

# THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

News, announcements, and more from the  
Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority



Photo by Joaquin Sosa

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Questions? Comments?

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## New Avenues for Communication & Community Engagement



This is the first issue of the refreshed HRHA monthly newsletter, an effort to better communicate HRHA initiatives, projects, successes, challenges, stories, and news. We will be primarily distributing the newsletter via email to community partners, stakeholders, and interested residents. The newsletter will be available on our website and in our office.

In this issue you can read about our other new communication efforts, the new 5-year plan, highlights from our Family Self Sufficiency program, and a spotlight of one of our residents. Our hope is that these new communication efforts can provide opportunities to better share about our work and partner with our community to address our housing challenges.

# From Homelessness to a Habitat Home

After a set of difficult circumstances, Jessy Gonzalez found herself homeless and a single mother. With a commitment to change her situation, the help of local services, and the HRHA & the Family Self-Sufficiency program (FSS), she is now getting ready to move into a 4-bedroom Habitat house with her husband and children.

“

*I applied [for Housing] and waited and waited and they finally contacted me...that was like the best news ever. I was going through so many horrible, horrible times of my life. And they [HRHA] called, showed me this apartment, and I was able to get everything in life that I honestly needed to survive. I had a house for my kids, I was able to get a car.*

*The FSS program teaches you to be an adult. To be responsible without always having the government give to you. They will give to you to the point that they are helping you, so that in the future, after the five years, you can be on your own. Then they can bless somebody else with an apartment that needs it.*”



Jessy in front of her soon to be completed Habitat House. She and her husband help throughout the process, contributing "sweat equity" hours of their own time. August 2019

More on Habitat for Humanity's local work at [www.centralvalleyhabitat.org](http://www.centralvalleyhabitat.org)

## Photo of the Month



Flowers and Gardens in full bloom at Commerce Village  
- August 2019

## Executive Director's Corner



Welcome to the Authority's initiative to highlight our community's housing issues and our efforts to address these challenges. We want to share the successes of our residents in achieving self-sufficiency, showcase programs/partnerships and services that assist individuals in accessing housing, and increase the community's understanding of the challenges residents face in finding safe, decent, and affordable housing. Our goal is to build community awareness and support of effective policies and practices that increase access to housing for all, including the most vulnerable in our community. Housing is a national issue, and a significant local issue. We see these challenges in the increasing number of homeless individuals in our community, as well as the high number of individuals requesting housing assistance. With low to stagnant wage growth not keeping step with higher housing prices, combined with a limited housing supply and increased demand for housing, more residents are facing major housing challenges. The Authority's waiting list currently has over 2400+ applicants.

With this increase demand and limited supply of housing assistance resources, the Board of Commissioners reaffirmed at its August meeting the Authority's prioritization of serving the most vulnerable within our community; the elderly, persons with disabilities, individuals experiencing homelessness, those working with service providers, those referred from centralized intake or transitioning out of institutions, and veterans. The Administrative plan is available for a 45 day public comment and I encourage all to provide either written comment to me or speak at the next Board of Commissioner's meeting at 4:00PM on September 18, 2019 at the Authority's administrative office at 286 Kelley Street.

Addressing housing challenges is a "wicked" problem requiring work with multiple partners and use of comprehensive strategies to effectively solve. The Authority recognizes the need to partner to address these challenges and is excited about the opportunity to collaboratively address these issues with local residents and community stakeholders. Thank you for your engagement and I look forward to sharing the challenges and opportunities as we move forward.

- Mr. Michael Wong



# The Family Self-Sufficiency Program

The Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS) is a 5-year program available to Housing Choice Voucher holders and residents of HRHA's Franklin Heights. Dedicated HRHA staff assist residents in setting and meeting financial, work, and self-improvement goals. Participants who increase their earned income while in the program earn monthly escrow (savings) that can then be claimed upon program graduation, and for select job related purchases while in the program.

## A few highlights from the past month:

### +Over 50 Back to School Kits for FSS Families

Donations and community partners helped HRHA provide close to 50 back to school kits to FSS families meeting their monthly goals.

### + A Set of Wheels to Commute within the City

One FSS Participant utilized savings in her FSS Escrow (Savings) account, as well as a grant from the Letters Foundation, to purchase a car.

### + Five Job Promotions

Five FSS participants received job promotions. As their income, and rent, increases, they have the opportunity to start accruing escrow (monthly savings).

### + Two FSS Graduations

In the past few months, two FSS participants successfully graduated from the program. One participant even graduated early, having grown their income above program guidelines. This means they were able to successfully increase their income, grow a savings account, and move out of HRHA housing!



## Comment Period Open for 5-year plan

The 2020-2025 Five year plan, as well as other administrative plans, are available for review and comment through October 4, 2019

The HRHA Board of Commissioner's August 21 meeting began the start of the public comment period for HRHA's Annual, 5-year, HCV, and Property plans and policies. HRHA's first main goal over the next five years includes **becoming a Move to Work Agency (MTW)**. This would grant HRHA increased autonomy in the development of policies to improve program efficiency and effectiveness, increase participant's self-sufficiency through rent reform strategies, and increase landlord participation to improve housing access. Upon selection into the MTW program, HRHA would develop a team of stakeholders and conduct community outreach and public comment processes related to the MTW goals. The second main goal involves **increasing housing opportunities** through unit development, private/public partnerships, expanded Fair Housing training, continued dialogue around social justice and neighborhood revitalization, increased communications efforts, and continued leadership in addressing regional homelessness.

To review and/or comment on the proposed HRHA plans and policies, please visit [www.harrisonburghrha.com](http://www.harrisonburghrha.com) or stop by the HRHA main office at 286 Kelley St.



# Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority

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Waiting List & Applications

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## HRHA Board of Commissioners

The Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the Harrisonburg City Council. The Board establishes the Authority's policies and procedures and appoints the Executive Director.

Board of Commissioner meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 4:00PM, at the Authority's administrative office located at 286 Kelley St., Harrisonburg, VA.

### + Timothy Smith – Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2019

### + John Hall – Vice Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2021

### + Scott Gallagher – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2020

### + Benjamin Fuller – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

### + Costella Forney – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

## Website & Facebook

In the last month, HRHA launched a **redesigned website and new Facebook page**. Our new website offers a cleaner and more engaging platform for residents, landlords, and the community. Our Facebook page provides regular updates and news for the community. Follow us on facebook!



@harrisonburgrha

## Community Support

A note of appreciation to **Kay Kibler** of Broadway for her donation towards the HRHA's Homeless Veterans Fund. Her donation will help furnish and equip veteran apartments at Commerce Village. She donated in memory of her father Jacob Saylor, a veteran, for Father's Day 2019. You can help support the Homeless Veterans Fund and other HRHA initiatives through the QR code at the right, or by calling 540-437-9545.



All donations are submitted to the non-profit branch of HRHA, Shenandoah Housing Corporation (501 c3), and are tax-deductible.