

# A Higher Sense OF PURPOSE



REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY 2020





# A Higher Sense OF PURPOSE

## Table of Contents

Fighting for Chester's Future	4
A Higher Sense of Purpose	5
Providing Essential Services	6
Building Community	7
Ruth Bennett Community Farm	8
Housing Choice Voucher Program	10
In Memoriam	10
Organizing for Good	11
Housing Stability Program	11
Chester Housing Authority In the News	12
By the Numbers	13
Energy Cost Savings Program	13
Organizational Chart	14

# Fighting for Chester's Future.



I often say, in both formal speeches and addresses as well as in everyday discussions with residents, that “teamwork makes the dream work.” While simple, the phrase and its essence stand firm. Unless we all work together, our dream of making Chester a vibrant, safe and welcoming city for folks to live in will be impossible to achieve.

Given what we faced in 2020, teamwork has never been more important and necessary. Yet it is also increasingly difficult to achieve, as the pandemic means we all have to remain in our own safe bubbles as best as possible. But as usual, Chester and its formidable institutions like the Chester Housing Authority (CHA) have risen to the challenge.

I have always been grateful for CHA’s leadership and their drive to provide quality, safe and affordable housing for Chester’s low- and middle-income residents. But CHA’s work has never been more important.

In the spring, when health experts informed us that the safest place for us and our family members was our homes, thousands of Chester residents could feel protected and comfortable thanks to CHA properties.

Beyond housing, CHA continued to adapt and foster an environment that is conducive to healthy lifestyles. Their biweekly distribution of free fresh food was a lifeline to many who were both frightened to travel to grocery stores and feeling new financial burdens. And their new *Building Community* series is not only informing residents of important health, civic and community information, but also

keeping folks connected during a time of physical isolation. I feel fortunate to live and serve in a city where so many rallied around each other and did what they could to minimize the unnecessary trials and tribulations, and the assurance of CHA’s steadfast service and stewardship proved important for a city like ours.

As we step into 2021, perhaps with both hope and trepidation, I look forward to working with organizations like CHA to continue to fight for Chester’s future. I know the road to recover what we’ve lost in this time will not be easy. But if we all come together and work as a team, as I’ve seen so many do these past few months, I know we will be okay.

And certainly, if we have organizations like CHA helping to lead the way, our city and its residents are in good hands.

**Thaddeus Kirkland, Mayor**



# A Higher Sense Of Purpose.



2020. That's all one really needs to say for a report of the year. Everyone will recall in vivid detail what surpassed. How their lives were upended—personal and work. But an annual report memorializes the year, and I'm not looking for an excuse to take the year off.

Every year, when scripting the title of our annual report, we attempt to tie it to an apt phrase that characterizes that year. When Voucher Program Director Mary Militello reported on her staff's laudable response to adversity, she said they had reached for "a higher sense of purpose." That line struck a chord with me, and I have repeated it in my own reporting about the Housing Authority. Because it is true. That is what our people did to not only cope, but ensure our strong work continued.

Housing business aside, let's start with what 2020 will be known for— a global health crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. After a normal first half of our fiscal year, July-December 2019, we were full-force into revamping operations by March 2020. As unemployment was an early effect of the crisis, we quickly reminded residents and voucher holders they were safe on rent and implored them to promptly notify us of job losses or hours reductions. Through it all, we worked with residents to adjust payment plans as needed.

As is always the case when crises hit, weak spots in the usual course of things stand out. Economic and social injustice reared their ugly heads to those who don't notice them every day. As an organization, we made a cognizant decision to participate in the public dialogue

that took hold and gained strength as the pandemic rolled on. I emphasized this in my June 2020 address to staff. I believe workers should have a say and a stake in what their employer stands for.

