

# THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

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



Photo by  
Christa Good

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Questions? Comments?

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## Behind the Numbers



Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional character Sherlock Holmes is often quoted, "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data." Our work with affordable housing and homelessness aims to avoid such a mistake, ensuring our efforts are data-driven and number rich. Data informs our policies, and part of our vision is to "base all decisions on rational and provable data."

For our community, the data surrounding housing and homelessness present stark challenges, particularly for our most vulnerable members. In this issue, we examine a few of the numbers that are part of our day in and day out work. We first highlight the 12 years of service that Shirley Sheets has dedicated to improving local family's self-sufficiency. Additionally, this issue includes a monthly update from Executive Director Michael Wong, a dive into HRHA's distribution of funds to local landlords, an examination of the data behind the HRHA waiting list, and a spotlight on one of our Commerce Village residents.

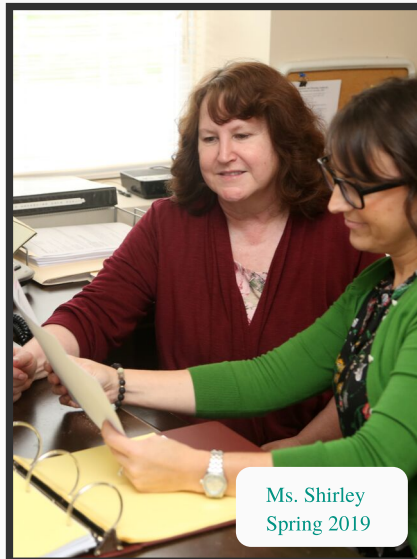
Data helps predict needs, clarify concerns, and communicate with integrity. It invites discussion and community problem-solving. Let's take a brief look at some of the numbers.

# 12 Years of Service

Shirley Sheets has served as the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Coordinator for HRHA since 2007. The FSS Coordinator develops individualized plans with participants that facilitate achievement of financial, educational, and employment goals. She has been instrumental in helping low-income individuals and families move towards self-sufficiency.

An advertisement in the paper originally drew Ms. Shirley (as many program participants call her) to the FSS Coordinator position. **"I've always liked helping other people. That was the most important thing I was looking for,"** she noted. Over the years she has assisted hundreds of individuals with job applications, educational achievements, and access to community resources. Walk into the office on a typical weekday and Ms. Shirley is likely meeting with an FSS participant, working with them on pre-employment preparation, finding quality childcare, or making a budget. When not in the office, Shirley is often out in the community, coordinating programs that help encourage and empower program participants.

She shared, "Seeing people fulfill their goals, like when they buy a house or a car, that has been very rewarding for me." One program participant shared, "After I quit my last job, I had pretty low self-confidence. Ms. Shirley worked with me to find a new opportunity. She helped with the application for my current job, and I eventually went in for an interview. **If I didn't have Shirley's support, I would not have gotten my new job. I'm really going to miss her. Her positivity rubs off on people, her confidence helped me get to where I am today.**"



Ms. Shirley  
Spring 2019

Shirley is moving into the role of Literacy Coordinator with the Rockingham County School system. We wish her all the best in this next phase.

## Photo of the Month



Lineweaver Patio  
Photo: Christa Good  
September 2019

## Executive Director's Corner



The Authority's philosophy is to use data-driven processes and evidence-based procedures in its decision making and delivery of service. Without data the Authority is unable to measure outcomes, identify trends, and determine progress toward achievement of goals. Each month, the Board of Commissioners reviews a number of reports to monitor the Authority's effectiveness and determine how its resources are allocated.

Much of the data, like the waiting list highlighted in this newsletter, clarify an immense challenge: our community is in an affordable housing crisis.

