



# *Keeping it*



---

Report to the Community 2017

---





# Table of Contents

Message from the Mayor .....	4
Message from the Executive Director .....	5
Housing Choice Voucher Program .....	6
Major Legal Victory .....	7
Ruth L. Bennett Community Farm .....	8-9
Better Property Maintenance .....	10
Energy Savings.....	10
Human Resources .....	10
Chester Housing Authority in the Media .....	11
Financials.....	12
Safer Communities .....	12
Partnerships Make Us Stronger .....	13
Looking Ahead .....	13



## Partners in Progress

During my campaign for mayor, I pledged to follow the mantra “it takes teamwork to make the dream work.” I’m thankful to count the Chester Housing Authority as a partner in working toward a better Chester. Many of the issues my staff, council members and I tackle daily mirror the issues with which CHA deals.

The Housing Authority is more than my partner, though. Through its unrelenting work, it has fostered a turnaround of historic proportions, thereby showing that we can change the way business is done in Chester ... to the good. Not only has the Authority done this through entirely rebuilding and rehabilitating its properties and straightening out its governance, it has also, through its reorganization, placed an emphasis on the residents it serves, Chester’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens.

CHA provides more than homes—it builds communities as its motto states. Communities in tune with their residents. It recognizes their challenges, sees areas of opportunity and makes the most of its resources. Its development of the Bennett Community Farm and all the other youth programming that has grown out of that—work training, summer meals, computer education and on and on.

CHA also supplies our local grocery store with organic produce, offers a zero-judgment work environment for ex-offenders, supports apartments for veterans and is a prime sponsoring business of the City’s WorkReady program.

Through all of its supplemental programs and strategic partnerships, CHA does not lose sight of its primary mission—providing quality, safe and affordable housing for low and moderate-income households. Research shows that adequate housing leads to higher levels of education and employment. I can personally attest to this, as my family came out of the Bennett Homes. CHA has come a long way since that time but even then it gave my family a springboard.

A proud graduate of Chester High School and Cheyney University, it took a village to get me where I am today, and that includes the Chester Housing Authority. Now, I call CHA one of my most important partners. As my administration leads the city forward, it is imperative that the Housing Authority is in capable hands under the leadership of Steve Fischer and a skilled Board of Commissioners.



*Thaddeus Kirkland*  
Mayor

# Message from the Executive Director

The title for this year's report plays off of our score of 100 for the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Already rated a high performer for 10 consecutive years, it is with pride that we circle 2017 as the year we hit the three-digit mark. But keeping it 100 means much more than that. It means being true and honest with yourself. As an organization, the Chester Housing Authority does that every day in its efforts to serve and benefit its clients. It is ingrained in policy and carried out more so than ever by a dedicated team.



The past period was no different at CHA than recent years in that it was action-packed and brought with it a lot of change. Our passionate workforce delivered services, trained more, and flexed their innovation muscles to create new approaches to sustaining the all-too-needed resource of quality, affordable housing for Chester.

Take for example the deals struck with Fare & Square, Chester's only full-service market, and the Swarthmore Cooperative. The marketing of produce and flowers grown at our Bennett Farm now bring back revenue to help sustain the farm's operation. We were quite proud to accept the highest state-wide honor for this best practice in public housing at a ceremony in Lancaster.

On another front, our Police Department's new system of issuing debarment orders to undesirable visitors has made a noticeable difference to residents as they have expressed in Town Meetings. Less crime equals money saved. Also on the same security front, our investment in surveillance equipment was beefed up and moved to coordinate its implementation with the mayor and the Riverfront Alliance which had taken a lead on getting the city "on camera" to a much greater extent. Smile!

Fathers Are Talking, the network of fathers grappling with their issues since 2012, took two bus loads of Chester residents (over 100 people) to Washington, DC to visit the new African-American History Museum. Proceeds from the trip raised money for future programming.

The Ruth L. Bennett documentary, *Finding Home*, produced the prior year continued to receive notoriety. In total to our knowledge, it has appeared twice in Philadelphia at film festivals, at Swarthmore College, at the NAACP annual banquet and, of course, in Chester at our own events. This has brought a renewed awareness to Mrs. Bennett's historical significance to Chester and that has great educational value.

As this report will outline, we took care of business methodically, finding openings for creation and innovation where we thought we could do so responsibly. In managing the Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher Programs, a mix of newer and older apartment complexes and smaller clusters of units scattered around, we received high grades from our funders. Our staff works hard, works smart and connects well with the families it serves.

