



2021 Annual Report



Mary Desarbo, Chairwoman
Marvin Michalsen, Vice Chairman
Dr. Phillip Goldblatt, Treasurer
Robin LaFrance, Secretary
John Cabral, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Treasurer
Hazelann B. Cook, Executive Director

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HAMDEN HOUSING AUTHORITY

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I am pleased to present the Annual Report for the Housing Authority of the Town of Hamden (HHA) for the Calendar year 2021. Throughout 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to present challenges however, the Hamden Housing Authority remained a high performing, sustainable and fiscally responsible agency.

Since March of 2020, our team has continued to work through the pandemic's obstacles to maintain our programs and services to all residents and program participants. This past year our HHA staff not only achieved our expectations but, in many respects, exceeded them while training 4 new employees. Our teams' ability to overcome the hurdles they faced, can only be attributed to their remarkable strength, dedication, and hard work. The HHA's Board of Commissioners and I sincerely thank each employee for their tremendous effort, loyalty, and commitment to the Authority.

I am pleased to take you through the year and highlight HHA's challenges and achievements.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hazelann B. Cook
Executive Director

Mission Statement

The Hamden Housing Authority's (HHA) mission is to provide safe, decent, affordable, and sanitary housing for persons of low-and moderate-income. The Housing Authority believes that all persons have the right to quality affordable housing.

HHA is committed to helping people in need without regard to any protected class status including, without limitation, any such status based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, lawful source of income, disability, age, marital status, and/or familial status.

HHA shall endeavor at all times to protect its residents from discriminatory housing practices. In accordance with its Fair Housing Policy Statement, programs funded and administered by the Hamden Housing Authority shall comply with the provisions set forth in Section 46a-64c of the Connecticut General Statutes, as well as with all other applicable provisions both state and federal laws, and regulations that prohibit discriminatory housing practices.

Administration & Departments

Board of Commissioners:

Mary Desarbo	Chairperson
Marvin Michalsen	Vice-Chairperson
Dr. Phillip Goldblatt	Treasurer
Robin LaFrance	Secretary
John Cabral, Jr.	Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

Executive Director:

Hazelann B. Cook

Departments:

Administrative Office	203-281-7774	hha@hamdenhousing.com
Finance Office	203-248-9036	finance@hamdenhousing.com
Section 8 Programs	203-281-7669x101	section8@hamdenhousing.com
Elderly/Disabled Housing	203-248-9036	hha@hamdenhousing.com
Congregate Housing	203-248-9376	congregate@hamdenhousing.com
Resident Services Coordinator	203-287-8977	
Maintenance	203-248-9036	maintenance@hamdenhousing.com

Pandemic Protocol

In January of 2021, the CDC reported COVID-19 cases elevated all over the country. There was an urgency nationwide to distribute the vaccine to the most vulnerable population, the elderly, and the immunocompromised individuals. Since the beginning of the pandemic, older adults have been at greater risk of serious illness, hospitalizations, and death due to the virus. HHA quickly began the task of getting the resources needed to vaccinate our elderly residents. Mrs. Cook met, via Zoom, with the State and Michael Santoro, regarding all Congregate facilities in Connecticut who were scheduled to receive the vaccine as part of Phase 1B, which also included all staff members.

During this time, only people who were 65 years and older, or persons who were immunocompromised, were eligible to receive the vaccine. HHA monitored the CDC guidelines closely and notified the residents when their age group was authorized to get vaccinated. The staff assisted the residents by providing a list of organizations, phone numbers, and addresses, who were accepting registrations for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Simultaneously, the COVID-19 tests were in very high demand, which made it extremely difficult for our residents to find an available testing location. Once again, Mrs. Cook partnered with the state, and with Fair Haven Community Center, to have the COVID-19 tests administered monthly to all staff, and residents at Congregate, Centerville, Mount Carmel, Hamden Village, as well as the Affordable housing residents at no charge. Offering the COVID-19 tests at all the HHA's properties was instrumental in keeping our population safe. HHA is pleased to report the COVID-19 first dose, second dose, and booster shots were received by all Congregate residents and staff, as well as most of the residents from our entire community.

