



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 18, 2012
Re: Report of the Executive Director for 2012

PREFACE

As in prior years, I would like to begin this Annual Report to the Springfield Housing Authority Board of Commissioners by acknowledging the assistance of SHA staff in creating this summary of the activities of the Authority over the past year. The team effort that created this Report followed the same process as last year, which is explained in the preface to last year's Annual Report. With appreciation for all staff who contributed to this Report, special thanks are due to Executive Department Manager **Isabel Serrazina**. Isabel skillfully managed the process from initial distribution to final proofreading.

Every effort has been made to ensure that information in this Report is accurate, but as always any errors are my responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The year preceding this Report has seen major changes in the governing body of the SHA, the Board of Commissioners. On behalf of the SHA I would like to acknowledge and thank those members who left the Board this year, Melinda Pellerin-Duck and Timothy Babcock. Ms. Pellerin-Duck served as the organized labor representative on the Board, and Mr. Babcock as Board Chair. Both of these Board members were deeply rooted in public education in Springfield, Ms. Pellerin-Duck as a former teacher who won the prestigious statewide "Teacher of the Year" award in 2004, and Mr. Babcock as a former teacher and school principal who continued to substitute and mentor in

the public schools throughout his Board service. Ms. Pellerin-Duck and Mr. Babcock worked long and hard to steer the SHA into a new era of integrity and accomplishment. They deserve major credit for many of the accomplishments set forth below. Their intelligence, good humor, and collegiality enriched this organization, and their contributions will be missed.

In honor of Tim Babcock’s long service as Board Chair, in June, 2012 the Board renamed our Executive Offices “*The Springfield Housing Authority Timothy J. Babcock, Jr. Center,*” a fitting tribute to a leader who contributed so much to our community.

In June, 2012, the Board elected longtime Board member and Vice-Chair Raymond Warren as Chair of the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Warren has served on the Board for over eight years. He brings to his new position commitment to the mission of the Authority and deep knowledge of the background and operations of the SHA, as well as expertise in economic development and municipal management.

In July, 2012, Mayor Sarno nominated and the City Council confirmed two new members to the SHA Board: **Thomas Labonte**, a long-time employee with the City of Springfield’s Department of Public Works and **Angela Robles**, employed by the Hampden County District Attorney’s office. Mr. Labonte serves as the Board’s organized labor representative. We welcome our new Commissioners and trust that that they have much to add to our work.

* * * * *

I am pleased to report that after years of hard work on the part of the SHA’s Board and staff, the condition of the Authority is sound. We are operating in the black. Major upgrades to our physical facilities have been accomplished and more are in progress. Management improvements continue to strengthen our lease enforcement and maintenance systems. SHA collaborations within the Springfield community continue to grow. Our programs have garnered a number of awards and citations.

As I reported in more detail last year, the condition of the SHA must be viewed in the context of the deep problems affecting Springfield and the region, particularly in education, employment, and public safety. Poverty, particularly among children, is on the rise, an alarming number of Springfield's children are struggling and failing in the public schools, and the weak economy has led to both unemployment and reductions in municipal services. At the same time, many elements of the community are pulling together to address these problems. The Springfield Housing Authority is determined to do everything it can to participate in and support these efforts. This theme runs through the below highlights, many of which are covered more fully in the individual sections of this Report.

- **Federalization**. As previously reported, three years ago the SHA embarked on the most ambitious federalization process in the state, with the goal of converting all three of its state family developments to the federal portfolio. With major financial and logistical support from the state Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the complex process of federalization is producing upgrades in the physical condition and the management systems of those developments.

This year saw the completion of the first federalization, at Reed Village, which received an “excellent” score (over 90 out of 100 points) from HUD on its final REAC (Real Estate Assessment Center) physical inspection. The second development that was originally funded for federalization, Duggan Park, is moving towards completion, with its REAC inspection now scheduled for September 19, 2012.

Last year I reported that discussions had been renewed with the Department of Housing and Community Development for funding for federalization of our remaining state family development, Robinson Gardens. I am pleased to report that funding has been awarded for that development and that work is now underway in Robinson Gardens as well as Duggan Park. Our goal is to have Robinson Gardens ready for the REAC inspection late this year or early in 2013.

Details of this complex process can be found in last year's report. All in all, the SHA has received grants from the state in the amount of approximately \$20 million

for the upgrading of these developments and for bottom-to-top improvements in our management and maintenance systems. Once federalization is completed the result will be the preservation of these previously at-risk developments and substantially improved quality of life for our residents. Deputy Directors **Michelle Booth** (operational systems) and **Wallace Kisiel** (capital improvements) have led these efforts, along with Senior Property Manager **Daniel Bresnahan** and his team.

- **Audit**. This year, the SHA received its first audit in many years containing no “findings,” meaning that independent auditors have determined that all aspects of SHA operations are free of significant problems. This includes our complex finances, of course, but the audit also includes review of applications, leases, management of resident files, compliance with reporting obligations, and other aspects of SHA operations. Our financial team, including Deputy Director **Nicole Contois** and financial consultant **Mike Petro**, played a central role in the audit process.
- **Choice Neighborhood**. Last year I reported that after an unsuccessful first try, the City of Springfield and the SHA were preparing another joint application for a HUD “Choice Neighborhood” Planning Grant for the South End neighborhood of Springfield. I am pleased to report that our application was successful—the only application in New England to be funded and one of just thirteen successful applications in the United States. With the \$300,000 Planning Grant the City and the SHA have been working hard in preparing our application for the Implementation Grant. If the application is successful, the grant could bring up to \$30 million for neighborhood transformation in the South End of Springfield.

Grant activities would include the demolition and replacement of the SHA’s outdated Marble Street Apartments located in the South End. Choice Neighborhood grants are also designed to leverage private investment in neighborhood revitalization activities. Deputy Director **Michelle Booth** has taken the lead on this effort for the SHA.

- **Talk/Read/Succeed! /“TRS”**. Two years ago, core funding for this “mini-Harlem Children’s Zone” program was awarded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in the amount of \$390,000. The program operates in the John Sullivan Apartments and in Robinson Gardens. Now at the end of this two-year grant, the SHA and its partners, including the United Way of Pioneer Valley, the Regional Employment Board, the Springfield Education Association, the Davis Foundation, and local public schools will shortly be submitting an application for a three-year grant. If awarded, that grant will double the per-year grant funding for the program and allow it to expand its services and offer those services to residents of at least one additional family development.