We have exciting plans for the coming year—new commercial and residential development and the acquisition of existing housing sites to manage. And our goal and pledge to the city we serve is to "keep it 100."



*Steven A. Fischer*  
Executive Director

# Housing Choice Voucher Program



The Chester Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) achieved **High Performer** status for the 10th consecutive year – scoring **100** in this, the 10th year under HUD's Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP). The success of the program is measured by 15 indicators. Beyond that, CHA regards families finding quality homes in neighborhoods where they want to live is paramount.

## UTILIZATION

Due to a funding shortfall, CHA could not issue new vouchers from the waiting list in FY 2017. CHA anticipates the shortfall will continue through FY 2018. A tenant survey was sent to recent lease-ups and a high level of satisfaction with their homes and landlords was reported.

## Moving to Opportunity

CHA continues to meet its de-concentration goals by encouraging housing opportunities in lower poverty areas. One hundred eighty-six households with children moved last year and 64 households with children found housing in lower poverty neighborhoods. This represents 34 percent of all mover families with children.

## Owner Participation

Leasing goals can only be met with landlords who provide decent, safe, and sanitary units. New owner participation increased 30 percent in FY 2017, with 42 new owners joining the program. That is in addition to the continued support of the more than 800 landlords who have participated in the program over the years.

## A Stabilizing Force in Chester

The CHA's Housing Choice Voucher Program has earned the trust and esteem of the clients we serve. As stated by a local real estate investor and commonly heard among HCVP landlords, "the CHA is a stabilizing force in the City of Chester."



## Household Demographics

The HCVP serves more than 1,500 very low and extremely low-income households in the City of Chester and surrounding communities. Two thousand and twenty-six program household members are between the ages of 18 and 62, with 769 HCVP household members reporting some type of earned income.

Three hundred and sixty-seven heads of household are 62 or older and an additional 261 are under the age of 62 and disabled. The number of disabled households increased by 23 percent in 2017.

The HCVP provides decent and affordable housing opportunities to 1,740 children under the age of 18, with two thirds of them under the age of 12. Almost 30 percent of the families with children assisted by the Chester Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher Program live in lower poverty areas.

## Major Legal Victory

The Chester Housing Authority won a major case on behalf of clients' privacy rights when the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ruled public housing authorities may keep the addresses and names of Housing Choice Voucher Program participants private.

The case stems from a 2014 request by Chester Township. Under the Right to Know Law, the township asked CHA for a list of all properties where tenants receive housing assistance from the Housing Choice Voucher Program. CHA argued that tenants' names and addresses are confidential, in keeping with the pledge made to all clients.

The case made its way through Common Pleas Court, Commonwealth Court and the state Supreme Court and then back to Commonwealth Court before CHA prevailed in 2017.

"Too often, we have seen public officials try to paint a scarlet letter on the homes of low-income families, vets and others who receive assistance from the government in paying their rent," said CHA Executive Director Steven A. Fischer. "This ruling clearly states that housing authority clients cannot be singled out. "We fought the original decision because we knew it was wrong." The decision applies to every housing authority in Pennsylvania.



# Ruth L. Bennett Community Farm



The **Ruth L. Bennett Community Farm** sold thousands of pounds of food and hundreds of flowers this past year as a result of partnerships with local retail outlets:



## Fare & Square

Chester's only grocery store, sells the farm's seasonal produce.

Located only a mile from the farm, residents can shop at their convenience for food grown in their backyards.

## Swarthmore Co-op

A community food market, sells Ruth Bennett's pesticide-free flowers.



The farm's **mobile market** visits four senior centers each week to make fresh, pesticide-free produce accessible to all Chester residents. The mobile market has made additional stops at City Hall and Fare & Square, where it has sold out of its popular produce supply.

The Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies (PAHRA) bestowed its highest honor on CHA with this year's Bellamy Award for the Bennett's unique farm-to-store partnership with Fare & Square.



## Programming

The farm provided activities for dozens of children in 2017, including bouquet-making workshops, and opportunities to plant, harvest and prepare fresh food. There were also training and educational opportunities for young adults through partnerships with WorkReady Chester and Swarthmore College.

The first-annual Farm-to-Table fundraiser dinner was held at the Bennett Farm and the William Penn Community Center. The event brought together Chester residents, including children, veterans, property owners, musicians and notable figures from all over the county to share a meal featuring fresh, organic produce from the farm.



