



# CHESTER HOUSING AUTHORITY RISING

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY 2016



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## Rising Tides - Message from the Board Chair and Executive Director

Almost two years out of Receivership, the CHA turned in another solid year. The basic indicators of successful performance showed upward movement. The programs we offer residents beyond housing also continued to improve. The trends moved higher by virtually all measurements.

Families come to assisted housing to get their feet on the ground. A stable living environment, solid roof overhead and affordable rent make for a good foundation on which to build a better life. The two parts of life most affected positively tend to be education and employment.

In Fiscal 2016, we had good results with both. Family income rose nine percent, consistent with numbers reported by Delaware County for the same period. If that was simply the result of an improving overall economy, then our residents shared in that good fortune. On the education side, we instituted computer learning classes for youth as an addition to our summer meals program. Because the program was so well received and attended, we decided to continue with it as an after-school activity. At the same time, our community agricultural and health movements grew by leaps and bounds. Not only have those ventures been educational but they began generating revenue this year as well. Even our federal ratings rose this year. In both Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher program we received our highest scores ever.

On the development front, we found suitors for the Highland Avenue site. After a decade of attempts at attracting commercial development on the 12.3-acre site, we made deals with two entities, subdivided the parcel and construction is underway for the Chester Charter School for the Arts and a Dollar General store. A shout-out to Chester Mayor Thaddeus Kirkland is in order here. As state representative, Kirkland was our staunch supporter over the years in trying to lure a supermarket to the city. Prior to his taking office as Mayor, we presented him with a revised strategy for the site including a proposal for the school. Not only did he support it, he delivered a unanimous City Council.

With more than \$2.5 million added to our development coffers as a result of the land deals, we look forward to looming projects to push tides even higher in the coming years.



*Sheila Church*  
**Board Chair**



Mayor Thaddeus Kirkland (left),  
Steven A. Fischer (right)

*Steven A. Fischer*  
**Executive Director**



## If You Build It They Will Come

The former site of a CHA development on Highland Avenue, vacant for several years, was put back into service in 2016 with the sale to the Chester Charter School for the Arts (CCSA) and Dollar General. Construction is underway on what will soon become home to a beautiful new K-12 school. Hundreds of CHA households near the school will have access to a state of the art building and grounds with a convenience store alongside.

At the June groundbreaking ceremony, Executive Director Steven Fischer was joined by Mayor Thaddeus Kirkland and school officials in signalling a brighter day for Chester children.



“The Chester Housing Authority is proud to have found the right buyer for this real estate,” Fischer said in his remarks to the overflow crowd. “This 12-plus acres of land, on which we stand today, has always had the potential to be the anchor of the most densely populated section of Chester – its West Side. It has been well documented that various ideas and themes have been strategized for this site along what has seemed like a long journey at sea. The ship has landed and a school shall be the anchor.”



CCSA, which now has its campus outside of Chester but serves the Chester-Upland school district’s children, is the top-performing school in the district, based on state testing results. It also boasts a 96 percent attendance rate. The new building will allow CCSA to expand to include high school.

The Chester Housing Authority could not be more pleased that the developer of its land will occupy the space to educate the next generations – today’s children.



## Bennett Farm Expands

**The Ruth Bennett Community Farm** has grown into a functional urban farm over the past two growing seasons. Nearly 2,400 pounds of produce has been raised and distributed, serving hundreds from the community through direct marketing, programming and events.

Terrence Topping-Brown manages the farm and its programming, with a lot of help from residents in the community, students from high schools and area colleges and the Hicks Foundation. The effort has made a significant impact toward developing a sustainable food system in Chester.

The space is home to a diverse abundance of agricultural products and an aquarium with frogs and fish. The fruit trees are established and a bountiful crop of blueberries is produced in June.

This intergenerational community of learners and teachers are exchanging knowledge about wellness. Elders are served dishes by 10 year old chefs who pick from the garden. They chop and sauté as they have been shown by educators during programs over the course of the season.

Children paint, mold clay and explore the garden with props made from cardboard and other scraps laying around, exercising their imaginations. Hands-on introduction to agriculture keeps the work on the farm distributed and empowers the youth by seeing change happen right in front of their eyes as they fill buckets with saved seed from okra and basil. Beds are manicured from messy to neat and organized spaces after several hours of weeding in the summer sun.

