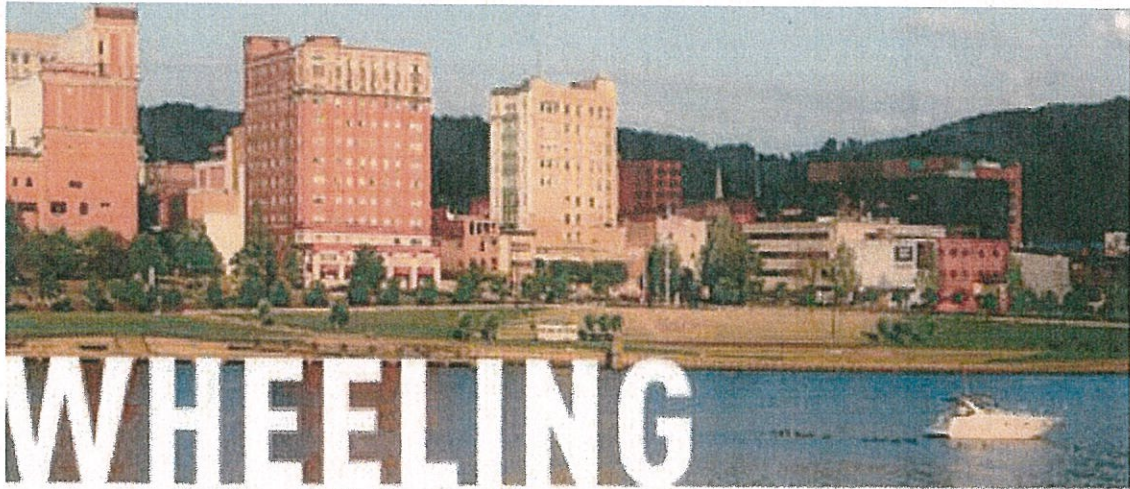
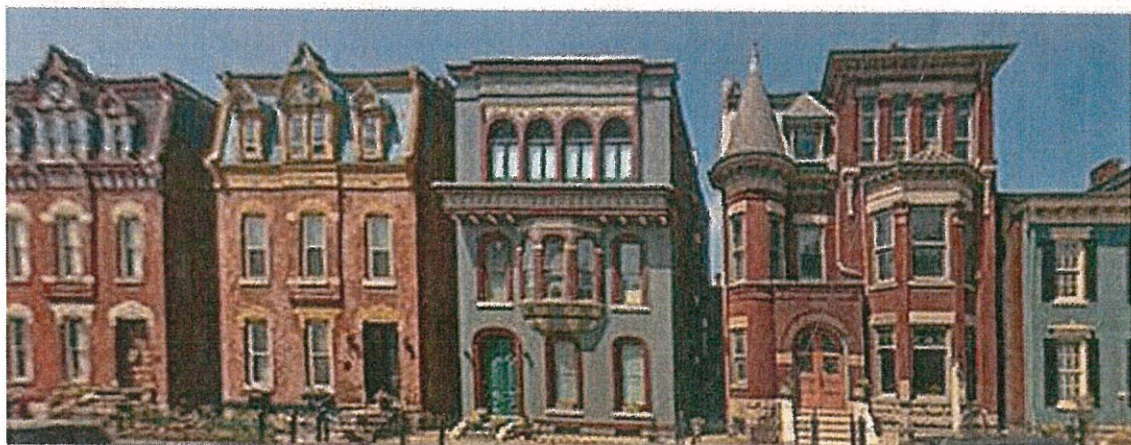
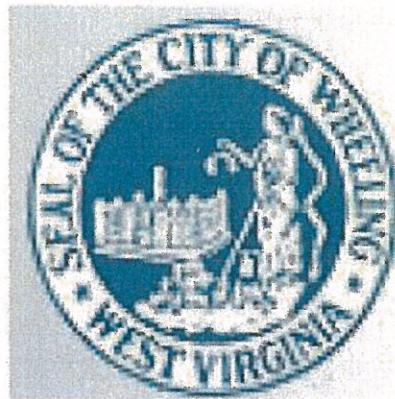


Ad-Hoc Committee On Workforce Housing
August 2016 – March 2017



WHEELING

AD-HOC COMMITTEE
FOR WORKFORCE HOUSING
FINAL REPORT
2017



Ad-Hoc Committee On Workforce Housing
August 2016 – March 2017

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Ad-Hoc Committee On Workforce Housing
August 2016 – March 2017

Committee Charge:

The Ad Hoc Committee on Workforce Housing is tasked with conducting and presenting to City Council an analysis of the affordable housing options existing in the Wheeling real estate market and, to the extent necessary, preparing a series of recommendations for incentivizing additional development thereof.

The Committee will analyze local housing and population data and conduct research using local focus groups and other available information, and it will evaluate municipal and regional policies and practices as they pertain to housing development. The committee will consider both short-term and long-range strategies for improvement. Within six months from its formation, the Committee shall present its findings and recommendations to City Council.

