



SPRINGFIELD
HOUSING
AUTHORITY

**MEMORANDUM FROM
THE DESK OF THE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

To: Springfield Housing Authority Board of Commissioners
From: William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director
Date: September 20, 2011
Re: Report of the Executive Director for 2011

PREFACE

As in prior years, it is fitting to begin this Annual Report to the Springfield Housing Authority Board of Commissioners by acknowledging the assistance of SHA staff in capturing and summarizing the activities of the Authority. This year, in addition to giving credit where due, I would like to provide some detail about how this report was prepared as an example of the collaborative team approach—sometimes purposeful, sometimes organic—that has come to characterize our work.

The template for this document, of course, was last year's Annual Report, which was formatted for consistency by Executive Department Manager **Isabel Serrazina**. The effort that went into that formatting will be familiar to anyone who has tried to synthesize various drafts prepared in the Word program.

Isabel then distributed the formatted 2010 report to each division head, with the sections for which he or she is responsible highlighted, and with a request, in consultation with their respective staff, to update the section by a prescribed date. The updated sections then went back to Isabel who then compiled the first draft of the 2011 report. Once that process had been completed, the edited draft went to me. This gave me an opportunity to ask my own questions and make my own suggestions to both the AED and the division/department head. With final approval of a section accomplished, the drafts then went back to Isabel to be collated and integrated into a master draft of

the 2011 report. A near-final draft was circulated once again and one more round of edits made before the report became final.

While all of this was going on, I was working on the introduction and conclusion, which are my original responsibility. The process began in early August, 2011 in order to have the final product ready for presentation at the September Annual Board Meeting.

Without minimizing the contributions of other staff, and with thanks to all, I would particularly like to acknowledge the help of AED's **Nicole Contois**, **Michelle Booth**, and **Wallace Kisiel**, and (again) Executive Department Manager **Isabel Serrazina**. Without their close knowledge of our operations, this report could not have been created. As always, any errors that may have found their way into this report are my responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The annual reports of all organizations seek to emphasize the positive, and as will appear below, the SHA has plenty of positives to emphasize. The condition of the SHA is sound both fiscally and operationally, with many improvements completed and innovations in progress. At the same time, we also must acknowledge that we are working in a difficult environment, with additional perils gathering on the horizon.

Some of the difficulties are pervasive and widespread. Macro forces at work in our country have combined with changes in our community to create an ever-widening gap between the more affluent and the poor. On August 21, 2011, the *Boston Globe* ran a story entitled, "Between haves, have-nots, an ever greater gulf." The article reported that

[i]n Berkshire County and the Pioneer Valley, where decades of plant closings have left hollowed-out economies, the inflation-adjusted median income of the poorest families fell 24 percent, from \$21,000 a year in 1979 to \$16,000 - on par with some of the most impoverished parts of Appalachia. "No real income growth over three decades is what we're seeing - no improvement in the standard of living," said Michael D. Goodman, one of the study's authors. "It's a lost generation of families."

“Lost generation of families” is strong language, but it captures the predicament of many in the community. Increased poverty subjects many people and families to deprivation and grinding stresses, and leaves the underfunded social safety network struggling with fewer resources relative to demand. When millions of middle-class Americans cannot find jobs or retirement income to maintain a stable standard of living, what happens to those already poor—the people the SHA is here to serve?

The public can debate the reasons for these troubles—global forces, politics and government policy, skewed priorities—but the effects are there for all to see. People get discouraged. As opportunities dwindle their hopes for the future diminish, and the cycle of disadvantage is exacerbated.

Some of the difficulties may become specific to public housing. The debt ceiling agreement recently enacted into federal law provides for an extended cap on discretionary spending programs and also requires that major new reductions in the deficit must be found by the end of this year. If Congress is unable to agree on reductions, a process of automatic cuts (“sequestering”) will go into effect. Whatever the mechanism, leaders in the assisted housing industry are beginning to talk about budget cuts in the range of 20%.

How can the SHA respond to these circumstances? First, we must redouble our efforts to operate in the most efficient ways possible, identifying and eliminating waste and duplication wherever they are found. Second, we must plan ahead. This fall, SHA staff will begin contingency planning in preparation for potential cuts in the 20% range. With good fortune this level of cuts may not come about, but we can anticipate leaner budgets beginning with the next fiscal year (FY 2013).

As you know, a further major complication for the SHA came in the form of the tornadoes that swept through the City on June 1, 2011. Almost miraculously, the SHA community suffered no fatalities or major injuries from the twisters, but we did suffer heavy losses in the form of property destruction and damage. All in all:

- Forty families residing in SHA public housing were immediately displaced and temporarily sheltered at the City Place Inn and Suites under a pre-procured emergency shelter agreement with the hotel;
- Twenty-two families were permanently housed in other public housing and/or housing assistance programs and the remaining eighteen families were returned to their residences within days of the tornado, if not by the end of June at the latest;
- Twenty-seven Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program participants were displaced and as of the writing of this annual report, all but four of those households have found suitable housing and have had their vouchers reassigned;
- Structurally speaking, a total of twenty-five buildings (24 residential, one maintenance garage) suffered some level of physical damage, with an initial cost/loss estimate of \$1,454,000.00;¹
- Of the twenty-five damaged buildings, all will be restored, at a minimum, to their previous conditions, with the exception of three: an eight unit walk-up at 425 Central Street and two duplexes located at 418-420 and 426-428 Eastern Avenue, which will have to be demolished and replaced;
- A Request for Public Assistance has been filed to FEMA, and the SHA will be submitting applications for Category A-Debris Removal and Category E-Permanent Work/Buildings and Equipment. An application for Category B-Emergency Protective Measures has already been completed and submitted to FEMA in the amount of \$20,281.08.

The silver lining to this dark cloud (beyond the lack of injury or loss of life) was the commendable response made by our staff and residents. Staff worked around the clock to get displaced residents relocated and to stabilize damaged properties. Most residents were cooperative and helpful, some serving food and water to first responders at their developments. We have some way to go, but we will rebuild from the great tornadoes of '11.

¹ Please note that this cost estimate is based on initial assessments made by SHA staff. Official insurance cost/loss estimates are pending.

Then, on the weekend of August 27-28, 2011, Hurricane Irene moved up the Atlantic coast and into western Massachusetts. Hoping for the best and preparing for the worst, SHA staff developed comprehensive emergency response protocols in which property managers, foremen, and other staff such as Public Safety and Resident Services participated. Fortunately, Springfield was spared significant damage, but our planning will pay off in the development of emergency protocols for future events.

In seeking to recoup its losses from the natural disasters, special acknowledgement and appreciation are due to Executive Department Manager **Isabel Serrazina**, who accepted the assignment of “Disaster Relief Tsar” for the SHA, Facilities Manager **Paul Spedero** and Accountant **Terri Potito**. These individuals have spent (and continue to spend) many hours compiling information about our losses, accompanying FEMA, insurance company and city representatives on site visits, assembling loss information into the forms required by the disaster relief agencies, insurance companies, DHCD, and HUD, coordinating staff, and guiding our claims for compensation through the systems. Isabel has acted as the facilitator of this difficult work with her characteristic diligence and competence, while also attending to her many other responsibilities.

Although the circumstances the SHA faces are demanding, your SHA staff continues to turn out remarkably high quality work, realizing improvements in our operations and in the services we provide to our residents. Highlights of this work follow.

Asset Management Project [“AMP”] Budget. The budget is the foundation for all housing authority operations. As reported in prior years, the SHA has completed the restructuring required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s asset management model, with our property management systems organized and operating smoothly under asset management regulations. This year, for the first time, our Property Managers have begun to participate in the formulation of their own AMP budgets (the federal side of which was approved by the Board at its August, 2011 meeting), an essential step to realizing the benefits of asset management. In the next budget cycle, we anticipate that property management staff and, we hope, residents, will become even more involved in the budgeting and priority-setting processes.