Reason for optimism about renewal of the grant is found in the assessment of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which points to TRS as a national “best practices” model for breaking the cycle of disadvantage and increasing educational opportunities for poor families. 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 demands of integrating TRS into the SHA’s already-complex Resident Services program are managed by Resident Services Manager **Pam Wells** and her staff.

- **Central Office**. As discussed with the Board over the past two years, the SHA’s business operations and work in the community would be enhanced by replacement of its outdated and scattered administrative offices by one centralized office. At this writing a Request for Proposals has been issued by the SHA for office space in the Metro Central District of Springfield. The process is managed by Real Estate Project Administrator **Sean Cahillane**.
- **Central Fueling**. The SHA has entered into a cooperative agreement with the City of Springfield for fueling its vehicles and equipment at the Department of Public Works facility on Tapley Street. This allows the SHA to save staff time devoted to

supervising a separate fueling facility and to reduce vehicle traffic in and out of Jennie Lane, where the SHA fueling facility has been located.

- **REAC.** On a regular basis, HUD’s Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) scores every large housing authority on a number of performance standards, including financial, operational, and regulatory compliance criteria. Authorities are graded as “substandard,” “standard,” or “high performing” authorities. For the past several years, the SHA has scored high enough on every standard to merit high performer status, with the exception of its REAC (physical inspection) scores. This year the SHA began a concerted push to raise its REAC scores and cross the line to high performer status. The result has been high scores in a number of recent REAC inspections for fiscal year 2012 as follows: 95 for AMP 2 (Stephen J. Collins Twin and Tri Towers), up from 61 for fiscal year 2011; 91 for AMP 3 (John L. Sullivan and Morgan Apartments), up from 41 for fiscal year 2011; and 95 for AMP 5 (Manilla, Pendleton, Marble and Jennie Lane Apartments), up from 60 for fiscal year 2011.

If the SHA can match this performance in upcoming inspections, for the first time in its modern history it will be classified as a high performing housing authority. In addition to the bragging rights that go with this classification, high performer status carries tangible benefits, including less frequent inspections and advantageous positioning for certain HUD grants. Deputy Directors **Nicole Contois** and **Michelle Booth** have led this effort, along with Property Managers **Brenda Clinton**, **Celina Correa**, and **Sandra West** and their management and maintenance teams.

- **SEMAP.** Approximately half of the SHA’s budget goes to funding its Section 8 program, consisting of approximately 2,500 units in the community. As with public housing, HUD grades every housing authority annually on the operation of its Section 8 system, through the Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP). I am pleased and to report that for the sixth year in a row the SHA received a score of 100% in its SEMAP assessment, an impressive accomplishment managed by Rental

Assistance Director **Joseph D’Ascoli**, Assistant Manager **Blanca Spencer**, and their staff.

- **Head Start.** Nothing is more important for poor families than a healthy and enriched start for their children. The Head Start program provides this opportunity for participating families. In order to make access to Head Start work for our families, the SHA has undertaken to bring Head Start into its family developments. Since 2008 we have opened Head Start programs in Robinson Gardens and the Riverview Apartments. Last year we obtained approval from HUD to take a unit at the Sullivan Apartments off line and to convert it into our third Head Start facility. This requires renovations to comply with state and federal child care center regulations, a process managed by Deputy Director **Wallace Kisiel**. We anticipate that this Head Start center will begin operation next spring.

Please note that once the Head Start centers are prepared by the SHA, all costs of Head Start apart from utilities and maintenance are borne by the Head Start program itself, with no cost to the SHA.

- **Shot Spotter.** As part of the North End Safe Neighborhood Initiative [“NESNI”] the SHA agreed to contribute \$2,000 to the program of the Springfield Police Department to acquire “Shot spotter” technology that has the ability to sense and report shots from weapons to enable the police to make a faster and more effective response.
- **HUD VCA Handicapped Units.** Under HUD standards, housing authorities are required to have 5% of their inventory handicapped accessible. Historically the SHA has fallen below this standard. In 2010, we signed a “Voluntary Compliance Agreement” with HUD, under which we will bring our unit count to the required level over a five-year period, or by October 31, 2015. Construction to convert the required number of units has begun this past year. This process is managed by Deputy Director **Wallace Kisiel** and his staff.

- **New Telephone and Purchase Order Systems.** After approximately two years of preparation and selection, the SHA has acquired and installed a modern Shoretel telephone system, replacing our prior inefficient and outdated system. The new system has many advantageous features, including mobility and computer interface, and can largely be maintained and adjusted by our own IT staff rather than by an outside contractor.

In the near future the SHA will move away from its outdated paper purchase order system towards a secure, web-based system, adding further efficiency to our operations. These changes have been managed by IT Director **Stephen Ethier** with assistance from Purchasing Manager **Michael Bailey**.

- **Communications and Community Relations.** Under the direction of Communications and Community Relations Manager **Mary Ellen Lowney**, this year has seen positive news and editorial coverage of the work of the SHA and the beginning of a Resident Newsletter. As this report illustrates, the SHA has many good stories to tell and Mary Ellen, a veteran reporter and Chair of the Journalism Department at American International College, is working with staff and residents to get those stories out.
- **New Staff.** Several new staff members have been added to personnel, which includes vacant positions that have been filled as well as new positions. **Joan Miranda** and **Jason Guyer** were hired to fill the vacant positions of Receptionist and Foreman/District B, respectively. New trades positions were created to fulfill the need for electricians and plumbers directly to the AMP level and include electrician **Joseph Ricker**/Districts A and E, and plumbers **Raymond Bronner**/Districts A and E, **Richard Hawley**/Districts C and D, and **John Trudell**/District B. In addition, there were several new positions created and hires made: Assistant Accounting Manager **Nicole Rancourt**, Career Planning & Placement Counselor **Elizabeth Wills-O'Gilvie**, and Communications & Community Relations Manager **Mary Ellen Lowney**.