This report includes department rundowns that reflect adjustments made due to COVID-19. Many took their offices home in accordance with governmental direction. Many others continued to report physically due to the nature of their jobs, since you can't respond to maintenance emergencies or police neighborhoods from home. These are our in-house frontline heroes, and we so appreciate the continuing risk they take to keep others comfortable and safe at home.

Communication is key in times of crisis. We did our best to keep residents and staff fully aware of changing norms, corresponding via daily emails for the first few months. In April we rolled out the *Building Community* online video series, which continues to reach residents, staff and community members.

The CHA Board of Housing Commissioners are appointed by the mayor, reside in the City of Chester, and are long on experience and training. I applaud them, as they have continued to monitor our performance during this turbulent time. Their support and guidance— along with the sense of community that continued to shine through our residents, staff and community— bolstered us as we sought a higher sense of purpose.

**Steven A. Fischer, Executive Director**



## Providing Essential Services



This year our work of providing safe and affordable housing took on a new meaning. Demand for CHA housing remains high, especially in a city hit simultaneously by high poverty and a pandemic. We admitted 47 households into CHA properties – 19 of those housed during the initial statewide shutdown in response to COVID-19.

The Maintenance staff conducted safe inspections, repairs and installations throughout this time. A special example came from our work with Keystone First Community Health

Choices, which helped complete a home modification for one of our tenants who can no longer safely use her staircase.

Along with providing safe spaces during this time, CHA also did its part to help residents participate in the 2020 election. We held two voter registration drives at the William Penn Homes and assisted residents with their Census forms.

CHA developed a new plan to modernize 65 units of housing at the Ruth L. Bennett Homes. The modernization work will begin February 2021 and continue through Fall 2023.

CHA's police department continues to protect and serve residents as they spent more time in their homes due to the pandemic. Officers fielded and responded to over 15,600 calls this year. In addition, CHA now has a CHA police officer living on-site as a community policing initiative. Finally, sitewide security camera installation at Wellington Ridge is on schedule. This will be the second CHA development to have this level of protection.



# Building Community

CHA launched the online informational series *Building Community* in April 2020 to rapidly respond to the social isolation impacts of the novel coronavirus. Faced with an unfamiliar landscape of radical health recommendations, limited in-person contact and widespread community confusion, CHA organized an effective mode to communicate its messages to residents, business partners and the community at large. *Building Community* was the answer.

Executive Director Steve Fischer and Project Coordinator Ulysses "Butch" Slaughter framed conversations, scheduled guests and hosted a range of engaging forums focused on everything from health to fatherhood to voting and social justice via Zoom. After only six months in production, the video series was awarded Special Districts 2020 Technology Innovation Award from AT&T and Government Technology Magazine.

What started out as a quick response to a rapidly changing world has become a staple in the everyday CHA way of doing business. In the months ahead, *Building Community* plans to incorporate skills trainings, game shows and food demonstrations, among other engaging topics.





## Ruth Bennett Community Farm

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ruth Bennett Community Farm began distributing free fresh produce boxes in April. CHA has given out 200 boxes containing 10 pounds of food each at 16 distributions, for an average of 32,000 pounds of produce—an increase of 12,000 pounds of food over last season. Many families and housebound seniors have relied on these boxes as their source of fresh produce during quarantine.

The farm sold an average of 60 bouquets a week from June to October through Philly Foodworks, an online farmers market that distributes local produce to the Philadelphia region. This was an increase from 20 bouquets a week the previous year due to higher demand for online shopping and local produce.

The farm had six youths participate in its Youth Crew program, three of whom returned from last season. Youths assisted with planting, watering, harvesting and produce box distributions all season. They also went on educational

field trips to inform their work experience. In addition, four adult mentors received stipends to assist with the farm stand and with youth programming this season. Aside from receiving supplemental income, these adult mentors also continue to learn agricultural skills, serve as excellent role models to the youths, and positively engage the community around health and wellness.

A highlight of the season was when Grammy-winner and Chester native Jahlil Beats visited the farm and interacted with the youths. CHA also welcomed back U.S. Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon to the farm for the second year in a row as part of her tour to promote local community gardens and farmers markets.