Staffing. Over the past year, four new positions have been created to help the SHA address unmet needs.

First, after reorganizing to include our three federalizing developments (Reed Village, Duggan Park, and Robinson Gardens) into one AMP, we created the position of **Senior Property Manager** to fill that position. In addition to the usual duties of a property manager, the senior property manager is responsible for preparing the developments to pass HUD REAC (physical conditions inspections—the last major hurdle in federalization), and for developing best practices as a model for all of our property management. The SHA received and evaluated over 200 applications for this position, ultimately hiring **Daniel Bresnahan**, the long-time director of the Holyoke Building and Health Departments. Former Public Safety Officer **Kevin Kleszczynski** now serves as assistant property manager in this AMP. Please note that although the Senior Property Manager is a new position, it replaces a prior Property Manager position, limiting the additional cost to the SHA to several thousand dollars a year.

Second, the SHA has created and filled the temporary position of Federalization Coordinator to help complete the “operational” steps required by HUD for acceptance of Duggan Park and Reed Village into the federal portfolio (see below). **Jason Guyer** has been selected to fill this position. He is due to start on the date of this report, September 20, 2011.

Third, although the public relations firm used by the SHA, Garvey Communication, has done a fine job on assignments we have given it, we determined that we needed in-house staff to get out the word about the many positive developments at the SHA. We have to do a better job on a daily basis of communicating with both an external audience—the Springfield community and beyond—and, equally important, our own employees and residents. The active involvement of employees and residents alike is vital as we strive to improve the life of our communities. Hence we created the position of **Communications and Community Relations Manager**, which has been filled by veteran Springfield journalist and Professor of Journalism at AIC, **Mary Ellen Lowney**. Please note that this is a part-time position; in addition to enhanced effectiveness in communicating about our work we

anticipate that the cost of this approach will be lower than the cost of an outside PR firm. We remain open to using an outside PR firm on a project-by-project basis should the need arise.

Fourth, in order to move forward on our need to develop central office space, as discussed on a number of occasions with the Board, we created the position of **Real Estate Development Project Administrator**. This position has been filled by **Sean Cahillane**, who has long experience in both private and nonprofit real estate development. Mr. Cahillane may also work on other real estate matters important to the SHA, as time and the structure of his position permit. Our thanks to the **Cambridge Housing Authority**, which has provided guidance and advice on this project.

Two other staffing changes should be mentioned. For the past two years, under a grant from the Regional Employment Board, an Employment Specialist has been part of our Resident Services Department, assisting residents in obtaining needed jobs and job training. With thanks to **Regional Employment Board Executive Director Bill Ward** and his staff, I am pleased report that a new grant has been awarded for another two years, with attention given to strengthening the supervision and administration of the grant and with a special focus on support of our Talk/Read/Succeed! families. This position has been redefined as that of **Career Planning and Placement Counselor** and filled by **Elizabeth Wills-O'Gilvie**.

The position of Receptionist has been upgraded to that of **Administrative Assistant**, with Receptionist **Kourtney Hunter-Sams** having agreed to accept the responsibilities of the new position, to include direct clerical and administrative support to the executive staff. This will allow for more efficiency and productivity on the part of executive staff at minimal additional cost to the SHA.

Information Technology. After a long process, we anticipate that by end of year the SHA will at last have a new, computer-based **telephone system** to replace our current antiquated and problem-prone system. To cite just one efficiency of those that we expect this system to bring, our receptionist currently spends dozens of hours each week simply answering calls and directing them to the appropriate location within the SHA. An automated system will save a great deal of this time that

can be put to more productive uses. (It should be added that we are committed to having a live receptionist available to callers at all times during normal business hours.)

Another outdated system within the SHA involves our **purchase order and requisition forms**, which are currently transferred on paper (with carbon copies) manually from one SHA office to another, creating lost time and paperwork that can be replaced by a computer-based system. We also hope to have this system in operation by the end of this year. Our thanks to the **Hartford, CT Housing Authority**, which has provided guidance and advice on this project.

Lease Enforcement. The SHA continues to push on lease enforcement to create a healthier environment for our residents. We have greatly increased the number of “for-cause” evictions from the SHA (lease violations other than nonpayment of rent). Although eviction is always a last resort, and although we work with residents wherever possible to secure lease compliance short of eviction, in the last analysis everyone has to follow the rules that are there for the benefit of all. Community-building is a slow process, with steps backwards as well as forward, but we are committed to staying the course and continuing to see improvements in lease compliance. Within the next year, we hope to close in on a “tipping point” at which lease enforcement has led to a substantially higher level of lease compliance and an observably more respectful atmosphere in our housing. In our family developments in particular, our children need a safe and orderly environment to promote their healthy development, and this is the environment we are determined to provide for them.

Federalization. As previously reported, the SHA received grants of approximately \$15 million from the Department of Housing and Community Development [“DHCD”] which funds are being applied to prepare **Reed Village** and **Duggan Park** for acceptance into the federal portfolio. At this writing, capital work is well underway at both sites, with completion scheduled for early 2012. When those developments are fully federalized, we will pick up our discussions with DHCD, which has left the door open to potential funding for federalization of **Robinson Gardens** in the next budget cycle. (Preliminary approval for the federalization of Robinson Gardens has already been given by HUD; now it is a question of finding funding in the approximate amount of \$5 million to upgrade that development to the federal standard.)

The “other half” of the federalization process is referred to as the “operational” side, meaning correcting a myriad of long-standing smaller (non-capital) violations of HUD physical conditions standards. Over the years, deferred maintenance, sub-Code practices, and tolerance of resident abuse of their premises have combined to make the list of needed operational corrections long and complex. To help effectuate this part of the process the SHA has put on extra staff (the Federalization Coordinator referred to on p. 6, above, and several temporary maintenance employees) and has contracted with the nationally recognized firm of **TAG Associates** to develop standards and protocols for all items that must be addressed, and then to work through the lists systematically to completion. Pending the federal inspections, monthly inspections will be scheduled to prevent backsliding due to resident practices. This demanding work is also well underway and should be completed by early 2012.

Smoking Policy. The SHA is gearing up for implementation of the smoking policy adopted by the Board last year. By April 1, 2012 we will have completed a full annual cycle of lease renewals, with all renewed and new leases containing a clause that all interior areas of the SHA, including the inside of units, will become smoke-free by that date, and with a further clause that the entire SHA will become a smoke-free environment, inside and out, effective April 1, 2013. Just as we worked with a number of community health organizations on the structure of our policy, we will continue to work with them on implementation, to the maximum extent possible offering residents and employees smoking cessation assistance. We want to do our part to protect our residents from second-hand smoke and our children from exposure to the most pernicious of all gateway drugs, tobacco.

Talk/Read/Succeed!["TRS"]. Much information about the innovative “TRS” program has already been presented to the Board. Approximately one year into the program, we are making substantial progress in breaking down barriers, forging connections with residents, and working collaboratively with the many community partners involved in this work: the United Way of Pioneer Valley, the Regional Employment Board, the Springfield Education Association, the Davis Foundation, local public schools, and an array of programs and providers including Hasbro Summer Learning, the Behavioral Health Network, and the YMCA of Greater Springfield. Among the many

people involved in this program, SHA employee **Ana Grajales** and Regional Employment Board employee **Lynne Cimino** work closely with resident families on a daily basis.

The mid-point evaluation (of the \$390,000, two-year Kellogg Foundation grant that substantially funds this program) is due out soon, with all signs pointing to a positive report. This summer, a program representative from Kellogg visited the SHA, meeting with all participants in a day-long event held at the Boland School, one of the two TRS schools (the other is the Dorman School). The Kellogg representative's comment was encouraging: *"Everyone talks about doing what you are doing, but you are the only people I have seen who are doing it."* She was particularly impressed by the active collaboration between the Springfield Education Association (teachers' union) and the public school administration.

