

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR 2017**

*Here lies a man who knew how to enlist in his service better [people] than himself.*  
-- Andrew Carnegie's suggested inscription for his own tombstone

**Introduction**

In each Annual Report over the past nine years, we have summarized the accomplishments of the SHA and the challenges we face. I hope that the information in those reports has been helpful to the Board.

This year, instead of organizing the report Department by Department, we started with **three major themes** of our work, summarizing activities under each theme.

The themes are:

- I. Protecting the SHA's Investment in Safe and Secure Housing**
- II. Supporting Residents — Families, Children, Seniors, Individuals with Disabilities**
- III. Building Partnerships and Engaging with the Community**

In any given area you will see a good amount of overlap, and participation by several SHA departments and others. The level of cooperation, of everyone pulling in the same direction, jumps out at every turn. This is a credit to the SHA and its hardworking staff.

Further information about any of the items summarized in this report is available upon request.

Much of the planning and initial drafting for this report was provided by Nicole and Michelle, to whom I extend my thanks and appreciation.

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**Reflections in my final year as Executive Director**

Now in my tenth year in this position, my work with our Board, staff, and community has been engaging and rewarding. Certainly there have been vexations along the way. These are part of the

territory, but they have been secondary to the positives of the work. The people with whom I've had the privilege of working, both in the SHA and in the community, and the creativity, brains, and values they bring to their efforts, have made all the difference. Through teamwork, we have accomplishments of which we can be proud.

As for challenges, they come down to scarcity of resources. Public funding is what it is (and likely better than it will be). But our staff has done a lot with what we have, belt-tightening, economizing, and bringing in grants and community programs.

Before turning to this year's activities, this is a good time to provide two bullet lists, the first for accomplishments and the second for items remaining to be addressed as the SHA looks towards the future.

At the top of the accomplishment list has been the restoration of public trust and confidence in the SHA, which of course arises from the integrity and transparency of our operations. By now this topic looks more backwards than forwards, to a point at which we strive to turn attention to our current work. Enough about the bad old days! But memory is long and the public still often voices its appreciation for the turnaround.

Beyond that fundamental change, when one views the decade as a whole we have indeed much to our credit, as shown by the following bullet list of accomplishments, presented in no particular order and with apologies for anything left out:

- Achieving "High Performer" status from HUD after years of step-by-step improvements in our operations;
- Building and working with a strong, effective Board of Commissioners;
- Building and supporting a strong administrative team and staff;
- Building strong collaborations within the City and State, including participation by SHA staff on a number of boards and committees;
- Completing conversion to the complex HUD Asset Management system;

- Successfully carrying out the two-year, \$20m+ federalization project;
- Ongoing improved upkeep, safety, and lease enforcement at the SHA's public housing developments;
- Creating a web-based interactive procurement system to make it easier for local businesses to access opportunities at the SHA and submit proposals;
- Expansion of the Section 8 homeownership program, allowing individuals and families with federal housing vouchers to buy homes and move towards financial independence;
- Assuming administration of project-based Section 8 subsidies at the request of HUD at several local privately-owned apartment complexes;
- Pending closure of the outdated Marble Street Apartments and providing residents with Section 8 subsidies and relocation assistance, a project aligned with the City's revitalization plans for the South End;
- Implementation and enforcement of one of the first housing authority smoke-free policies in the country, making all areas at the SHA smoke-free;
- Acquisition of our building at 60 Congress Street and relocation of SHA administrative operations to the site; the building is currently supported on its own revenue and in the future will produce unrestricted income for the Authority;
- Strengthening and supporting our Resident Services Department;
- Strengthening and supporting our Public Safety Department;
- Strengthening and supporting our IT Department and making significant upgrades of our IT systems;
- Negotiation/implementation of union contracts, including narrowing the compensation gap between clerical and maintenance staffs;
- Closing out HUD/OIG investigations, EPA complaints, and the oil spill remediation project;
- Establishing Talk/Read/Succeed!, and finding federal, state, and grant funding to maintain it; this collaborative, family-based local literacy program joins three SHA family developments with their neighborhood elementary schools, educational and counseling programs, and family support services and has been nationally recognized as a successful approach towards breaking the cycle of disadvantage for residents;
- Rebuilding and repairing or disposing of damaged and destroyed properties from the 2011 tornadoes.

