

MTW Expansion Cohort #1 Application

Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority

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Part 1: MTW Plan (max 10 pages)

Vision for PHA's Local MTW Program

The Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA) is a progressive agency that has expertise in providing housing for individuals with extremely low income, affordable housing development, community/coalition building, and neighborhood revitalization. As the largest public housing authority in the northern Shenandoah Valley, HRHA serves as a leader in addressing affordable housing, as well as self-sufficiency for residents, with our emphasized positive resident outcomes with self-sufficiency, service coordination and/or peer support services provided at all residential properties HRHA owns and manages. As Cohort #1 participants in the Move to Work (MTW) demonstration, HRHA defines our MTW program vision, “to be a proactive innovative agency that identifies, develops and implements evidence-based housing policies that addresses local needs, increases resident/program participant’s self-sufficiency outcomes, provides greater mobility and access to housing options including supportive services, and promotes efficiency and efficacy in the delivery and operations of all services.”

HRHA works closely with local government to ensure fair housing standards are understood and upheld in Harrisonburg. In 2017, HRHA, in partnership with the City of Harrisonburg, was one of the initial 26 localities nationwide to participate in the new Affirmative Furthering Fair Housing process with HUD’s acceptance of our new plan. Additionally, the HRHA Executive Director provides a Fair Housing presentation to the City Council and HRHA Board of Commissioners on an annual basis, has held fair housing trainings for local landlords, and HRHA staff members attend third-party fair housing trainings regularly. HRHA also upholds the

tenets of the Civil Rights Certification that is signed and submitted annually to HUD as part of the PHA Annual Plan packet.

Plan for Future Community/Resident Engagement

Over the past several years, HRHA has prioritized engaging residents and extending communication outlets to better serve our tenants, clients, and community members. In the MTW planning process, HRHA utilized informational flyers, our website and social media outlets, bi-monthly newsletter, Survey Monkey, Zoom/conference call technology, and direct communication to announce meeting and MTW process information, provide various outlets for feedback throughout the application process, and support engagement.

Each month, clients and community members are invited to attend the Board of Commissioners meetings. In addition to an in-person option for attendance, HRHA also now provides access to these meetings through Zoom conferencing. HRHA further utilized this platform, as well as HD Conference Call services, for the Resident/Participant meetings and the Public Hearing on the MTW program. These digital platforms enable those with disabilities easier access to attend and participate. All offerings include access to a language line for those who require translation services to participate in the meetings. Residents and members of the community were notified about the Resident Meetings and Public Hearing through mailed informational flyers to all HRHA clients, public postings on the website and local newspaper. Additionally, the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Coordinators provided door to door, social distant outreach to tenants of HRHA's Franklin Heights properties.

To provide the most immediate and current information, HRHA maintains an active website and Facebook presence. Along with our website, HRHA created a bi-monthly newsletter, to expand our communication connections, as well as increase our ability to highlight

important news, updates, and activities. Our digital presence has continued to support our outreach efforts to our community during the MTW process and has enhanced our ability to engage more frequently. Beyond the designated Zoom/conference call meetings sessions, HRHA also created two online surveys aimed at current clients to provide direct feedback. The survey was publicly shared on the website, emailed to clients, and administered through phone calls with staff.

HRHA is continuously striving to find and implement new modes of engagement. To better support residents and participants, in 2021 HRHA will be providing a digital Resident Portal. This Resident Portal will allow for easier access in obtaining rent statements, submitting work orders, and reviewing other information for individuals of all backgrounds. Additionally, HRHA continues to examine new ways to ensure full inclusion and access for our quickly diversifying client base. Last year, HRHA included racial equity as one of our goals within the 5-Year PHA Plan submitted to HUD. This goal outlines plans for ongoing staff training, and annual reviews of policies/procedures through an equity lens. HRHA also plans to form a Resident and Community Stakeholder (RCS) Advisory Committee that will meet on a quarterly basis to advise HRHA on the development of goals and objectives, and implementation of MTW activities, as well as help HRHA ensure an equitable approach to these activities.

PHA Operating and Inventory Information

The HRHA currently administers 956 vouchers, a portion of which are utilized for project-based housing at two properties HRHA manages: Franklin Heights properties and Commerce Village Apartments. HRHA also owns and manages J.R. Polly Lineweaver (JRPL) Apartments, a Section 8/New Contracts for elderly/disabled; and Lineweaver Annex, a LIHTC elderly/disabled housing complex. The Franklin Heights properties are comprised of 129 one to

five bedroom units. The units serve a diverse group of individuals and families, with incomes below 50% of the area median income. The Commerce Village apartments provide 30 permanent supportive housing units to chronically homeless and medically vulnerable individuals, and chronically homeless veterans. Lastly, the JRPL Apartments & Lineweaver Annex offer 121 unit's affordable efficiencies and one-bedroom apartments to individuals and couples who are elderly or disabled. The JRPL Apartments require tenants to only pay 30% of their monthly income towards rent and the Lineweaver Annex rents area fixed affordable amount, which includes utilities. The remaining vouchers provide housing choice to clients to obtain rental housing with the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia. The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program serves low-income individuals and families and also provides specific vouchers to homeless veterans, disabled persons, and family unification program participants. Currently, 42% of all vouchers are single, and are elderly, disabled, or both.