- **Smoking**. In April of this year the SHA's new smoking policy went into effect. Under this policy, smoking in all indoor locations is prohibited. In April, 2013, the second phase of the policy will become effective, making all property of the SHA smoke-free. The Board will recall that this policy was adopted after a survey of our residents showed a large majority in favor of a smoke-free environment. In adopting this policy the SHA joins the growing number of private and public facilities, including public schools, hospitals, colleges, public facilities, and a number of other housing authorities in seeking to protect and improve the health of our residents, particularly our children. With assistance from public health organizations, smoking cessation is offered to residents and staff upon request. No one at the SHA expects the adoption of a policy, by itself, to change deeply ingrained habits. But we are confident that with persistence and compassionate enforcement a change in the culture will occur and a healthier environment will be created.
- **Beautification**. At our Saab Court headquarters, deteriorated retaining walls have been removed and new and attractive landscaping has been installed. Once we have cleared additional REAC hurdles (above) we will continue to improve the appearance and curb appeal of our developments. Thanks to Real Estate Project Administrator **Sean Cahillane**, Property Manager **Celina Correa**, and Foreman **Jose Torres** for accomplishing this project.
- **Leadership Pioneer Valley**. Deputy Director **Nicole Contois** graduated this spring as a member of the first class of Leadership Pioneer Valley, a new organization dedicated to educating and supporting the next generation of civic leadership in the region. This year, the SHA is sponsoring Resident Services Grants Manager **Lidya Rivera** as a member of the second LPV class.
- **Board Memberships**. As Executive Director I have accepted invitations to serve on a number of community boards, including the Springfield Technical Community College, the Citizens Housing and Planning Association (statewide umbrella organization for housing and regional planning), the Regional Employment Board

(workforce development and early education), the Board of Corporators of the Mason-Wright Foundation (assisted living for low-income elders), the Advisory Board of ROCA (intervention for youthful offenders), the Access Springfield Promise program (soon to be known under the new name of “UAspire,” – support and financial assistance for college-bound youth), and Pro Springfield Media (on-line reporting of positive activities in the Springfield community).

Further Division and Department specifics are found below.¹

THE SHA DIVISIONS AND DEPARTMENTS – OVERVIEW:²

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 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.

² Please see the SHA organizational chart attached to this report.

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

D. RENTAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION

A. **EXECUTIVE DIVISION**

Supervisor: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin

1. Finance and Accounting Department

Supervisor: Deputy Executive Director (DED) Nicole Contois

Between nationally recognized consultant Casterline Associates, PC [“Casterline”] and Accounting Manager **Michele Decoteau**, assisted by Assistant Manager **Nicole Rancourt**, our Finance and Accounting Department is continuing to make changes to bring the Department more up to date and improve efficiency. During the upcoming year we will be working with Executive staff and Department managers to prepare for the potential for significantly reduced federal funding in future years and the possible recapture of operating reserves.

Highlights:

- **Hiring of Assistant Accounting Manager.** The filling of this position has rounded out the reorganization of the Finance and Accounting Department that began in 2008. Our new Assistant Accounting Manager, **Nicole Rancourt**, graduated from Western New England University in Springfield, MA in the spring of 2011 with her BSBA in Accounting. Her principal duties have been helping to close the fiscal year and prepare the audit work papers. She also creates monthly journal entries and balances both general ledger accounts and bank accounts.

- **Annual Independent Public Accountant Audit.** The SHA's most recent audit covered our most recent full fiscal year (through March 31, 2011). The audit firm of Rector and Reeder PC from Lawrenceville, GA provided an unqualified opinion with no audit findings. This was the first year that the SHA had no audit findings. The Audit reflects the overall condition of the SHA from the accounting records to tenant files. This report is a testament to the hard work of the entire SHA staff.

The March 31, 2012 audit fieldwork will begin on October 1, 2012 and will be conducted by a new audit firm, Yeager and Boyd, from Birmingham, AL, selected through a request for proposal process. It is anticipated that the results of this audit will be received in December, 2012.

- **Budgets.** Casterline continues to provide guidance to Ms. Decoteau and has developed the FY2013 budgets in conjunction with Department heads. This is the second year that the Department and Property Managers have played a role in developing budgets for their respective Departments and AMPs (Asset Management Projects, the groupings of developments that form the foundation of the HUD asset management system). Budget responsibility on the part of Department and Property Managers is a basic principle of asset management and this year's budget marks an important milestone in the SHA's conversion to the asset management model.
- **Financials.** The Finance and Accounting Department provides monthly financial statements to management. This is a vital tool in enabling management to work within their budgets and plan for the future. Ms. Decoteau and Casterline assist in monitoring budgets.
- **PHAS Rating.** HUD's Public Housing Assessment System ["PHAS"] measures the 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.³

- **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 emerge from strong Finance and Accounting Department leadership, leading to more accuracy, efficiency, and cost savings.

2. Human Resources Department

Supervisor: DED Nicole Contois

Since she joined the SHA in April 2009, Human Resources Manager **Kathy Hardy**, working with our legal team and DEDs, has continued to improve SHA’s policies and procedures.

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 continued to mentor a student at the Dorman School through the 2011-2012 school year.

Highlights:

- **Applicant Tracking System.** Ms. Hardy implemented a web-based Applicant Tracking System [“ATS”] called “The Resumator.” The ATS allows Ms. Hardy to manage incoming resumes, rank and rate applicants, and communicate with the hiring manager, all electronically. The ATS eliminates the need for mounds of paper resumes.
- **Safety Committee.** Ms. Hardy serves as the head of the SHA safety committee.

³ As noted in the introduction, 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.

- **Hiring.** Working with department heads, Ms. Hardy has participated in the hiring of twenty-seven employees, eleven Putnam students, and thirty-one employees from the pre-release/day reporting Vocational Training Program sponsored by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department. In addition, 53 temporary employees were hired to work on the federalization project in District B and REAC inspections for other Districts. The temporary staff consisted of carpenters, masons, and helpers.
- **Union Negotiations.** Negotiations continued throughout 2011-2012 for all four AFSCME bargaining units. A tentative agreement has been reached for one, Unit D.

3. Information Technology Department

Supervisor: DED 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 and covers 20 wired buildings, 12 different locations, and 300+ devices. The Department

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

The Department is successful in the both IT Operations and electronic modernization because it seeks to emulate the culture of a “startup business,” analyzing IT needs from the ground up. IT Department staff wear multiple hats and successfully work as a team to cover a large spectrum of areas and skill sets. Technology changes fast and the Department utilize training to stay current and save money. The IT Department partners with other Departments to find technology that is the right fit instead of just throwing technology at problems. Once specifications have been flushed out, the Purchasing Department assists with the creation of bids and RFPs.

Some upcoming projects include mobile REAC inspection software, electronic requisitions, a new website, disaster recovery, server virtualization, and accounting/pha software RFP.