Soil gets put into beds and young builders lend a hand with drilling and cutting for construction projects. A new generation of growers, educators, scientists and engineers are learning inside “The Bennett.”

Members of the community have begun to meet to explore ways to increase participation, organize existing resources, and identify needs that are unmet. Through cooperative exchange we are exploring ways to build wealth in Chester for its people today and future generations.

To address wellness, we built a mobile market cart to use at events to sell produce and flowers, do healthy cooking demonstrations and provide information.

This year, the farm served a total of **1,195** people. We continue to educate ourselves by looking at other sustainable models and best practices in the urban agriculture world to improve our space and transfer that technology to our students.



## Looking Up

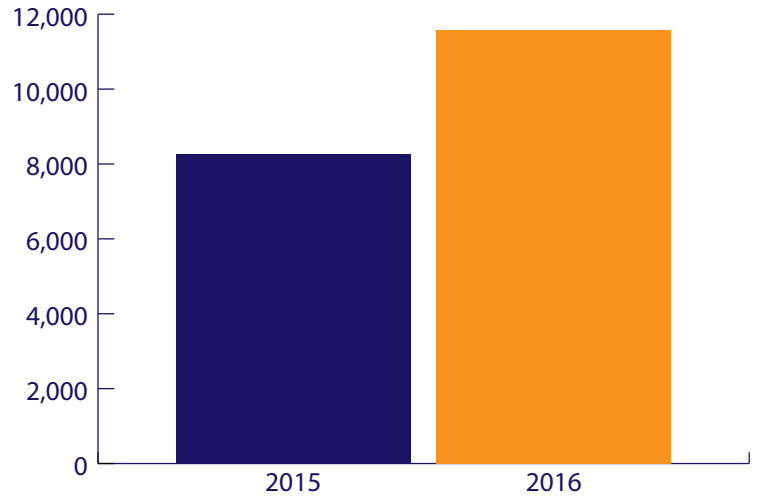
For residents living in CHA communities 2016 was a year of moving up. The average CHA household earned more money, an increase of 9 percent.

The increase in revenue is part of trend in which incomes in Delaware County moved higher after years of stagnation. Because rent is based on 30 percent of household income the increase in earning also means more funds for the housing authority to provide services. **Rent collected increased by \$97,000.**

Also moving up were federal scores for management. The Public Housing Assessment System score climbed from 81 last year to an 84 this year.

**The number of families moving into CHA housing also increased from 42 last year to 57 this year. Families use Chester public housing as a springboard; move in, move up, move out.**

### Average Household Income (Working Families) Comparison



**2015 Average Household Income = \$8,254**  
**2016 Average Household Income = \$11,584**

## Energy Savings

Chester Housing Authority continues to reap the benefits of energy savings through a cooperative arrangement with HUD, which lent CHA \$2.8 million to finance costly but needed modernization. The upgrades ranged from replacing old fashioned light bulbs with modern bulbs to major infrastructure improvements to plumbing and heating systems.

CHA has now made great progress in "repaying" the grant through energy savings since 2010. **As of the end of 2015, the agency realized a cumulative total savings of \$2,029,119.**



**Total Savings = \$2,029,119**

# Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Chester Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) achieved high performer status for the eighth consecutive year under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 8 Management Assessment Program, scoring 97 percent, our highest score ever.

## Utilization

There was a 35 percent increase in lease-ups in FY 2016, with 367 households contracting new units as compared to 239 in the previous year. A tenant survey was sent to recent lease-ups and 100% indicated satisfaction with their homes and landlords.

Leasing goals could not be met without the landlords who provide decent, safe, and sanitary units. New owner participation increased 5 percent this year, with 32 new owners/investors.



## New Initiative: Homeless Set-Aside Vouchers

In keeping with national goals to end homelessness, the CHA executed a memorandum of understanding with the Delaware County Department of Behavioral Health to provide referrals and case management to homeless households. The CHA received 18 referrals from Behavioral Health and the Delaware County Community Action Agency.

## Moving to Opportunity

CHA continues to meet its de-concentration goals by encouraging housing opportunities in lower poverty areas. This year, 186 households with children moved with 64 of them finding housing in lower poverty neighborhoods. This represents 34 percent of all mover families with children.



## Household Demographics

The HCVP serves more than 1,500 very low and extremely low income households in the City of Chester and surrounding communities. The CHA's Housing Choice Voucher Program has earned the trust and esteem of the clients it serves. As stated by one of our HCVP landlords, "the CHA is a stabilizing force in the City of Chester."