During the 2021 year, all staff and residents continued to follow the pandemic safety protocols that were set in place since March of 2020. All Villages including Congregate, and the HHA offices, located at 51 Worth Ave, remained vigilant in fighting the virus. Thanks to our maintenance staff our properties were sanitized daily and stocked with PPEs like masks, hand soap, and hand sanitizers which were distributed to the residents during this crucial time.

Continuing the day-to-day business operations during COVID-19 has been challenging. HHA adopted a new business model to keep staff, residents, and participants safe. In a sense the pandemic has created a new normal way of operating. HHA implemented some changes. For instance, all grievance hearings, briefings, and meetings were only conducted via zoom, audio/video or by telephone. Conducting hearings and meetings in this format was not only safe and convenient for our residents and clients, but also very effective in continuing business as usual.

To ensure the wellbeing of our residents and staff, the offices at 51 Worth Ave remained closed to the public. We have asked residents and or program participants who wish to meet with one of the office staff, to call the office and make an appointment. Even when the pandemic is no longer a health concern, the HHA offices will remain closed to the public and staff will be available by appointment only.

In May 2021, HHA began the task of transitioning the recertification paperwork into electronic documents using PHA-Web software. This new technology has proven to be an asset for the office staff. It will help reduce the space needed to store these files and will support the staff when working remotely.

Finance Report

Schedule of Major Expenditures 1/1/2021-12/31/2021

Apartment Renovations	\$ 96,627.18
Surveillance Cameras	23,429.40
Tree Removal, Pruning and Landscaping	20,075.00
Resident Gifts/Events	12,483.68
Replace Electrical Panels-Congregate	12,145.75
Generators and installation	9,515.15
Lighting/Cameras-Morse Street	8,369.00
PPE-Masks, Gowns, Gloves, Sanitizer, etc.	4,701.55
Community Room-Washers and Dryers	4,162.00
Maintenance Equipment	1,819.20
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 193,327.91

Annual Financial Audit

Our annual audit for the fiscal year end June 30, 2021, was completed by Maletta & Company, CPAs in January 2022. The auditors issued an unmodified opinion and did not disclose any findings or matters of concern. The audit was submitted and accepted by US Department of HUD and the State of Connecticut Department of Housing and Connecticut Housing Finance Authority. A copy of the audited financial statements is available at the HHA office upon request.

New Policies Adopted

- **Employee Vaccination Policy:** This policy states that HHA encourages all employees to get vaccinated unless the employee has medical issues, allergies, or religious beliefs that prevent them from taking the vaccine. In that case, they will need to submit a statement explaining their request, which will be added to their personnel file.
- **No Smoking Policy Revision:** HHA found it necessary to revise the current No Smoking Policy by increasing the fine from \$25 to \$50 after the third offense. In addition, the revised smoking policy also includes two new tobacco products, ENDS (Electronic Cigarettes) and Hookahs.
- **Trespass/Banned Policy:** This policy informs the police of guests or visitors who have caused disturbances at any of the Hamden Housing Authority properties. The policy also states these visitors/guests can be removed from the property by the police if necessary.

Congregate Housing & Assisted Living

The Congregate residents were isolated for most of 2021 due to the pandemic safety concerns. However, in May of 2021, the CDC reported things were slowly getting back to normal. The decision was made to open the dining room and serve all three meals again. Movies, games, and other activities also resumed giving the residents some enjoyment. In August, the Congregate facility was forced to lockdown due to a tenant and employee who had COVID-19. Out of an abundance of caution, from that point on, all residents had their meals served in their apartments and all activities in the common areas were cancelled. Once more, the residents, staff and all visitors were required to wear their masks in the communal areas.

Grants and Critical Needs Funding

Congregate

The Congregate facility over the years has needed various upgrades to the interior and exterior of the building. Several years ago, HHA applied for a grant for the full scope of work needed which we were unsuccessful in obtaining. Therefore, the Authority had been applying for a *Priority Needs Grant* to replace such items one at a time. CFHA realizing the magnitude of work and the funding needed at Congregate, invited the Authority once again, to apply for a *SSHP Grant*. This grant would cover the entire scope of work such as exterior siding, insulation, new windows, a generator, new heating / air-conditioning system, and three ADA compliant bathrooms. The Authority hired Steve Ball, from J. D'Amelia & Associates, LLC, to complete the application on behalf of the Authority. The application was accepted and HHA is looking forward to the much-needed renovations.

