



# Turning the Corner: A Year of Rebuilding and Change

Chester Housing Authority

— 2024 Annual Report —

Board of Commissioners.....	2
Message from the Board Chair .....	3
Message from the CEO .....	4
Public Housing .....	5
Housing Choice Voucher Program .....	5
Entrepreneur Innovation Center.....	6
Bennett Farm .....	7
Thank You to Our Funders .....	8
Remembering Deborah Montgomery .....	9
Human Resources .....	10
Public Safety .....	11
Finance .....	12
Year End Giving .....	13
Our Communities .....	14





**Sheila Church**

Director of Patient and Community Services at  
ChesPenn Health Services



**Catherine Feminella**

Associate Dean of Students at Widener University



**Roderick Powell**

Retired, Instructor at the Center for the Blind and  
Visually Impaired



**Tonya Warren**

Retired, Office Administrator for Chester Eastside  
Ministries, Inc.



**Alethea Davis-Moses**

Retired, Supervisor of Residential Counseling at Maxine  
Health Services

## Message from the Board Chair

As I reflect on this past year, I am filled with gratitude, pride, and unwavering hope for the future of our housing authority and the community we serve.

With the retirement of longtime executive director, Steve Fischer, this year has truly been one of transition and transformation. After navigating a period of challenges, we have emerged stronger, more resilient, and more committed than ever to our mission of providing safe, affordable, and dignified housing to the residents of Chester. This has been a year of rebuilding and renewal. I am thrilled to report that we are on a path toward becoming a more effective and impactful organization, meeting our goals with HUD and working hand in hand with them to build on our strategic plan for repositioning our units.



One of the most significant milestones of this year was the appointment of new leadership at the Chester Housing Authority. With fresh perspectives and a shared vision for progress, our leadership team has already begun laying the groundwork for long-term success. Their dedication to transparency, innovation, and community engagement has been instrumental in driving our recent achievements and setting the stage for a brighter future.

As we continue making strides, our progress will only be possible with the collaborative efforts of our residents and partners. We look forward to working collaboratively with the City of Chester, as well as the many community organizations, advocates, and stakeholders who have joined us in our mission. Together, we will prove that when we work hand in hand, we can create meaningful change and improve the lives of those we serve.

I would like to take this moment to acknowledge the incredible resilience and strength of our residents. You are the heart of the Chester Housing Authority, and your voices, dreams, and aspirations inspire us every day. We remain steadfast in our commitment to serving you with dignity, respect, and compassion and look forward to working with all of our new resident council leaders.

As we look ahead, I am confident that we will continue to build on the momentum of this transformative year. With the continued dedication of our board, CHA staff, partners, and residents, we will rise to meet the challenges of tomorrow and seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

Thank you for entrusting me with the privilege of serving as your Board Chair. It has been a joy working alongside all of you to build a stronger, more vibrant Chester Housing Authority.

Here's to a future filled with hope, continued progress, and success.

*-Sheila Church*

## Message from the CEO

As I write my first annual message as Chief Executive Officer of the Chester Housing Authority, I am filled with optimism about our future and grateful for the warm welcome I have received from our residents, staff, and community partners.

While this past year presented its share of challenges for our organization, including aging infrastructure needs and budget constraints, I have been deeply impressed by the resilience of our community and the dedication of our team. Our staff worked tirelessly to maintain quality housing services and support our residents through difficult times. Their commitment to our mission has never wavered.



Looking ahead to 2025, I am excited about the opportunities before us. We are developing a comprehensive strategic plan that will focus on:

- Modernizing our facilities through targeted renovation projects and energy efficient upgrades
- Expanding our resident services programming, with a particular emphasis on youth development and senior support
- Strengthening our partnerships with local organizations to provide enhanced educational and employment opportunities

Most importantly, we will continue to put our residents first in everything we do. Together, we will build on Chester Housing Authority's legacy of providing safe, quality, affordable housing that our residents are proud to call home.

I am honored to lead this organization at such a pivotal time. While we face real challenges, I am confident that with our dedicated staff, engaged residents, and supportive community partners, we will make significant progress in the year ahead.

*-Cindy Thompson*

The CHA's primary focus in the last year was to assess, upgrade, and reposition the public housing inventory, increase occupancy rates, increase rent collection, and increase resident access to administrative and maintenance staff.