## Infrastructure Improvements

The farm completed a number of infrastructural improvements in 2017, which will greatly aid in crop production going forward. Improvements include:

**Installation of a water line and electricity**

**Greenhouse renovations**

**A walk-in cooler to keep produce fresh**

**Increased production space by 50%**



# Better Property Maintenance Through Training

This year, all six of CHA's mechanics underwent special training with the Pennsylvania Apartment Association East (PAA East). Now, for the first time, all are certified in the industry standard, not just the public housing standard. This designation will now be a requirement when CHA hires new mechanics.

"There was a time when some people said our maintenance people didn't know what they were doing," CHA's Director of Operations Norman Wise said. "When you have this designation it means they do know what they're doing. This is not an easy course to pass. This gives us comfort and confidence in the staff we have."



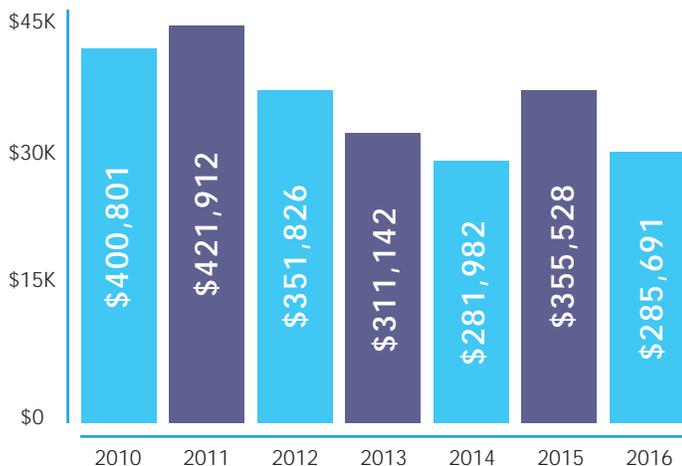
The employees earning the designation include: **Nathaniel Pope, Thomas Watras, Tina Johnson, Victor Martinez, Wilbert Jarrett** and **Christopher Martinez** (not pictured).

Most of CHA's mechanics have been with the agency for many years, but they had never undergone a formal industry-level training regimen.

PAA East is a non-profit organization representing multi-family developers, owners, and managers in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties.

## Energy Savings

The Chester Housing Authority saved \$285,691 in energy costs in 2016. That brings total energy cost savings to \$2.4 million since 2010 when CHA initiated an energy performance contract, which included major infrastructure upgrades to plumbing and heating systems. Cumulative savings should exceed the initial \$2.8 million cost of the program within the next two years.



## Human Resources

The Chester Housing Authority dramatically reduced its workforce through efficiencies over a 10-year period through 2015. In the last few years, CHA was able to stabilize its finances, add employees in 2016, and maintain virtually the same number in 2017.

CHA is currently in the second year of three-year collective bargaining agreements with two labor unions, Teamsters Local 312, representing administrative staff, and Local 32BJ Mid-Atlantic Region representing maintenance employees. CHA's upper management and police are now under the Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission.



# Chester Housing Authority in the Media



**CHA's 'less is more' boss gets contract extension**

December 29, 2016



**A farm grows in Chester City, and so does supermarket partnership**

February 27, 2017



**Chester Housing Authority farm gains outlet at local grocer**

June 13, 2017



**Chester farm shares its bounty**

September 22, 2017

*It pays to read*



**CHA Wins Major Award for Unique Farm/Store Partnership**

October 4, 2017

*It pays to read*



**Court Favors Privacy for Sec. 8**

December 6, 2017



**THE STEFAN ROOTS BLOG**  
*Rants Opinions Options Truth Substance*

**Chester Housing Authority Officers Awarded for Work with Trauma Victims**

February 23, 2017



**THE STEFAN ROOTS BLOG**  
*Rants Opinions Options Truth Substance*

**Steve Fischer is too cool for the Housing Authority**

December 30, 2016

## Financials

The Finance Department operated management budgets of approximately \$23 million for fiscal year 2016. Once again, there were no financial-related findings in the independent annual audit.

Working with the Executive Staff, the Finance Department continues to generate income-producing activities while simultaneously keeping costs under control. In light of reduced HUD subsidies over the past several years, CHA is working to create a surplus of cash to cover future shortfalls, while at the same time continuing to provide an excellent level of service to residents, landlords and vendors.