Committee Members:

- 1) Ashmore, Missy Adams
- 2) Becker, Josh
- 3) Benyo, Josh
- 4) Brothers, Adam
- 5) Burkey, Ashlee
- 6) Calvert, Paula L.
- 7) Clegg, Mallory
- 8) Coogan, Alex
- 9) DeLuca, Rich
- 10) Drahos, Matt
- 11) Ellwood, David
- 12) Geese, Randy
- 13) Gilot, Jon-Erik (co-chair)
- 14) Hagan, Susan James (co-chair)
- 15) Kain, Scott
- 16) Klug, Katie Hinerman
- 17) Pockl, Jason
- 18) Wetmore, Brooke Hamilton
- 19) Wood, Morgan

Introduction:

In August 2016 Mayor Glenn Elliott and Wheeling City Council announced the formation of four ad-hoc committees to study and report back on several aspects of our community – retention; volunteerism; the proposed ethane cracker plant at Dillies Bottom, Ohio; and workforce housing. The housing committee was instituted with a particular concern that Wheeling lacks a robust ‘workforce’ housing market. While there are a number of high-priced properties and low-end ‘fixer-uppers’ on the market at any one time, our area offers a dearth of housing for those who fall in-between. Should the proposed ethane cracker become a reality, Wheeling will face an immediate housing shortage for the thousands of construction and ancillary jobs the plant is expected to bring.

That’s not to say that Wheeling has not seen investments in our local housing market. The Woda Group has recently invested more than **\$30 million dollars** in rental housing in downtown Wheeling, South Wheeling and Elm Grove, addressing the needs of both young professionals and seniors/fixed-income residents. These developments have proven to be wildly popular, with full buildings and waiting lists the norm rather than the exception.

Wheeling is also experiencing some of the fastest growth in the history of our area. In 2015 the Wheeling Metropolitan Statistical Area ranked as the **fifth-fastest growing** MSA in the nation. From 2013 – 2014 the Wheeling MSA added around 1,000 jobs, many of those in high-wage industries paying above and beyond the state and local average income figures.

With this in mind, the Ad Hoc Affordable Housing Committee met from August 2016 to March 2017 on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule to discuss problems and solutions with ‘affordable’ housing in the greater Wheeling market. The committee has consisted of more than a dozen professionals in the non-profit and for-profit markets, including real estate, banking, development and community service, with each member bringing unique insight into both the real and perceived issues as they relate to affordable housing.

As charged by City Council, the committee aggressively targeted the local and regional housing and development market. In October, committee members met with Jim Rokakis of the **Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Thriving Communities Institute**, who identified the struggles and successes that the greater Cleveland area faced in vacant structures and affordable housing development. In December committee members spoke with representatives from the **Northside Community Development Fund**, who finance loans for real estate development in Pittsburgh’s North Side. Additionally the committee also reviewed reports and information from additional housing committees, from Charleston, West Virginia to Seattle, Washington.

Locally, the committee hosted a listening session at **Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP** to hear from company employees, some of whom travel as far away as Pittsburgh each day, about their struggles with finding local affordable housing. Orrick employees also shared what factors would be most attractive to them in considering living in Wheeling. The committee also solicited responses to an online survey relating to the local housing market, generating more than 200 responses (detailed herein).

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The committee also met or spoke with current and former Wheeling city representatives, including members of City Council; Wheeling Fire Department; and Building Code Services Division, each offering insight from their experience as they relate to development and local and state codified ordinances.

Finally, the committee spoke with a number of local and regional builders and developers who offered their experiences – both good and bad – in working with and in the City of Wheeling. Their understanding of both existing building renovation and new-build construction was beneficial in understanding how each option can (or cannot) be accomplished within what would be deemed 'affordable' housing solutions for the local market.

The responses provided from each individual and group were helpful to this committee in developing realistic recommendations for City Council on how to approach solutions for affordable workforce housing in the City of Wheeling.

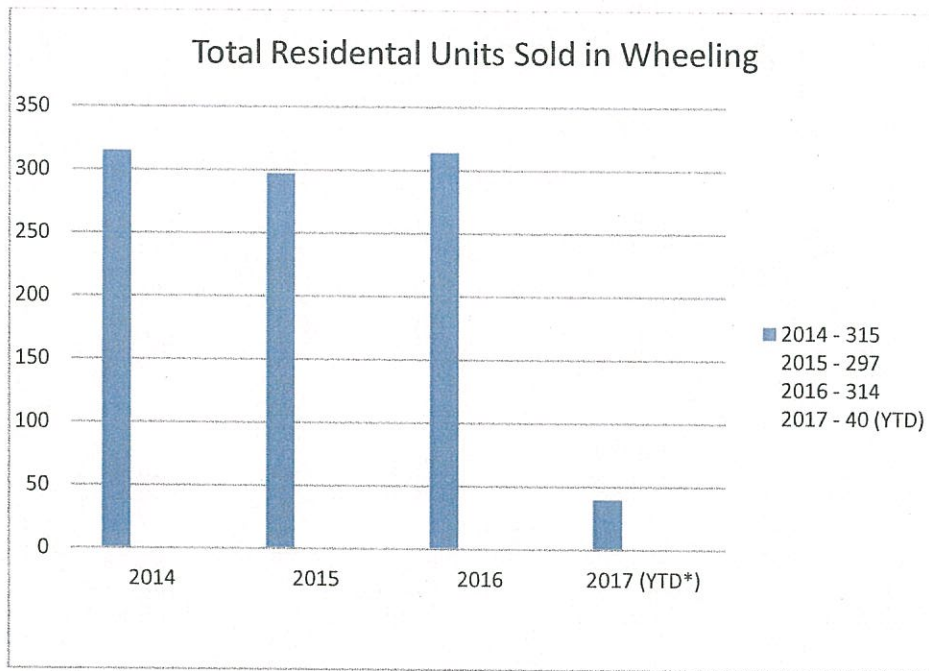
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Analysis of Current Real Estate Market:

When analyzing the recent state of the Wheeling real estate market, the committee set \$200,000 as a maximum price for workforce housing based on the following:

- A \$200,000 home purchased with 20% down (\$40,000) and 80% mortgaged at 4.25% (30 year fixed conventional), has an estimated principle and interest payment of approximately \$787.10.
- A \$200,000 home purchased with 5% down (\$10,000) and 95% mortgaged at 4.25% (30 year fixed conventional), has an estimated principle and interest payment of approximately \$934.69 with an additional \$93.93 PMI payment.
- The median rental rate in the Wheeling market is presently \$750.00 per month, with an average range of \$600.00 - \$1,200.00.