We worked diligently on waiting list management, eligibility determinations, and admissions. The files were removed from the public housing sites and centralized at the administrative office for both the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher Programs. The work is assigned to one (1) Admissions and Eligibility Specialist. Historically, the CHA averages less than 50 admissions to public housing on an annual basis.

## Housing Choice Voucher Program

Our Housing Choice Voucher program has consistently been a high performer for the past 20 years, earning a 96% score in 2024. The HCVP averages roughly 68 new admissions annually.

### Utilization

A second-year surge of rental property sales and new investors in Chester also increased the demand for landlord access. Leasing activity has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels with a tight rental market and market gross rents often exceeding the payment standard, making it difficult for lower income households to transition to another unit. While Chester remains to be among the lowest cost rental housing in Delaware County, rents have also surged along with the rents in other areas. Due to the rise in HAP costs, CHA continues to meet its utilization goals despite the decrease in the number of households.





## Entrepreneur Innovation Center



The CHA Entrepreneur Innovation Center (EIC) opened its doors in 2023, a vision brought to life by Marrea Walker Smith and her students at Devon Preparatory School. The center aims to cultivate entrepreneurial spirit and foster innovation among Chester residents. By providing training in key areas like podcasting, music production, photography, technology, digital design, and apparel design, the EIC empowers individuals with the skills necessary for financial independence. This initiative is made possible through generous grants from the McClean Contributionship and the Justamere Foundation.



## Produce Distribution

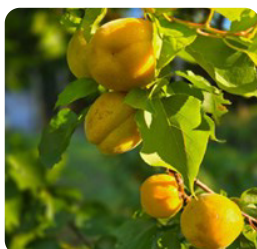
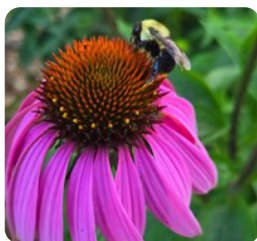


Ruth Bennett Community Farm (RBCF) continued its mission to provide free, fresh produce boxes throughout 2024, and we're excited to receive additional funding to further support this vital program. Our bi-weekly produce distributions, which ran from May through November, culminated with a special Thanksgiving delivery. RBCF partnered once again with Philly Foodworks to pack the boxes, which contained an average of 10 different types of produce this season, along with eggs and fruit. These boxes have become an essential resource for many families and housebound seniors who rely on them as a primary source of fresh food.

In 2024, RBCF distributed 3,360 produce boxes and approximately 40,000 pounds of food, marking a 25% increase from the previous year.

## Youth Crew Program

This year, our Youth Crew program saw 11 youth participants, five of whom were returning from the previous season. Over the course of the 7-week program, these youth received hands-on training in planting, watering, harvesting, and assisting with produce box distributions. In addition to this practical experience, they also participated in workshops on communication, leadership, professionalism, plant biology, herbalism, and even bouquet making.



## The Orchard

The orchard is continuing to thrive. We have dozens of fruit trees and fruiting shrubs, including peaches, apricots, plums, cherries, paw paws, plums, jujubes, persimmons, figs, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and currants, many of which are native. An irrigation system was installed to help make sure plants receive adequate water during the growing season. The bee hives continue to thrive, and we are adding additional frames to the hives to accommodate their growth.

# Ruth Bennett Community Farm

Through a grant from the USDA OPPE Socially Disadvantaged Veterans, Farmers & Ranchers Grant, RBCF staff had the opportunity to visit three farms in the South in March. They traveled to the Rockdale Farm site in Conyers, GA, run by Global Growers, Grow Dat Youth Farm in New Orleans, LA, and Eat South in Montgomery, AL. These sites were selected because of their similar scale and community-oriented programs.



In addition to this enriching trip, RBCF expanded its educational offerings in 2024 by increasing the number of workshops available to the community. Topics included Winter Orchard Pruning, Chainsaw Training, and Fungi for the Urban Gardener, among others.

We are grateful for the continued support of our community and partners as we strive to provide access to fresh, local food and meaningful educational opportunities.

