

# STEADY STEWARDSHIP



CHESTER  
HOUSING AUTHORITY  
*Building Community*

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY **2019**





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# IT ALL STARTS HERE.

## *A Message from Chester's Mayor*

In my most recent State of the City Address, the message centered around the theme of “It All Starts Here” – a new tagline the city adopted this year to place emphasis on Chester’s accomplishments and impact— past and present.

When I think of City partners that embrace and carry out that tagline, the Chester Housing Authority (CHA) sits high on the list. CHA understands that all positive change must start with our own people and our own programs, and they have been demonstrating this consistently for years, including in 2019. As they have been doing for the past two decades, CHA leadership continues to leverage benefits and shared interests to make Chester a brighter place for everyone to live.

What makes CHA so valuable is that they not only tackle problems; they create opportunities. For example, the Red Brick Café, a thriving, privately-owned business operated by housing authority residents on CHA property, recently celebrated its first anniversary. And of course, the Bennett Community Farm continues to more than

capitalize on the two extra acres CHA had at its disposal, providing fresh food for residents and jobs for young people.

Indeed, through all of its problem-solving and opportunity-creating strategic partnerships, CHA never loses sight of its primary mission – to provide quality, safe, and affordable housing for low-income households in a discrimination-free environment.

That’s what we mean when we say “It All Starts Here.” Chester has a long history, and its residents are proud of it. Any progress we make in the near and distant future will be the result of folks on the ground making the incremental changes. CHA knows that, and that is why I am so fortunate to have them as a strong ally and partner.

Congratulations on another successful year, CHA. I cannot wait to see all that you accomplish in this next year and decade.



**Thaddeus Kirkland, Mayor**



# NOT YOUR FATHER'S HOUSING AUTHORITY.

## *Leadership You Can Count On*

Addressing a late year gathering of benefactors, I drew on the catch phrase from the old Oldsmobile commercials. We are “not your father’s Housing Authority.” Expanding on our core mission – to provide decent and safe housing that upholds quality standards – we appeal to local businesses and foundations for support. Programming related to health, education and employment, with numerous offshoots, would not be possible without sponsors. They enable us to be a different breed of Housing Authority.

Being different, and doing so effectively, does not come easy. It requires creativity, abundant administrative energy and a passion for uplifting others. These attributes have driven us to establish a reputation for service. That then leads to partnership building and attracting outside support.

We could spend the rest of this publication outlining and detailing the planning, development and stories

of each endeavor; something we do each year in this report. This year, let us point to the more narrow underlying basis for our success, the people in the board rooms and the war rooms.

At the culmination of the Judicial Receivership in 2014, Judge Norma Shapiro left in place five Chester residents, deeply entrenched in their community, to oversee the Chester Housing Authority. One retired and the other four still serve (see page 6). They employ an Executive Director who leads a five member Executive Staff, each in place from between 14 and 20 years. What does this amount to besides year totals? Steady stewardship and leadership you can count on.

Everyone knows of our Board of Commissioners and Executive Staff and their impeccable credentials and qualifications. We are not an agency that rests on its laurels. In our Board and War Rooms, we push the envelope to serve better and more broadly.

It’s the Chester Housing Authority. But it features a list of programming and accomplishments highlighted by, the A-NU-ME Health Movement, the Ruth L. Bennett Community Farm, the EnRichment Academy pre-school program, the Red Brick Café, the Resident Training Academy, Fathers Are Talking, the Women’s Circle and New Integration Accommodations. People similarly inclined to improve their city make these things work year after year.

Our logo has us as the CHESTER HOUSING AUTHORITY, Building Community. But we are not your father’s Housing Authority.



**Steven A. Fischer, Executive Director**



# CHA BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Our Commissioners came to their appointments in unique fashion. All but one of the current members were originally designated by the Court while the housing authority was still under receivership to train for permanent roles. This longevity speaks to their dedication, and seriousness of approach to their fiduciary responsibilities.