Highlights:

- **Telephones.** A state of the art VoIP [Voice over Internet Protocol] telephone system was rolled out across the SHA. The new system costs less money, offers better reliability and modern features such as computer/telephone interface, and can be maintained internally by the IT Department.
- **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.
- **Direct Deposit.** The Department partnered with the Rental Assistance Division to almost completely eliminate monthly paper checks and postage for over 1,300 landlords.
- **Networks.** A new Wide Area Network and several new Local Area Networks have been rolled out in order to support modern devices such as telephones.
- **License Plate Lookup System.** The Department discovered that the license plate lookup system utilized by Public Safety and Rental Assistance was outdated and inefficient. The Registry of Motor Vehicles was contacted and has granted the SHA real time access to their system.

4. Legal Department

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

The primary function of the Legal Department is to represent and 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. 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”] 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, “talk-outs,” and evictions. Student Law Clerks **Jessica Marcellino** and **Julie Ann Stebbins** work with our Deputy Executive Directors and property management staff to prepare legal notices and files involved in our lease 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 30% increase in the number of cases brought before the Western Division Housing Court in the September 2011 to August 2012 period as compared to the previous year—which also saw a marked increase from prior reporting periods. This increased lease enforcement is sending a powerful message about the SHA’s expectations concerning timely rent payments and adherence to lease requirements, and contributes to the SHA’s increased success in REAC inspections, including those under the ongoing federalization program, and more generally throughout our developments.

- **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 and potential loss of housing for residents.
- **Policy Review.** During this past year, the legal department has conducted a review of corporate policies, including assistance animal policy, storage and basement use policy, and parking and parking lots use policy.
- **Risk Management.** The Department has played a significant role in the SHA's risk management efforts by reviewing and responding to tenant related issues and serving as liaison with counsel for insurers on tort claims. The Legal Department plays a central role in responding to lead paint disclosure errors which resulted in an administrative complaint filed against the SHA by the Environmental Protection Agency/Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- **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. Legal has been in union negotiations for the past year with four separate bargaining units, and has come to a tentative agreement with Unit D (managers). Negotiations continue with Units A, B and C (maintenance, foremen and clerical).
- **Real Estate.** The Legal Department has worked closely with executive staff in negotiating terms on the disposition of properties destroyed by the June 2011 tornado, which include 425 Central Street, 57-59 Melrose, and 426-428 Eastern Avenue, in addition to several other ongoing real estate projects, particularly the SHA's central office project.

- **Contracts.** The Legal Department has represented the SHA on the central motor fueling agreement with the City, the Executive Director's contract renewal, and Executive Director evaluation tool.
- **Cost Containment.** The SHA recognizes the importance of identifying ways to reduce legal costs; staff are working with the Legal Department on this issue with a goal of bringing proposals to the Board within the next several months.

5. Real Estate Development Department

Supervisor: Executive Director William H. Abrashkin

In 2010, the Board of Commissioners authorized the creation of a 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. Mr. Cahillane is the sole member of the SHA's Real Estate Development Department.

The central responsibility of this position is to help the SHA obtain consolidated central office space. As has been discussed at various junctures with the Board, 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 completed in 2009 by the local architectural firm of Dietz & Company analyzed and quantified the office needs for our central administrative staff, including contiguous good quality administrative office space situated in a centralized location, an upgraded high efficiency HVAC system, parking for a minimum of 70 cars, an appropriate site location preferably with proximity to the downtown government and business districts, and access to public transportation.

To date, Mr. Cahillane has evaluated the present day needs of the SHA. He conducted a discreet building-by-building evaluation of potential properties located within the Downtown/Metro Central District. The large majority of existing office sites for sale in this area did not satisfy the basic requirements for SHA office space needs as spelled out by the Dietz & Company analysis. Common problems included on-site parking in short supply, poor building conditions, and inadequate HVAC systems. Several inspected sites, however, could potentially meet SHA requirements. The RFP process is the best available tool for uncovering appropriate sites for SHA acquisition, and an RFP for office space has been issued with a response date of September 21, 2012.

Mr. Cahillane helped steer the negotiating process which resulted in the execution of an MOU arrangement between the City of Springfield and the SHA for the purchase of gasoline from the city's municipal yard which is centrally located on Tapley Street.

The three tornado damaged sites located on Eastern Avenue and Melrose Street are in the process of being disposed of by the SHA. Disposition of the land is the initial phase of relocating and putting the six residential units back into service. The Melrose Street property is being transferred cooperatively to the City of Springfield. The transfer is part of a process allowing the city to receive 90% reimbursement from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the building of a new state of the art elementary school replacing the tornado damaged Brookings School.

A related responsibility of this position is to plan for re-use of existing SHA office sites after they are vacated for the new office site. 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 in this space is also being considered.

Plans are under consideration for establishing a new educational/social community center, most likely at Robinson Gardens, the geographical center of the Reed Village, Duggan Park, and Moxon developments. The center would support the SHA Talk/Read/Succeed! program and other aspects of our resident services programs, and also could be designed to include sorely needed administrative space to replace the inadequate management space at Robinson Gardens. The planning

process has begun, with a focus on modular buildings that could meet these needs for the next several years, while more permanent facilities are in the planning stage.

6. Communications and Community Relations

Supervisor: Executive Department Manager Isabel Serrazina

In September, 2011, the authority hired **Mary Ellen Lowney** as Communications and Community Relations Manager. This new position was intended as a “test run” to determine whether an in-house staff person could deliver timely and positive information and outreach to staff, residents, and the broader community. As noted in last year’s report, the outside public relations firm used by the SHA, Garvey Communications, carried out assigned tasks professionally and with sensitivity to the mission of the SHA, but we also believed that the in-house model might be more responsive to the many stories to tell about positive activities in the SHA.

Over the past year, the work of Ms. Lowney, a communications professor and chair of the Journalism Department at American International College, and prior to that a long-time Springfield Republican reporter, has proven prolific and successful on a variety of levels. She has crafted together the information needed to complete the ‘blank’ sections of the SHA website – including content under Resident Services and Landlords, as well as regular updates to the News section, where viewers can find postings that include text and photographs of various events and initiatives, including the recent regional, state and national Talk/Read/Succeed! awards.