## Thank You to Our Funders and Partners!

### Funders

- Foundation for Delaware County
- Leo & Peggy Pierce Foundation
- USDA OPPE SDVFR Grant
- Chester Rotary Club
- PA Department of Agriculture
- The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP PHASE 41)

### New Funders for FY24

- W.W. Smith Charitable Trust
- Delaware County Interactive Gaming Revenue Authority (DCIGRA)
- City of Chester Grant
- Xerces Society - Native Plant donation

### Partners

- CeaseFire PA
- Chester Rotary Club
- Crozer Library
- Crozer Health
- DaVita Healthcare
- PA Health & Wellness
- Philly Foodworks
- Youthworks
- Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
- Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
- Pleasant Playground Community Garden in Philadelphia
- Swarthmore College
- Swarthmore Rotary Club
- The Community Foundation
- Villanova University
- Widener University
- Xerces Society

# Remembering Deborah Montgomery

It is with heavy hearts that we remember Deborah “Da Diva” Montgomery, a devoted Community Health Worker with the Chester Housing Authority who successfully ran the ANUME exercise program for ten years. Deborah was more than just a colleague; she was a guiding light in our community. Her unwavering commitment to helping others, especially children, touched countless lives. Whether it was driving the van to ensure kids had their annual trip to the Universoul Circus, delivering produce boxes, or trips to Longwood Gardens, Deborah was always there for those in need, offering her time and heart.



Deborah's dedication extended far beyond her work. She was a beloved figure at the Bennett Farm, where her warmth, witty personality, and love for gardening made her a staple. She built connections, lifted spirits, and made everyone around her laugh. Her presence was a constant reminder of the power of dedication to the community and selflessness.

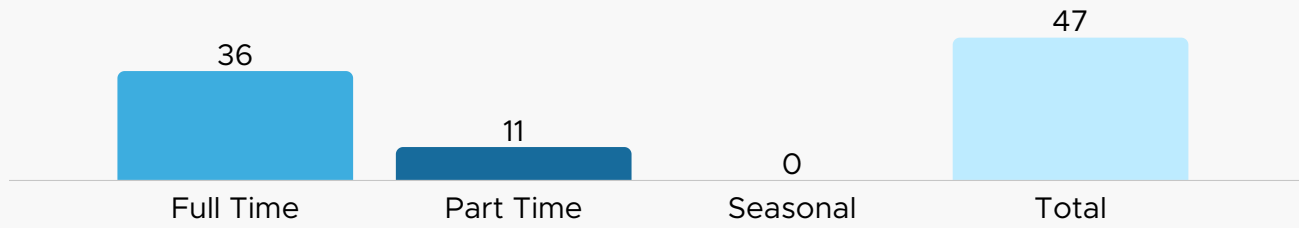
Loved by all who knew her, Deborah's legacy will live on in the lives she touched and the community she helped strengthen. She will be greatly missed, but we find comfort in knowing that her memory will continue to inspire us to act with the same love and kindness she shared so freely.



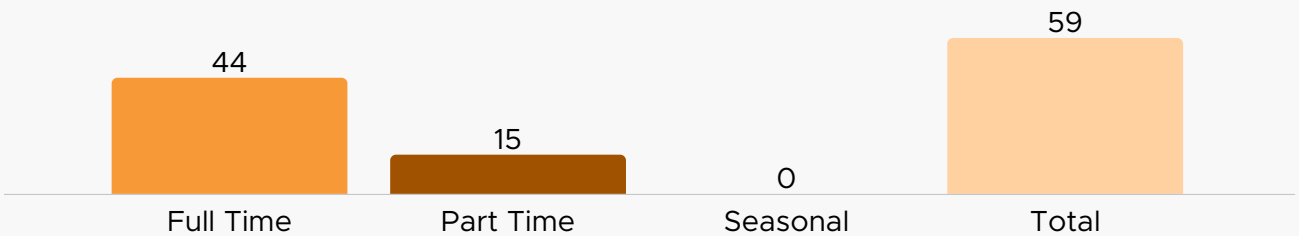
Rest in peace, Deborah. Your light will never fade.