Assets	
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$1,342,864
Cash, restricted	\$3,806,520
Accounts Receivable, net	\$222,908
Prepaid Expenses	\$59,517
Assets Held for Sale	\$7,962
Capital Assets, net	\$36,060,469
Notes Receivable	\$32,098,777
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$73,599,017</b>

Revenue	
Federal Assistance (Table Below)	\$21,850,455
Rental Income	\$1,276,282
Interest Revenue	\$5,672
Other Revenue	\$415,703
Gain on Disposal of Asset	\$2,300,000
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$25,848,112</b>

Net Assets	
Invested in Capital Assets	\$33,265,154
Restricted Net Assets	\$35,707,499
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$1,017,451
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$69,990,104</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$73,599,017</b>

Expenses	
Administrative Costs	\$2,009,926
Resident Services	\$68,987
Utilities	\$1,313,473
Maintenance	\$1,744,416
Protective Services	\$761,106
Insurance Premiums	\$378,846
General Costs	\$1,262,529
Housing Assistance Payments	\$14,900,075
Depreciation & Amortization	\$3,931,623
Interest Expense	\$138,989
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$26,509,970</b>

Liabilities	
Accounts Payable & Accrued Liabilities	\$205,839
Accrued Compensated Absences	\$373,124
Other Liabilities	\$229,958
Notes Payable, Capital Projects	\$2,799,992
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$3,608,913</b>

## Safer Communities

Serious crime continued to trend downward at all CHA properties. A contributing factor was the aggressive issuance of debarment orders by the CHPD to undesirables. Over the past year, more than 100 individuals were informed they would subject themselves to automatic arrest if they caused trouble for Chester's public housing residents.

Additionally, and in accordance with CHA's current Five-Year Plan, the agency will install surveillance equipment at all of the large developments beginning with the William Penn Homes in 2017.

The success of the CHPD in recent years is a direct result of its officers' diligence and bravery. In 2017, two of CHA's finest, **Wesley Seitz** and **William Cooper**, were recognized at an event in Wilmington, Delaware by the Trauma Survivors Association for their courageous work.



## Partnerships Make Us Stronger

CHA's many partnerships amplify the efforts and services the housing authority supplies for its residents. Here are some of the highlights from the past year:

- Teamed up with **Community Action of Delaware County** as an employment partner for **Youth Building Trades Program**. The program was designed to help out of school, economically disadvantaged young adults gain skills leading to careers in the building trades and maintenance field. Five program participants were assigned to CHA for the six-month program.
- Participated in the **Child and Adult Care Food Program** during the school year. This program was funded through the US Department of Agriculture and PA Department of Education. The funding allowed CHA to open its computer lab at the Ruth L. Bennett Homes from 3 to 6pm 4-days a week while providing nutritional snacks and homework assistance.
- Partnered with **Widener University's Soccer Team** to implement a program similar to former First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign. The program was held onsite at the Ruth L. Bennett Community Center. Widener students provided homework assistance before incorporating energizing soccer games as a way of providing children more opportunities for exercise and fun.

2017 marked the third year of CHA's successful participation in the **Summer Food Service Program**. This program was funded through the US Department of Agriculture and the PA Department of Education. Over the three-year period, CHA served approximately 24,598 nutritious hot meals (breakfast and lunch) at each development during the summer months while school was out. CHA received \$61,949.65 in reimbursement for operating the program. The program also covered the expenses CHA incurred to hire and train residents to run the program.

---

## Looking Ahead

We could be discouraged by shrinking federal support for our mission and services. At CHA, however, we remain undeterred.

For 2018 and beyond, the development of the downtown land that formerly housed our headquarters has been put in motion. We envision a mix of commercial and residential spaces in close proximity to the emerging arts district and the main transportation center. The sale of our former Highland Avenue site making way for the now-complete Chester Charter School for the Arts gives us a solid financial base from which to build.

Additionally, in 2018 we will bring another 150 units of public housing into our management portfolio. We are in the final stages of a deal with Pennrose Properties.

Finally, it has been our tact not to rest on the laurels of the receivership years (1994-2014). We will continue establishing best practices, coming up with ways to sustain existing programs and develop real estate.





CHA Board of Commissioners



Proclamation of Ruth L. Bennett Day by City



Christmas at Enrichment Academy of Bennett Homes



Executive staff work session



CHA recognized for support of City's WorkReady program





### Board of Commisioners

Sheila Church - Chair  
Tonya D. Warren  
Catherine A. Feminella  
Roderick T. Powell

**Steven A. Fischer**  
Executive Director