Head Start. A third on-site **Holyoke.Chicopee.Springfield Head Start, Inc. Center** is scheduled to open at the John Sullivan Development (one of the TRS sites) next year. The SHA has received permission from HUD to dedicate a unit at the development for this purpose, and engineering and architectural planning is in progress under the supervision of Assistant Executive Director **Wallace Kisiel**. This will be an exciting addition to the array of services and programs offered to TRS residents to help break that cycle of disadvantage and open opportunities for the young people coming up. With Head Start programs operating at our Robinson Gardens and Riverview developments, we are making progress towards the goal of having Head Start available to all SHA pre-school children. Please note that although the SHA pays for the bricks and mortar work needed to comply with federal and state regulations for early childhood learning centers, all program costs are paid for by Head Start.

South End. The SHA is a co-applicant with the City of Springfield for a planning grant under HUD's **Choice Neighborhood program**, for revitalization of the South End neighborhood of Springfield. Last year the joint application by the City and the SHA for a planning grant was unsuccessful, but with a new City consultant on board to help guide the process we are hoping that this year's joint application will be successful. If so, the City and the SHA will receive a 2-year, \$250,000 HUD grant to analyze and plan for the neighborhood's housing, education, and business and

commercial needs. As part of the plan, the SHA envisions possible replacement of its 48-unit federal Marble Street development with higher-quality housing and perhaps even home ownership opportunities to benefit our residents and the community alike.

Beautification. Our property management and maintenance staffs have worked hard to maintain our buildings which, despite the problems referred to above, are in reasonably sound structural shape. We now propose to work on the landscaping and “curb appeal” of our developments to improve the environment for residents and community alike. By this time next year we hope that the Board will see landscaping improvements at Saab Court and several other developments, as a model for the kind of setting we hope to provide for our developments.

Roca. This year, the innovative and widely-recognized Roca (Spanish for “Rock”) program expanded its operations from Chelsea to Springfield, purchasing and renovating a new headquarters off of State Street and continuing its successful work of reaching out to youthful offenders and helping them to turn in a more constructive direction. Under a memorandum of agreement with the SHA, Roca participants are now providing grounds-keeping services to several of our developments, a win-win arrangement for both Roca participants and the SHA. Please note that the SHA is not charged for the services of Roca participants. Assistant Executive Director **Michelle Booth** as well as your Executive Director sit on the Advisory Board of Roca/Springfield.

School Mentors. Last year, the Board adopted a policy permitting all SHA employees, with permission of their supervisors, to spend up to two paid hours serving as mentors for Springfield Public School students, under the auspices of the **Springfield School Volunteers**. Last school year approximately ten SHA employees served as mentors, and we hope that it will be possible to continue and increase the participation of SHA employees in this important program.

Assistant Executive Director Nicole Contois was recognized by Business West as a leader in its “Forty under 40” feature. Congratulations to Nicole who, despite working many extra hours for the SHA, finds time for her “little sister” in Springfield’s Big Brother/Sister program.

As can be seen from the above, it has been a productive year at the Springfield Housing Authority. Once again, it has been the performance and dedication of our employees and the participation of our residents and community partners in many activities and projects that have led to the achievements realized.

Further Division and Department specifics are found below.²

THE SHA DIVISIONS AND DEPARTMENTS – OVERVIEW:³

A. EXECUTIVE DIVISION

1. Finance and Accounting Department
2. Human Resources Department
3. Information Technology Department
4. Legal Department
5. Real Estate Development Department

B. PUBLIC HOUSING MANAGEMENT DIVISION

1. Property Management Department
2. Applications Department
3. Resident Services Department
4. Public Safety Department
5. Warehouse Department

C. FACILITIES AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS DIVISION

1. Facilities Maintenance Department
2. Capital Improvements
3. Purchasing Department

D. RENTAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION

A. EXECUTIVE DIVISION

Supervisor: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin

² As you read through this report you will find some items referred to several times, reflecting that those items involve the work of more than one department.

³ Please note that this arrangement of Divisions and Departments reflects some changes from last year to bring greater logic and clarity to our organization chart. The current SHA organizational chart is an attachment to this report.

In previous Annual Reports I explained the evolution of the Executive Division under the leadership of Assistant Executive Directors **Nicole Contois** and **Michelle Booth**, who function as the chief operating officers of the SHA. After approximately two years under this approach, I am pleased to report that the Executive Division is operating efficiently under their leadership. This is only possible because of the energy and talents that both Ms. Contois and Ms. Booth bring to their positions. Both AEDs are skillful supervisors and administrators who combine a “big picture” view of the SHA with close attention to detail. Between the two, they supervise all aspects of SHA operations apart from facilities and capital operations, which are managed by the SHA’s third AED, **Wallace Kisiel**, whose Division activities are described below.

At our Annual Meeting this month, I will recommend to the Board that the title of all three of these positions be upgraded from “Assistant” Executive Director to “Deputy” Executive Director. The duties of each AED will remain the same, but the change will be symbolic of the central responsibilities they discharge within the Authority.

1. Finance and Accounting Department

Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois

Between nationally recognized consultant Casterline Associates, PC [“Casterline”] and Accounting Manager **Michele Decoteau**, our finance and accounting department is continuing to make changes to bring the department more up to date and improve efficiency. In addition, we will be working with executive staff and department managers to prepare strategically for the potential for significantly reduced federal funding in the upcoming years and the possible recapture of operating reserves.

Highlights:

- **Budgets.** Casterline continues to provide guidance to Ms. Decoteau and has developed the FY2012 budgets in conjunction with the department heads. As noted in the introduction, this is the first year that the department and property managers have provided a role in developing budgets for their respective departments and AMPs.

- **Financials.** Within the next few months the Finance and Accounting Department will be providing monthly financial statements to property managers. This will be a vital tool in enabling the managers to work within their budgets and plan for the future. Ms. Decoteau and Casterline will assist the managers in monitoring budgets until they are comfortable with the process.
- **PHAS Rating.** HUD’s Public Housing Assessment System [“PHAS”] measures performance of the SHA’s management of its federal public housing portfolio. An asset management-based scoring process has yet to be finalized, although HUD continues to review this possibility. A draft financial score for the FY 2010 has not yet been released, but based on preliminary scores for some of the indicators using the previous agency-wide system we expect that the SHA will be a “Standard Performer.” Our goal, of course, is to become a “High Performer” as soon as possible.⁴
- **Continuing Asset Management Budget Transition.** As the Finance and Accounting Department continues to make the transition to the asset management form of organization, which is still relatively new, time and training will be required. We continue to believe that the results will be strong Finance and Accounting Department leadership, more accuracy and efficiency, and, ultimately, cost savings.

2. Human Resources Department

Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois

Since she joined the SHA in April 2009, Human Resources Manager **Kathy Hardy** has continued to improve SHA’s policies and procedures in conjunction with our legal team and AEDs. Ms. Hardy has also participated in negotiations with the four employee bargaining units that currently represent SHA employees.

⁴ On all indicators apart from physical conditions, the SHA achieves scores that are comfortably high enough for “High Performer” status. Our challenge is to elevate our physical conditions scores enough to pass the High Performer Threshold. In addition to the recognition it brings, High Performer status positions a housing authority for some additional HUD funding and gives it a competitive advantage in pursuing certain federal grants.

Ms. Hardy continues to build her contacts in the Human Resources community through networking. She is an active member of the Northeast Employers Association. In addition, she has served on the Putnam High School Office Technology Advisory committee and as a mentor to a second grader at the Dorman School.