The following represent numbers provided from the Wheeling Board of Realtors.

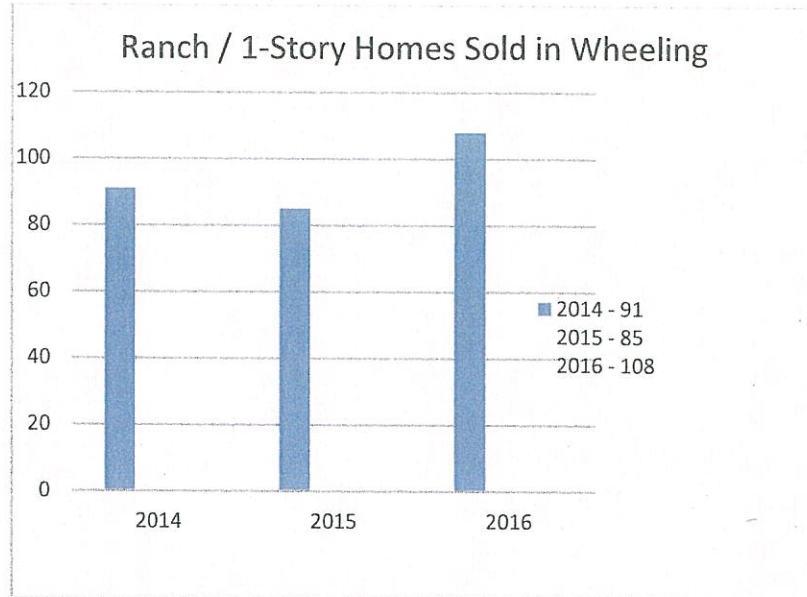


* - Wheeling market down 30% from this time last year, primarily affecting the higher end of the market. Many buyers are bouncing to Ohio market.

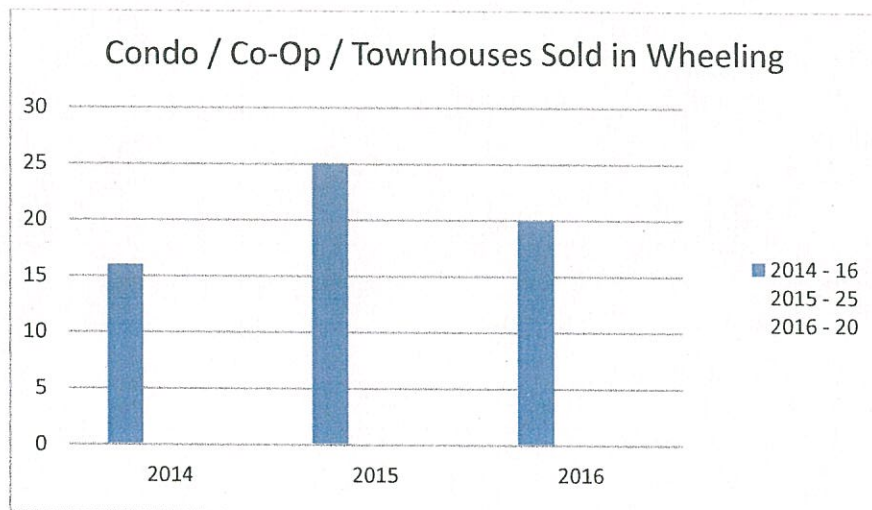
From 2014 – 2017, there were only 25 properties (5 condo / 20 1-story) that were withdrawn from the market. Essentially – if you list it, it will sell.

Within this price range homes sit on the market for an average of approximately 108 days before being sold. If you bump the selling price up to \$350,000.00, the average time on the market rises to three years. As it stands in 2017, the number of available houses on the market and dollar value are down, while the number of days on the market are up.

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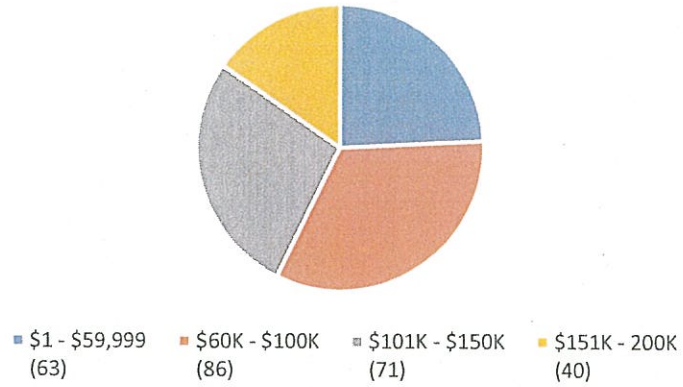


*- A large part of the older Wheeling population (60+) are looking to downsize to single story. Another group (50+) are also looking at single story now before health/mobility problems arise.