In October 2021, HHA accepted a bid from A. Secondino & Sons to complete the rehab work at Congregate. The work is set to begin in May or June of 2022. The rehab only includes the construction of three ADA compliant bathrooms however, the Maintenance Staff has been installing walk-in showers in the units as they became available. Two of these units have received the upgraded showers which will make it easier and safer for the residents.

Affordable Housing

In January, HHA received approval for a \$261,918 *Priority Grant* (not a loan) to rehabilitate the Affordable duplexes (4 units). HHA hired J. Associates of Newington, as the architect for the Affordable rehab. The scope of the work will include brand new bathrooms, new kitchens, exterior doors, patio sliding doors, exterior siding, insulation, as well as new air-handlers to upgrade the heating and cooling systems. This rehab is extensive but will breathe new life to the Affordable properties.

Resident Services Coordinator & Resident Care

The position of Resident Services Coordinator continues to be the friendly voice for all, as well as the mediator for tenant issues. The Year 2021 continued to expand the needs of many residents due to the pandemic. The Resident Services Coordinator was instrumental in facilitating help for those residents who required

assistance. Our staff continued to meet once a week via Zoom to share any information concerning the residents and our properties. These meetings are vital in keeping us united in our mission of service to the residents.

Caring for our residents remained our top priority. Keeping them informed, engaged, and providing them with plenty of PPEs to ensure their safety was the theme of 2021. Checking-in on them by calling once a week made our residents feel valued and not forgotten. HHA, partnered with **The Home Pantry** and **The Hamden Food Bank**, to offer residents who wanted to participate, an opportunity to sign-up for food deliveries. The food was delivered door to door once a month, from January through April, by the Maintenance Staff. This was effective in keeping our residents safe and sound by eliminating the need to go out in public during this critical time. A monthly Newsletter given to each resident provided the latest information regarding the COVID-19 virus, vaccine and testing locations, COVID-19 safety guidelines, and the latest CDC information on the pandemic. The newsletter also provided upbeat news and fun facts pertaining to the month the newsletter is issued. There are easy to follow instructions for craft projects, recipes, word search puzzles, and a joke of the month.

The pandemic caused HHA to think outside of the box when it came to hosting public picnics, luncheons, and parties for our residents. With our safety protocols in place, the Authority needed a way to reassure the residents that they were valued and not alone. Over the past two years the residents expressed how much they appreciated all the PPEs and supplies they received from HHA. So once again, the pandemic initiated HHA to shift and adopt a new way of keeping our community united while demonstrating that we were in this together. With the assistance of our maintenance staff, who delivered each package right to the resident's front door, HHA provided the following in 2021:

- In February of 2021, the Housing Authority applied and received \$2,000 from the HASIP program, (Housing Authority Small Improvements Program) which allowed HHA to purchase a multitude of PPE supplies for the residents like hand sanitizers, and masks. The HASIP funding also allowed HHA to deliver to each resident a variety of healthy snacks, winter gloves and winter essentials for Valentine's Day. In April, each residents received a chocolate Russell Stover's box of candy for Easter.

- In lieu of the annual summer picnic, which is held in June, the Housing Authority distributed another essential bag filled with more PPEs like hand sanitizers, Led-Light/whistle keychains, tissues, masks, fanny packs, and magnets which provided emergency information and phone numbers. The residents also received a \$10 Wal-Mart Gift Card and a “*Save the Date*” notice for **FREE** ice cream. HHA hired an ice cream truck to visit each property twice in July and twice in August to distribute ice cream to the Residents.
- In October 2021, the Residents received a Halloween Bag of candy to provide some fun during this critical isolation period.
- During the Christmas holiday, operation “*Warm Wishes*” was in full effect. The Residents received winter gloves, winter scarf, winter hat, and an emergency lantern/flashlight with batteries for the cold months ahead.