Let's hear it for accomplishments, but there are also important items that remain on the to-do list, including but not necessarily limited to the following:

- Recycling, a potential opportunity for significant savings and environmental benefits;
- Rental Assistance Office upgrades. We are working on potential plans for upgrading of our RAO space, including possible renovation of our current space in the Riverview Development (Sanderson Street). This has the advantage of allowing the SHA to draw on both capital and Section 8 funds. Current estimates of about \$1.5—\$1.7m can probably be reduced somewhat. In addition, we are considering other options.
- Further expansion and stabilization of funding for Talk/Read/Succeed!, and perhaps the identification or creation of an independent nonprofit to manage the program in order to increase fundraising opportunities;
- Mixed-income housing, drawing on tax credits and other funding to improve our state portfolio in particular. It is frustrating that these programs are geared towards the more lucrative real estate markets in the state, leaving poor cities at a disadvantage, but there may be avenues forward to explore;
- Implementing additional “aging in place” programs and improvements for seniors;
- Updating the SHA’s out-of-date software;
- Fundraising through commercial real estate investments (e.g., market rate housing development) and/or other entrepreneurial activities;
- Working more closely with our Legislative delegation and Boston-centered organizations such as CHAPA and the Mass. Housing Partnership;
- Moving forward with partners on pending legislation to create a statutory “Zero to Three” education program within the state Education Department;
- More collaboration with the national public and affordable housing networks.

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## **I. Protecting the SHA’s Investment in Safe and Secure Housing**

### ***A. Capital and Modernization work.***

Much of this work was performed under the supervision of Deputy Director Wallace Kisiel. Upon Wallace’s retirement, the Department was reorganized under the leadership of John Healy, who

now serves as Director of Capital Improvements and Procurement, reporting to Deputy Director Nicole Contois.

- *Completion of VCA with HUD.* Under the mandatory “Voluntary Compliance Agreement” arising from the addition of 482 federal units under federalization, the SHA was required to add 31 handicap-accessible units to its portfolio to comply with the federal 5% requirement. The completion of this project this year has resulted in high quality homes for persons who need accessible apartments, allowing them to live independently in the community.
- *Heating System Upgrades.* Many of our developments have aging heating systems. The installation of new energy efficient boilers, at no cost to SHA due to collaboration with the Boston-based non-profit Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), has allowed us to replace a significant number of inefficient or failing heating systems.
- *Improved Lighting.* The SHA was able to update lighting at many developments this year by installing new, energy efficient LED lighting at no cost to SHA due also to a collaboration with ABCD. This new lighting provides an enhanced living environment and greater safety due to the improved brightness of LED lighting.
- *Energy Audit.* The SHA entered into a contract with the Siemens Company to perform an ESCO (Energy Services Company) energy audit of our building systems and recommend top priorities in replacement to produce savings. Under HUD standards the SHA will be able to retain 50% of energy savings to apply to identified energy-saving priorities.
- *Replacement of “Tornado Units.”* This year we completed construction of four units to replace those lost at 425 Central Street in the 2011 tornadoes. These units, our first new housing units in over 30 years, will be home to four families requiring two bedroom apartments. The units are bright and spacious and the buildings feature a design that compliments other buildings in a neighborhood newly revitalized after the destruction of the tornadoes. Two of the units are handicap accessible.

### ***B. Maintenance/Maintenance Systems***

In the face of shrinking funding we have begun to work more closely with the Union to assess the capabilities of staff and institute programs that improve maintenance skills and efficiency to increase cost-effectiveness.

- SHA teams were successful in preparing for and achieving strong passing scores for REAC inspections at the Jennie Lane (79), Moxon (88), Reed Village (88), and Robinson Gardens (89) AMPS. (We will submit an appeal for the Jennie Lane AMP to try to capture 6 points lost due to a roof condition at Marble Street.)
- Districts are piloting new ways to deploy staff in a manner that ensures that resources are assigned where needs are greatest.
- We are challenged by an aging stock of vehicles and equipment, much of which will need replacement in the next five years. We will need to explore new options, such as vehicle leasing programs, as opposed to purchase, to meet our needs.

### ***C. Information Technology***

The IT Department underwent reorganization this year, hiring new staff to meet the IT demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After a number of delays, IT staff are now in the roll-out phase of a major project in which the SHA will move from an environment of high maintenance individual desktop computers to a virtual server that SHA staff can access from any SHA or remote location; in addition, IT staff will be able to access the server from any location to correct problems.