Sheila Church (ChesPenn Health Services) has enjoyed the confidence of the Board and served as Chair since 2012 following her appointment in 2010. Tonya Warren (Chester Eastside) appointed in 2012 is Vice-Chair. Catherine Feminella (Widener University) appointed in 2013, Roderick Powell (retired, The Blind

Center) serving since 2014 and Susie Kirkland (retired, Congressman Robert Brady) joining in 2019, round out the team. Never taking their oversight lightly, they ask CHA's executive staff to provide training on an annual basis and, from time to time, hear from industry professionals for outside perspectives.

"We could not be more proud of the transformation of affordable housing in Chester under our watch. We will continue to do everything in our power to guard this vital resource closely. This begins and ends with seeing that we have the right stewardship in place."  
Sheila Church – Board Chair.

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## EXECUTIVE STAFF — *20 Years in the Making*

A strong team of dedicated men and women began to take shape 20 years ago. When Norman Wise joined the Chester Housing Authority ("CHA") in 1999 to manage the agency's properties, it set off a string of hirings over the next five years. Norman was joined by General Counsel Maria Zissimos in 2000, Police Chief Rodney O'Neill in 2001 and Housing Choice Voucher Program Director Mary Militello in 2003. The Judicial Receiver then conducted a national search and brought in Executive Director Steven Fischer in 2005.

This uniquely qualified and passionate group was the right blend of professionals to guide a notoriously dysfunctional organization off of the scrap heap of Housing Authorities; onto becoming a sound developer and manager of affordable housing. Any of them could have polished off their resumes with substantive accomplishment and moved on to other career opportunities. But here they remain, committed to

further refining what many wrote off as hopeless.

The transformation of the CHA has seen the total rebuilding and rehabilitation of its entire Public Housing portfolio and the revamping of its Housing Choice Voucher Program. In addition, as its reputation evolved, it pursued funding which laid the groundwork for complementary programming centered on the development of peoples' lives. Today's CHA is as much known for agriculture, business attraction and development, early childhood education, employment training and health and wellness, as it is for housing. Chester activist Barbara Gooby-Muhammad put it this way some years ago, "They took care of the bricks and mortar. Now they're taking care of the people."

Our team looks forward to building upon its record and achieving even more for the Chester in 2020 and beyond.

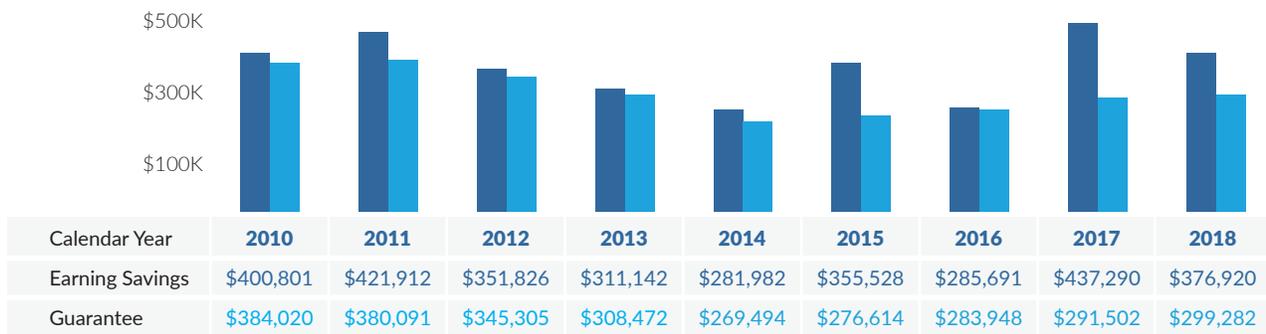
*CHA Board of Commissioners*

*CHA Executive Staff*



## ENERGY COST SAVINGS PROGRAM

The Chester Housing Authority saved another \$376,000 in energy costs in 2018. That brings total energy cost savings to \$3.2million since 2010 when CHA initiated an energy performance contract, which included major infrastructure upgrades to plumbing and heating systems. Cumulative savings have now exceeded the initial \$2.8 million cost of the program. CHA is grateful to HUD for underwriting the critically-needed modernization work in 2010. It continues to pay dividends.