Ms. Lowney has also garnered the SHA considerable media attention, all positive. Among the dozens of published pieces and broadcasted stories include a page one story in the Springfield Republican on March 25, 2012 entitled ‘Housing Authority Turns New Page,’ with an accompanying guest opinion piece by Judge Abrashkin entitled “It’s a New Day for the Housing Authority.” The Republican published a related editorial on March 31, 2012, entitled

“Springfield Housing Authority Ushers in a New Era.” There have also been considerable published and broadcast pieces on SHA programs, including Talk/Read/Succeed! initiatives, the Roca painters at Riverview Apartments, our Farris Mitchell Scholarship, and grant announcements, including the \$6.7 million state grant received this past spring to federalize Robinson Gardens Apartments. Ms. Lowney has organized press/media events for our bigger announcements. She has certainly helped the agency in our efforts to achieve a positive public awareness of the full contours of our work.

Ms. Lowney has also been an active collaborator on planning our T/R/S! luncheon tours, including recruiting an AIC student to produce a video summarizing the program and she has compiled and published both tenant and employee newsletters. Ms. Lowney has cooperated whenever called upon to help out in matters such as our website redesign efforts and the SHA annual picnic.

In sum, I am pleased to report that the experiment of creating this position has worked out very well for information-sharing inside the SHA and with the broader community. It also bears mention that this change in approach has yielded annual savings to the SHA of approximately \$15,000 per year. It is in the interest of the SHA to continue with this arrangement.

B. PUBLIC HOUSING MANAGEMENT DIVISION

Supervisors: DEDs Michelle Booth and Nicole Contois

The Public Housing Management Division contains the Property Management, Applications, Resident Services, Public Safety, and the Warehouse Departments.

Deputy 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 DEDs Michelle Booth and Nicole Contois

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 are managed by our five property managers, **Sonia Colon-Diaz** (District A), **Daniel Bresnahan** (District B, holding position of Senior Property Manager), **Brenda Clinton** (District C), **Celina Correa** (District D), and **Sandra West** (District E). Activities 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 Department. In addition to management staff assigned to the properties, Maintenance Foremen **Michael Leblanc** (District A), **Jason Guyer** (District B), **Kevin Logue** (District C), **Jose Torres** (District D) and **Leonard Stadnicki** (District E) lead multidisciplinary crews that provide maintenance services to SHA developments.

Highlights:

- **Federalization Work.** In May, the SHA received news that it passed the HUD Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) physical inspection required for HUD approval to federalize the Reed Village Apartments. We anticipate successful inspections of the Duggan Park and Robinson Gardens Apartments in September and December 2012, respectively. This project has been funded with the generous investment of over \$20,000,000 from the Commonwealth (through the Department of Housing and Community Development), and could not succeed without the technical assistance of the Facilities Management Specialists of DHCD led by James Marathas, and the hard work of SHA maintenance and management staff to bring these properties up to federal standards.

- **Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant.** The City of Springfield and the SHA were one of only 13 communities nationwide to be awarded a HUD Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant in the last round of funding. The SHA is pleased to be working with the City to develop a plan for transforming the South End of Springfield, including potentially demolishing and replacing public housing units located at the Marble Street Apartments. This fall the SHA and the City will contract with a master developer (approved by the SHA Board at a special meeting in August, 2012) who will lead the development of a strategy for creating a mixed-income, mixed-finance development in the South End, of which the public housing units located at the current Marble Street Apartment will be a part. The City and the SHA anticipate filing a Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant application in the spring of 2013.
- **Real Estate Assessment Center Results.** The SHA has experienced notable improvement in its Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) inspections for its federal properties conducted by HUD. The SHA has improved its property condition score to high performer status for all three of its federal asset management property (AMP) clusters inspected to date this year, as was summarized in the introduction of this report.
- **Lease Enforcement.** The SHA, through a continued high level of collaboration among property managers, public safety staff and the Legal Department, has established new protocols and renewed a commitment to effective lease enforcement that is communicating clear and consistent expectations of behavior necessary for the peaceful enjoyment of all of our developments by residents and staff. By applying these new protocols and renewed commitment, the SHA has experienced increased rates of success at the Western Massachusetts Division of the Housing Court when it has had to seek the assistance of the Court in addressing resident behavior that interferes with the peaceful enjoyment of SHA developments by residents and others.
- **Enhancing Curb Appeal.** As a result of a collaborative effort including Management, the Real Estate Development Department, and the Tri-Tower Tenant Council, Saab Court has a new look. Upgrades include a variety of plantings, paving, and new seating areas where

residents can enjoy the company of neighbors and the benefits of nature within an urban environment.

- **Resident Engagement.** We are pleased that in addition to two existing tenant councils within SHA properties, two new tenant councils have been recognized this past year; one at Robinson Gardens and one at Marble Apartments. Property Managers in whose portfolios these properties are located look forward to working with the new councils and supporting their efforts to further engage residents in their SHA communities.
- **Services for Residents.** The continued poor economic conditions continue to adversely impact SHA residents, many of whom are unemployed or underemployed. In an effort to meet the needs of residents struggling with these economic conditions, Property Managers continue to work with the Resident Services Department to make referrals for residents needing emergency financial assistance, job training, educational opportunities, counseling, and other services.
- **Section 3.** This section of the HUD statute requires entities receiving HUD funding to direct employment and contracting opportunities, where possible, to low-income persons and businesses. The SHA looks forward to working with the City and the Regional Employment Board (REB) to foster Section 3 employment opportunities for SHA residents. As a result of a collaborative grant application led by the City and supported by SHA and REB matching funds, the City will hire and supervise a Section 3 employment coordinator who will work with SHA residents and other qualified City residents to prepare and place them in Section 3 employment opportunities.
- **Sheriff's Department and Roca.** In addition to a continuing and long-standing on-the-job training 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. This new partnership with Roca involves the painting

of hallways at the Riverview Apartments – the largest painting project in many years at the SHA – a project that will be completed with significant cost savings to the SHA.

2. Applications Department

Supervisor: DED Michelle Booth

The Applications Department is managed by **Jacqueline Banks**, who oversees the daily operations of the department and supervises a staff of three. The Applications Department staff include **Natasha Lopez**, **Ruth Maio**, and **Dianna Martinez**. The department is the first contact that prospective tenants have with the SHA. It strives to 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 25 new vacancies 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 2012, the SHA's federal housing occupancy rate was 97.64%.
- **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 2012, the SHA state public housing occupancy rate was 99.24%.
- **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

- **Currently Open Waiting Lists** include federal four-bedroom family and state elderly. In August, 2012 the Board approved the opening of federal handicap accessible two, three, and four-bedroom units (effective 9/1/12 for two months) and federal elderly (effective 10/1/12).
- **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 and 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.
- **Recovery from the Tornado.** The Applications Department worked with Management staff to reoccupy units damaged by the June 1, 2011 tornado as they were repaired and brought back on-line. We anticipate that as of August 31, 2012, all units damaged by the tornado (apart from those destroyed on Central and Melrose Streets and on Eastern Avenue) will be fully repaired and re-occupied.