HRHA is seeing a trend in increased voucher awards for individuals versus family units. This increase correlates to the increase in Mainstream Vouchers HRHA received in the past two years, which are specifically targeted to this demographic.

HRHA plans no changes to housing stock and classification, but is exploring Permanent Supportive Housing development to provide additional housing opportunities for chronically homeless individuals. This is based on the increased need identified through data trends from the Homeless Management Information System, with 93-111 individuals being identified over the past five years.

Currently, the challenge facing HRHA clients, both residents and participants, relates to family units seeking one- and three-bedroom units. The three-bedroom unit size is difficult to

fill within the HRHA properties, due to eligibility issues, and both unit sizes prove difficult for HCV holders trying to obtain through private landlords. Even with increased landlord outreach efforts by HRHA, the overall lack of available affordable housing in the City Harrisonburg remains an issue. This is due to low inventory of affordable housing stock, with the emphasis landlords place on James Madison University student housing and the low development of affordable housing, as developers also focus on student housing.

Plan for Local MTW Program

As stated in the letter of interest, HRHA's drive to participate in the MTW Demonstration is due to our interest in improving resident outcomes and program cost effectiveness through development of a rent reform and incentive program. The proposed program would encourage and support program participants' self-sufficiency and increased landlord involvement through use of community-based services and incentives with a focus on serving highly vulnerable individuals and families encountering significant housing instability. Improved program cost effectiveness would be achieved by higher voucher utilization and retention, increased landlord participation and retention, and decreased administrative burden. Above all else, participation in MTW would enable HRHA to be better equipped for adaptive change, by providing more flexibility and agility in addressing challenges in affordable housing and self-sufficiency and cultivating solutions through locally driven, individualized innovation.

In addressing cost effectiveness, HRHA is looking to accept partner inspections, reduce the frequency of certifications and changes, and simplify rent calculations. The Harrisonburg-Rockingham Community Services Board (HRCBSB) recently had staff become a certified HQS Inspector and HRHA is looking to them for partner inspections. Reducing the frequency of

certifications and changes is another cost saving measure, as HRHA HCV staff noted that the majority of time is spent on monthly interims. This puts an additional burden not only on staff, but also voucher holders to ensure they submit any changes to their income and employment on a monthly basis. HRHA plans to adopt a triennial certification schedule and limit the number of interim certifications to one annually. To simplify the rent calculations, HRHA plans to increase the elderly/disabled allowance and eliminate medical expense deductions. This would lower the tenant payment for the vast majority of elderly/disabled participants and save both the clients and HRHA time and resources, while allowing hardship exceptions for the few participants whose medical expenses would create a rent burden even with the increased allowance. Additionally, data reviewed by HRHA revealed that the childcare expense allowance has not necessarily benefited the majority of clients; it could potentially be eliminated, and partially offset by an increase in the dependent allowance. HRHA also may eliminate earned income disallowance, exclude school grants from income, and only require additional bank statements and documentation of assets if combined assets exceed \$50,000. Further streamlining of rent calculations could be accomplished with the simplification of the utility allowance schedule.

As one of the first agencies in Virginia to implement a FSS program, self-sufficiency has long been an area of focus for HRHA and MTW participation will only enable us to be more flexible and local focused in enhancing this for our clients. To best address support and encourage all participants entering the program, HRHA plans to transition from an escrow program to an incentive based program, expanding incentives beyond an increase in salary to a more holistic approach. Regardless of income level at the start of FSS enrollment, FSS participants will be able to earn escrow and receive short-term awards based on individual achievements in health, education, employment, and housing that are critical to self-sufficiency,

with the immediate rewards providing tactical feedback. FSS staff also plan to increase emphasis on a coaching model, to more effectively hone in on and support the goals of participants, whether that is true self-sufficiency or in the case of those with fixed incomes, ensuring the maintenance of permanent supportive housing. To help ensure a more smooth transition once participants graduate, the FSS staff will continue to provide coaching support up to six months after graduation. Lastly, FSS staff plans to further enhance the linkages to community based partnerships to help improve access to programs that best support participants in achieving self-sufficiency, which include education and job training, as well as health and supportive services.

To continue advancing housing choice for clients, HRHA will invest in landlord recruitment, client rental supports, and project-based housing flexibility. This spring HRHA initiated a Landlord Recruitment & Retention program to increase landlord participation. HRHA aims to further this initiative under MTW with incentives such as reimbursement payments for vacancy loss, damage claims, extra month rent and signing bonus to continue incentivizing affordable housing rentals. On the client side, HRHA is considering funding flexibility to support clients with paying for rental application fees and creating dedicated staff to serve as a housing locator, assisting with housing search and rental options specific to the client's needs. Lastly, HRHA will increase flexibility to project-based rental assistance by removing limits to the number of project-based units in property buildings, increase the number of vouchers available to project-base, and eliminate the procurement process for PHA owned units.