Highlights:

- **Attendance System.** Ms. Hardy continues to monitor the attendance system including year-end reconciliations of employee benefits and assistance for supervisors with reports to monitor employee attendance.

- **Employee Handbook.** In collaboration with General Counsel and AEDs Nicole Contois and Michelle Booth, Ms. Hardy has reviewed and revised the Employee Handbook for presentation to the Board at its October, 2011 meeting.

- **Safety Committee.** Ms. Hardy serves as the head of the SHA safety committee.

- **Hiring.** Working with department heads, Ms. Hardy has participated in the hiring of twenty-five employees, fourteen Putnam students, and thirty-one employees from the pre-release/day reporting Vocational Training Program sponsored by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department.

- **Compensation.** Ms. Hardy has collected data for a comparability study of certain SHA salaries.

3. Information Technology Department

Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth

The Department consists of Director **Stephen Ethier** and IT Technicians **Terrelle Castle** and **Michael Laprade**. The primary function of the department is to ensure that the Authority's employees have the necessary technological resources to do their jobs, that vital data are properly protected, and that the SHA continues to move in the direction of a modern and efficient business organization. These resources include computers, mobile electronic devices, software, telephones,

and databases. The department has been working hard to meet the demand for these resources in our rapidly-evolving technological world.

Highlights:

- **Telephones.** After a careful RFP process a contract was awarded for a new telephone system. This system will provide the agency with modern, computer-based communications and will reduce costs related to operation and outside maintenance.
- **Automation of Recurring Tasks.** An automated system to handle recurring IT- related tasks, such as updates and monitoring systems for problems, has been instituted.
- **Letters and Reports.** The department created numerous letters and reports that are essential to daily operations for both public housing and rental assistance, such as occupancy and public safety statistics. Department staff have attended trainings that have increased our ability to create these reports.
- **Web Filter.** A new web filtering system has been implemented. This system filters content and helps to protect the Authority's computers from viruses.
- **New Software.** In preparation for the upgrade of the existing or purchase of a new agency-wide software system next year, the department hosted demonstrations of the different public housing software systems available to the Authority.
- **STCC Students.** A new program was created in which the department has partnered with Springfield Technical Community College ["STCC"] to provide internship and resume-building experience opportunities for STCC students. The partnership allows opportunities for students to gain real-world experience while providing the SHA with additional resources to meet the IT demands of our organization. Six interns have successfully completed the program at the SHA.

- **Cross-Training.** The Department fully implemented a staff cross-training program which has resulted in an increased level of staff expertise and efficiency, while enhancing service and response time to the agency as a whole.

4. Legal Department

Supervisors: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin; AEDs Michelle Booth and Nicole Contois; Legal Assistant supervised by Executive Department Manager Isabel Serrazina

The primary function of the Legal Department's representation of the SHA is to advise the staff, the Board, and the executive director on all legal matters relating to issues such as personnel and employment, the administration and management of public and leased housing, procurement, contracting, fair housing, human resources, and tort claims. The legal department handles evictions and other court proceedings and represents the SHA at civil service hearings and. The legal department is a chief negotiator in collective bargaining with the units represented by AFSCME.

The local law firm of **Lyon and Fitzpatrick, LLP** ["L&F"] now serves as SHA General Counsel, with the firm coordinating the work of **Sullivan, Hayes and Quinn** ["SH&Q"] with regard to the SHA's labor matters.

Legal Assistant **June Ball** maintains legal files and prepares and tracks court cases. Student Law Clerks **Erika Scibelli** (past) and **Jessica Marcellino** (present) work with our property management staff to prepare legal notices and files involved in our legal enforcement work.

Highlights:

- **Staff Legal Training.** Property managers and assistant property managers received enhanced legal training in the past year in support of their direct responsibility for increased levels of lease enforcement. Training topics have included elements of a cause eviction case, conducting an informal conference, standards of evidence, and obtaining temporary restraining orders.

- **Increased Court Action.** The department's work has resulted in a 72% increase in the number of cases brought before the Western Division Housing Court as compared to the previous year. There was a 13.49% increase in non-payment of rent cases and an 820% increase in the number of cause eviction cases. This increased lease enforcement is sending a powerful message about the SHA's expectation concerning timely rent payment and conduct that violates lease requirements.
- **Problem-Solving.** Close collaboration among the legal, property management, and resident services departments has continued to be the cornerstone of a legal approach that whenever possible emphasizes identifying and addressing underlying causes of lease violations before they turn into costly and disruptive legal proceedings.
- **Policy Review.** During this past year, the legal department has conducted a review of corporate policies, including smoking, grievance panel policies, parking policy, intellectual property issues, fraud reporting, property acquisition, and legal status of restitution funds.
- **Risk Management.** The department has played a significant role in the SHA's risk management efforts by reviewing and responding to tenant related issues, serving as liaison with counsel for insurers on tort claims, and reviewing the SHA's revised snow removal policy adopted after the Supreme Judicial Court issued a decision with revised standards for snow and ice injuries.
- **Employee Policies.** Other important activities of the legal department include several key employee-related projects, including a redraft of employment policies and an update of affirmative action plans.
- **Unions and Discipline.** The Legal Department plays an active role in union negotiations and in employee discipline assistance. It is also working on a whistleblower policy for consideration by the Board.

5. Real Estate Development Department

Supervisor: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin

In 2010, the Board of Commissioners authorized the creation of a new position within the Executive Department to handle real estate acquisition and development. The position, carrying the title of Real Estate Development Project Administrator, is held by **Sean Cahillane**, who began his service with the SHA in May, 2011, and who holds the post for a three-year period under an agreement with the SHA. Mr. Cahillane is the sole member of the SHA's new Real Estate Development Department.

The central responsibility of this position is to help the SHA obtain consolidated central office space. The SHA offices are scattered among several locations and are inadequate in a number of ways for the needs of our business operations. They contribute to the isolation of the SHA from the broader community, are substandard in terms of size and space, and make it difficult for the SHA to collaborate with other entities in the City and beyond. A study previously done by the local architectural firm of Dietz & Company has analyzed and quantified the office needs for our central administrative staff, including approximately 20,000 square feet of contiguous good quality administrative office space, parking for a minimum of 60 cars, an appropriate site location, preferably with proximity to the downtown government and business districts, and access to public transportation.

Other real estate projects in under consideration include blighted properties adjacent to our Jennie Lane and Johnny Appleseed developments.

In his first several months with the SHA, Mr. Cahillane has familiarized himself with the SHA organization and its staff and he has undertaken an assessment of available properties within the City, with an emphasis on the central business district.

A related responsibility of this position is to plan for re-use of existing SHA office sites after they are vacated. For example, the three high-rise buildings at Saab Court (288 units) have only one

community room in one of the buildings and no other space for resident use. Common rooms for social activities and space for health care functions would be of benefit to our residents, and the potential to create additional housing units is also being considered.

B. PUBLIC HOUSING MANAGEMENT DIVISION

Supervisors: AEDs Michelle Booth and Nicole Contois

The Public Housing Management Division contains the property management department, the applications department, the resident services department, the public safety department, and the warehouse department.

Assistant Executive Director Nicole Contois supervises districts A (state), C (federal), and D (federal and state), as well as the resident services and warehouse departments. Ms. Booth supervises districts B (state) and E (federal), as well as the applications and public safety departments.

1. Property Management Department

Supervisors AEDs Nicole Contois & Michelle Booth

The property management department is primarily responsible for the management of the SHA's public housing portfolio, consisting of 1,327 federal and 1,060 state units spread across 27 developments throughout the city. Daily activities managed by our five property managers, **Sonia Colon-Diaz** (District A), **Daniel Bresnahan** (District B), **Brenda Clinton** (District C), **Celina Correa** (District D), and **Sandra West** (District E) include lease enforcement, maintenance, rent collections, inspections, response to tenant concerns, coordination of resident programming with the resident services department, coordination of issues relating to criminal activity with the public safety department, and participating in efforts to address legal matters, such as termination of tenancies, with the SHA's legal team from the firm of L&F. In addition to management staff assigned to the properties, Maintenance Foremen **Keith Jones**, **Michael LeBlanc**, **Deveron Plummer**, **Leonard Stadnicki**, and **Jose Torres** lead multidisciplinary crews that provide maintenance services to SHA developments.