## CONSISTENT PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

CHA prides itself on excellent property management, including safety. Plans were finalized in the past year to install site-wide security cameras at Wellington Ridge, the second CHA development to have that level of protection. CHA is also in the initial planning stages of installing site-wide security cameras at Ruth L. Bennett Homes (Fall 2020), and Chatham Estates and Chatham Estates Senior (Spring 2021).

Although CHA provides robust maintenance on its properties, extraordinarily high repair costs have led the agency to begin demolition of eight buildings at Ruth L. Bennett Homes. After these buildings are demolished the site will have more open space.

CHA is considering moving towards a Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) model for some developments to preserve and improve properties and address a backlog

of deferred maintenance. The agency will be hiring an outside expert to perform physical needs assessments for its public housing portfolio.

CHA is also in discussions to develop a recently purchased land parcel on 3rd street, next to the William Penn Homes. This development would be done without the use of federal funds.

Demand for CHA homes remains great in a city with a 35% poverty rate. CHA ended the year with 1,674 households on the waiting list for public housing. Sixty-one households moved into CHA properties over the past year.

This year, Tina Johnson (*below, center*) was promoted to lead mechanic, the first time a woman has held that post.

CHA Maintenance Team



# RUTH BENNETT COMMUNITY FARM

The two-acre Ruth Bennett Community Farm continues to serve as a shining example of how a housing authority can use one of its biggest resources, land, to serve the community with 5-10,000 pounds of fresh food and nutrition education each year. The farm stand schedule was expanded in 2019 to every Thursday, serving an average of 75 customers each week. The market runs from June through October, plus a special Thanksgiving market so customers can shop for their holiday needs. The farm also sold an average of 20 flower bouquets each week to Philly Foodworks, an online farmers market which distributes local produce to the Philadelphia region. This is in addition to making bouquets and arrangements for special events at the new Comcast Center. In April 25 more garden beds were added during the annual Hicks Foundation day of service.

Perhaps the farm's most significant accomplishment this season was expanding its youth internship program from one to five youth. This presented an extremely valuable first job experience for the five. In addition, five adult-mentors received stipends to assist with the farm stand and with youth programming. Aside from receiving supplemental income, these adult mentors also continued to learn agricultural skills through different farming activities (especially cut-flower production). They are excellent role models to the youth and positively engage the community around health and wellness.

Over 350 youth from the organization Youthworks visited the farm this season and learned about community food security and urban agriculture from our youth while providing community service.



*(L-R) Jasmin Young, Joseph Dukes, London Sharpe, Ah'Maj Jackson, Khi'Jhane Hall*



# HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

The Chester Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) achieved HUD's high performer status for the 12th consecutive year, a remarkable record of consistency.

The success of the program is measured by 15 indicators, but CHA regards families finding decent, safe, affordable homes in neighborhoods where they want to live as the most important measurement of program success. After fifteen years of outreach to expand housing, employment, and educational opportunities, more than a third of CHA's assisted households live in lower poverty areas.

**CHA invited applications in February 2019 and received more than 4000.** The agency then completed a lottery of 500 applicants for placement on the waiting list. Since the lottery, approximately 54 applicant households were issued a voucher.

The CHA's newest business initiative celebrated its first anniversary in August. Four landlords with a combined total of 60 tenants participated in the pilot program.

Since the program's inception, the CHA has collected and disbursed 375 payments, totaling \$108,000; saving property owners time in rent collections. By enforcing the terms of the lease and program rules, CHA sends a strong message that paying rent is necessary to ensure units are properly maintained.

One of the HCVP's primary goals is to encourage program participants to work towards self-sufficiency and homeownership. Twenty-one households ended housing program participation this year due to increases in earned income - and one bought a house. CHA continues to **provide homeownership opportunities** through its Housing Choice Voucher Program Homeownership Option.

