

THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

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



Volunteers at Godwin Hall, JMU
April 2020.
Photo courtesy of Open Doors

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Community Resiliency



The emergence and spread of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has completely disrupted daily life for all of us living in Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and beyond. Job losses & transitions, stay at home orders, and social distancing have brought new challenges for all. Whether it's grappling with how to pay bills, balancing work and home life within the same space, or taking extra precautions as we continue to go into our work environments, we can be left feeling a mix of emotions including anxiety, frustration, isolation, fear, and sadness.

This crisis has helped shed light on many broken elements throughout our systems, as well as reveal some of our own individual challenges. But it has also foregrounded incredible community collaboration and resiliency. We hold these disjointed truths together. We know there is much work we need to do to repair and restore our communities. We also know we have much to celebrate and be grateful for.

In this issue, we hear stories from local families about how their lives have been impacted over these last few months, as well as collaborations that have emerged from this pandemic.

Resident Perspectives

The Coronavirus has impacted all of our residents in various ways. Here we share, with permission, just a few of their perspectives. We invited residents living in Franklin Heights to share how the Coronavirus has impacted their life, what has surprised or frustrated them, and what gives them hope moving forward.

"When the lockdown began, I was searching for a job. I had gone on interviews only to have the employer call me back saying they suspended hiring due to COVID-19. To be honest, I thought this would be devastating to my family as we were already behind 2 months on bills. One afternoon, I got a text from a friend at a local poultry plant. He knew of my struggle to find a job and keep our bills paid and connected me with a job. The new position was called "health screener" and I take temperatures of employees as they enter the facility and screen them for symptoms of the virus. This has allowed me to begin catching up and getting our finances back on track." - Franklin Heights Resident

"Everyday I feel anxious. I read about it everyday. My anxiety goes through the roof. Where I work, we have lots of residents who don't get to see their family members. They miss seeing their families that come in all the time and now they can't come. It's been over a month now. It's really heartbreaking. All they see is the staff. We got to go in there and brighten up their day. So I sing and I dance for them. Anything that makes them smile."
- Franklin Heights Resident

"The Coronavirus has impacted my work life, because I am an essential employee. But my job didn't take enough precautions I felt to keep their employees safe, so I opted to just quarantine. It's frustrating because you never know when this virus will creep up on you if you're not washing your hands or covering your mouth. My faith gives me hope! I wish people were more educated on this virus, especially the minority population, because it has hit us hard." - Franklin Heights Resident



Executive Director's Corner



Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult-once we truly understand and accept it-then life is no longer difficult. - M Scott Peck

On March 13, 2020, our community was significantly changed when the first COVID-19 case was locally identified. The negative economic, social, and mental impact has been overwhelming and traumatizing for all but especially for the most vulnerable and for the many individuals and families we serve. Adding to these difficulties are the many uncertainties and unknowns of these unprecedented times.

Life is difficult, but these difficulties also force us to learn, to grow, and to adapt. We, like many in our community, are adjusting to a new work environment, implementing new services to increase our connectivity, and incorporating new information to ensure safety but also to continue to address the needs for all. We are appreciative to the community for their patience and grace as we implement these new processes. We are also thankful for the many local organizations and individuals rising to the challenge, providing leadership, and being champions in addressing these many needs. The community's response has been tremendously positive.

These are difficult times, but the actions of the many make me hopeful for our future and proud to be a member of our community.

- Michael Wong

Guest Piece: Decisions for the Long Term

At United Way, we talk about how it's difficult to make decisions for the long-term if you're constantly putting out fires right in front of you- a feeling that our neighbors who are struggling to make ends meet (ALICE) know personally. For example, it is really difficult to invest in your higher education, which may put you on the path to earning a higher income, if you're worried about paying your rent right now. In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been amazed to see how local community leaders have stepped up to put out the greatest fires in front of us. Organizations like Mercy House, Healthcare for the Homeless Suitcase Clinic, Our Community Place, Open Doors, and The Salvation Army mobilized with urgency and have worked collaboratively to meet the immediate needs of those who are experiencing homelessness.



Tashfia Hasan is the Coordinator of Community Impact for the United Way of Harrisonburg and Rockingham

It's important that we trust the experts to put out the fires in front of us while we make decisions for the long-term health of our community. We must take the time now to push forward on finding long-term solutions to our community's greatest issues (such as the need for safe and affordable housing). Without coordinated investment in and advocacy for long-term solutions, we may very easily find ourselves exacerbating the growing needs of our community. I challenge you to continue learning about the impacts of this pandemic and find an organization that you can support with your unique skills and expertise. We can make it through this pandemic. Together.

For local resources, information, and more see www.uwhr.org

Open Doors Partnership

This April, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) awarded the Western Virginia Continuum of Care (CoC) funding to support necessary emergency shelter operations and hotel/motel vouchers in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The CoC Executive Committee approved funding distributions to support three regional thermal shelters, as well as some hotel/motel vouchers. In Harrisonburg, funding is supporting the continuous operations of Open Doors, as well as case management for clients through Our Community Place, and hotel/motel vouchers administered by Mercy House. HRHA worked in partnership with these agencies, as well as the City of Harrisonburg, to ensure these funds were administered as quickly as possible. As the old proverb goes, it takes a village, and HRHA is grateful for partners who are quick to collaborate in addressing local needs.



Open Doors of Harrisonburg is working on moving towards a year-round model. Partnering with JMU and others, Open Doors is currently operating out of Godwin Hall.

Photo courtesy of Open Doors.

HRHA Increases Online Access

The emergence of the Coronavirus has pushed many organizations and businesses to implement new policies and re-imagine standard operations. HRHA is no exception. To better serve our community members and increase access, HRHA will provide new online portals for applicants, residents, and owners beginning May 2020. These portals will allow applicants to update their information & check their status, residents to complete much of the certification processes online, and increase communication with our participating landlords. These portals will better streamline and simplify our existing processes, making it easier and clearer for our families and community partners.



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www.harrisonburgrha.com

Facebook



[@harrisonburgrha](https://www.facebook.com/harrisonburgrha)

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.

+ 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

+ Dany Fleming - Commissioner

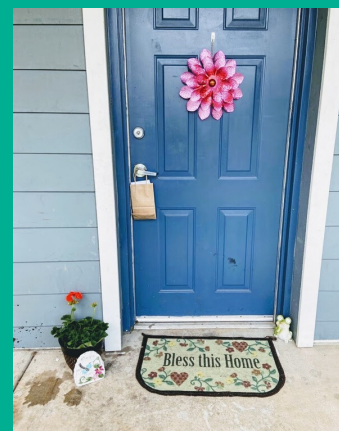
Term Expires: November 29, 2023

1,000 Donated Masks

In mid-April, HRHA put out a call for 1,000 cloth face masks for our residents, staff, and those experiencing homelessness. In less than a week, over 200 masks came in. Purchased masks combined with a continuing stream of donations launched us beyond our goal of 1,000 masks in less than three weeks!

We are incredibly grateful for the rapid and generous response of our community. We have already begun distribution to our residents. We will continue to distribute any additional masks that come in.

For more information on HRHA programs and policies during this time please visit: www.harrisonburgrha.com/covid19



Franklin Heights residents received a gift bag which included information on COVID-19 and donated face masks.