Highlights:

- **Federalization Work.** Taking advantage of a unique opportunity presented by the 2009 Stimulus Legislation [ARRA], the SHA, in collaboration with DHCD, applied for and received preliminary approval from HUD to federalize its three large state family developments, Reed Village, Duggan Park and Robinson Gardens. With an investment of \$15,000,000 from the Commonwealth, the SHA is working to bring these properties up to federal standards; the SHA anticipates an inspection by HUD in the spring of 2012 as the final stage in the federalization process of two of the three developments.
- **Reorganization of AMPs.** The SHA reorganized its state-aided public housing properties to create specialized Assent Management Project [AMP] that includes the SHA's federalizing family developments, a specialized AMP of properties housing elders and individuals with disabilities, and reassignment of scattered site family units to geographically closer management offices in order to provide enhanced maintenance and management service to these residents.
- **Lease Enforcement.** Working closely with the legal department, property managers have implemented enhanced levels of lease enforcement that are communicating clear and consistent standards of behavior that support healthy communities for elders, children and families.
- **Beautification.** Seeking to address curb appeal in its developments, the SHA, in collaboration with the Riverview Tenant Council, embarked upon a beautification project of the Riverview Apartments by adding new plantings, mulching, signage, and lighting.
- **Resident Engagement.** Property managers and the public safety department continue to work closely together to address and prevent activities that interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of our housing developments. There has been a significant increase in resident engagement in public safety initiatives. In this past year there has been a marked increase in resident reporting of incidents and conditions, allowing the SHA to achieve increased

rates of lease enforcement activity and no trespass actions to keep persons engaged in illegal or other community-violating behavior away from our properties.

- **Services for Residents.** The continuing bleak economic climate has had a severe impact on SHA residents, with many burdened by unemployment or under-employment. Property managers continue to work with the Resident Services Department staff and outside agencies to help connect residents to social services, job training, and other programs that help individuals and families move towards self-sufficiency and access educational and job training programs.
- **Sheriff's Department and Roca.** In addition to a long-standing partnership with the Hampden County Sheriff's Department that involves engaging three pre-release crews to help maintain grounds, clean hallways and prepare vacant units for occupancy, the SHA entered into a similar partnership with Roca, a job training program for at-risk youth. These partnerships not only help the SHA to meet its mission to maintain quality housing and foster cost-savings; it also allows the SHA to support youth development and job training in the City of Springfield.

2. Applications Department

Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth

The Applications Department is managed by **Jacqueline Banks**, who oversees the daily operations of the department and supervises a staff of three. Applications Department staff include **Natasha Lopez**, **Ruth Maio**, and **Dianna Martinez**. The department is the first contact that prospective tenants have with the SHA and, as such, strives to consistently provide excellent customer service to help applicants navigate a process that can be confusing for many. In addition to processing applications for federal and state-aided public housing, the applications department coordinates the offer and assignment of units for applicants and for tenants being transferred within SHA housing, and determines whether an applicant is entitled to a priority or preference in admissions or transfer. For example, displacement due to fire and homelessness without fault are priority categories in state public housing. In addition, if an applicant is a Springfield resident, is employed in Springfield, or is a

veteran, that applicant will take preference on the state housing waiting list. In federal housing, examples of preferences are also Springfield residence and displacement due to (federally declared) natural disaster.

The SHA is required to use separate application forms for state and federally aided public housing. Once an applicant has been determined to be preliminarily eligible for public housing, the application is date and time stamped and placed on the appropriate waiting list(s). Although applicants often request an estimate of when the SHA will make an offer of housing, it is very difficult to predict precisely when an applicant will reach the top of the waiting list. The factors that influence this waiting time include the level of priority or preference (if any), date of application, unit size, and current vacancy rates. Applicants must document that they meet the state and federal income limits, have satisfactory landlord references, and pass a credit and criminal background check. To qualify for elderly housing, a person must be 60 years of age or older, or be disabled or handicapped as defined under federal and state law.

The wait for priority applicants can range from three to six months or longer. The waiting list for non-priority applicants can be several years. *SHA housing is in such demand that we have only an average of 35 available apartments per month against a waiting list of thousands.* In recent months, this reality has often discouraged applicants from filing applications for public housing, despite encouragement from staff to apply.

Highlights:

- **Occupancy Rates/HUD.** HUD has instituted financial sanctions when a public housing authority's occupancy level drops below 97%. The applications department has maintained an average occupancy rate of at least 97% in the federal public housing portfolio. At the end of fiscal year March 31, 2011 the SHA's federal housing occupancy rate was 99.2%.
- **Occupancy Rates/DHCD.** DHCD has established a standard occupancy rate of 96%. The applications department has maintained an average occupancy rate of at least 97%; at

the end of fiscal year March 31, 2011, the SHA state public housing occupancy rate was 98.4%.

- **Certain Waiting Lists Closed.** The Applications Department examined the waiting list for the SHA's federally-aided public housing program and determined, regrettably but realistically, that there are unit sizes for which new applicants would have no reasonable hope of receiving a unit offer within the foreseeable future based upon projected unit turnover. In accordance with the SHA's Admission and Continued Occupancy Policy [“ACOP”], the Board accepted a recommendation and voted to approve closing designated waiting lists. The following lists were closed on November 1, 2010.
 - Two and three-bedroom federal family;
 - One-bedroom federal elderly; and
 - Riverview Near Elderly

- **Unit Turnaround Time.** The applications department staff continues to work on decreasing unit turnaround time for the state and federal public housing developments. Currently, the average turnaround time can be up to twenty-one days. Our goal is a turnaround time of ten days or less.

- **Application Rates.** Last year the applications department received between 220 to 300 applications per month. This year, the rate of applications has decreased to approximately 65 per month since the closing of a portion of the SHA’s waiting lists.

- **Project Homeless Connect.** The applications department staff participated in Project Homeless Connect, a daylong event at the Mass Mutual Center designed to link homeless individuals with housing and other supportive services.

- **Tornado Victims Housing Assistance.** The applications department worked with the property managers to house the SHA tenants who were displaced due to the tornado on June 1, 2011. The application staff also worked with the Springfield Office of Housing

and the Mayor's Office to assist Springfield residents that were also displaced due to the tornado.

- **Veterans Stand-Down.** The Applications Department staff also participated in the Western Massachusetts Veterans Stand-Down, a day-long event at the Greek Cultural Center, servicing the needs of veterans and their families.
- **Staff Training.** The Applications Department provided training to all new employees assigned to work with state-aided public housing to familiarize them with regulations, policies, and procedures related to eligibility for public housing, continued occupancy and rent calculation.

3. Resident Services Department

Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois

The resident service department, with **Pam Wells** as Manager, has continued to grow over the past year. The department is now comprised of ten full-time and five part-time positions, funded by and carrying out the grants outlined below.

Highlights:

- **Transitional Housing Program and Housing First.** Funded by DHCD for 35 units, these programs have continued to be successful even as our vacancy rate at SHA has been reduced significantly. We have managed to keep occupancy at 90% during the past year for THP and 100% for Housing First. One of the many highlights of the past year was the development of a partnership between SHA and Behavioral Health Network to bring mental health services to our participants. Community partners also provided a number of training opportunities for participant families, including parenting skills, nutrition training, financial literacy, communication skills, and anger management strategies. These trainings have been effective in helping our families gain important information that will help them in their successful transition out of homelessness.