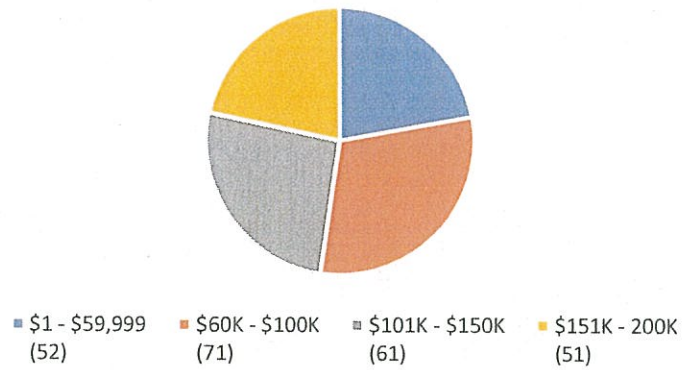


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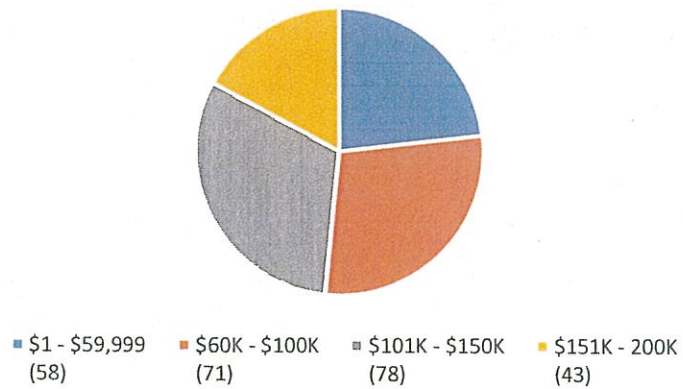
2014 Residential Sold by Selling Price



2015 Residential Sold by Selling Price



2016 Residential Sold by Selling Price



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Affordable Housing Survey:

The following report is reflective of the Wheeling WV – Affordable Housing Questionnaire and represents a total of 215 participants. The results of this survey are presented in an analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

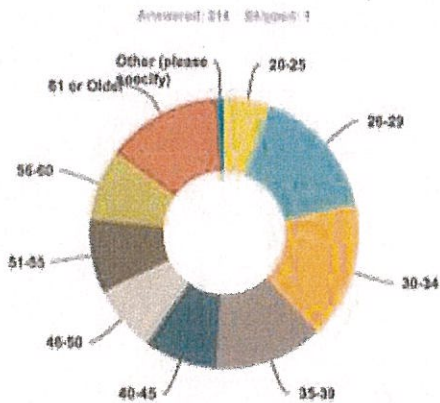
Summarization of Results

Question #1: In which type of housing do you currently live?

- Answered: 214 Participants
 - 16.36% – Apartment
 - 77.10% – Home
 - 3.74% – Duplex
 - 2.80% – Condominium

Question #2: Age Range of Participants

- Answered: 214 Participants



- 5.61% – 20-25 years
- 15.89% – 26-29 years
- 16.36% – 30-34 years
- 13.08% – 35-39 years
- 8.88% – 40-45 years
- 7.94% – 46-50 years
- 8.88% – 51-55 years
- 8.41% – 56-60 years
- 14.02% – 61-Older
- 0.93% – Other
-

Question #3: in what City/Town do you currently reside?

- 209 Responses of 215 Participants
 - 185 Participants – Wheeling, WV
 - 3 Participants – Benwood, WV
 - 3 Participants – Moundsville, WV
 - 3 Participants – Bethlehem, WV
 - 2 Participants – Cameron, WV
 - 1 Participant – Clearview, WV
 - 1 Participant – New Martinsville, WV
 - 1 Participant – New Cumberland, WV
 - 1 Participant – West Liberty, WV
 - 3 Participants – Shadyside, OH
 - 2 Participants – Bridgeport, OH

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- 2 Participants – Martins Ferry, OH
- 1 Participant – Bellaire, OH
- 1 Participant – St. Clairsville, OH

Question #4: Which of the following describes your current housing situation?

- Answered: 214 Participants
 - 64.02% – Homeowner
 - 24.77% – Renter
 - 6.54% – Living with others but not paying rent or mortgage
 - 4.67% – Living with others and assisting with paying rent or mortgage

Question #5: Are you currently satisfied with your living arrangements?

- Answered: 213 Participants
 - 59.62% – Yes
 - 40.38% – No

Question #6: If not, please tell us why?

- 99 Responses of 215 Participants – Lack of Satisfaction
 - 14.14% – Home/Apartment needs repairs beyond my means
 - 5.05% – Landlord won't make repairs
 - 4.04% – Property Value Fell
 - 0.00% – Foreclosure Concerns
 - 7.07% – Bad/Rude/Loud Neighbors
 - 2.02% – Crime in Neighborhood
 - 16.16% – Too Expensive
 - 51.52% – Other (See Attachments)

Question #7: What factors are most important to you when choosing your home or apartment?

- Answered: 212 Participants
 - 91.04% – Affordable
 - 16.04% – Close to bus/transit
 - 40.57% – Close to services
 - 42.45% – Close to shopping
 - 41.04% – Close to family/friends
 - 32.08% – Close to Schools
 - 25.00% – Close to health care facilities
 - 5.19% – I/We are disabled and require accessibility
 - 70.75% – Low Crime Rate
 - 55.66% – Preferred Neighborhood
 - 66.98% – Number of Bedrooms
 - 45.75% – Yard Size

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Question #8: Would you like to move from your current home or apartment? If so, please tell us why.

- Answered: 215 Participants
 - 0.47% – Yes
 - 39.53.09% – Yes
 - 60.00% – Yes, because... (See Attachments)

Question #9: What are the three main reasons you haven't moved yet?

- Answered: 161 Participants
 - 13.04% – Can't sell home
 - 41.61% – Can't afford to move
 - 58.39% – Can't find affordable place to live
 - 18.01% – Family resides here
 - 9.32% – Looking for employment
 - 11.80% – Family reasons
 - 38.51% – Other (See Attachments)

Question #10: If condos were available in Wheeling, would you be interested in purchasing one?

