

# ANNUAL REPORT

An annual review of the Hightstown Housing Authority

2021

**Annual Report of the  
Hightstown Housing Authority  
February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021**



This annual report is being presented to the Borough Council to inform the Council and general public of the highlights, activities and plans developed by the Executive Director and dedicated Board of Commissioners.

## **Description and History**

The Hightstown Housing Authority (HHA) was originally established in the mid 1950's with the intent of redeveloping the blighted area of town bordered by Rogers Avenue, Mercer and Academy Streets. In 3 phases and separate grants, the 100 housing units were built, and the remaining property was deeded to the Post Office, with portions sold to what is now the 1<sup>st</sup> Constitution Bank. The Housing Authority (HA) property and housing units are strictly controlled by HUD through deed restrictions, a Declaration of Trust, a Use Agreement and an annual ACC (Annual Contributions Contract). We also have a Cooperation Agreement with the Borough. All these documents control what we are able to do with the property and how we are required to operate.

## **Importance of Our Board of Commissioners**

Unlike most boards and commissions in the Borough, the HHA Board has a legal and fiduciary responsibility to the Borough, the State of New Jersey and the Federal Government. The Board is liable for the operations and can be sued for their actions or lack thereof. Our commissioners are required to have state mandated training at Rutgers. In addition, the HHA makes continuing education and conferences available at the HHA expense. The Commission has selected new members based on expertise that is needed by our business. We currently have on our board representatives with experience in law enforcement, finance, insurance, banking, legal, social services, and education. Having expertise in these fields is beneficial to managing a social service based real estate business.

Covid 19

This has marked the second year our country has gone through what can be considered the worst pandemic in recent history. We are all proud of our residents who many of which came to our vaccine clinics or went downtown and got fully vaccinated. Also our board members who got vaccinated decided we put enough procedures in place to have in person meetings again. We are the first commission in Hightstown to do so, and to the staff and guests attending it is appreciated. Once again we had to halt the in person meetings due to the Omnicron outbreak and the rampant spread of the virus. We are hopeful as we move into the 2022 season we will be able to get back to in person meeting.

We continue to provide our residents with a number of flyers, notes and suggestions on Social Distancing, limiting exposure to others. We feel it has helped to keep our families safe, and the staff healthy not only the pandemic, but flu season.

### **In Hightstown We See Housing as a Basic Need**

Every major source will confirm, Food, Water and Shelter are the 3 basic needs for human survival. Our hope is the newly selected “affordable housing administrator” in Hightstown holds the same values and helps to promote affordable housing in our town.

What are the chances of a person holding down a full-time job, or a child graduating from High School without a roof over their heads? Housing is a critical element, but it’s so much more. Properly housed, our residents have access to clean drinking and bathing water, ability to cook and prepare food, enjoy the security of closing their door at night and sleeping peacefully. We as the Hightstown Housing Authority have developed a community where neighbors become friends, caring for one another, caring for the children and the elderly. By having this stability, we enable people to achieve a level of self-worth by allowing them to develop their own feelings of self-esteem.

**Capital projects**

The Hightstown Housing Authority continued to invest both cash and the limited capitol funding in basic improvements. We have moved forward with our resident Council suggestion of replacing the flooring in the units as we turn units over. This is a long-term project that will add significant value to our units. While we are doing this, we are also replacing all the outlets, switches and associated plates, base trim and fixed lighting.



**Roofing:**

The Board of Commissioners voted this year to begin the re-roofing project at the Hightstown Housing Authority. This 2-year project is costing almost \$500 thousand dollars but will carry a new 50 year warranty of the shingles. While we are doing this we are installing new gutters with gutter guards, fascias and soffit materials. After seeing the quality of the workmanship and the extensive plywood work that is needed, the board directed the ED to contract for the balance of the roofing. This will guarantee the same color and workmanship throughout the facility.



### Exterior Stairs:

The board of Commissioner approved the renovation of the exterior stairs this year. This project addresses the concern of the rust on the exterior stringers and the deteriorating stair treads. The contractors removed all the stair treads, sanded, scraped, and cleaned all the stringer before priming and painting the stringers with an industrial based paint. Over 30 stair treads were fabricated and replaced as part of the project and the facility has 10 additional treads made for replacements that may be needed in the future.