- Microsoft Office 2016 aspires to be the most user-friendly office productivity suite yet introduced. After several years spent field-testing and streamlining the MS Office suite, the IT Department has concluded that the 2016 edition captures all of the tried-and-true functionality of its predecessors, along with many new cutting-edge features, including:
  - Real-time co-authoring and notebook sharing for collaborative work;
  - Simplified document sharing and attachments;
  - Email clutter management;
  - New chart and reporting types.

The change to this office suite is near completion.

### ***D. Property Management Practices***

- The SHA is reviewing and revising its Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy.
- The Applications Department and Property Management teamed up to draft a new pre-tenancy orientation program as a means to better educate applicants about their responsibilities as SHA tenants. This orientation will take place at the time when Applications staff meets with applicants to determine final eligibility for public housing programs. We plan to partner with students from an area college to produce a video in English and Spanish that applicants will view. This new program is projected for implementation this fall.

### ***E. Legal and Lease Enforcement***

This year the SHA restructured its contract with Lyon & Fitzpatrick, including changing to a fixed-price contract and having an attorney from Lyon & Fitzpatrick work at the SHA office two days per week. (The fixed-price contract excludes unusually time-consuming cases that Lyon & Fitzpatrick typically handle no more than once or twice per year.)

- Holding tenants and guests accountable for actions through fair, but firm lease enforcement has resulted in resident communities that are safer and in which residents meet expectations and cooperate to a higher degree with Management efforts.
- When lease enforcement involving court action is necessary, the SHA makes use of either the District or the Housing Court, depending on the nature of each case. Cases suitable for the services of the Tenancy Preservation Program typically are brought in the Housing Court (TPP does not operate in the District Court).

- The SHA Legal Department assisted in arranging an anti-discrimination workshop and training on serving persons with disabilities this year for all staff interacting with the public.
- Legal assisted the Executive Department in the drafting of updated policies and procedures related to new Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) legislation this year. The SHA adopted new VAWA policies, including emergency transfer and relocation policies for public housing and rental assistance programs. Legal provided training to ensure that all staff are aware of the VAWA rights of tenants, applicants and program participants, as well as the responsibilities of staff to respond to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

#### ***F. Public Safety and Investigative Services Division.***

- The Public Safety and Investigative Services Division reorganized the Division to provide for increased public housing fraud investigation and lease enforcement capacity. To date, investigations by the Division have resulted in stronger evidence in court cases.
- The Division engages in ongoing teamwork with contracted Springfield Police Department (SPD) night patrols and special investigations, as well as collaboration with The Massachusetts State Police and SPD in the Counter Criminal Continuum (C3) policing. This teamwork has resulted in improved law enforcement action in and around our developments to address drug, gang, and weapons violations.
- The Public Safety and Investigative Services Department Director serves as the point of contact for Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) issues for Public Housing Management staff, residents and applicants and tracks SHA responses to requests for VAWA transfers and other assistance by the SHA.
- The Division filed a funding application for \$250,000 in security improvements with HUD; notification of awards is scheduled to be announced by HUD shortly.
- Division investigations of fraud and violations of HCV rules and regulations are ongoing. Staff have referred cases to Legal, which in turn has contacted the HUD Office of the Inspector General, seeking prosecution in the most serious cases.

#### ***G. Finance and Accounting***

The SHA continues to receive solid standard performer Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) scores from HUD.

- Between consultant Mike Petro of Casterline Associates, Finance Director JoAnn White, and Accounting Manager Michele Decoteau, our Finance and Accounting Department has improved efficiency and kept the Department up to date with state and federal compliance and reporting requirements.
- JoAnn White reached out to property managers for their budget adjustment suggestions during the year. She used this information to create the fiscal year end (FYE) 2017 budget

modifications and to develop the FY 2018 budgets. She also prepared a narrative with comparisons, explanations, and graphs to assist the board in reviewing those two items. Suggestions from staff also provided the basis for expense reductions incorporated in the FY 2018 budget. Ms. White conducted training session with property managers to increase their understanding of their budgets, how to read financial statements, and raise awareness of the responsibility for them to take corrective action for any excess spending within the budgets.

- Better understanding of the budget process and the continuing emphasis on monitoring expenses helped the property managers to reduce costs and generate suggestions for improvements. Expense reductions combined with higher than expected rental revenue allowed the SHA to significantly reduce the expected loss for FY 2017, bringing it close to the break-even point.

## **II. Supporting Residents—Families, Children, Seniors, Individuals with Disabilities**

### ***A. Property Management Department***

In addition to other Talk/Read/Succeed! activities and Property Management’s ongoing work with residents, District B Management and Maintenance staff assisted TRS and its participants in establishing a Community Garden this past year. The community garden helped residents and their children learn about gardening and provided home-grown fresh produce for families.