- Answered: 207 Participants
 - 34.30% – Yes
 - 65.70% – No

Question #11: Where would you like to see condo units for sale located?

- The following responses were counted by hand*
 - Elm Grove/Springdale: 11 participants*
 - Edgwood/Woodsdale/Fulton: 22 participants*
 - Warwood: 3 participants*
 - South Wheeling: 3 participants*
 - North Park: 1 participant*
 - Wheeling Island: 4 participants*
 - North Wheeling, East Wheeling, Downtown/Centre Market/River Views: 65 participants*

Question #12: What types of rules/restrictions would you want a condo association to enforce?

- Common restrictions entered by analysis of words used repeatedly.
 - Age
 - Appearance
 - Cleanliness
 - Noise
 - Pets
 - Security & Safety
 - Waste Disposal & Collection
 - Quiet Hours
 - Banning Illegal Drugs

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Question #13: Are you willing to park a block or more from your home?

- Answered: 211 Participants
 - 18.96% – Yes
 - 81.04% – No

Question #14: What is the ideal location for were you would like to live?

- The following responses were counted by hand*
 - Elm Grove/Springdale: 11 Responses*
 - Pleasanton/Dimmeydale: 8 Responses*
 - Edgwood/Woodsdale: 40 Responses*
 - Warwood: 7 Responses*
 - North Wheeling, East Wheeling, Downtown/Centre Market/River Views: 33 Responses*

Question #15: How long do you plan on living in your first home in Wheeling?

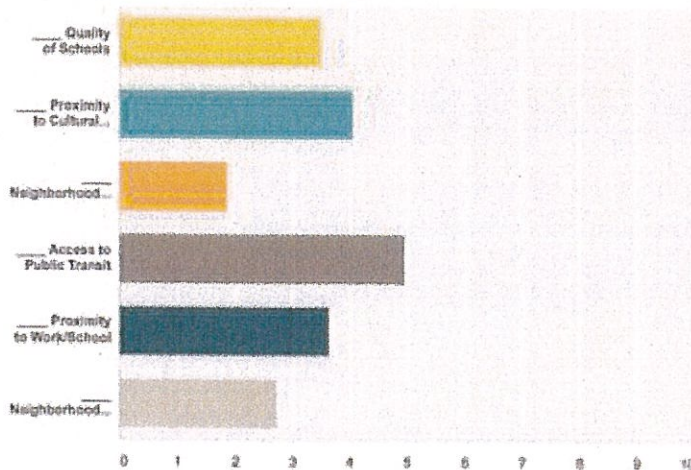
- 168 Reponses of 215 Participants – Time in First Home
 - The following responses were counted by hand*
 - Under 5 years: 7 Responses*
 - 5 years: 13 Responses*
 - 6-10 years: 16 Responses*
 - 11-15 years: 9 Responses*
 - 16-20+ years: 12 Responses*
 - Forever Home: 36 Responses*

Question #16: Please rate the importance of the following considerations when choosing a place to live.

- Answered: 207 Participants

Please rate the importance of the following considerations when choosing a place to live: (1-Not Very Important; 3-Neutral; 5-Very Important)

Answered: 40 Skipped: 5



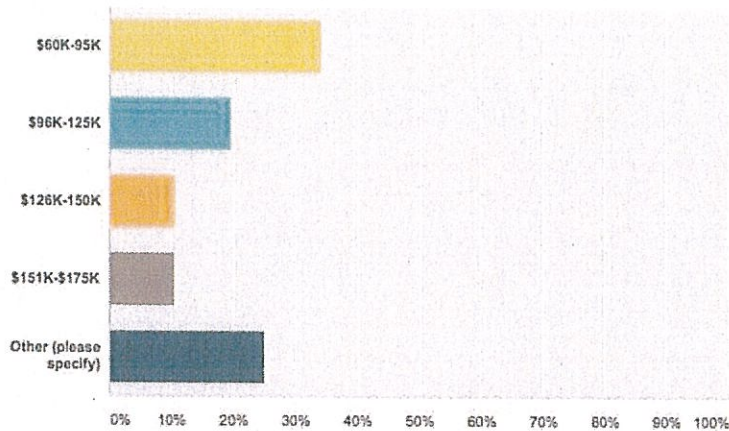
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Question #17: What is the ideal price range that you are seeking for a home?

- Answered: 191 Participants

What is the price range that you are seeking for a home?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 11



Question #18: Tell us your housing story. What are your greatest challenges?

- Answered: 137 Participants (See Attachments for additional housing stories)

"I am disabled. Finding something on one floor that had minimal steps was close to impossible. Lucked into a co-op in downtown Wheeling as a first floor unit became available. New construction here is non-existent. New apartments near the Highlands have no elevators. Wheeling is about 15 years behind reality." – Survey respondent, #1

"We are happily settled in Warwood now, but were frustrated in finding a starter home, or home that could be renovated to become a "forever" home in our price range. As we have a family, we were very concerned with a safe neighborhood, and initially focused our search in Elm Grove, Springdale and Woodsdale. Most of the houses under 120K in these neighborhoods required a ton of work and were overpriced for their state of repair. Once we widened our search to include Warwood, there were definitely more houses available that fit our criteria. Warwood is a nice, safe, walkable neighborhood for the most part, but I would like to see more shopping and dining options in the Warwood area." – Survey respondent, #31

"Husband is a medical student. Income is variable and mostly loans, plus we may move soon or we may not. We have to rent but it's so expensive" – Survey respondent, #34

"Finding quality homes." – Survey respondent, #52

"Steps, finding a place that permits pets, level lot" – Survey respondent, #59

"As a renter, finding a good landlord." Survey respondent, #62

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Question 19: Do you have any additional thoughts regarding housing in Wheeling?