### **Raingardens:**

The Hightstown Housing Authority continues on the mission to save water and conserve natural resources as much as possible. In 2021 we built another raingarden, bringing the site total to 3! This garden, on the end of building 1 captures a large amount of rainwater that would normally become stormwater and redirects it into the raingarden, slowly recharging the natural aquifer. To date we are recharging approximately 500 thousand gallons of water on the average year.



Winter rain garden



## **HHA & NAHRO “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest**

NAHRO invites Housing Authorities to participate in their yearly poster contest. In March we ask our Resident Students, Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade to participate in our Poster Contest. 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winners in each age category (Elementary, Middle School and High School) are summited to NAHRO Regional Competition, and the winners from Regionals are summited to the National Competition. Our students show their artistic flair and do a wonderful job each year.

## **Resident Council**

Our Resident Council normally meets the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month at 2 pm in our Community Room. We encourage all our Residents to participate. The Council gives the Residents the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns and give us feedback on the projects going on here at the HHA. Unfortunately, we had to cancel all the Resident council meeting in 2021, but we look forward to restarting the meetings in January 2022.

## **Our Gardens**

The Board and Staff of the Hightstown Housing Authority are dedicated to providing quality housing and service to our residents, both inside their apartments and outside on the grounds. We have expanded our “Resident Garden” program in 2020 to include over 12 participating families including 6 planting boxes specifically for the kids. Our “pollinator gardens” designed to attract bees, birds and other insects that assist in pollination are in their third full season and the plants are maturing nicely. The colorful signage helps everyone understand the purpose of the gardens and provides a bit of fun education. The original rain gardens, (yes, now 7 years old) were completely redone this past year. Its amazing how things filled the space, making it look like we never touched it! We built a new raingarden in 2021 on the end of building 1, behind the resident gardens. All the gutters on the end of building 1 have been connected and redirected to the rain garden that has been planted with several perennials and one dogwood tree as the anchor.



## Employment and Community Service

The Housing Authority has policies in place that promote work and self-sufficiency. Each resident who is 18 or older and is not a full-time student, senior citizen, family caregiver or disabled must be employed and work at least 30 hours per week. If none of these are applicable, they must perform community service. Community service is a benefit to the local community by volunteering at local non-profits.

We currently have 63 residents working at the businesses listed below. Many of our residents do not have cars, but rather rely on bikes, cabs or walking to work. As you can see, many of the employers below are within walking distance of our community.

### Workforce Housing: Employers Served

Meadow Lakes	Shop Rite	E.W. School District	Walmart
Princeton Hospital	Target	Amazon	Comfort Keeper
RISE	Home Health Aids	4 Seasons Deli	CVS
Hightstown Housing	Temp Agency	Better Beginnings	Wawa
Bank of America	Local Construction	Home Depot	Hilton
Jiffy Lube	Victoria Textiles	Lifetime Brands	
US Post Office	RISE	Morgan's Grill	Retro Fitness
NJ Turnpike	Staples	Home Depot	Morgan's Grill
Local Dry Cleaner	Forsegate CC	Dollar Tree	Monroe Village

### We have 13 residents performing community service at the following organizations

Rise	Trenton Area Soup Kitchen	Better Beginnings
United Methodist Church	St. James EME	First Baptist Church
HHA Resident Council		

### Wait Lists and Wait List Management

The Hightstown Housing Authority actively monitors and twice per year updates the waiting lists to make sure everyone on the list is still interested. In 2019 we opened our wait lists for 4 months for all apartment types. We currently have 202 families waiting for apartments. We are estimating a 3-5 year wait for a unit, especially one-bedroom units (both family and senior citizen). We had several turnovers in 2020 that allowed us to renovate several apartments.

## Financials

The Hightstown Housing Authority has developed a strong financial position over the last 10 years. Maintaining 100% occupancy and strict financial controls have allowed us to generate over \$900,000 in cash that has been dedicated to supplementing our Capital Fund which is used to rebuild and maintain the Housing Authority. 2021 continued this trend as demonstrated below.

<b>2021 at a Glance:</b>	Revenues	\$995,948.67	
	Expenses:		
	Salaries	\$244,267	
	Payroll Expenses	\$102,227	
	Utilities	\$196,771	
	Maintenance Exp.	\$108,534	
	Admin Exp.	\$ 82,688	
	Insurance	\$ 53,576	
	PILOT	\$ 42,194	
	COVID	\$ 39,134	
	Extraordinary Maintenance	<u>\$ 158,101</u>	(Boilers storage tanks, roofing, flooring, exterior stairs)
	<b>Revenue VS Expenses</b>	<b><u>\$ -31,444</u></b>	(Unaudited)

We are pleased with our performance given the amount of cash we spent this year on capital improvements. We were very fortunate this year to benefit from the increase federal subsidy and resident incomes.