Four qualified HCVP households were referred to the Chester Community Improvement Project's First time Homebuyer Education Classes in FY 2019. Through the voucher program, CHA also supports the Riverfront Alliance's new construction of four homeownership units on Rural Avenue.



*New homeowner Nadeia Stokes with Larry Douglas, Sheena Benwick and Steven Fischer.*

# CHESTER HOUSING AUTHORITY — *In the News*

## The SPIRIT

**CHA Delights Children with Christmas Party - Jan 2-8, 2019**



**Chester Housing Authority Residents Enjoying Donated Art - Jul 11, 2019**



**Chester Farm Feeds The Body And Soul Of A Community - Aug 27, 2019**



## DAILY TIMES

**Scanlon Pays Visit To Chester Housing Sites - Sep 8, 2019**



## DAILY TIMES

**Chester Youth Shine At Urban Farming Conference - Nov 29, 2019**



## DAILY TIMES

**Chester Gets Federal Housing Voucher Boost - Dec 2, 2019**



**'Bag it Chester' distributes hundreds of reusable bags in campaign to clean up Chester - Nov 15**



## The SPIRIT



Dear Paul,

Congratulations on your 10-year milestone! You've said there were those that thought you wouldn't last. But you have gone into the community and found actual news. We appreciate how often you found OUR news. If not for outlets like yours, we could not tell our story.

You took all our telephone calls, whatever day or hour — and i took a few of yours (same). All in the name of keeping it real between us and solid journalistic results.

It is with deep regret that I cannot be present to celebrate 10 years as I am committed to an out-of-state conference.

Again, congratulations and thanks for what you do for the community, and for your friendship.

Sincerely,

Steven A. Fischer  
Executive Director

# CHESTER HOUSING AUTHORITY

## *By the Numbers*

<b>ASSETS</b>	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$1,177,509
Cash, restricted	\$2,811,737
Accounts Receivable, net	\$466,571
Prepaid expenses	\$45,799
Assets held for sale	\$7,962
Capital Assets, net	\$31,017,484
Notes Receivable	\$32,098,777
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$67,625,839</b>

<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Administrative Costs	\$2,352,502
Resident Services	\$102,992
Utilities	\$1,349,751
Maintenance	\$1,818,948
Protective Services	\$886,690
Insurance Premiums	\$471,258
General Costs	\$1,323,563
Housing Assistance Payments	\$15,590,099
Depreciation and Amortization	\$2,569,071
Interest Expense	\$92,005
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$26,556,879</b>
<b>NET INCOME (LOSS)</b>	<b>\$(1,564,607)</b>

<b>LIABILITIES</b>	
Accounts Payable	\$296,549
Accrued Compensated Absences	\$492,646
Other Liabilities and Accruals	\$387,444
Notes Payable, capital projects	\$1,406,811
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$2,583,450</b>

<b>NET ASSETS</b>	
Invested in Capital Assets	\$30,063,639
Restricted Net Assets	\$34,713,083
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$265,667
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$65,042,389</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$67,625,839</b>

<b>REVENUE</b>	
Federal Assistance (table below)	\$22,900,406
Rental Income	\$1,383,040
Interest Revenue	\$8,062
Other Revenue	\$700,764
Gain on Disposal of Asset	
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$24,992,272</b>

<b>GRANT &amp; SUBSIDY SCHEDULE</b>	
HUD Public Housing Operating Subsidy (CY)	\$4,026,852
HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program (FY)	\$16,659,761
HUD Capital Fund Program	\$2,213,793
Department of Agriculture Summer Food Program	\$4,160
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$22,904,566</b>

### EMPLOYEE LEVELS

The size of CHA's full-time staff has remained fairly steady over the past four years. This consistency reflects the organization's stability and fiscal soundness.

	Full Time	Part Time	Seasonal	Total
2015	30	17	0	<b>47</b>
2016	37	16	0	<b>53</b>
2017	34	15	2	<b>52</b>
2018	35	19	5	<b>59</b>
2019	36	15	3	<b>54</b>





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