As part of ongoing infrastructure improvements, in March CHA installed pedestrian-friendly deer fencing around the 2-acre farm site, which has helped save hundreds of pounds of crops.





## Thank You to Our Bennett Farm Funders & Partners

### Funders

Foundation for Delaware County  
Leo & Peggy Pierce Foundation  
Patricia Kind Foundation  
PA Department of Agriculture

### Partners

Food Moxie  
Philly Foodworks  
The Food Trust  
The Common Market  
Youthworks  
The Hicks Foundation  
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society  
Greener Partners  
East Park Revitalization Alliance





## Providing Housing, Saving Lives

CHA continued to place families in new housing during the shutdown through its Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP). HCVP Program Director Mary Militello likened this to saving lives, as getting families into safe housing where they could quarantine was vital, especially during the beginning of the pandemic.

For the 13th consecutive year, CHA’s HCVP achieved HUD’s high-performer status. Through nearly two decades of consistent outreach, CHA has expanded housing, employment and educational opportunities for program participants, and more than a third of CHA voucher holders live in lower poverty neighborhoods.

In March, CHA received funding for new vouchers—the first time in 18 years – through the Mainstreaming Persons With Disabilities Program. Despite the COVID-19 shutdown, 27 of the Mainstream vouchers are under contract with the remaining six expected to contract shortly. CHA also provided housing services to 13 incoming portable households from other jurisdictions. In addition, the HCVP continued to maintain high utilization levels with 170 families processed from the waiting list for tenant-based vouchers from the February 2019 lottery.

Now in its second year, CHA’s Rent Collection Service for HCVP owners has collected and disbursed more than

\$208,000, saving owners time in rent collections. As a result of this program, there have been only two evictions due to nonpayment of rent since 2018. The online payment feature was especially important during the pandemic.

CHA continues to provide homeownership opportunities through its HCVP Homeownership Option. Three qualified HCVP households were referred to the Chester Community Improvement Project’s First-Time Homebuyer Education Classes this year, with one closing on a house. Through the voucher program, CHA also supported the Riverfront Alliances’ new construction of four first-time homeownership units on Arbor Lane, promoting new investment in the City of Chester.

As part CHA’s COVID-19 response and ongoing effort to support healthy lifestyles and in partnership with Betty Dorsey, a HCVP program participant and co-owner of AGD Manna Cleaning Services, CHA launched a housekeeping guide entitled Ready, Set, Go! Action Plan to a Clutter Free and Healthy Home Environment. In a time when infection control is paramount, Ready, Set, Go! provides practical cleaning tips for the home. In addition to improving health outcomes, good housekeeping reduces repair costs, promotes community reinvestment in rental assistance programs and helps maintain property values.



Ella Thompson



Dolores Walker

## In Memoriam

Speaking at Ella Thompson’s funeral service, Executive Director Steve Fishcer said “CHA does not let it’s heroes go quietly ...” Indeed, lost but not forgotten this year were three giants who were pivotal in CHA’s transformation. Ella Thompson was honored in 2018 as one of the four heroes who sparked the lawsuit leading to CHA’s judicial receivership, which led to the necessary staffing and operational changes that helped make CHA the nationally accredited authority it is today. She was memorialized beautifully in an emotional February 2020 service largely attended by the many she fought for and guided at the William Penn housing development. In August, two more stalwarts in CHA history—Gonzella “Gonnie” Hales and Dolores Walker—passed on as well. They are sorely missed but their good works and spirit live on.



Photo Credit: Greg Irvin

## Organizing for Good

In January 2020 CHA celebrated the life's work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by expanding the community intervention campaign "Bag It, Chester." Initiated by CHA in October 2019, Bag It is an innovative health and education campaign aimed at eliminating single-use plastic bags. Honoring the work of the civil rights icon, CHA used the initiative to organize one of the larger volunteer efforts in Chester's recent history.