The Board of Commissioners has updated and established the following strategic goals to address these housing issues:

- + *continue application to become a Move to Work organization*, to provide local flexibility in development of rent reform policies, landlord incentives, and program participant's self-sufficiency;
- + *aggressively seek additional resources* to address the demand for rental assistance from the most vulnerable;
- + *increase outreach to landlords* to enhance housing options; and
- + *seek to develop additional authority-owned property outside the northeast neighborhood.*

The Board recognizes that Federal and State funds are insufficient to address the affordable housing crisis and that for our community to be successful we will need collaborations with locally-driven solutions. The Authority encourages all community members to be engaged and be a partner as we seek local solutions to these problems.

- Mr. Michael Wong



# \$5.5 Million to Support Rental Assistance in 2018

While HRHA owns and manages 280 housing units in Harrisonburg, a majority of families receiving housing assistance rent from private landlords through the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV). Voucher participants pay a portion of the rent based on their income, and HRHA pays the rest of the rent directly to the landlord. **In 2018, the \$5.5 million in rental assistance included rental payment to 200+ private landlords housing over 600 families.** We are incredibly grateful for our participating landlords, who provide affordable housing units throughout the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.

Currently, **HRHA administers 883 vouchers, and is always seeking participating landlords.** There are many benefits to partnering with HRHA, including guaranteed payment by HRHA, maintained independence, and more. For more information and to list your unit with us, you can check out our website at [www.harrisonburgrha.com/landlord-programs](http://www.harrisonburgrha.com/landlord-programs), or reach out to our HCV Manager Liz Webb at (540)-434-7386.

## 2,371 on the HRHA Waiting List

The waiting list can be a frustrating part of applying for affordable housing assistance, but is also one of the primary instruments HRHA uses to ensure that, given the lack of affordable housing in the region, assistance is provided equitably while prioritizing those with greatest need.

A waiting list report was shared with the Board at its August meeting. In November 2018, the Authority opened its Housing Choice Voucher waiting list to fill an award of 25 vouchers targeting individuals experiencing homelessness, individuals transitioning out of institutions, and non-elderly persons with disabilities. **As of June 30, 2019, the waiting list has increased from 1300 to 2,371.** On the waitlist, 80.6% of the households were listed as extremely low income ( $\leq 30\%$  Area Median Income - AMI), 12.8% listed as very low income ( $>30\%$  but  $\leq 50\%$  AMI) and 4.3% low income ( $>50\%$  but  $<80\%$  AMI). 60% of the households are with children, 5% are elderly households and 25% are households with disabilities. Average search time to locate housing varied by program area and voucher size, with those seeking one bedroom units having the longest search time, with an average of 68 days to find housing. Currently there are 57 households searching for housing.

**Within the past year, turnover (the number of new participants who enter into the HCV program) was 91. If this rate holds year over year, it would take over 20 years to get through the entire waitlist.** The waitlist number is one data point among many that signify the need for dramatic increases in affordable housing in our community. **To make progress, we will need moves in local policy, increased landlord participation, innovative zoning/building, community collaboration, and more.**



## 15 Veterans

Milford is one of 15 Veterans who lives in HRHA's Commerce Village, which provides permanent supportive housing for 30 chronically homeless and medically vulnerable individuals. Milford served as a cook in Germany from 1964-1965. Though he trained to fly helicopter, a heart murmur kept him grounded. He held a variety of jobs after coming home but struggled to afford decent housing. He's lived in Commerce Village for the last two years.

*"I've been to this Salvation Army, the Valley Mission, Roanoke Rescue Mission, Salvation Army in Staunton....and I just got tired of it. I heard about this place [Commerce Village] from one of the ladies who used to work at the Salvation Army Thrift Store. I came here, and the VA helped me considerably. I'm very content here.....This is perfect for an older veteran or homeless person."*



# Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority

## Contact Us

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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

This fall, 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

Finishing a degree or pursuing a new one can be a key stepping stone in achieving self-sufficiency. HRHA oversees a Scholarship Fund to assist youth and young adults in the cost of post-secondary activities and education. You can help support the Scholarship Fund and other HRHA initiatives through the QR code on the right, or through our website at [www.harrisonburgrha.com/donate](http://www.harrisonburgrha.com/donate).

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