Proposed Use of MTW Funds

HRHA is a Section 8 only public housing agency and therefore requests to use our Housing Choice Voucher funds (Housing Assistance Payment and Administrative fees)

flexibly. HRHA plans to use these funds for the landlord incentive and retention program, FSS incentive program, and housing search and stabilization services. No other non-traditional uses are currently planned at this time.

Evidence of Significant Partnerships

The HRHA maintains strong ties, connections, and partnership with various agencies within the City of Harrisonburg, as well as across the Shenandoah Valley region. Through various grant programs, HRHA cultivates strong, consistent collaborations with supportive service agencies to provide and/or coordinate wrap around services. As the administrator of the Mainstream Voucher program, HRHA maintains active MOAs with the HRCSB, local Department of Social Services (DSS), and Valley Associates for Independent Living (VAIL) with ensuring supportive services are obtained and maintained for individuals awarded Mainstream Vouchers. Additionally, HRHA partners with HRCSB on staffing a Peer Support Specialist at Commerce Village and VAIL in staffing two Service Coordinators to support the needs of residents of the JRPL Apartments. Furthermore, these agencies all work with residents and voucher holders of HRHA and have pledged to continue providing the necessary supports to ensure those they work with through our program are assisted in housing choice mobility and connect with programs they need to improve their self-sufficiency.

Outside of local organization connections, HRHA serves as the Lead Agency for the Western Virginia Continuum of Care (CoC) and works closely with CoC partner agencies throughout the northern Shenandoah Valley in identifying and addressing housing issues for those experiencing homelessness. HRHA will continue to coordinate with the CoC's case conferencing initiative to receive client referrals and also partner directly with Our Community Place and Strength in Peers (both in Harrisonburg) for housing locator support and housing

stabilizers services for homeless clients, supporting our self-sufficiency initiative. Moreover, HRHA's Executive Director stays in direct contact with the Virginia Community Development Corporations and plans for HRHA to participate in Elevate, an initiative through the Virginia Board of Workforce Development, to enhance HRHA's self-sufficiency initiative and enable us to adjust to various adaptive change factors that will play into our MTW program.

HRHA plans to leverage funding options with our grant funding programs, such as CDBG grant funds through the City of Harrisonburg, as well as new funding avenues, such as the Virginia Housing Trust Funds program. HRHA also plans to partner with the City of Harrisonburg for cost sharing of Franklin Heights initiatives and continue collaboration with members of the FSS Program Coordinating Committee to leverage resources of these agencies specifically to support our self-sufficiency efforts. Currently, the FSS staff work closely with the Blue Ridge Community College with Adult Education and Workforce Assistance Program to help connect clients with workforce training opportunities, as well as Massanutten Technical Center and Skyline Literacy for ESL and GED classes. FSS staff also plans to cultivate more formalized agreements with these agencies to ensure access to these trainings for FSS participants. Moreover, HRHA continually collaborates with various housing initiative programs in the City of Harrisonburg, whether through the local government, Harrisonburg Realtor Association, and the advocacy group, Faith in Action, to not only leverage resources for programs at HRHA, but also to highlight community needs, issues, and challenges relating to housing and self-sufficiency in our local community.

Significant Dates and Milestones for the PHA's Local MTW Program

HRHA anticipates receiving notice of approval for the program in January. Upon approval, HRHA will update the FY2021 Annual Plan, Leases, Administrative and Continued

Operations Policies (ACOP) for HRHA's properties, and HRHA Administrative Plan and would commence the public, 45-day comment period in March. With the start of the public comment period, HRHA would also provide a public hearing section during Board of Commissioners meeting and plan to hold a couple additional resident meetings to discuss the changes to these plans. Once the public comment period concludes, the Annual Plan would be resubmitted to HUD in early May for final approval. Moreover, from January to July 2021, HRHA would be conducting necessary trainings with staff, software and database updates through Tenmast, and meetings with stakeholders to finalize MOAs related to the MTW demonstration. HRHA plans to begin implementation of the MTW plan on July 1, 2021, with landlord recruitment/retention, recertification, income exemptions and standard deductions, and escrow changes taking effect, as well as enhanced data collection and evaluation activities and new processes. This will also begin the new triennial certification process, although we anticipate a one-year process for full implementation to commence. In August 2021, HRHA will present the Annual Plan to the Board of Commissioners, as well as begin the 45-day comment period, that will further highlight the goals and objectives for our MTW program in 2022. The first quarterly meeting of the RCS Advisory Committee will take place in fall of 2021, to establish the input and evaluation process for this group. Beginning in January 2022, any additional new MTW activities will be implemented and the RCS Advisory Committee will continue their quarterly meetings. Summer of 2022 will see the completion of the full implementation of the triennial certification process and the initial one-year evaluation process and data analysis to will inform not only the Annual Plan and adjustment the administrative plans, but will also be shared with the RCS Advisory Committee and Board of Commissioners to help inform their input on the process as it continues.