The event, titled "Reclaiming Chester's King," was intended to reconnect Chester with King's commitment to large-scale mobilization. With financial support from more than two dozen local businesses including Power Home Remodeling,

Covanta, MOR, Chester Made, the Chester Education Foundation and the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, CHA designed and printed more than 3,000 orange-and-black reusable bags that featured King's image.

CHA then partnered with local nonprofits, universities, colleges, faith-based groups and individuals to help with the massive distribution effort. Volunteers from more than 20 groups including Penn State Brandywine, Widener University, West Chester Friends and Team MAC gathered to execute a door-to-door operation that inspired all in attendance.

## Housing Stability Program

A partnership between CHA and The Foundation for Delaware County, the Housing Stability Program provides participants in the Foundation's Healthy Start and Nurse-Family Partnership programs with assistance and support in accessing affordable housing provided through CHA. Each year we provide up to 10 housing choice vouchers and 10 public housing units to clients of the Foundation's home-visiting programs, with the goal of providing supportive case management services and safe, healthy, and affordable housing in order to improve birth outcomes and the quality of life for the whole family, while at the same time reducing eviction rates.

Program participants, who are usually younger families, have the support of case managers, nurses, health educators, social workers, and lawyers as they navigate their time in public housing.

The project received support in November 2019 from the Pennsylvania Department of Economic Development (DCED) and was recognized by the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies (PAHRA) as an exceptional example of nonprofits combining resources to deliver enhanced service.



# Chester Housing Authority *In the News*



## **DAILY TIMES**

**Three win scholarships from Chester Housing Authority**



**Chester Housing Authority and Everest Urgent Care Partner to Provide Rapid Result Testing Sites for Residents**



## **The Philadelphia Inquirer**

**Chester woman who survived cancer, a house fire, and husband's accident now uses cleaning to help others**



## **DAILY TIMES**

**Scanlon pays visit to Bennett Community Farm**

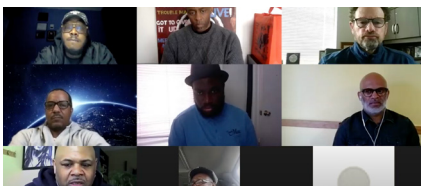


## **The SPIRIT**

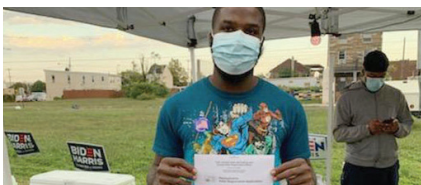
**Learn to CODE for FREE in Chester**



**Bennett Homes food distribution is a success**



**My first ZOOM call was 'Fathers Are Talking'**



## **The SPIRIT**

**CHA Holds Voter Registration Event**

# Chester Housing Authority *By the Numbers*

<b>ASSETS</b>	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$1,080,924
Cash, restricted	\$2,886,764
Accounts Receivable, net	\$611,796
Prepaid expenses	\$30,812
Assets held for sale	\$7,962
Capital Assets, net	\$28,557,485
Notes Receivable	\$26,209,067
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$59,384,810</b>

<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Administrative Costs	\$2,696,322
Resident Services	\$155,450
Utilities	\$1,422,902
Maintenance	\$3,110,534
Protective Services	\$862,843
Insurance Premiums	\$543,570
General Costs	\$1,781,854
Housing Assistance Payments	\$14,633,450
Depreciation and Amortization	\$2,578,029
Interest Expense	\$56,314
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$27,841,268</b>
<b>NET INCOME (LOSS)</b>	<b>\$(1,662,674)</b>

<b>LIABILITIES</b>	
Accounts Payable	\$581,879
Accrued Compensated Absences	\$558,825
Other Liabilities and Accruals	\$671,415
Notes Payable, capital projects	\$1,504,299
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$3,316,418</b>