## Statistics

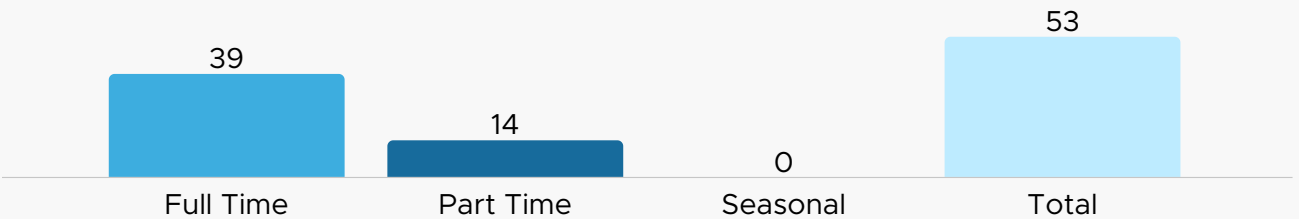
2022



2023



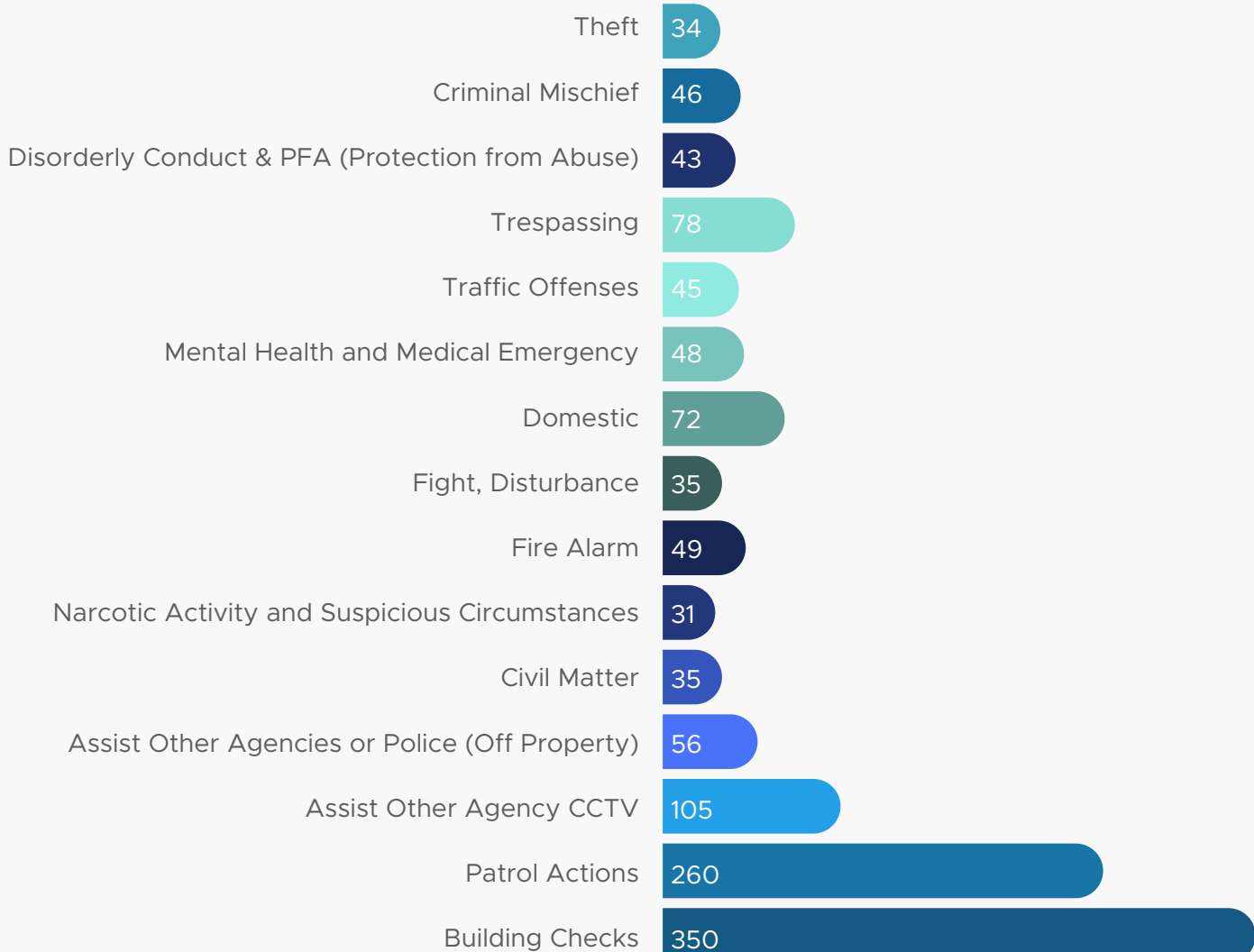
2024



The Chester Housing Authority Police Department has proudly served our community for the past 25 years, ensuring the safety and security of residents across all of our properties. Supported by a 24-hour police dispatch center, our dedicated officers maintain a vigilant presence, fostering a sense of peace within our housing communities. Though a small department, we are mighty in our commitment to upholding the law, preventing crime, and building strong relationships with residents.



## Top Calls Answered by CHA Police



## Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$2,824,974
Cash, Restricted	\$2,205,836
Accounts Receivable, Net	\$553,452
Prepaid Expenses	\$130,821
Assets Held for Sale	\$7,962
Capital Assets, Net	\$21,706,625
Notes Receivable	\$26,209,067
Other Non-Current Assets	\$14,400

**Total Assets \$53,653,137**

## Liabilities

Accounts Payable	\$462,295
Accrued Compensated Absences	\$689,555
Other Liabilities and Accruals	\$14,044,281
Notes Payable, Capital Projects	\$837,214

**Total Liabilities \$16,033,345**

## Net Assets

Invested in Capital Assets	\$20,869,411
Restricted Net Assets	\$34,090,464
Unrestricted Net Assets	-\$17,340,083

**Total Net Assets \$37,619,792**

**Total Liabilities and Net Assets \$53,653,137**

## Revenue

Federal Assistance (table below)	\$25,380,784
Other Government Grants	\$272,135
Rental Income	\$2,754,028
Interest Revenue	\$3,544
Other Revenue	\$879,511