Section 8 and RAP Rental Assistance Programs

The HHA manages 305 Voucher holders in Hamden, as well as a large portfolio of Vouchers and RAP Program Certificates for an additional total of 1,570 participants.

In keeping with the 2020 protocols, the staff maintained open communication with the families participating in these programs and continued to provide landlord and tenant rent relief. Annual program activities such as recertifications continued to be completed on schedule, interim reexaminations, and tenant moves were also processed on-time.

In April 2021, the HHA resumed full annual Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections while continuing to use the CDC safety recommendations of wearing masks and practicing social distancing. Resuming the annual inspection process was important to ensure that the subsidized properties were being properly maintained. Throughout 2021 the HHA staff has continued to adapt to meet the needs of the Section 8 and RAP program participants.

Safety Committee

The Safety Committee had much to consider at our regular quarterly meetings. In addition to the usual safety procedures and concerns, COVID protocols, in the office and on all our properties, were front and center at all meetings this year. Items discussed during the year included but were not limited to testing, vaccinations, masking, air purifiers, sanitizing stations, CDC mandates and quarantine requirements. The HHA's number one priority this year has been to keep our residents and staff safe and healthy.

Elderly/Disabled Waitlist

The Elderly / Disabled wait list opened on September 1, 2021, through November 19, 2021. A total of 199 pre-applications were received and entered in PHA Web. The applications were then put into a lottery system which randomly assigned each applicant a wait-list number. On December 6, 2021, all applicants received a letter from HHA notifying them of their application status and their current number on the Elderly/Disabled waiting list.

The Website

Early in 2021, the HHA website received a complete overhaul which included a variety of information for our residents and the public. Many inquiries have been directed to our website regarding waitlist, property locations, and qualifications for our programs. The *Links and Information* page provides important data of organizations that can assist those seeking specific services. The monthly newsletter is also posted under *Resident News and Information* page for those residents who have access to a computer or smart phone. The website was instrumental when our Elderly/Disabled waitlist opened in September 2021 through November 2021. The downloadable pre-applications in Spanish and in English were posted on the website for the public to download, print and mail back. The website has also posted the HUD Annual plan, as well as the Legal Notice for the *Section 8 Department*. Property pictures of the Hamden Housing Authority villages (on the next page) have been added to the website to showcase each property. The website maintains monthly updates to help provide as much information as possible.



CENTERVILLE VILLAGE



CONGREGATE HOUSING



MOUNT CARMEL



HAMDEN VILLAGE



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Noteworthy Accolades

- In March, HHA received HUD's high Performer status.
- In August, The Housing Authority Risk Retention Group (HARRG), honored the Hamden Housing Authority, with the first runner-up status for the most improved in liability insurance claims for housing authorities with less than 500 units.
- Denise DeMaio completed and passed the *Hearing Officer Specialist Certification* giving her the authority to mediate applicant and tenant grievance hearings.
- Gabe Daddio was promoted from Maintenance Supervisor to Facilities Manager.
- I am so proud of our entire staff for how they have demonstrated their strength and perseverance through another year of this pandemic. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our Congregate and Maintenance Staff. Their jobs couldn't be done remotely; in fact, they have been our Front-Line Essential workers for the past 2 years. Their courage, devotion, and hard work has proven to be a key factor in keeping our residents and staff safe. On behalf of the Authority and the Commissioners, we thank and salute the entire Congregate Staff and the entire Maintenance Staff.

Closing Remarks

As we come to the end, we can all agree that much has been accomplished this past year. Our residents' safety and wellbeing continue to be HHA's priority and the motivation behind all we do. I am honored to be a part of this team which devotes so much of themselves to the success of this organization. I am especially grateful for the dedicated support of our Board of Commissioners, who strengthen and guide us every step of the way.

I am pleased to report that the Hamden Housing Authority, once again, succeeded in achieving our Mission Statement in 2021, of providing safe, decent, and affordable housing to low-and moderate-income families.

Respectfully submitted,

Hazelann B. Cook
Executive Director