

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

An annual review of the Hightstown Housing Authority

**Annual Report of the
Hightstown Housing Authority
February, 2024**



This annual report is being presented to the Borough Council and the 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 Lakeland 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 pending Cooperation Agreement with the Borough. All these documents control what we can 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 University. In addition, the HHA makes continuing education and conferences available to the Board and Executive Director at the HHA expense. The Commission assists the Mayor in selecting 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, Real Estate, and education. Having expertise in these fields is beneficial to managing a social service based real estate business.

Covid 19

This has marked the fourth year our country has gone through what can be considered the worst pandemic in recent history. Although COVID is still prevalent in the area, we have all learned to deal with the virus and the risks of exposure. Also there are numerous medications available and our local health department has been very helpful to both the residents and staff of the Housing Authority. 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.

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 that Food, Water and Shelter are the 3 basic needs for human survival.

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, the 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.

Crawlspace, underground piping damage:

What started out as a major 2-inch hot water line developing a large leak underground between buildings 1 and 2 has turned into a large infrastructure project with a Grant from HUD for almost \$1.9 million dollars to upgrade the systems. We spent several months surveying all our crawl spaces and the condition of all the plumbing systems by our contract plumber and the bid selected engineer, O&S Associates.

What was found is we have extensive corrosion where dielectric unions were omitted, or improperly installed, deteriorating copper lines developing pin hole leaks, valves that are broken or no longer functional and general lack of mechanical isolation that hampers our ability to solve problems.

The leaking problems exists in most of our crawlspaces and underground between the buildings. These are the lifelines of the Authority, providing heat, domestic hot and cold water to our apartments. The Executive Director made the bold move and reached out to Local, State and Federal Agencies detailing the ongoing concerns. His persistence paid off. As a result of his efforts, and at no cost to the Housing Authority, we were granted \$615,000 dollars for year one to do the engineering and begin the construction replacing all the aging piping that supplies heat and water to each apartment. HUD has given us assurances that a total of 1.9 million dollars needed to complete the project is available when needed. Many thanks for these efforts supporting our residents and ensuring the safety and comfort of our residents.

O&S Engineering, in a very competitive situation won the competitive bid that was done by the Housing Authority and has designed the new systems that will last the Housing Authority for generations to come. They designed our boiler plants and boiler rooms, so they are very familiar with HHA and our residents.

Turnover:

We had a very busy year in 2023 with 10 apartment units being renovated and rented to new residents. We are pleased that 3 of our previous tenants purchased homes this past year, saving enough money for a down payment while still paying a fair rent to the Housing Authority. All the units have been redone with new flooring, base trim, switches and outlets, lighting and counters. We make sure the goal of making the units look like new is accomplished every time.

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 12th Grade to participate in our Poster Contest. 1st Place Winners in each age category (Elementary, Middle School and High School) are submitted to NAHRO Regional Competition, and the winners from Regionals are submitted 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 3rd Wednesday of the month at 10 AM 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. Fortunately, we have been able to be meeting in person. This past year our resident had a large Easter Egg hunt for the kids, Halloween treats and a Holiday gift for both the children and the Senior Citizens of the Housing Authority.

Demographics

Age and ethnicity: The HHA is currently serving 198 residents of which 112 are female and 86 males. We have 49 senior citizens and 12 younger persons that are permanently disabled. We currently have 56 children under the age of 18. We are an ethnically diverse community, with 99 Caucasian residents, 90 African American residents and 9 Asian residents. 57 of our residents are listed as Hispanic.

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. HUD is currently working on eliminating the community service requirement. We understand the reasoning behind this, but 8 hours per month is little to ask for the benefits the resident receives.

We currently have 58 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	CVS	Hightstown Diner
Hightstown Housing	Temp Agency	Better Beginnings	Wawa
Bank of America	Local Construction	Home Depot	Hilton
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 15 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	HHA Delivering Notices	HHA Clean-up

We are pleased that we have several residents that patrol the site daily, picking up litter and keeping the campus neat and clean.

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 2024 we will open our wait lists for all apartment types. We currently have 61 families waiting for apartments. We are estimating a 1-3 year wait for a unit, especially one-bedroom units (both family and senior citizen). We had 10 turnovers in 2023 that allowed us to renovate several apartments.