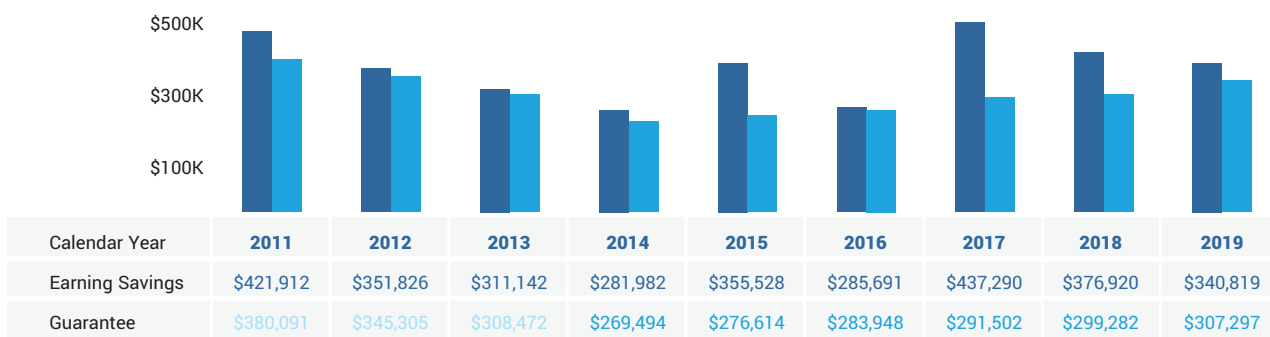
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	
Invested in Capital Assets	\$27,053,186
Restricted Net Assets	\$28,842,245
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$172,961
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$56,068,392</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$59,384,810</b>

<b>REVENUE</b>	
Federal Assistance (table below)	\$22,386,565
Rental Income	\$2,444,361
Interest Revenue	\$26,556
Other Revenue	\$1,321,112
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$26,178,594</b>

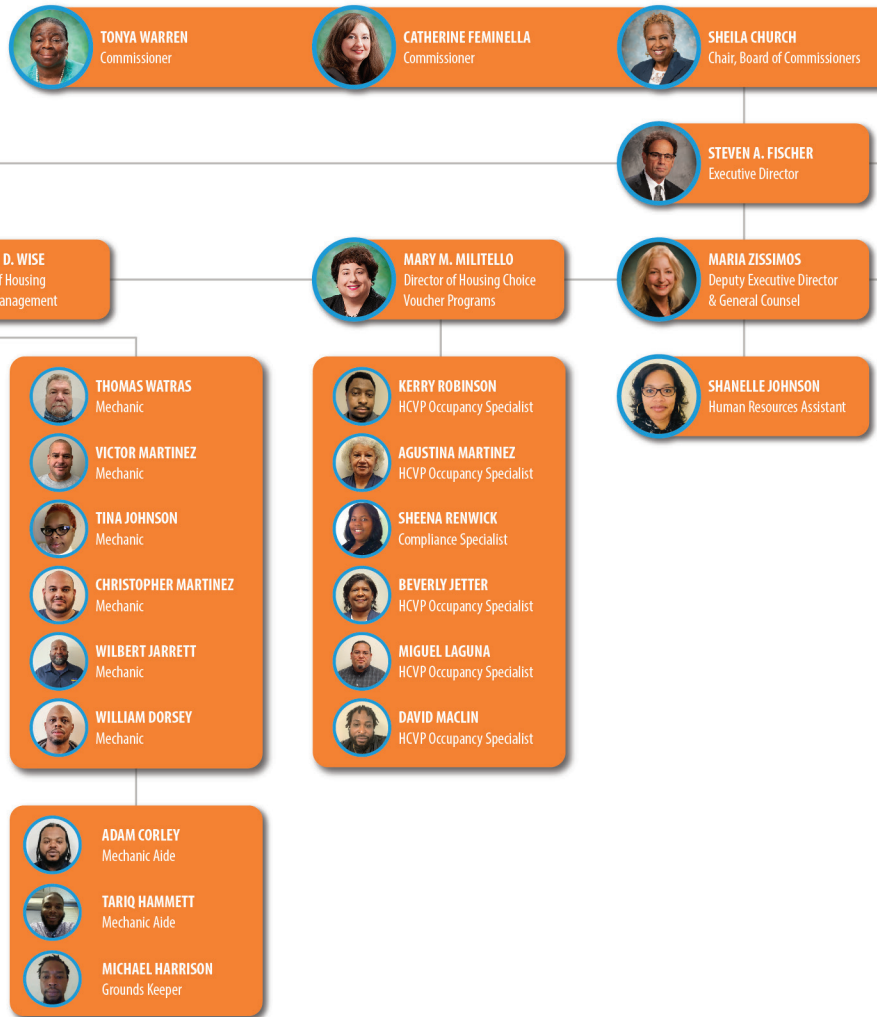
<b>GRANT &amp; SUBSIDY SCHEDULE</b>	
HUD Public Housing Operating Subsidy (CY)	\$4,339,154
HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program (FY)	\$15,498,431
HUD Capital Fund Program	\$2,548,980
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$22,386,565</b>