## The Trend in Public Housing

In our opinion, Public Housing and publicly subsidized housing will be going through a slow transition to a private housing model. This has been underway for several years and will continue to evolve over the next 10 years. The Federal Government no longer has the will or the financial resources to properly fund these vital programs, although there is hope through the “Build Back Better” plan, each HA will receive a generous amount of capital subsidy that will allow us to complete all the capital projects that have been planned. The Tax Credit Program is one of the models to help fund development without long-term capital and operating support. The RAD (Rental Assistance Demonstration Program) is another model that is currently being tested and shows promise. This helps fund operations and long-term capital. The problem is the local HA loses control of the operations in either scenario. In the future we believe affordable housing will become an issue that must be solved and funded locally.

## Planning for The Future

- 1. Investing in Infrastructure:** In 2021, the HHA invested from its cash reserves and limited capital funds over \$400,000 dollars into the physical plant and residential units. We contracted an architect to redesign our handicap kitchens around the facility. To date 4 kitchens have been completed, and the others will be scheduled upon turnover. The board undertook the replacement of the flooring material on turnover this year. This was originally a recommendation from the resident council, that the board considered and decided to move forward. With this we are replacing the base trim, outlets, switches and mounted light fixtures. Counter tops and appliances are replaced as needed in the units. The apartments look brand new when they are turned over. We continued with our normal capital activities such as appliance replacement, storm water drainage systems, landscape improvements and removal of unused impervious surfaces.
- 2. Roofing Project.** In 2021 undertook the reroofing of 3 residential buildings. The board has approved, and we will continue in 2022 reroofing the entire complex. The Board chose a 50-year shingle, a virtual lifetime of leak free service from our roofs. To compliment this, we are replacing all the soffits, fascia's and installing new gutters with “gutter guards”. This is yet another benefit for our residents, to go along with the new heating systems, hot water systems, stairways, and sidewalks.

- 3. Infrastructure piping:** The board is actively working with the Architect and engineers to begin the next phase of infrastructure work at the Housing Authority. We will be replacing all the heating and domestic water piping in the crawlspaces. This will include replacing and labeling all the valves leading to each radiator and apartment fixture. Most of this piping is over 50 years old and beginning to fail in some areas. We had one major failure in 2021 that happened very early in the heating season. We were fortunate we were able to have it repaired before there was a need to heat.
- 4. Exterior doors and Windows:** The board is actively working towards replacing all the exterior doors and windows in the complex. When installed, the window are all aluminum without thermal breaks. So, when it's cold or hot, that temperature gets transmitted into the unit. The new doors and windows will be thermally broken and energy efficient, saving the Authority money on utilities but more importantly keeping the residents comfortable.

## **Memberships, Affiliations and Certifications**

**The HHA holds memberships to the following national and regional organizations:**

- PHADA - Public Housing Authority Directors Association. The ED is a principal member of their Small PHA Committee.
- NAHRO - National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.
- NJNAHRO - NJ division of the above.
- NJNAHRA - NJ division of National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Authorities
- IREM - Institute of Real Estate Management
- AHAB - Affordable Housing Accreditation Board

### **Executive Director's Accreditations:**

- **ARM** (Accredited Residential Manager)
- **CPM** (Certified Property Manager) designations from the Institute of Real Estate Management
- **AHM** (Assisted Housing Manager) from the National Leased Housing Association
- **PHM** (Public Housing Management) from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.

### **Awards and Honorariums**

- High Performance Housing Authority as awarded by HUD for operational, financial and physical plant excellence. 2013,2014,2015,2016,2017,2018, 2019.
- New Jersey Sustainable Business Designation
- River Friendly Business - Stony Brook Millstone Watershed
- NAHRO Award of Merit for Sustainability Efforts and Education
- Accredited Agency by the Affordable Housing Accreditation Board

**Our Board of Commissioners:**

James Eufemia, Chairperson

Vacant

Vacant

Jeet Gulati

Brent Rivenburgh

Terry Parliaros

Eva Teller.

**Our Staff:**

Allen Keith LePrevost, Executive Director

Cheryl Cavanaugh, Certification Specialist

Lynmarie Newman, Administrative Assistant

Charles Schilling, Maintenance

William Miller, Maintenance