Financials

The Hightstown Housing Authority has developed a strong financial position over the last 12 years. Maintaining 99%+ 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. 2023 continued this trend as demonstrated below. We continued to spend down the excess revenues this year and some of our capital reserves, being mindful of our long-term goals and objectives.

2023 at a Glance:	Revenues	\$1,025,285	
	Expenses:		
	Salaries	\$290,275	
	Payroll Expenses	\$146,177	
	Utilities	\$220,470	
	Maintenance Exp.	\$119,850	
	Admin Exp.	\$105,605	
	Insurance	\$ 61,195	
	PILOT	\$ 41,937	
	Extraordinary Maintenance (Roofing and major pipe repairs)	\$190,403	
	Revenue VS Expenses	<u>\$150,627</u>	(Unaudited)

We are pleased with our performance given the amount of cash we spent this year on capital improvements. We use just over \$150 thousand in excess revenue, and we utilized resources from our savings, and we still maintained over \$500K in liquid cash. We were very fortunate this year to benefit from the increased 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, our hopes were dashed through the “Build Back Better” plan, which was approved by the House, but failed to reach the Senate floor. This bill would have brought substantial subsidies into the Housing Authority allowing us to complete many capital projects. The Tax Credit Program is one of the models to help fund development without long-term capital and operating support. The downside is the Housing Authority would lose control of the property during the compliance period (15 Years)

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. The difficulty remains in getting the local municipality to recognize the Housing Authority as a resource.

Planning for The Future

Everything we do is designed to extend the life of the Housing Authority, enhance the comfort level of our apartments, and make sure the Housing Authority as an invaluable resource remains available to people who have real needs and desire to live in a safe and caring environment.

- 1. Investing in Infrastructure:** Each year the HHA invests from its cash reserves and limited capital funds over \$350 thousand dollars into the physical plant and residential units. To date we have professionally redesigned our handicap kitchens to modern codes and used the advice and consent of residents with handicaps in the design. 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 last 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. Has been completed in 2022.** The board took the bold move to reroof the entire complex, using cash reserves to lock in the prices. This proved to be a good move, given the inflation in 2022, saving more than \$100 thousand dollars. The Board chose a 50-year shingle, a virtual lifetime of leak free service from our roofs. To compliment this, we replaced all the soffits, fascia's and installed 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 engineers and contractors have begun the next phase of infrastructure work at the Housing Authority. We are replacing all the heating and domestic water piping in the crawlspaces

and underground areas. This includes 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 multiple failures on the heating and hot water loop that happened very early in the heating season. We were fortunate we were able to have it repaired before there was a serious need to heat. We are currently dealing with several issues on the hot and cold-water supply side almost weekly.

4. **Apartment Radiator Piping:** This project is planned to start in the next year building by building connecting the new piping system in the crawl spaces to all the radiator units in the apartments. Given the 1054 radiator connections to be done (supply and return) on 3 floors, this project will take several years and coordination between residents, staff, and outside contractors. We are beginning the process of seeking grant money to help with this project.
5. **Exterior doors and Windows:** The board is actively working towards replacing all the exterior doors and windows in the complex. When installed, the current windows 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. Unfortunately, this is not seen as a high priority project the granting agencies. We are putting money into our capital funding that will support the project, but it will take longer to complete.

Memberships, Affiliations and Certifications

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

- PHADA - Public Housing Authority Directors Association.
- 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(now closed)

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, 2019,2023 (first inspection since Covid in January 2023)
- New Jersey Sustainable Business Designation
- River Friendly Business - Stony Brook Millstone Watershed
- NAHRO Award of Merit for Sustainability Efforts and Education
- One or only 8 Accredited Agency's by the Affordable Housing Accreditation Board in the United States. Unfortunately, this agency has been shut down.

Our Board of Commissioners:

James Eufemia, Chairperson
Anne Studholme
Brent Rivenburgh
Terry Parliaros
Eva Teller.
Sean McDonnell
Jameeliah Lance

Our Staff:

Allen Keith LePrevost, Executive Director
Chelsea Graham, Assistant Director
Lynmarie Newman, Administrative Assistant
Charles Schilling, Maintenance
William Miller, Maintenance