### ***B. Resident Services Department***

- The Talk/Read/Succeed! program expanded to a third site, Duggan Park, with Daisy Gomez serving as Outreach Coordinator. Her position is funded by a 3-year ROSS (Resident Opportunities for Self –Sufficiency) grant from HUD. With HUD authorization and hard work on the part of Senior Property Manager Daniel Bresnahan, District B Foreman Jason Guyer and our IT staff, a three-bedroom, handicap-accessible apartment has been repurposed as a Resident Services &Talk/Read/Succeed! Office.
- Resident Services and the Executive Department obtained a grant of \$38,000 from the Davis Foundation to assist with funding for TRS Outreach Coordinators.
- Funders Collaborative funding in the amount of \$50,000 was used for family centered activities that were decided on via a committee which included parents, SHA, and school personnel. Activities included parent’s planning events, “Math Night Family Feud”, “Zoo on the go”, a trip to the Children’s Museum in Hartford and a superhero night.
- A mobile food truck was arranged to reduce food insecurity for seniors and families. A mobile market in the summer promotes the use of fresh vegetables and fruits.
- The Behavior Health Network in partnership with the SHA was awarded a grant to provide wrap around mental health services for families.
- We held a health and community service fair recently at Riverview Apartments.

- Riverview Apartments has a twice weekly computer class for seniors provided by the Resident Service Department.
- Several trainings were provided by Greater Springfield Senior Services at our developments. We are working with the City of Springfield on a grant that was recently awarded by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation that will look at Age Friendly Cities from the perspective of improving housing and transportation.
- District B Management and Maintenance staff worked to repurpose office space at the Reed Village Apartments to create the Reed Village Opportunity Center. Property Management and Resident Services are collaborating to bring programming to the space that will promote family self-sufficiency in this 200- unit development.

### ***C. Information Technology***

- The Executive Department, IT Division, and Resident Services formed Springfield's ConnectHome Team in partnership with the City of Springfield in this HUD-led project to increase internet access for public housing residents. The SHA was one of 32 housing authorities nationwide selected to participate in this initiative. Residents were provided with information about low cost access to the Internet.
- IT spearheaded the installation of VRI devices in all SHA Offices that serve the public so that deaf and hearing impaired residents, program participants and applicants can communicate effectively with SHA staff.
- In partnership with Partners for a Healthier Community, IT is close to adopting Enterprise-Grade Software for Talk/Read/Succeed! (TRS). This is a project called CiviCRM, a universal web-based contact management system.
- Community Development Block Grant funds awarded by the City of Springfield were used to procure 60 computers - 30 desktops and 30 laptops - for distribution across four lab sites: Riverview, Reed Village, Duggan Park, and Sullivan Apartments. Upon delivery to SHA's office at 60 Congress St., Springfield MA, each unit was cataloged and disc-imaged to suit the needs of each lab. New computer workstations were then established at each lab by IT staff.
- In addition the IT Division and Executive Department collaborated to access grant funds from the Lowe's Foundation to purchase software licenses for new computers.
- IT also added a Reed Village Wireless Router and connected laptops to new Wi-Fi network, and performed printer installations at Sullivan & Riverview sites.

### **III. Building Partnerships and Engaging with the Community**

Boards on which SHA staff have served during the year include Springfield Technical Community College, the Regional Employment Board, Roca's Western MA Advisory Board,

Revitalize CDC, the Mason-Wright Foundation Board of Corporators, the Hampden County Sheriff's Department CHESS Program Advisory Board, the Boy Scouts Board of Directors, the U.S. Attorney's Western Massachusetts Re-Entry Task Force, the Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence, Bay State Health Care Community Benefits Committee, Home City Development Board of Directors, and the Tenancy Preservation Project Advisory Committee.

