



Breaking

NEW GROUND

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY **2021**

Breaking NEW GROUND

Table of Contents

Continuing to Reach New Heights	4
Breaking New Ground	5
New CHA Program Prevents Evictions	6
New Housing Measures	6
Housing Choice Voucher Program: Meeting New Needs	7
Building Community	7
Ruth Bennett Community Farm	8
Organizing for Change	10
Chester Housing Authority In the News	11
Chester Housing Authority By the Numbers	12
A Year In Photos	13

Continuing to Reach New Heights.



This year, while filled with its continuous challenges from COVID-19, was also a milestone year for the City of Chester and the Chester Housing Authority – and myself. To say I never anticipated celebrating my fifth year as mayor during an ongoing pandemic is an understatement. But it has also lifted my spirits to see how Chester and its institutions have come together – and continue to come together – for the betterment of all. Of course, nowhere is that truer than the housing authority.

CHA's continued efforts to support residents through the pandemic, even beyond providing safe, decent, and affordable homes, is invaluable. From its multiple of vaccination clinics, to its free fresh food distribution program, to enhancing its Building Community video series, the agency continues to go above and beyond and reach new heights to best serve its residents.

Of course, a standout from my perspective this year is the HUD grants for capital improvements around safety and security. I can't wait until CHA breaks ground on the Ruth L. Bennett Homes security camera project, which will only continue to add to the momentum we saw this year with crime trending down significantly throughout the city. Finally, let's not forget how this year started for our city: with a visit from President Joe Biden. We were on the national stage to show that no matter how the odds are stacked against us, we always rise up. And, as CHA continues to prove through their operations, with a little investment and attention, we can thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thaddeus Kirkland".

Thaddeus Kirkland, Mayor



As a health professional of over 30 years, I know well the challenge of getting the public unified to battle a health crisis -- from the crack and AIDS epidemics at the close of the last century to the global pandemic that turned all our lives upside down starting in 2019. Here we are in 2021 still working to combat widespread disease that knows no borders.

Early in 2020, as it became clear we had a full-fledged public health crisis on our hands, "stay at home" became the battle cry. That put organizations like the Chester Housing Authority, which provides housing and rent assistance to thousands, in the eye of the storm dealing with how to maintain stable home environments while also contending with illness and supply line disruptions.

I have said before that the CHA stands tall among public service agencies. As a Commissioner entrusted with the oversight of the agency, I am proud to point to the skill with which the CHA has dealt with COVID-19 and the unique and evolving challenges it has presented.

The CHA Board of Commissioners are proud of the job Steve, our executive team and the entire staff have done carrying us through this most difficult period.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sheila Church".

Sheila Church, Board Chair

Breaking New Ground.



We started and ended the year in a pandemic. While I hope we never say that again in our lifetimes, or ever, the Chester Housing Authority stands ready to meet any challenge. Housing organizations like ours have always

been considered a part of society's safety net. During a health crisis in which "stay at home" was the mantra, we were elevated from safety net to "essential," and the Chester Housing Authority rose to the occasion. Essential staff reported to work every day to ensure residents would be comfortable in their homes. Many converted their own homes into makeshift offices. Despite the obvious adversity, we forged forward attempting to carry out as much of our pre-pandemic planning as we could, and then some. This report bears that out.

Breaking new ground can come in various forms. It can be the actual shovel in the ground to build a structure, a new initiative to enhance service, new variations on old themes. In Fiscal Year 2021 we hit on a number of them. On one hand, because we didn't slow our pace due to the pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic prompted us to devise strategies perhaps not thought of otherwise.

New on the CHA scene this year was the Eviction Prevention Program, obviously a response to COVID-19 and the need to retain housing at all costs. For this, we invested in additional peoplepower, bringing in Marrea Walker-Smith and her CEO Academy. It succeeded in keeping rent coming in during an eviction moratorium, meaning more evictions will be prevented as the courts reopen. Housing Voucher Program Director Mary Militello, whose office never stopped housing new families, devised a Furniture Collection and Delivery system that immeasurably enhanced the move-in process for families coming out of poor housing conditions. On the education front, we were about to launch a Carpentry program with Delaware County Community College through the efforts

of our General Counsel Maria Zissimos and College officials. On the construction front, Director of Housing Operations Norman Wise's planning on reconfiguring and rehabilitating the Bennett Homes was set on course this year. We also partnered with Human Good on the development of 44 units in Yeadon to be known as Makemie Court. We closed on that right at the end of the fiscal year, and broke ground by the summer. It was a strong year financially as we received healthy federal support and we were the recipient of many grant awards and performance awards as well, with recognition from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies.