## ENERGY COST SAVINGS PROGRAM

CHA saved another \$340,819 in energy costs in 2019, bringing total savings to more than \$3.5 million since 2010 when CHA initiated an energy performing contract. This is an innovative approach for housing authorities to finance costly but sorely-needed modernization. CHA's energy performance contract included major infrastructure upgrades to plumbing and heating systems, resulting in significant utility savings. Thanks to HUD's investment for underwriting the work, the program continues to pay dividends.



# Chester Housing Authority Organizational Chart



**RODERICK POWELL**  
Commissioner

**SUSIE KIRKLAND**  
Commissioner

**QUINEKE HARRIS**  
Executive Assistant

**ROMAN KUBAS**  
Chief Financial Officer

**ANTHONY PALMER**  
Senior Accountant

**CRYSTAL HARRISON**  
Accountant

**DEBARAH SMITH**  
Accountant

**RODNEY O'NEILL**  
Chief of Police  
MIS Director

**LOUIS DEMARCO**  
Administrative Assistant/MIS  
Technician

**BONNIE DOWNS**  
Reception

**LABARBARA BRONSON**  
Dispatch Supervisor

**CHRISTINE WHITE**  
Dispatcher

**RAYMOND MORRIS**  
Dispatcher

**TIMOTHY LANGILLE**  
Dispatcher

**CURTIS COOPER**  
Dispatcher

**EBONEE DANDRIDGE**  
Dispatcher

**ALMEIDA DODSON**  
Dispatcher

Security Monitors  
**STANLEY CARR**  
**LINDA DEMARCO**  
**MABEL HARRIS**  
**ANNA MACK**  
**SHANNON PARKER**

**JOHN FETZER**  
Lieutenant

**WILLIAM COOPER**  
Corporal

**ROBERT JONES**  
Officer

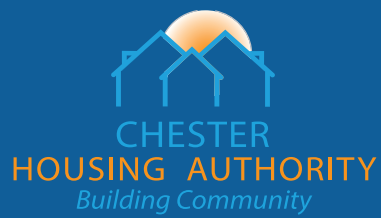
**BRIAN REESER**  
Officer

**ULYSSES SLAUGHTER**  
Special Projects

**ELISE CORBETT**  
Communications



**CHESTER**  
**HOUSING AUTHORITY**  
*Building Community*



1111 Avenue of the States  
Chester, Pennsylvania 19013

610.904.1111

[chesterha.org](http://chesterha.org)

## Board of Commissioners

Sheila Church

Tonya D. Warren

Catherine A. Feminella

Roderick T. Powell

Susie Kirkland