- **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. The Department also provided training to staff in District B to familiarize them with federal regulations, policies, and procedures related to eligibility for public housing, continued occupancy, and rent calculations in preparation for the federalization of Reed Village, Duggan Park and Robinson Gardens Apartments.

3. Resident Services Department

Supervisor: DED Nicole Contois

The Resident Service Department, with **Pam Wells** as Manager, has continued to grow and increase programming opportunities for the residents of SHA. The Department is comprised of ten full-time and six part-time positions carrying out the activities listed below.

Highlights:

- **Transitional Housing Program and Housing First.** Funded by DHCD for 35 units, these programs served homeless families transitioning into permanent housing. We have three case managers who work one-one-one with each family to develop self-sufficiency plans to not only stabilize their housing situations but to also increase their economic self-sufficiency. The programs also work with community providers to conduct workshops and trainings in relevant topic areas such as nutrition, parenting workshops, communication skills, and conflict resolution. Because the transitional housing program is not authorized to operate in federal developments, the SHA has

requested authorization from HUD to transfer all of its transitional housing units to the HUD-authorized housing first program upon completion of federalization.

- **Deborah J. Barton Neighborhood Network Center.** The center continues to grow and provide a myriad of services for SHA families. The GED class is still fully enrolled with a wait list of students. The job search program also continues to grow with the staff position funded by the Regional Employment Board. We continue to collaborate with a number of community agencies to provide services to the Center including: Behavioral Health Network (BHN), Massachusetts Society for Prevention for Cruelty to Children (MSPCC), Home City Families, Planned Parenthood, Springfield Parent Academy, UMass Extension Program, and Western New England College.
- **Housing Retention Program.** This is a program that was initially funded through a grant with DHCD. At the end of the grant period, SHA has continued to fund this position to work with our residents at risk of losing their housing due to non-payment issues and other lease violating behavior. We continue to work with residents and refer them to programs both internally and externally that will stabilize their housing situations.
- **Talk/Read/Succeed!** This program has completed its second year of funding. An application for renewed funding with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation will be submitted in mid-September to continue and expand this programming to an additional SHA property. The number of partners working on the TRS initiative continues to grow. The summer program will take place again at both Dorman and Boland Schools with pre and post evaluations conducted on the reading scores of the children participating.
- **Youth Outreach at Robinson.** As a result of SHA's work with TRS, we realized that we had not engaged the teenagers at Robinson Garden in any of the activities. This year the position of Youth Engagement Coordinator was created and filled by **Jimmy Mitchell**, a retired Dean of Students from the Springfield School System. The youth

at Robinson have been engaged in this programming since Mr. Mitchell came on board. Some of the successes to date include summer employment opportunities for a number of the youth as well as continued engagement and dialogue with the youth about career goals and trainings.

- **After School and Summer Programming.** The SHA recently procured our after school and summer programming contracts. The new contracts were started on July 1, 2012. We continue to work with a consultant on increasing the quality of these programs. We recently hired the Boston Children’s Museum to conduct training for our providers in interactive activities to engage children in programming that enhances critical thinking skills. We will be evaluating the results of the training over the next several months.
- **Elder Services.** We continue to work with our elderly residents at several of our developments. We have ongoing programming provided by community partners at many of the developments including topic areas such as healthcare, exercise, and social activities.

4. Public Safety Department

Supervisor: DED Michelle Booth

The Public Safety Department, supervised by Manager **Rosa Lebron**, was comprised this year of Ms. Lebron and four other staff, **Camilla Turnorutsky**, administrative assistant, and public safety officer **Brad Fink**. This year, Camilla’s position was changed from part to full time and Camilla promoted into it. 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:

- **Tacking Trends.** The Department worked closely with the IT department to further develop the Department's crime incident database to produce reports that assist property managers and administrators in quantifying and monitoring crime and public safety incident trends. The Department's database provides an overview of incidents on SHA-wide, district, and development levels and allows for a comparison month-by-month and year-to-year. These data allow the Department to work with Property Managers, the Resident Services Department, law enforcement agencies, and community agencies and organizations to develop approaches to enhancing public safety and preventing crime in SHA developments.
- **Inter-departmental Communication.** In addition to monthly reports provided to property managers and administrators, the Department provides a nightly incident report that details the activity of the SHA's public safety officers and police detail officers. These reports include a summary of activity at each development patrolled and are accompanied by more in-depth incident reports prepared by the public safety officers, police reports when police are involved, and photos concerning any incident that rises to a level of a serious lease violation. These reports and officer testimony have played a key role in the SHA's enhanced lease enforcement activities and success in holding lease-violating tenants accountable in housing court for their behavior.
- **Collaboration.** The SHA continues to apply a collaborative public safety approach to protecting residents from crime, holding perpetrators of crime accountable for their actions on SHA property, and promoting safety. This collaboration includes not only working with other SHA departments, but also with the Springfield Police Department, Hampden County Sheriff's Department (including the Neighborhood Watch Committee), Hampden

County District Attorney's Office, Massachusetts Probation Department, U.S. 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's public safety officers, by performing a combination of motor and foot patrols in all developments, are building connections with residents that have result in improved levels of communication between the SHA and its residents and increased reporting of crime and public safety-related incidents by residents.
- **Prevention Programming.** The Department expanded its crime prevention capabilities by creating the position of administrative assistant. This position, while responsible for maintaining the Department database, also analyzes trends and assists in developing and delivering training events that prevent crime. As an example, this year the Department, in collaboration with Greater Springfield Senior Services, provided training to seniors at two of our largest developments concerning recognizing elder abuse and preventing financial exploitation and fraud. In addition, the Department also worked as a member of an inter-departmental task force to raise resident awareness of their role in promoting security. The Department developed and delivered, in collaboration with Management and Resident Services Department staff, a series of workshops for residents who live in family and elderly developments where they share common entrances and hallways.
- **Violent and Drug-related Incidents Down.** In analyzing data and conferring with the SPD, the Department has noted a continued decrease in violent and drug-related incidents in SHA developments, with more reported incidents involving quality of life issues. Of the 355 incidents in 2012 (January – July 31):
 - Nearly 60% percent of incidents were related to quality of life issues, including incidents such as: motor-vehicle related (62); arrests/warrants (47); unauthorized pets (40); disturbance/noise (35); motor vehicle-related (28); breaking and entering (12);