Giving thanks to our Board of Commissioners who always hear us out and support our best efforts – in acknowledgement of a city that appreciates the role we play and the service we provide – and to the families that seek and then accept our best efforts to provide comfort and stability in the lives, I give you our Annual Report to the Community for 2021.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Steven A. Fischer".

Steven A. Fischer, Executive Director



New CHA Program Prevents Evictions

CHA's leadership is committed to keeping families in their homes. When the federal CARES Act eviction moratorium began in March 2020, CHA explored solutions to help residents avoid eviction once the moratorium ended.

Eviction Prevention Program in November 2020. More than 200 residents received support to reduce eviction and improve their quality of life. CHA's model was based on empathy, creativity, and financial stability. The Eviction Prevention Program offers residents the opportunity to share their challenges and identify mutually beneficial solutions to their past-due rent balances, including an attainable repayment plan based on income.

In April 2021, CHA established a partnership with the Delaware County Emergency Rental Assistance (DELCO ERA) program. Working in unison with the residents, CHA provides technical support and assisted with other barriers which prevent residents from accessing the grant funds.

"I want residents to realize that they're resilient. Don't let surrendering be an option, reach out and get the support you need. We can get through tough times. Don't give up."

-Marrea Walker-Smith, Eviction Prevention Program Manager

New Housing Measures

Planning on reconfiguring and rehabilitating the Bennett Homes was set on course this year. And, thanks to a \$250,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Bennett Homes will also have security cameras installed on its campus next year.



From left to right: Resident Council Sargent at Arms Bruce Callahan, CHA General Counsel Maria Zissimos, Special Master Joseph Lesniak, Executive Director Steve Fischer, Resident Council Treasurer Gail Dennis, CHA Housing Director Mary Militello, Resident Council President Phyllis Hinson and Resident Council Vice President Diane Seals

Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, there was much less movement in and out of housing this year as we were encouraged to "stay at home." This eviction moratorium also worked to keep families in place. Chatham Senior Village also elected a new Residents Council.

Housing Choice Voucher Program: Meeting New Needs

The CHA continued to place families in new housing during various state shutdowns through our Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) – one of the highest performing in the nation. The HCVP’s dedicated team of four fulltime occupancy specialists, one parttime housing program assistant and one compliance specialist serve approximately 1600 households and 542 landlords.

This year, as many clients in the Mainstream Persons with Disabilities Program were coming from shelters, a major effort was made to assist clients in setting up sustainable households. The initiative began as “Paying It Forward Friday,” when staff and the community donated furniture and household items. In April, the CHA received notice that there would be additional funds to support housing authorities to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, and the HCVP allocated funds for this initiative as well. There was a direct economic, environmental and health impact from the initiative. Items came from local stores and thrift shops, students and unemployed workers were hired for delivery, and tons of donated items were put to good use instead of ending up in a landfill. Tenants were able to move right in instead of having to ride city buses to find items to furnish their homes. The extra advocacy also reduced the number of nights spent in the homeless shelters, thereby further limiting the spread of the coronavirus.

The department looks forward to creating new opportunities for our families in 2022 and beyond through new programs and initiatives that had roots in 2021. This includes the Brandywine Housing Partnership, HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher Mobility program and Human Good’s Makemie Court development in nearby Yeadon.

2021 Outcomes

1,835
annual certifications completed
350
income adjustment requests managed
73
moves completed
51
people processed from waiting list
44
households managed through HUD’s Mainstreaming Persons with Disabilities program
37
leases from portability households in other jurisdictions
17
households in the Nurse Family Partnership Housing Stability program
8
Homeless Set-Aside initiative households
2
Non-Elderly Disabled households

Building Community



“When the pandemic struck, we knew we needed to establish a substitute for our in-person residential development programs – and fast. Thanks to our dedicated staff, strong technological infrastructure and digital savviness, we’ve been able to keep reaching and serving our residents safely through productive programming – and we’re having fun while doing it!”

-Project Coordinator Ulysses “Butch” Slaughter

CHA launched the online informational series Building Community in April 2020 to rapidly respond to the social isolation impacts of the novel coronavirus. After an overwhelmingly positive response from residents, community partners and guests, as well as recognition from Government Technology Magazine, Building Community continued to innovate in its second year. In addition to its programming specific to the pandemic, Building Community began to incorporate more skills trainings, game shows and food demonstrations, among other engaging topics.