- The SHA's Rental Assistance Division engages in several collaborative specialty housing programs, including the Voucher Program for Chronically Homeless Individuals, the Homelessness Prevention Partnership with the City and Friends of the Homeless, and the CHESS initiative, a collaboration founded by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department. CHESS is a program that uses 11 project-based Section 8 vouchers to promote the successful community re-entry of persons formerly incarcerated in the Hampden County House of Correction.
- The Rental Assistance Department operates the SHA's Homeownership Program which currently has 50 active participants. This year, Division has revised the Homeownership Program Administrative Plan to provide more intensive pre-and post-purchase counseling and support. The Division's Participant Services Department, which administers the program, has conducted extensive outreach to lending institutions to provide applicants and participants with greater financing options.
- The Property Management, Resident Services, and Executive Departments began a partnership with the Western MA Division of the Housing Court to pilot what is termed an "Upstream" Tenancy Preservation Project (TPP) initiative, allowing those with disabilities to access TPP services without the SHA having to file a court eviction action.
- Members of the SHA staff continue participation in three C3 (Counter Criminal Continuum Policing) Teams: North End, South End and Mason Square. The SHA's participation in this program allows the SHA to connect with law enforcement, community agencies, the business community, other landlords, and neighborhood residents to increase crime prevention for safe neighborhoods.
- The SHA Executive and Property Management Departments are in the final stages of the Choice Neighborhoods Community Planning grant project with the City of Springfield to revitalize the South End. The revitalization plan includes the relocation of the residents of the Marble Street Apartments and sale of the property to the City to make way for new roadway connections and other public improvements. We expect the Marble Street Apartments development to be vacated by mid-October and conveyance of the property to the City is expected by the end of the year.
- The Executive Department convened and led a teamwork approach that includes an interdepartmental group of SHA staff and representatives of the Sheriff's Dept., Community Legal Aid, and Roca to examine the issue of the re-entry of formerly incarcerated persons, the use of criminal records in public and subsidized programs, and possible models of community re-entry involving the SHA and its programs. The SHA, as the lead organization, applied for and obtained a technical assistance grant from the Vera Institute of Justice to assist in this endeavor.

- The Resident Services Department collaborates with the Regional Employment Board, HCC, and STCC on Adult Basic Education, including a program funded by a grant from the State Education Department.
- The Executive, Property Management, and Resident Services Departments partnered with Community Legal Aid’s *Community Benefits Program* this year to provide training to staff in Public Housing and Rental Assistance on how to refer tenants to the services of this program.
- SHA staff from Maintenance, Property Management and Resident Services, working in collaboration with the Western Massachusetts Food Bank and community volunteers, conducted monthly food distribution programs at the Moxon Apartments and monthly Brown Bag programs at Gentile and Saab Court.
- SHA District E Management staff collaborated with Wayfinders (formerly HAPHousing) and the YMCA to bring an exercise program to seniors and persons with disabilities residing in the Kathryn Jones Apartments.
- District B Management staff are collaborating with Springfield Partners for a Healthier Community to bring Financial Literacy and Economic Self-Sufficiency Programs to the Reed Village Resident Opportunity Center.
- Resident Services collaborates with Sodexo food services to bring lunches to kids in summer. Sodexo also collaborates with Resident Services to provide food and backpacks to families and children at our annual Talk/Read/Succeed! back-to-school events.
- Resident Services collaborates with the Indian Orchard library to promote the services available at the library to our families.
- Resident Services also collaborates with our two existing partner elementary schools, the Dorman and Boland schools, and this year started a new collaboration with the Indian Orchard Elementary School.
- Property Management and Resident Services collaborate with the Regional Employment Board summer work program to provide summer employment to teens at the Robinson Gardens and John L. Sullivan Developments.
- Resident Services continues to work with the Eric Carle museum through a grant from the Davis Foundation. This funding was used to present multi week program called “Bonding with Books” at two TRS schools plus at two developments. We have already spoken to the museum to discuss the possibility of expanding to Duggan.
- Resident Services and Property Management also work in cooperation with the City of Springfield and Partners for a Healthier Community to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to our residents in the summer and early fall at several of our developments.
- Human Resources has collaborated with the Employers Association of the Northeast in reviewing and updating the SHA’s affirmative action policies and procedures (to be presented to the Board this fall).

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### *Conclusion*

To keep this report relatively brief, the above information has been presented in summary form. As the Board can see, there is a lot going on at the SHA. Again, more complete information about any of our activities is available upon request.

Within our community there is much unrealized potential for addressing the problems and challenges we face. As this report illustrates, SHA staff have engaged with the best side of the community to draw on that potential. Leadership is important but doesn't go very far without the participation of enough members of the community, in different walks of life, to make a difference. It is that participation that we strive to promote.

In one sense, to be sure, belief in community is an act of faith. But a central lesson from my experience with the SHA is the extent to which people will step up when offered avenues and given encouragement for their efforts.

Thank you to all for your collegiality and support over the past decade, and I extend my very best wishes to the Board, staff, and residents of this vital organization.

Respectfully,

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William H. Abrashkin  
Executive Director  
September 19, 2017