“Would like to see historical restoration.” – Survey respondent, #47

“Yes, as more and more buildings are torn down, I'd like to see some kind of architectural commission have a say on the architecture of the replacement buildings, something tying together the architecture so that all the buildings tie together.” – Survey respondent, #56

“Houses in Wheeling cost more than houses in neighboring communities.” – Survey respondent, #64

Recommendation – Incentivize Development:

- **Expand Building Façade Improvement Program**

The committee applauds city council for reinstating the Building Façade Improvement Program. The previous program had benefited some of our most recognizable historic Wheeling buildings before ending after only five years. We understand the limited scope (Downtown; Chapline Row; Centre Market) of the current program maximizes the limited budgetary funds available. After gauging the success of the current program, we would urge city council to consider expanding the program into other existing historic districts within the city.

By expanding the areas where façade funds were available, additional historic districts may consider design review standards, thereby strengthening and preserving the historic character of our neighborhoods. These additional façade-funded districts could be rolled out over a yearly schedule or by specific areas or blocks within historic districts.

While the amount of funding is limited, these funds for roof or façade restoration could prove to be the deciding factor whether small developers or buyers choose to take on a vacant or dilapidated building.

- **Revolving Loan / Loan Guarantee Program**

Recently the Friends of Wheeling, a non-profit historic preservation organization within the city of Wheeling, launched a revolving loan fund that guarantees loans so that property owners and developers taking out a loan for restoration on a historic property can receive a lower interest rate than might otherwise be possible.

While the city offers an Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund through the Community Development Block Grant, we recommend the city to investigate the feasibility of creating a similar revolving loan fund to encourage restoration or redevelopment of housing properties for housing of low-to-moderate income city residents. This loan could be administered either through the city or through the Community Foundation for the Ohio Valley.

- **Future Revenue Backed Asset Bundling**

The committee recommends city council investigate the feasibility of a program focused on future revenue backed asset bundling. Such a program would take any monetary transactions done through the city that applies directly to property owners and turn it into an asset for the property owner to use for a qualified redevelopment loan. The city would agree not to collect the fees and the developer would be able to spend that money on development or renovation costs. This could be applied to a single property or portfolio of properties.

- **Tax Abatement / TIF Zones**

A number of cities have spurred new housing developments through implementing tax abatement or tax increment financing (TIF) zones. The committee would urge city council to investigate the feasibility of such abatement or TIF zones to spur pockets of re/development within the city of Wheeling. Some cities, such as Pittsburgh, have been able to leverage these TIF zones to rehabilitate and restore vacant, abandoned and dilapidated properties into new residential developments. Understandably Wheeling's limited size and tax base as compared to somewhere like Pittsburgh may not make this feasible.

- **City Assistance With Improved Utilities, Roads, Works**

Recently the City of Wheeling has made available infrastructure upgrades at a shared or reduced cost at several economic development projects within the city. The committee would urge the city to consider this strategy for any future housing re/development projects. Such upgrades, including water, sewer and roads, are beneficial not only to any new developments but are also to the neighboring property owners.

Recent media attention paid to the Manchester area has highlighted the possibilities associated with a new bridge or road into the area. Such an improvement would open a new area of the city to development and would likely alleviate Wheeling Hospital traffic at the Washington Avenue exit.

Recommendation – Improved Strategies for Vacant Buildings, Brownfields:

- **Revamp Strategy For Vacant, Dilapidated Buildings**

Since its inception Wheeling's vacant building registration program has met with some success, generating thousands in income each fiscal year and taking nearly 200 buildings off the list, either through demolition or reuse. Fees associated with the vacant building registry were last raised in the spring of 2015. As it stands, property owners would be assessed a fee of only \$500.00 for the first year vacant and \$1,000.00 for the second year. The fees continue to rise each year until the fifth year, where the fees plateau at \$4,000 plus an additional \$300 per year afterwards.

- 1 The first crucial years of being vacant or abandoned often decide whether a building can structurally or financially be brought back online. After being left vacant for an extended period of time, buildings can become health and safety hazards, as evidenced by recent façade collapses in both North Wheeling and Downtown, as well as havens for criminal activity.
- 1 Even still, property owners have expressed a feeling that the process is subjective rather than objective, and not consistent in enforcement. The committee would urge city council to consider reworking a strategy for the vacant property registry to encourage property owners to maintain and return vacant buildings to everyday use. This would include standardized definitions of what differentiates a building from being vacant (no one residing, no utilities connected, etc.) or merely dilapidated, as well as consistent enforcement across the board. Annual vacant property inspections, to be paid for by the property owner, would help to ensure that any imminent issues are recognized and addressed before becoming a significant safety or health hazard. To the extent necessary, an increased fee structure for vacant building registration could be considered to add incentive to repair or restore a building.
- 1 Frederick, Maryland is one example of a city with a similar building stock of historic, vacant, and out-of-code buildings that the city has been attempting to clean up and bring back to code through a Blighted and Vacant Property Committee. Were Wheeling to create a similar committee to address these issues, we would recommend the committee include local stakeholders, including realtors, landlords, as well as members of the Wheeling Historic Landmarks Commission and city council.

- **Work With Absentee Owners to Strategize Plans for Vacant Buildings**

The committee understands that a number of vacant or dilapidated structures within the city have absentee or out-of-town owners. These owners may not have the means or ability to actively market or rehabilitate properties from outside the area. They likewise may be unaware of imminent structural or security issues associated with their buildings.

The committee would recommend that city council investigate ways to work with absentee property owners to market or rehabilitate their property. Likewise, an annual inspection program could be instituted wherein absentee property owners pay a fee to the city for inspections of any imminent issues on their vacant property. This optional program would be a way for property owners to protect their investments.