This year, CHA and its Building Community were formally recognized by the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies (PAHRA). The housing authority won the association’s top award – the Bellamy – in the redevelopment/community development category for applying innovative technologies and leadership in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

What started out as a quick response to a rapidly changing world has become a staple in the everyday CHA way of doing business, and the agency continues to be recognized for it



“Something that I will take away from working at the farm is the communication skills that I have gained. There are also many times where I will need to use problem solving skills in the future, and I’ve had plenty of situations where I’ve gotten to practice that at the farm.”

-Ahmiyah Jackson, First Year Youth Crew Member, Age 14

Ruth Bennett Community Farm

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Ruth Bennett Community Farm continued its biweekly distribution of free fresh produce boxes from April through November. Many families and seniors continued to rely on these boxes as their source of fresh produce during quarantine and spikes in virus counts. This year, the farm partnered with Philly Foodworks to pack the boxes, which contain an average of eight types of produce, eggs, and fruit. Over the 2021 season, the farm completed 17 distributions, with nearly 31,000 pounds of produce distributed.

The farm had nine youth participate in our Youth Crew program this year, five of whom were returning from last season. Students assisted with planting, watering, harvesting, and producing box distributions.

Youth crew members also attended educational field trips, including the Gather for Good conference for youth hosted by Saul Agricultural High School in Philadelphia, as well as Linvilla Orchards in Media.

Bella Korfmann joined farm manager Natania Schaumburg in a newly created role as Youth Coordinator.

In addition, four adult-mentors received stipends to assist with the farm stand and with youth programming. Aside

from receiving supplemental income, adult mentors also continue 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.

Farm staff and Youth Crew members hosted three on-site workshops this season, run in coordination with local partners and funders. These included a Tools and Small Engine workshop, a Food Safety walk and workshop, and a Cut Flower workshop.

We also partnered with Crozer Library to host two hands-on container gardening workshops that garnered more than 60 attendees each.

This season the farm sold an average of 100 bouquets a week to Philly Foodworks - an exciting increase from the previous year's average of 60 bouquets a week. Flower bouquets are sold from April through October, then production switches to wreathes through Christmas.

Looking to 2022, the farm plans to plant an orchard with at least 40 fruit trees and fruiting shrubs without deer interference thanks to recent investments and improvements in infrastructure.



Thank You to Our Bennett Farm Funders & Partners

Funders

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

Partners

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





Organizing for Change

In January CHA gathered Chester and Delaware County residents and businesses to honor the legacy of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a powerful two-hour service event. Titled “Six Feet of Freedom,” the event called attention to the urgent need to address environmental racism through a compelling visual – a nearly mile-long rope of plastic bags.

About 100 volunteers worked to string together thousands of plastic bags that stretched in two directions starting from Calvary Baptist Church down Rosa Parks Boulevard (PA Route 291).

Dr. King spent three formative years at Chester’s Crozer Theological Seminary from 1948-1951 and practiced his faith at Calvary Baptist Church. This year volunteers in the city of Chester gathered under a mural of Dr. King and honored his legacy by promoting sustainability in their community. Dr. King frequently talked about the need to curb materialism. This activity was meant to serve as a visual reminder of the urgency to respond to both pollution and environmental racism.

Volunteers also received a free reusable shopping bag with Dr. King’s image printed on the panel and a gift certificate to CHA’s Red Brick Café.

Organizations who participated alongside the Chester Housing Authority included: Power Home Remodeling, CASA Youth Advocates of Chester and Delaware

Counties, Delaware County Council, Delaware County District Attorney’s Office, Andrew L. Hicks Jr Foundation, Association of Black Social Workers of West Chester University, Chester Minaret Court No 154, Chester Community Improvement Project, Chester Education Foundation, The Delaware County Historical Society, Chester Community Improvement Project, Pennsylvania Humanities Council, Martin Luther King Commemorative Committee Chester, The YES Center, and Chester Matters.

“When the pandemic struck, we knew we needed to establish a substitute for our in-person residential development programs – and fast. Thanks to our dedicated staff, strong technological infrastructure and digital savviness, we’ve been able to keep reaching and serving our residents safely through productive programming – and we’re having fun while doing it!”