## Achieving the American Dream

Two HCVP participants became homeowners during this reporting period. **Since the Homeownership program started in 2014, 25 former participants have become homeowners, including Ebone Butler and Family.** Housing program participants may use their housing subsidy towards a mortgage, provided they meet credit and employment requirements to obtain a mortgage.

*"The Chester HCV program does in fact have key managerial controls in place and that the core functions of the HCV program appear to be operating quite well. This has been accomplished through a combination of knowledgeable, experienced housing professionals at the Authority along with effective contractors and technology."*



## Community Services

### “Finding Home: The Ruth L. Bennett Story”

To mark the 100th anniversary of the Great Migration of 6 million African Americans from the South, and in particular those who landed in Chester, the Chester Housing Authority produced a documentary telling the story of Ruth L Bennett, who devoted her life to helping women and children from an 1880s-era house, which served as a safe haven. CHA residents and staff participated in the making of the film. CHA’s largest development is named for Bennett. Special thanks to CHA residents Deborah Montgomery, Jonathan Whittington and Emerson Hughes for their work on the film.



### Healthier You

Encouraging residents to lead physically active lifestyles is important at the CHA. This year’s Healthier You conference – held in Philadelphia - was designed to boost attendees’ journey to health. The conference featured a full-day of interactive events, including workshops on the hottest health topics such as stress, weight loss, detox, behavior change and more. Attendees also participated in demos of kickboxing, stretching, and yoga given by fitness trainers. Two-hundred people attended the conference, including 20 CHA residents and staff members.

### Summer Food Program

CHA operated its summer food service program for the third consecutive year in 2016, providing hot breakfast and lunch to Chester children for the summer months, at its three community centers: the William Penn Homes; the Ruth L. Bennett Homes; and the Booker T. Washington Community Center.

CHA served 6,860 meals in 2016 and over 5,700 meals in 2015. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture conducted its review of our program and noted that CHA is in full compliance with program regulations.

CHA opened its newly refurbished computer labs during meal times. The agency also expanded this program to include after school snack/dinner to continue to serve the children of Chester year round.

CHA introduced computer coding lessons as a new part of its summer food program geared especially toward elementary school children. Children left the summer food program and went directly to the CHA computer labs, where college interns introduced the Hour of Code curriculum from code.org to the children.



Housing Director Norman Wise mixes it up with computer whizzes.

### Fire Safety

CHA rolled out a new fire prevention tool for residents’ kitchens, FIRESTOP. The FIRESTOP product is placed over the stove and automatically goes off when there is a grease fire or the temperature reaches a combustible temperature on the stovetop. This product prevents fire damage to the kitchen area and forestalls the fire sprinklers from igniting and causing further damage to the home and any adjacent homes.

CHA also partnered with the Chester City Fire Department to sponsor a Fire Prevention and Awareness Training and Certification Program for residents. This is a bi-annual training which provides the participating residents with a Fire Awareness Certification. This training is provided in October during National Fire Prevention Month. The training assists the CHA in educating its residents and preventing negligent fires that can be avoided through awareness of the pitfalls of certain avoidable behavior.



## Public Safety

The Chester Housing Police Department (CHPD) put on its thinking cap in a big way this year. Chief Rodney O'Neill led strategy sessions on the incremental design and placement of surveillance equipment around our properties. He also instituted a system for the issuance of Debarment Orders. Individuals known to the CHPD as non-residents with criminal intentions are now cited as trespassers. Biographical data and their photograph are posted and these individuals can be arrested for being seen on our property. The program has experienced immediate success and residents have expressed their satisfaction.

The Department handled nearly 15,000 service calls for the year. Officers also supported Chester City police by resuming the writing of parking tickets, issuing more than 200.

## Risk Management

CHA's Office of General Counsel continues to ensure that residents comply with all regulations and that CHA's resources are protected. The agency has been cited in each of the last several years by its insurance provider for the low number and value of claims. There are currently no new pending coverage matters, but three notices of claim.

The agency continues to use an arbitration system with a Special Master and an Appeals Judge to oversee eviction cases. Twenty evictions were ordered in 2016, nine carried out.