- **Implement Demolition Review In Historic Districts**

In December 2016 city council held its first work session with the Wheeling Historic Landmarks Commission regarding demolition review in Wheeling's historic districts. The committee would urge city council to continue investigating the feasibility of implementing demolition review within our historic districts.

While this review is not designed to serve as a roadblock from keeping property owners from doing what they'd like with their buildings, including demolition, we must recognize that losing any structure within our historic districts greatly affects its neighbors in a number of ways, including the risk of de-designation, which threatens an owners ability to leverage grant funding or tax credits.

People visit Wheeling each year for the express purpose of studying and appreciating our significant stock of historical buildings. Some have even relocated to Wheeling for this explicit purpose. While not every building deserves to be saved, Wheeling has lost a number of buildings that could have been rehabilitated into residential or commercial use. The empty lots left after demolition – akin to "missing teeth – are more difficult to fill and are often left empty.

Demolition review will serve as a system of checks-and-balances to ensure demolition is not seen as the first and best option within our vital historic districts. Should a building be too far gone to rehabilitate, we would urge council to find a way to work with property owners or demolition and salvage companies to make any unique architectural elements available to local companies specializing in architectural salvage. While historic restoration seems to be a growing trend, local residents must travel to Pittsburgh or beyond, or find legacy building or architectural material online to restore their homes. As it stands, material from demolished buildings end up in Wheeling landfills when they could be used to restore Wheeling homes.

- **Continue / Expand City-Purchase Program to Hold for Re/Development**

Recent years have shown the benefits of a robust program of the city holding property for redevelopment. The most noticeable development would be The Health Plan site between Main and Market, but also an option on two Main Street properties by Domokur Architects of Akron, Ohio, and the exciting potential of the 1400 block of Market Street.

The committee would urge city council to continue and, to the extent available, expand this program. Without the commitment of city council a number of these viable buildings with terrific commercial and residential possibilities would have been demolished, while other buildings, such as G.C. Murphy and the former Posin's and Vocelli buildings that had no intrinsic or architectural value, were cleared to make way for new development.

Should the City Operations Center in the Clator neighborhood ever be relocated, that property would be attractive for new residential development with its proximity to Wheeling Hospital, Interstate 70 and shops/restaurants.

The committee would likewise urge city consider to consider the feasibility of redevelopment of infill and vacant land in North Wheeling; River Road between North Wheeling and Warwood; Downtown; East Wheeling; South Wheeling; and Elm Grove. Some locations lack proper infrastructure, which opens the door for cost-share upgrades (pg. 16) to make the area more attractive for developers.

Likewise, additional developable land exists in several areas along the outskirts of the city, though any future annexation must be the result of voluntary petition from property owners.

Local cities, including Morgantown and Weston, have leveraged grant funding to establish similar programs to acquire, market or demolish dilapidated or at-risk buildings.

- **Improved '\$1 Building Program'**

By all accounts the recent "\$1 Building Program" has been a success, as we see buildings at 1069 Main Street, 16th Street and Wood Street returning to functional commercial and residential use. The committee would urge the city to improve and expand this program to put city-owned parcels back into private ownership.

Beyond a handful of newspaper articles relating to the sale of these properties, there's nothing done to draw the attention of a passerby that the property may be had at a substantially reduced cost. Clever, colorful signage would help draw eyes towards the building. Perhaps city council could work with Friends of Wheeling to arrange tours of the properties, as well as the local Wheeling Young Preservationists group – known for their popular #Wheelove 'heart-bombing' campaign – to boost visibility of these buildings.

Social media is likewise a great resource to promote this program. Local realtors have recently been utilizing "Facebook Live" videos to offer interactive tours of several local buildings, one of which received more than 10,000 views.

- **Continue Brownfields Abatement, Redevelopment**

For nearly twenty years the city of Wheeling has been active in the abatement and redevelopment of brownfield properties within the city. A number of former commercial/industrial turned brownfield properties still exist within several of our city wards. Local cities to the north and south of Wheeling, such as Follansbee and Moundsville, are taking steps to redevelop their brownfields, while regionally Huntington, West Virginia has launched an ambitious multi-million dollar plan to redevelop their Highlawn Brownfields area.

The committee would urge city council to continue work with available CDBG and EPA funding, as well as collaboration with the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center and Wheeling's own Better Buildings Team to strategize redevelopment of these properties.

Recommendation – Improved Communication, Education:

- **Improved Information on City Website, Literature**

The committee applauds city council for moving forward with a complete revamp of the city website. How our city presents itself with a web presence is vital to attracting those outside our area to relocate to or invest in Wheeling.

The city's current website does include information on building codes, permits and inspections, as well as limited information on building and demolition within the city. Unfortunately this information is often hidden under tabs within various departments and can be difficult to locate. The committee recommends that this information be more accessible and more streamlined on the new website.

Additionally, it would be helpful if the new website would allow features such as booking an inspection online, or applying/paying for a building permit. It is not always convenient to make time during a work day to visit the city building, so having these features available from your home or desktop would be beneficial.

When one is building a new structure or remodeling an existing structure within the City of Wheeling, there are several vital steps necessary before starting the work. Determining the best option for financing, looking into if historical tax credits are available and exploring alternative funding options would be one of the first steps for an individual or developer. The next step prior to the actual build would be to obtain the proper permits, determine if your project is within the guidelines of the city code and determine the necessary inspection schedule for the project. All of this information is vital to a successful project and there is currently no easy way to find all of this information or someone that is able to sit down and properly direct one through the process.