-Project Coordinator Ulysses “Butch” Slaughter



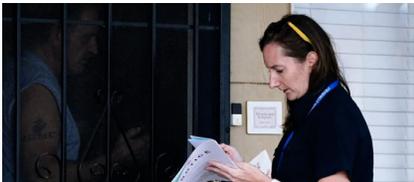
DAILY TIMES

Bennett Homes to get security cameras



The Philadelphia Inquirer

HUD's security grants will pay for cameras at area public housing developments



DAILY TIMES

Chester Housing Authority to reduce impact of evictions



The SPIRIT

Chester Housing Authority awards scholarships to two city residents



WHYY

Can moving to lower-poverty neighborhoods help kids long term? HUD awards Chester \$3.5M to find out



The SPIRIT

CHA scores big grant, top honors



WHYY

An urban farm in Chester embarks on its second year of feeding public housing residents



10

Local Businesses Take Advantage of Beautiful Weekend Weather

Chester Housing Authority *FY'21 Grants*

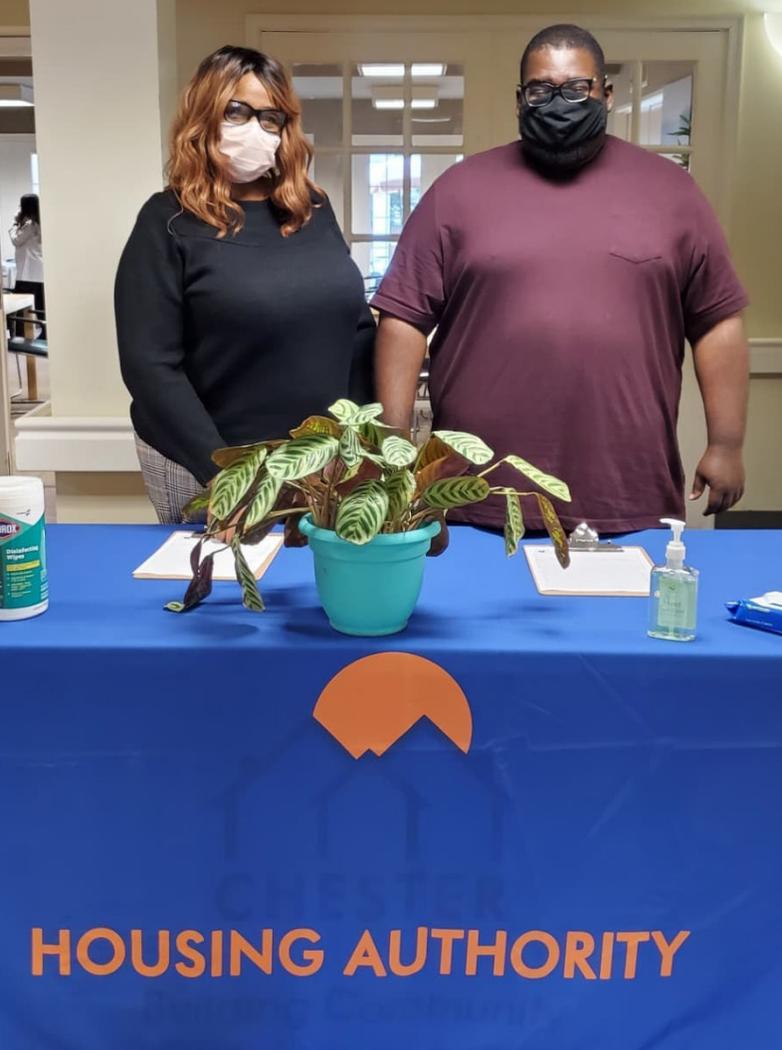
NEW HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES	
Mobility Demonstration	\$4,264,970
Foster Youth to Independence	\$151,898
TOTAL	\$4,416,868
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS	
Operating Fund Shortfall	\$335,494
Emergency Safety and Security	\$250,000
TOTAL	\$585,494
BENNETT FARM	
Delco Foundation	\$40,000
PA Urban Agriculture Grant	\$25,000
Pierce Foundation	\$15,000
USDA OPPE Grant	\$15,000
Delco Cares Act	\$12,500
Socially Disadvantaged Veterans Farmers and Ranchers	\$11,000
Food Trust	\$5,000
TOTAL	\$123,500
COVID-19	
SE PE AHEC Vaccine Hesitancy	\$15,000
Delco Foundation Vaccine Hesitancy	\$4,820
United Way Vaccine Hesitancy	\$700
TOTAL	\$20,520
GRAND TOTAL	\$5,146,382

ENERGY COST SAVINGS PROGRAM

CHA saved \$325,929 in energy savings in 2020, bringing total savings over the past decade to nearly \$3.9 million, accomplished through an energy performance contract (EPC). Energy performance contracting is an innovative approach for housing authorities to finance costly but sorely-needed modernization. HUD agrees to underwrite the construction work which the housing authority “repays” with the resulting energy cost savings. CHA’s energy performance contract included major infrastructure upgrades to plumbing and heating systems, resulting in significant utility savings.









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