plan. The document is designed to act as a planning tool, providing the City with the necessary framework to strategically reduce any identified impediments to fair housing choice over the next five years, and continue to make modifications based on events and activities in the community during this time period.

In order to affirmatively further fair housing in the City of Sharon, the City must look beyond its boundaries and coordinate fair housing with Mercer County and the Shenango Valley region. Fair housing choice is a goal of the AI and the opportunity should be made available to all low-income residents and the members of protected classes to live anywhere in the surrounding region.

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.

## Overview of Impediments and Recommendations

**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:* In order to meet this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**1-A:** Educate Code Office 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. Review and update City of Sharon Zoning Ordinances to affirmatively further fair housing.

**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. Create a Fair Housing page on the City’s website about Fair Housing information and how to contact and file a fair housing complaint with the Shenango Valley Urban League and the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission.
3. Create a Facebook post on the City’s page that links to the City’s website about Fair Housing information and how to contact and file a fair housing complaint with the Shenango Valley Urban League or the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission.

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

**1-D:** Rebuild relationship with the local Board of Realtors to provide information on Fair Housing choices and ways to promote fair housing.

**IMPEDIMENT #2: NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND SAFE RENTAL HOUSING** – About half of renter 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 burdened. The landlords of these rental properties and the City are not keeping up with the City requirements of a bi-annual rental housing inspection making it unclear if the landlord is providing decent, safe, and sound rental housing.

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

*Strategies:* In order to meet this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**2-A:** Continue to prioritize rental inspection with higher Code Office capacity, efficient scheduling, and building relationships with landlords to promote more private investment.

1. Discourage slum landlords from buying property that they cannot handle by working with Mercer County Tax Claim Bureau.

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

**IMPEDIMENT #3: NEED FOR HOUSING REHABILITATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT** – 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:* In order to meet 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.

**3-B:** Encourage residents, especially youth, to maintain their property by providing resources (including on city’s website), education, and opportunities with community organizations.

1. Update Community and Economic Development and Code Departments’ resources on the city’s website (e.g. lead and healthy homes resources)
2. Property and lawn care “tutorials”
3. Support from local housing/lawn care/hardware businesses

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

**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:* Increase the number of housing units and public accommodations that could be modified or to accommodate persons with disabilities to be decent, safe, and sound as well as affordable.

*Strategies:* In order to meet 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.

**4-B:** Promote programs to assist elderly homeowners in the City so they are able to make accessibility improvements to their properties in order for those residents to stay in their homes.

**4-C:** Continue to enforce 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 AWARENESS OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS** – There is a need for residents to become aware and utilize programs for financial literacy, educational and employment opportunities, housing and homeownership, and life readiness.

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

*Strategies:* In order to meet this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**5-A:** Building relationships and continue to support local agencies, organizations, and banks that provide these services to citizens, especially low-income individuals. These agencies include Shenango Valley Urban League, Community Action Partnership of Mercer County, and Mercer County Housing Authority.

**5-B:** Build relationships with local grade schools and colleges/universities to promote educational and employment opportunities, especially local businesses (industrial, healthcare, service industry).

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

**IMPEDIMENT #6: NEED FOR RACIAL DIVERSITY**– There is a need for the City to understand why minorities are concentrated in the low-income neighborhoods.

*Goal:* Research reasoning behind poverty and race disparity in specific neighborhoods and implement solutions to bring the gap.

*Strategies:* In order to meet this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

**6-A:** Survey these individuals and families on their determination in finding a home in general and in Sharon neighborhoods (location, income, job, etc.).

**6-B:** Continue research by talking with agencies that help these individuals and families.

**6-C:** Create and implement solutions determined from survey and other resources to help individuals and families explore more housing options.

**IMPEDIMENT #7: 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:* In order to meet this goal, the following activities and strategies should be undertaken:

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

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

1. Utilize Mercer County Housing Authority's quarterly newsletter.



**IMPEDIMENT #8: NEED FOR MORE STAFF CAPACITY** – There is a need for the Community and Economic Development Department and Code Department to have more staff capacity in order to meet the departments' demands more efficiently.

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

**8-B:** Aspects of the rental ordinances need to be updated or performed better.