In addition to an improved web presence and literature, the committee would also recommend city council to provide a "resource book" to guide users through the building and development process. This book would explain the steps must be taken; which city departments would be involved and their roles; and expected approval timelines through each step of the process.

- **Improved Education on Tax Credits**

Wheeling is a city made up of many forms of historical architecture, it's what makes Wheeling so unique and beautiful, but also what makes it costly and difficult to work with. Many of our buildings are out dated in their infrastructure and not up to basic code with sprinklers and egress. This makes it costly for renovations and repurposing. Over the years our once beautiful city has begun to look worn out and abandoned. The ability to repurpose our buildings and marry them with the current needs of our city in housing and business is one that could be met through the Historic Tax Credits.

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While the federal credit is at 20% the state of West Virginia is only at 10%. This puts Wheeling at a significant disadvantage. Our panhandle location between PA, whose tax credit is 25% and OH, also at 25% makes developers look toward our neighboring states due to cost effectiveness. When companies are looking to relocate or developers looking to renovate properties they will seek cities and towns with incentives that make what they are looking to do cost effective. A 25% return on investment is a significant return when paired with the federal. A developer would stand to receive back up to 45% of a project.

Developers are far more likely to take on large projects when a higher tax credit is given. The return on investment then becomes a large selling point in our historic properties.

Currently there is a bill before the state legislature to raise our tax credit. For Wheeling to move forward with providing housing and business locations for future development this increase is much needed. Without it the developers and business owners will continue to move to our neighboring states. Growth requires change and risk and this is certainly the change we need.

Education is key to tax credits. Although most people know that tax credits exist very few people are aware of how they work. Of those who are aware how they work even fewer are aware that they could sell them and earn money towards their renovation. Quarterly seminars would go a long way to educating the public both small building owners and large scale development investors. A booklet or brochure should be readily available to send to anyone that requests information and the names of consultants provided to assist people with the tax credits program. The more people are aware that programs like this exist the better they are informed as to why purchasing our current inventory of buildings is a both a great long term investment and a better answer then tearing down and starting over.

- **Investigate Creation of Public Information Officer Position**

A common theme throughout the discussions of this committee was the need for better communication, sources of information and educational resources for not only citizens of our community but also for developers. It was frequently expressed that there is confusion on where individuals need to go for things like permits, inspections and code information. Due to this confusion many individuals and developers become annoyed with the City and either complete their project with a bad taste in their mouth or choose to develop outside of the city limits.

When dealing with the City and obtaining the various pieces of necessary information and permits, one has to speak with multiple departments, taking more time than one would feel necessary. The addition of an Information Officer for the City to direct individuals and developers through this process (and many others) quickly would be a welcome addition and alleviate a lot of confusion.

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An Information Officer would be able to walk individuals and developers through the building or renovation process. This individual would be able to quickly, and efficiently, tell a developer the steps they need to take with the city, when they need to take them and the requirements of each step in the process. This would alleviate a lot of frustration and extra work on the person who is looking to invest in the City of Wheeling. The Information Officer could also be a resource for information on tax credits, developable land, city owned properties that need developed, and a variety of other material.

The Information Officer could also be utilized to market city owned or vacant properties to potential investors. With their knowledge of city codes and policies, they would be able to have productive conversations and provide valuable insight and guidance to someone looking to make an investment in Wheeling.

Recommendation – Investigate Feasibility, Need of Rental Permit / Inspection Program:

While the committee has primarily focused on owner-occupied property, we recognize that a significant number of Wheeling residents are renters. From stand-alone houses to large property developments, there are an estimated nearly 4000 multi-family units in the Wheeling market.

The Orrick listening session in October resulted in a number of respondents voicing their displeasure in the condition of available rental units in Wheeling. Likewise, nearly 20% of respondents in the affordable housing survey remarked that they were unsatisfied with living arrangements because their apartments need repairs beyond their means or that their landlord refused to make the repairs. From unsanitary to unsafe conditions, these concerns highlight the need for rental inspections in the city of Wheeling.

The committee would urge city council to investigate the feasibility of a rental permit or inspection program aimed at providing for:

- Safe, livable housing in the city of Wheeling
- Eliminating substandard living conditions
- Promoting standards for property maintenance
- Preserving the quality of Wheeling's neighborhoods

Rental inspections, which would be handled through the Economic and Community Development Department, could include a self-certification program and exemptions, and funds raised through fee schedules can offset the costs associated with instituting an inspection program.

There are a number of municipal rental inspection programs from which the framework could be borrowed to suit Wheeling's needs. Nearby cities with rental inspection programs include Morgantown, West Virginia; Bellaire, Ohio; and Washington, Pennsylvania. The committee would recommend looking at the successes or failures of these and other municipal rental inspection programs before committing city resources.

Recommendation – Establish Permanent Housing Committee:

For the first time in many decades, Wheeling is experiencing highly visible growth – new construction; restoration of existing structures; new businesses and restaurants. More people are working in downtown Wheeling than at any time in its history. Wheeling is primed and poised for continued growth and development. To that effect, it became very apparent very early on that the issues surrounding a lack of affordable, mid-range housing for the current and anticipated growth could not be solved by a short-term, ad hoc committee. It is therefore our recommendation that City Council investigate the appropriateness of instituting a permanent Housing Committee.

This committee, comprised of stakeholders within the city of Wheeling, would work hand-in-hand with the Economic and Community Development Department existing city committees to address long-range policies involving the creation, preservation or rehabilitation of housing within the city of Wheeling, included but not limited to:

- Draft a comprehensive housing strategy
- Proactively work with property owners and housing developers
- Develop new programs as relating to housing
- Other duties as assigned by the mayor and city council