- loitering/suspicious person (14); trespassing (12); and malicious destruction of property (11);
- Sixteen percent of incidents were crimes against persons, including such crimes as: assault and battery (26); harassment/threats (16); domestic violence (13); armed robbery (4); child neglect (1); assault and battery on a child (1); and accidental shooting (1);
 - Five incidents involved firearms and 20 others involved what was termed a dangerous weapon;
 - Two incidents involved gang-related issues; and
 - The top three categories of offenses year-to-date were: motor vehicle-related (62); arrests and warrants (47); and excessive noise/disturbance (35).

5. Warehouse Department

Supervisor: DED 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 warehouse manager and DED Nicole Contois continued to work together this year to reduce the amount of stock as recommended by recent audits. This has resulted in a reduction of over \$150,000 over the past two years. The SHA is planning for a surplus sale this fiscal year which will reduce the amount of obsolete inventory.
- **Backup Planning.** The warehouse has developed backup measures in the event that the warehouse manager is absent from work.

- **Cost Savings Planning.** In the upcoming year, the warehouse manager and DED 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: DED 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. Three words describe this Department; change, transition and adapting.

1. Facilities Maintenance Department

Supervisor: DED Wallace Kisiel

The Facilities Maintenance Department (including the prior trades department), under the management of **Paul Spedero**, assisted by Administrative Assistant **Virma Santiago**, was responsible for providing specialized trade services to SHA’s public housing developments and to the administrative offices of the SHA. In conjunction with the retirement of Mr. Spedero, the Department has transitioned into a more financially feasible Department by contracting for the services of painting, extermination and locksmithing and by reassigning the plumbers and electricians to the AMPs. 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. This past year the Department implemented 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.

The next step to streamlining this Department is planned for the upcoming year when the two night crew workers will be transitioned into the main work force on days. This strategic move will empower the Property Managers to have better control and awareness of their campuses.

The Department is also responsible for coordinating work performed by outside vendors and contractors. In addition to the above services, another example is 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 licenses 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 a determination is made as to 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, on which the SHA has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past several years.

2. Capital Improvements Department

Supervisor: DED 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 \$9 million of capital work this past year.

Beginning on June 1, 2012, the SHA started construction at Robinson Gardens. These construction contracts, which total \$4.7 million, will move us towards completion of the massive federalization project of Reed Village, Duggan Apartments, and Robinson Gardens that began three years ago.

The primary responsibility of the DED 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 improvements 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 2009 Capital Fund Program [“CFP”] grant, thereby demonstrating that funding is being obligated and expended in a

timely manner. At this time the 2010, 2011, and 2012 CFP grants are active. The 2010 CFP budget will be closed out by early 2013, one year early.

- **Roof Replacements.** Roof replacements at Pine-Renee, Central Elderly, Johnny Appleseed, and Morgan Apartments began last fall and were completed by December 2011. The work done at Pine-Renee, Central Elderly, and Johnny Appleseed Apartments was done due to damage from the June 1st Tornado. Morgan Apartments was included in this project because it was the next roof in line in the 5 Year plan. The total cost of this work was \$550,000.00. The work was completed by a local contractor, R.C.I. Roofing.
- **Robinson Gardens.** Replacement of siding, windows, sidewalks and stoops is underway at Robinson Gardens as of June 2012. This work will complete the capital projects associated with the Federalization of Robinson Gardens. The total cost of the capital work is \$4.7 million. RAC Builders Inc., a local contractor, is completing this work.
- **Sullivan ADA Renovations.** Construction has begun as of July 2012 on the renovation of nine (9) first floor units into ADA accessible units. This is the start of meeting the SHA's agreement with HUD to provide more handicapped accessible units throughout our federal developments. The work includes various upgrades to the unit to make it accessible to handicapped residents. Also included in the work are upgrades to the site, such as new ramps, sidewalks, and a new parking area to supply more handicapped spaces for our residents. The total cost of this project is \$1.5 million and will be paid from the FY2011 Capital Fund. Local contractor Inglewood Development is doing the work.
- **Moxon Office Renovations/District E & Marble Apartments Storage Building.** Renovations of the Moxon Community Room were completed this year. The community room has been converted into office space for the District E Management office. The office was created to improve service to the district's residents, particularly those that are handicapped. Also, part of this project was a new storage building at Marble Apartments. The building was built to better serve the residents at this site and to give our on-site maintenance staff proper storage space. The total cost of this contract was \$362,000.00

and was paid from the Marble and Moxon Apartments operating budgets. A local contractor, Inglewood Development, completed the work.

- **Sullivan Head Start and Handicap Accessible Unit.** This July, construction 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 and other participating families. Also being renovated is an adjacent apartment to make it handicapped accessible as part of our agreement with HUD to create more accessible units. The total cost of the project is \$306,000.00 and is being paid from the Sullivan Apartments operating budget. A local contractor, Inglewood Development, is completing the work.
- **Pine-Renee/Central Elderly Interior Repairs.** In April 2012, NL Construction, a local contractor began the repair of all the water damaged ceilings, walls, and insulation in the units at affected units at Pine-Renee and Central Elderly. This project will be complete by the end of July 2012. The total cost of this project is \$405,000.00 and will be paid from insurance funds.
- **Demolition of 425 Central Street.** In July 2012 the demolition of 425 Central Street began. 425 Central Street was one of the SHA's most heavily damaged properties from the June 2011 Tornado. After many back and forth discussions with the insurance company and HUD, the SHA was given the green light to tear down the building this past spring. The project's total cost is \$89,000.00 and will be paid from insurance money.
- **Roof Replacements Manilla Apartments and Riverview Low-Rise Apartments.** The SHA has recently executed a contract with Meadows Construction to replace the roofs at Manilla Apartments and the Riverview Low-Rise Apartments. This project is scheduled to begin in August. The contract amount is \$673,000.00 and will be paid from the 2010 Capital Fund.

3. Purchasing Department

Supervisor: DED 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.