*"Ongoing, community-wide crime statistics detail a decrease in crime on public housing properties. Contributing to the decrease is the dedication of the CHA Police Department."*

# Chester Housing Authority in the Media

It pays to read

## The SPIRIT

Serving Delaware County



**Thumbs Up For CHA a Year After Court Ends Oversight  
FEDS Say Public Housing Works Well in Chester**

December 5, 2015



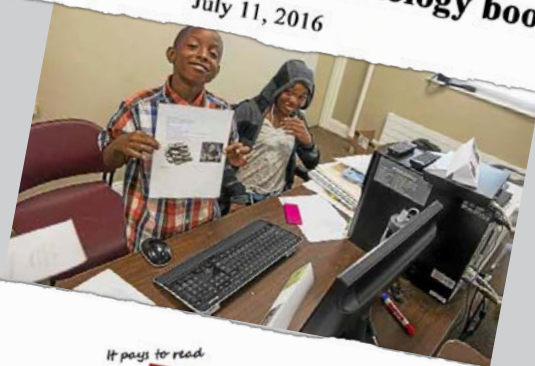
**Chester Housing Authority Commissioners  
Dedicate Day to Reviewing Rules**

March 30, 2016



**Chester Housing Authority targets  
Chester children for technology boost**

July 11, 2016



**Letter to the Editor:  
Judge Shapiro's legacy: A better Chester**

July 28, 2016



**Chester Housing Authority's Community Farm  
Recognized as Mayoral Point of Light**

May 25, 2016



It pays to read

## The SPIRIT

Serving Delaware County



**Fire suppression devices going into  
every CHA kitchen**

April 28, 2016

**The Philadelphia Inquirer**  
**In Chester program, food for body -  
and mind**

August 6, 2016



It pays to read

## The SPIRIT

Serving Delaware County



**Documentary Honors Chester Icon**

June 6, 2016

# Financials and Human Resources

## Financials

Assets	\$
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,905,244
Cash, restricted	1,337,416
Accounts Receivable, net	161,053
Prepaid expenses	59,752
Assets held for sale	7,962
Capital Assets, net	39,462,110
Notes Receivable, noncurrent	32,098,777
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$75,032,314</b>

Liabilities	\$
Accounts Payable & Accrued Liabilities	455,013
Accrued Compensated Absences	314,855
Other Liabilities	223,611
Notes Payable, capital projects	3,386,873
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$4,380,352</b>

Net Assets	\$
Invested in Capital Assets	36,033,074
Restricted Net Assets	33,240,319
Unrestricted Net Assets	1,378,569
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>70,651,962</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>75,032,314</b>

Revenue	\$
Federal Assistance	21,231,802
Rental Income	1,179,811
Interest Revenue	2,932
Other Revenue	515,685
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>22,930,230</b>

Expenses	\$
Administrative Costs	2,003,553
Resident Services	77,519
Utilities	1,127,836
Maintenance	1,522,783
Protective Services	736,752
Insurance Premiums	369,996
General Costs	855,997
Housing Assistance Payments	14,772,388
Depreciation and Amortization	3,889,182
Interest Expense	167,544
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>25,523,550</b>
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	<b>(2,593,320)</b>

## Human Resources

After years of reducing its workforce, the CHA has finally added back employees in 2016, seeing an increase of six from 47 to 53. It's a tribute to CHA's workforce that the agency maintained excellent customer service and generated additional revenue to overcome shortfalls in federal funding. Even with the additional hirings this year, CHA still has only about 55% the employees as it did in 2005.

Employment Totals				
Year	Full-Time	Part-Time	Seasonal	Total
2005	83	13	1	97
2014	31	24	2	57
2015	30	17	0	47
2016	37	16	0	53



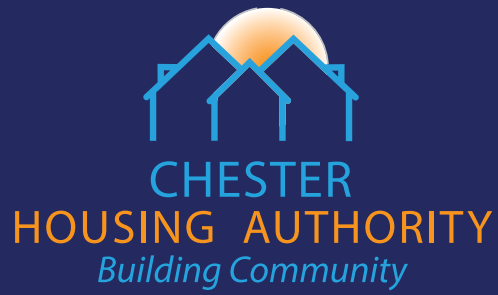
Ruth Bennett Film Crew



The CHA Board of Commissioners



Breaking ground for the new school



**Board of Commissioners**

Sheila Church - *Chair*

Tonya D. Warren

Catherine A. Feminella

Sheridan D. Jones, Jr.

Roderick T. Powell

**Steven A. Fischer**

Executive Director