- **Deborah J. Barton Neighborhood Network Center.** The center continues to be the hub of our family self-sufficiency activities and the site for a successful GED program. During the past year we had 15 students obtain their GEDs. We also continue to have an active computer center where classes in basic computer skills are taught. The computer center also is equipped with Rosetta Stone software which allows our non-English speaking residents to learn English at their own pace. As noted in the introduction, the employment and employment training program, funded by the Regional Employment Board, also continued last year and has been renewed for an additional two-year period.
- **Youth Empowerment for Adolescent Health! Network [“YEAH!”].** The YEAH! Network conducted an educational program for the youth at John L. Sullivan Apartments. This program coincided with the school year and the participants met weekly. The areas addressed included education on adolescent sexual health, leadership development and career exploration. Twelve youngsters participated in the program.
- **ROSS Service Coordinator.** Funded by HUD in the amount of \$390,000.00 for two resident service coordinator positions aimed at assisting federal family and elderly/disabled residents, for a period of two years, effective July 29, 2010.
- **Housing Intervention and Prevention Program [“HIP”].** SHA continues to operate this program, funded by DHCD to address the issue of residents at risk of losing their housing due to non-payment issues. This program was funded for two years and has been a successful catalyst in getting our residents involved with other programs that we offer to enhance their life skills as well as stabilizing situations that could result in homelessness.
- **Talk/Read/Succeed! Program.** Also as noted in the introduction, the TRS engagement strategies were initiated during this year. Several events were held to educate the residents about the importance of childhood literacy as it relates to success in school. There were also a number of trainings offered to parents and children, all designed to engage and educate. Among the trainings offered were: Ready for K (a training for parents to support

them in their roles as their child's first and most influential teacher) and Learning for Life (the objective of this series of workshops was to improve parent and child relationships through behavioral and literacy education). Both of these workshops were conducted by community providers with expertise and experience in this field.

- **After School and Summer Programming.** The after school and summer programming continues to operate at seven of our family developments. We continue to evaluate programming to develop and refine what is offered to make it an extension of the classroom learning environment. We have developed several relationships with the schools in the neighborhoods where our family developments are located. These relationships have led to discussions on ways to partner to ensure that our shared populations have successful outcomes. The TRS initiative has helped to structure a framework for these programs which will be instrumental as we move forward on improving quality. This summer we were able to make some changes in our summer programming at John L. Sullivan Apartments by hiring a teacher coach to assist the community provider in making changes to the programming to focus on literacy. The result was a higher quality of programming being delivered this summer. The teacher coach was also able to assess the literacy skills of the children participating by conducting pre and post "Dibbles" testing. Several children increased their reading levels while others stayed the same. This is especially significant because research says that children tend to lose ground in reading during the summer months.
- **Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative ["HSLI"].** The TRS program also collaborated with the HSLI to bring a summer learning experience to the children of the TRS families. The programs were housed at the two elementary schools (Boland and Dorman) which most TRS children attend. The programs ran for five weeks and were theme-based with learning embedded at every opportunity. The programs were very successful and discussions are already underway on how to sustain this programming next summer.

- **Forest Park Activity Center.** The Forest Park Activity Center was a collaboration between SHA and the Massachusetts Department of Elder Affairs. The center has become the focal point of this elderly development. Wellness based activities take place on a regular basis.

4. Public Safety Department

Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth

The public safety department, supervised by Manager **Rosa Lebron**, was comprised this year of Ms. Lebron and four other staff, including **Francis Caicoya**, part-time public safety officer, **Camilla Turnorutsky**, part-time clerk, and public safety officers **Matthew Chandler** and **Kevin Kleszczynski**.⁵ The SHA also contracts with the Springfield Police Department (SPD) for patrol services in addition to baseline services provided to the neighborhoods in which SHA developments are located. The department continues to develop and implement public safety strategies that serve to educate, preserve peace, foster crime prevention, enforce standards, and address quality of life issues by working in collaboration with a range of SHA, law enforcement, and community-based partners.

Highlights:

- **Reports.** The department worked closely with the IT department to produce reports that assist property managers and administrators in tracking and monitoring crime trends effectively. The department’s database snapshot of incidents at both the district and development level support targeted, place-based approaches to effective crime prevention in neighborhoods throughout Springfield.
- **Collaboration.** The SHA continues to apply a collaborative public safety approach focused on preventing residents from becoming victims of crime, deterring the potential perpetrators by making consequences apparent and swift, and reducing opportunities for perpetrators to engage in criminal activity on SHA property. This collaboration includes not only working with other SHA departments, but also with the Springfield Police

⁵ Mr. Kleszczynski has since been promoted to the position of Assistant Manager in our (federalizing) state family AMP (Reed Village, Duggan Park, and Robinson Gardens).

Department, Hampden County Sheriff's Department (including the Neighborhood Watch Committee), Hampden County District Attorney's Office, Massachusetts Probation Department, US Marshall's Service, the Massachusetts State Police, the North End Safe Neighborhood Initiative led by the Massachusetts State Police and the Springfield Police Department, the Mayor's city-wide Violence Prevention Task Force, the Western Massachusetts Gang Intelligence Roundtable, and the City of Springfield's Emergency Preparedness Advisory Group.

- **Reports by Residents.** The department continues to report an increased accounting of incidents by residents and property managers. This increase in reported incidents results from improved police and SHA outreach to tenants, as well as increased public safety personnel presence and police enforcement action in neighborhoods in which SHA developments are located.
- **Violent Incidents Down.** In analyzing data and conferring with the SPD, the department has noted a distinct decrease in violent and drug-related incidents in SHA developments, with more reported incidents involving quality of life issues.
- **Tornadoes.** Department staff played a role in the SHA's response to the tornado of June 1 by assisting residents and providing ongoing and increased patrols to SHA neighborhoods impacted by the storm.

5. Warehouse Department

Supervisor: AED Nicole Contois

Under the direction of Manager **Rosa Leo**, the warehouse department, inclusive of Stock Receiver **Derrick Howard**, is responsible for receiving equipment, materials and supplies and for distribution of those items to the developments and offices.

Highlights:

- **Reduction in Stock.** The auditor and the finance and accounting department, plus a pro bono review of SHA operations by the Cambridge Housing Authority, recommend a reduced inventory of stock items ordered and stored in the warehouse. The warehouse manager and AED Nicole Contois worked together this year to reduce the amount of stock. This resulted in a reduction of over \$100,000. In the upcoming year we plan to have an even greater reduction.
- **Backup Planning.** The warehouse has developed backup measures in the event that the warehouse manager is absent from work.
- **Relocation of Office Supplies.** As the warehouse manager recommended last year, the relocation of office supply storage has been moved from 18 Saab Court to 82 Division Street, to provide one location for all office supplies.
- **Cost Savings Planning.** In the upcoming year the warehouse manager and AED Nicole Contois will look at other cost saving measures such as delivery to sites rather than a central pickup by SHA maintenance staff.

C. FACILITIES AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS DIVISION

Supervisor: AED Wallace Kisiel

After the previous system, with its “silos” for maintenance, capital work, and trades, was replaced by a unified department under the direction of **Wallace Kisiel**, the Facilities and Capital Improvements Department has been extremely productive, as shown by its ability to continue to manage the major capital projects demanded by federalization along with its many other responsibilities, with the same staff resources.