The online procurement solicitation system, developed and implemented by the SHA last year after several years of planning, has quickly become the primary means of issuing RFP and IFB's. Vendors are continuing to receive email notifications of SHA bidding opportunities.

Highlights:

- **NIGP.** The SHA remains a member in good standing of the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing [“NIGP”]. Mr. Bailey will be attending its annual forum and products exposition in August 2012. Mr. Bailey states that membership in the NIGP has been invaluable in the sharing and exchanging of ideas and purchasing procedures with other government procurement professionals from across the country.
- **Major Procurements.** The Purchasing Department has played an important role in several key SHA projects, such as audit services, master developer for Marble Street Apartments, central office space, vehicle replacement, and after school youth enrichment services. These and other projects were completed along with the many annual IFB/RFPs that are required for various services.
- **Procurement Approach.** Along with the anticipated September 2012 roll-out of the Authority-wide paperless purchase requisition system, the Purchasing Department will be revising how materials are delivered to its Districts and Departments. A “site based” delivery method will be created. Districts and Departments will be able to order directly from approved contracted vendors via Bulk or Blanket Purchase Agreements. Such orders will be delivered directly to the District or Department thus reducing orders being shipped to the Warehouse only to have them “redelivered” by Warehouse staff members. Additionally, fewer purchase orders will have to be prepared/processed.

- **Purchasing Committee.** The purchasing committee made up of various SHA department members continues to meet and discuss ways in which the procurement processes within the Authority can be improved.
- **Community Support.** The Purchasing Department has offered service assistance to Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) in its attempt to educate local business on compliance regulations. It has also provided support to the Western Mass Development Collaborative (WMDC) in its goal to help small Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) & Women Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE) businesses looking to grow their businesses in the Greater Springfield area.

D. RENTAL ASSISTANCE DIVISION

Supervisor: DED 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 2,733 allocated vouchers. The Rental Assistance Office was allocated an additional 144 vouchers in March 2012 due to the SHA agreeing to administer vouchers for an “expiring use” property in Springfield (see below). In addition, the Department 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; and
- 137 Moderate Rehabilitation I & II

The Rental Assistance Department is comprised of a staff of nineteen. In addition to Mr. D'Ascoli, the department includes **Cole Alves, Christopher Broughton, Maria Collazo, Dorothy Flebotte, Denise Gignac, John Goodwin, Maryanne Hale, Patricia Leeper, Audrey Mitchell, Glorivee Muniz, Kristin Orr-Westbrook, Jasmine Perez, Lisa Quach, Aris Sanchez, Jackeline Santiago, Colleen Shea, Carmen Soto, Blanca Spencer, and Milton Torres.**

The Department is responsible for the distribution of over \$19 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 responds to inquiries from landlords, participants, and from the general public. In addition, Department staff conduct informational meetings, create RFPs and evaluate responses, and administer the Section 8 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, 2012. This is the sixth 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 SHA I extend many thanks to this capable staff and congratulate them on this significant team achievement.
- **Preserving Affordable Housing.** In March 2012, HUD approached the SHA and asked it to consider administering 144 Enhanced Housing Choice Vouchers that HUD intended to

issue to preserve affordable housing opportunities for persons residing in the Colonial Estates Apartments, an expiring use property in Springfield. The SHA agreed to administer these vouchers and staff worked with residents to complete the process necessary to preserve their affordable housing.

- **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, the Department was able to utilize 100% of funds allocated by HUD.
- **Chronically Homeless Program.** The SHA continued its collaboration 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. 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 39 to 40 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 \$234,000 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.
- **Direct Deposit.** The Rental Assistance Office with the technical assistance of the IT Department has implemented direct deposit banking to pay Section 8 rent subsidies to private landlords effective January 1, 2012. This will save the Rental Assistance Office an estimated \$100,000 per year.
- **Cost Savings and Efficiency Improvements.** The next phase for saving money and enhancing efficiency and communication with landlords will include e-mailing inspection reports to both landlords and participants.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from this Report, today's SHA is a bustle of constructive activities. With our physical plant and management systems improving, our resident services growing, and our collaborations increasing, it is an exciting time to be associated with this organization.

At the conclusion of last year's report, I set forth several priorities for the year that has just concluded. How well have we done in addressing those priorities?

The first priority was to continue the upgrading of the SHA as an efficient business organization into the next rungs on the organizational ladder. This year has indeed seen significant

improvements in our work order, maintenance and lease enforcement systems. We are not yet where we hope eventually to be but we are doing better than we were a year ago.

The second priority was to do a better job of engaging our residents and employees in the process of community-building within the SHA. Since last year, with the help property management and resident services staff, two new resident organizations have formed at the SHA, one at Marble Street and one at Robinson Gardens. At Robinson Gardens, our resident leaders also form the leadership of the parent teacher organization of their local school, the Dorman School. To anyone familiar with the dynamic that previously existed between the school and the families of its students, this is a remarkable accomplishment.

The third priority was to increase the “buy-in” for our mission from all elements of our community. Although not always susceptible of precise quantification, I am confident that we have made significant progress in this effort as well. The SHA is the recipient of favorable press, awards, and many and varied comments of appreciation for how far we have come. The invitations that I and other staff have received to participate in local boards and organizations is one measure of how the organization is viewed in the community.

All of the above is due to the dedicated and intelligent efforts of the SHA Board and staff. Although as Executive Director I am deeply involved in the work of the SHA on many levels, I also often have the experience of coming to work and observing many talented people “doing their thing” to strengthen and add value to the organization. In a long and varied career before joining the SHA, this was not always my experience. It is a privilege to be associated with such a fine group of people pulling together in service to our residents and our community.

In the assisted housing industry, and indeed in every field that assists the disadvantaged within our society, a chill wind can be felt—the fear that impending budget cuts will fall hardest on those least able to afford them. The most important challenge for the SHA for the upcoming year will be to plan for the maintenance of our operations in the event of substantial reductions in funding. We have

to look not only at efficiency and areas where the belt can be tightened, as important as those are, but also at potential new sources of income from foundations, grants, and also from entrepreneurial activities. We cannot expect to get from here to there in one year, but 2012-13 must be the year in which the discussion and the planning start in earnest.

As I look back over my previous several Annual Reports, I see that I have started a personal tradition which I am happy to repeat: concluding the Annual Report with the most enthusiastic *thank you* to the entire SHA team for your contributions and accomplishments.