**Total Revenue \$29,290,002**

## Expenses

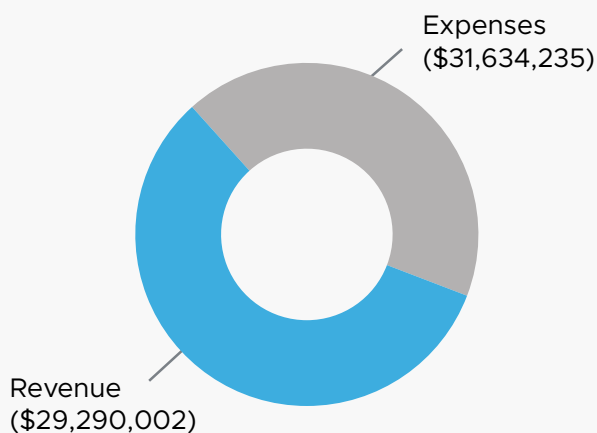
Administrative Costs	\$2,739,819
Resident Services	\$365,364
Utilities	\$1,654,948
Maintenance	\$2,965,396
Protective Services	\$933,270
Insurance Premiums	\$620,170
General Costs	\$1,373,871
Housing Assistance Payments	\$17,131,055
Depreciation and Amortization	\$2,751,150
Interest Expense	\$833
Bad Debt on Notes Receivable	\$1,098,359

**Total Expenses \$31,634,235**

## Schedule of Federal Funding

HUD Public Housing Operating Subsidy	\$4,602,036
HUD Housing Choice Voucher Program	\$17,786,541
HUD Mainstream Vouchers	\$342,374
HUD Capital Fund Program (Grant Years 2020 - 2022)	\$2,649,833

**Total \$25,380,784**





## Year End Giving

For the past 20 years, Saint Luke's Greek Orthodox Church in Broomall has generously sponsored a Christmas celebration for the littlest residents of CHA. This heartwarming tradition reflects the true spirit of Christmas, emphasizing the importance of giving back to the community. The event itself is a wonderful blend of holiday cheer and community engagement, featuring arts and crafts with students from Devon Prep, musical selections from a local children's chorus, and a visit from Santa Claus. This annual Christmas celebration is a testament to the power of community spirit and the positive impact that acts of kindness can have on the lives of others.





## Our Communities





610-904-1111



1111 Avenue of the States Chester, PA 19013



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

Connect with Us