1. Facilities Maintenance Department

Supervisor: AED Wallace Kisiel

The facilities maintenance department (including the prior trades department), under the management of **Paul Spedero**, assisted by Administrative Assistant **Virma Santiago**, is responsible

for providing specialized trade services to SHA's public housing developments and to the administrative offices of the SHA. These services include painting, plumbing, electrical work, extermination, locksmith service, and vehicle maintenance and repair. The department consists of seven full-time employees. In addition, the department also includes 11 student interns from Putnam Vocational Technical High School who are deployed in the field with other SHA employees to hone students' skills in their respective trades. The department is also responsible for developing a comprehensive preventive maintenance plan for SHA developments. All necessary licenses and permits, such as elevator, dumpster, gas tanks, etc., are acquired by the Facilities Maintenance Department.

Two members of this department's staff are scheduled to work nights and weekends to answer maintenance calls from the answering service. The facility department schedules coverage when they are not in.

Painting and exterminator services, previously handled by in-house staff, are now handled on a contract basis, with substantial savings to the SHA. Locksmith services have also been contracted out and the in-house locksmith services will be phased out by the end of October, 2011. Please note that this change was accomplished without any layoffs or reductions in force, which will be accomplished by attrition over time; for the present the extra staff resources provide welcome assistance on our federalization projects.

The department is also responsible for coordinating work performed by outside vendors and contractors (for example, coordinating with the Hampden County Sheriff's Department to schedule pre-release and day reporting crews who help maintain grounds, hallways, and prepare vacant apartments for leasing).

Fire department permits, electrical and plumbing license are renewed through this department as well. All fire inspections and fire suppression systems are monitored and records kept in this department. The facilities maintenance department assists the purchasing department in preparing RFQ/RFP's, supplying specifications, equipment identification, materials identification and building

sites. Any type of new equipment that comes on the market such as electrical and plumbing is evaluated and determined whether it would be a cost saving for SHA. The facilities department assists all departments during any type of natural disaster, coordinates insurance adjustments, architectural engineers, structural engineers and inspectors.

The department staff, in collaboration with management staff, represent the SHA on the Western Massachusetts Bedbug Prevention Task Force. This task force, funded by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture and coordinated by the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, seeks to identify and implement innovative strategies for treating and preventing bedbug infestation.

An important goal for this department is to expand its capacity to perform preventative maintenance and repair in-house, thus reducing the costs associated with outside contractors. Toward this end, the department is in the process of establishing a program to provide technical training certification to tradesmen and Mechanic I's through vendors, technical schools, and field technicians. The department anticipates implementing some aspects of the program in the next calendar year, including having the plumber and electrician performing preventative maintenance on boilers.

2. Capital Improvements Department

Supervisor: AED Wallace Kisiel

This department is responsible for the supervision of millions of dollars' worth of procurement and capital projects per year and its staff are experts in state and federal procurement requirements. The department consists of Capital Improvement Project Coordinator **John Healy** and Capitol Improvements Clerk **Naomi DeChristopher**, who provided the daily administration and oversight of the nearly \$13 million of capital work this past year.

Beginning on June 1, 2011 the SHA started construction at Reed Village and Duggan Park Apartments. These construction contracts, which total \$10 million, will help move us towards completion of the massive federalization project that began two years ago.

The primary responsibility of the AED with respect to capital projects (this term is sometimes used interchangeably with “modernization”) is to analyze the capital (i.e., major repair/improvement) needs of all buildings and equipment owned and managed by the SHA. With 27 separate housing developments, administrative and operational offices, and many complex systems (electrical, heating and air conditioning, elevators, etc.) this is a demanding and complex task. Once capital needs are identified, Mr. Kisiel and his staff meet with all staff members and residents interested in modernization planning to formulate and cost out a list of priorities. This list projects capital projects five years into the future, and is updated on an annual basis to keep in step with new needs and circumstances.

Department staff also identify and pursue all sources of funding for capital improvements, obligate and expend capital funds within the standards and deadlines specified by HUD and DHCD, and develop and implement resident training initiatives relating to the SHA’s maintenance and modernization programs. The financial records and capital budgets are maintained by the finance and accounting department.

Highlights:

- **CFP Grants.** In the past year, the SHA closed out the 2008 Capital Fund Program [“CFP”] grant, thereby demonstrating that funding is being obligated and expended in a timely manner. At this time the 2009, 2010 and 2011 CFP grants are active. The 2009 CFP budget will be closed out by early 2012.
- **Security Cameras.** Installation of a new security camera system at Gentile Apartments will allow on-site staff to view cameras from their desktop computers when incidents arise. As part of the project we installed new magnetic locks on the community room doors to secure the area when staff is not on site.
- **Reed Village and Duggan Park.** Replacement of siding and windows at Reed Village and Duggan Park Apartments is underway as of June 2011. This work will complete the capital work associated with federalization of the two developments. Also included in

these contracts is substantial site work at both developments. The total cost of this work is \$10 million.

- **Maintenance/Storage Facilities.** In addition to the federalization work, ARRA funds were used for the construction of seven new maintenance storage buildings, six of which have now been completed; this month, ground will be broken for construction of a storage building at Marble Apartments, using the last of the FY2009 Capital Fund grant.
- **FY 2008 Capital Fund Work.** \$1.2 million of the FY2008 CFP has been expended to install several new roofs, one new storage building, heat controls, and intercom systems.
- **Moxon Office/Community Room.** Renovations began in late August to convert the community room building at Moxon Apartments into the management office for District E. The office is being created to improve service to the district's residents, particularly those that are handicapped.
- **Sullivan Head Start and Handicap Accessible Unit.** Design work has begun on renovations of a unit at John L. Sullivan Apartments to be converted into a Head Start site to serve residents in the development. We will also be renovating an adjacent apartment to make it handicapped accessible to begin to meet our agreement with HUD of creating more accessible units.

3. Purchasing Department

Supervisor: AED Wallace Kisiel

Our purchasing department operates under the direction of Purchasing Manager **Michael Bailey**. It is primarily responsible for the procurement of supplies and services and adherence to public bidding laws. Mr. Bailey supervises Purchasing Clerk **Bette Goulet**, and is responsible for providing guidance to the SHA staff on appropriate procurement methods.

Last year the SHA launched its online procurement solicitation system which is available on the SHA website. All RFP/IFB's are now posted on the website. This has resulted in easier public access to our procurements and in reduction in the quantity bid packages mailed by the department, resulting in savings in postage and paper and an overall improvement of the RFP/IFB process. There has been positive vendor feedback regarding the online purchasing system.

Highlights:

- **NIGP.** The SHA remains a member in good standing of the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing [“NIGP”]. Mr. Bailey attended its annual forum and products exposition in August 2011 to meet with fellow purchasing professionals and meet with vendors who can assist the SHA in advancing its purchasing department initiatives.
- **Major Procurements.** The department played a major role in obtaining; a new state of the art telephone system, a contractor to provide comprehensive project management services for the SHA federalization initiative, and, a painting contractor who will be responsible for all major SHA painting services. These and other projects were completed along with the many annual IFB/RFPs that are required for various services.
- **Paperless Requisitions.** It is expected that before the end of the calendar year the department will have implemented a paperless purchasing requisition system. A paperless system will expedite the requisition approval system and eliminate the need for supervisors to drive from site to site for signatures. This paperless system will be the first step towards possibly procuring a complete electronic procurement system.
- **P-Card System.** The department will also procure and, subject to Board approval, implement a Purchasing Card (P-Card) system. A P-Card system would provide a convenient, cost-effective and efficient method of procuring and paying for goods and services within a predetermined dollar range by simplifying the procurement process, improving order cycle time up to and including delivery time, reducing paperwork, and expediting vendor payments. The P-Card system would give each AMP and department

more autonomy in the selection process of the goods/services it requires. A strict set of purchasing criteria would be established in order to be certain that all statutory and SHA purchasing policies are being followed.

- **Purchasing Committee.** Planning is underway for a purchasing committee so that all departments served by the purchasing department can have input into purchasing procedures. The committee will consist of staff members from various departments within the SHA.

D. RENTAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION

Supervisor: AED Michelle Booth

The SHA's Rental Assistance Division (the only division containing a single department), under the direction of **Joseph D'Ascoli**, is primarily responsible for the management of the Housing Choice Voucher Program ["HCVP," also referred to as "Section 8"] consisting of 2,589 allocated vouchers. In addition, it manages the state funded Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program ["MRVP"] consisting of:

- 112 tenant based mobile vouchers, although due to restrictions placed by DHCD, only 73 are under contract
- 9 "7H1" project based units through Chestnut Park
- 22 project based units through Martin Luther King Development, Miracle House (Gandara), and Memorial Parish House
- 137 Moderate Rehabilitation I & II

The rental assistance department is comprised of a staff of nineteen, increased by one staff member since last year. In addition to Mr. D'Ascoli, the department includes **Cole Alves, Christopher Broughton, Maria Collazo, Dorothy Flebotte, Angelina Galarza, Denise Gignac, John Goodwin, Maryanne Hale, Amanda Jimenez, Patricia Leeper, Audrey Mitchell, Krista Orr-Westbrook, Jasmine Perez, Aris Sanchez, Jackeline Santiago, Colleen Shea, Blanca Spencer, Milton Torres, and Myrna Vasquez.**

The department is responsible for the expenditure of over \$17 million in Housing Assistance Payments received from HUD. In addition, the department administers \$1 million in state funding for MRVP. Administering these programs involves processing requests for tenancy approvals, rent reasonableness determinations, annual and interim certifications, annual and special inspections to ensure that units participating in the program meet Housing Quality Standards [“HQS”], determining applicant eligibility, and maintaining the program waiting lists. Department staff also conduct informal hearings to ensure that landlords and participants comply with the regulations and requirements of the programs, hold participants and landlords accountable for program violations, and recover public funds if fraud has occurred. The department also provides responses to inquiries from landlords, participants, and from the general public. In addition, department staff conducts informational meetings, creates RFPs and evaluates responses, and administers the Home Ownership Program.

Highlights:

- **100% SEMAP Score.** The SHA is pleased to note that HUD recently designated the SHA as achieving “High Performer” status, with a score of 100%, under the Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) for fiscal year end March 31, 2011. This is the fifth year in a row that this department has achieved this status. This designation is the result of the hard work and dedication of the department staff under the direction of Joseph D’Ascoli and Blanca Spencer, Rental Assistance Manager. On behalf of the Board, I extend many thanks to this very capable staff and congratulate them on this significant team achievement.
- **Utilization Planning.** The greatest challenge for this department in the past year has been the successful management of the program in the face of unpredictable HUD funding patterns. Utilization planning becomes a real challenge when HUD funding levels are not announced in a timely manner, given that it takes an average of approximately four months from the time an applicant is drawn from the centralized waiting list until final lease-up into the program. Despite these challenges, this year the department was able to utilize 100% of funds allocated by HUD.

- **Chronically Homeless Program.** The SHA has collaborated with the City of Springfield and others to create and implement the Federal Chronically Homeless Program, an innovative project-based voucher program to address the homeless needs in the community. Through the issuance of four RFPs, the SHA has awarded project-based funding to seven landlords who have leased a total of 89 units to the program. Per recent Board authorization, the SHA issued a sixth RFP for the remaining 11 units that SHA has allocated to the program; the SHA anticipates awarding these project-based vouchers to landlords in the winter of 2011. All of the units at the new Worthington Street Homeless Center are assisted under this program.
- **Section 8 Home Ownership.** The SHA has increased its number of homeowners in the HCVP from 37 to 39 in the past year, making the SHA the second largest such program in the state.
- **Fraud Prevention.** Department staff continues to work diligently to ensure that the SHA complies with HUD and DHCD regulations to prevent and address fraud (including unreported income, discrepancies in financial information, identity theft, anonymous complaints, and others). The department currently has \$251,000 in active repayment agreements arising from fraud investigations. The department created a full-time fraud investigator position in January, 2011 to augment the SHA's existing efforts to identify fraud and support program integrity. This investigator works closely with the SHA legal team and networks with other agencies to recover funds and support prosecution of individuals engaged in fraudulent activity whenever possible.
- **File Auditor.** In an effort to assure compliance with all applicable regulations and policies, the SHA created a file auditor position in the department. The file auditor reviews all files that are being processed to ensure that there are no discrepancies and to make recommendations for staff training where necessary.

- **Tornado Victims Re-housed.** As a result of the tornado of June 1st, a total of 27 HCVP participants were left homeless. Mr. D’Ascoli, along with staff from other SHA departments, have worked with FEMA, American Red Cross, City of Springfield Office of Housing, HAP, and other organizations to facilitate the placement of individuals and/or families that were affected by the disaster.
- **NAHRO Training Center Recognition.** In August 2011, the SHA received recognition from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials [“NAHRO”] for the opening of a training center at the Joseph P. Gentile Apartments. Using this site, NAHRO will conduct various training(s) throughout the year. As host of the center, the SHA receives access to a designated number of free registrations for training events.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of last year’s Annual Report, I reported to the Board that many fundamentals of reorganization had been accomplished, including reorganization and updating of the Executive, Finance, Legal, IT, Facilities and Capital Improvements, and Human Resources Departments, streamlining of our organization chart, and the completion of many steps in the transition to asset management. At that point, the SHA had developed the capacity to take on important initiatives, including federalization, analysis of our office needs, reinvigorated lease enforcement, and the educational initiative embodied in the Talk/Read/Succeed! program, among others. I also reported that elements of the broader community now regard the SHA as an accountable and competent agency, available to serve as a partner in addressing a range of community concerns.

Both your SHA staff and members of the community are acutely aware that these steps were only made possible by the years of difficult work performed by the Board to create transparent and accountable administration of this large community agency. The Springfield community owes the Board its appreciation and thanks for this work. In addition, I would like to add appreciation and thanks, both personally and on behalf of your SHA staff, for the diligence of supervision and the

extraordinary support the Board has given for our efforts and initiatives, which has been the engine that drives the whole enterprise.

With those considerable accomplishments under our belt, what are the priorities for the upcoming year?

First, the upgrading of the SHA into an efficient business organization must continue into the next rungs on the organizational ladder. Staff will now turn more of their attention to a number of practices that need improvement and greater efficiency in our property management operations. In making this observation, no criticism of our SHA staff is suggested. On the contrary, our staff have been working hard, but without the systems and tools they need to achieve higher efficiency and better service to our residents. As prime examples, next year I hope to be able to report that we have achieved substantial improvements in our work order systems for our developments and that our lease enforcement continues to become more effective.

Second, and of major importance, we must make it a priority to do a better job of engaging our residents and employees in the process of community-building within the SHA. Our mission is a profound one, including the mandate set forth in our Employee Handbook to

design, implement, and support educational and vocational programs with the goal of reducing the long-term reliance of residents on public assistance programs. . . [and to] ensure that each SHA resident has the opportunities to achieve [his or her] maximum potential.

As I begin my fourth year as Executive Director it will be a priority to increase the “buy-in” for our mission from all elements of our community. The varied and important work summarized in this report will be enhanced by broadening the base of those who value and participate in that work. A significant measure of success over the next twelve months will be the extent to which we are able, together, to engage all elements of our community in our efforts.

Organization charts and job descriptions have their necessary places, but the success of every organization depends most fundamentally upon the intelligence and dedication of the people who

make it run. Without the right people, one encounters frustration at every turn; with the right people, the sky is the limit. The SHA has assembled a truly impressive team, which has grown and strengthened substantially over this past year.

We are primed to reach more of the potential that is there within the SHA community, waiting patiently for us to find it.

In recognition of our excellent Board and staff, I will conclude as I did last year, with the most enthusiastic *thank you* to the entire SHA team for your contributions and accomplishments.