

THE HRHA NEWSLETTER

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



Harrison Heights resident Cherie and Jones Garden Inc members Naomi & Rebecca spread wood chips at the Kelley Street Garden Build Day. April 17, 2021

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A Pandemic Year



As the pandemic moves into a second year we hold the hope for normalcy alongside the recognition that we are not past the loss, challenges, and need for caution. It has been quite a year, demanding changes that needed to be informed, fast, and flexible. As spring continues and our country 'opens back up', our work continues at a rapid pace.

This issue takes a reflective tone, thinking back over the challenges that began in March 2020 as the scale of the pandemic became clearer. We foreground three reflections from HRHA residents and voucher participants about how the last year impacted them. We also highlight three staff members, two of them joining us just this year.

We are looking at an exciting and busy year ahead, driving a number of collaborative programs and initiatives to empower self-sufficiency among our residents and participants, expand housing opportunities, and continue housing the most vulnerable in our community. We are grateful for your partnership.

Interested in subscribing? Questions?
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Reflections on a Pandemic

We invited a few residents and voucher participants to share their reflections on the last year and offer their words here.

~

"To learn in March 2020 that people would soon be sick and many would pass on was awful to hear. I learned I needed to be stronger, wiser, and more caring towards others. I learned a lot of new rules and really a new way of life. I learned that every day when I get out of bed I will have to make it count because tomorrow it never promised. **My hardest challenge this year was learning my grandma had COVID. Even harder was learning I only had a little time left with the lady that had raised me and taught me everything.** Sadly I did lose her in March of 2021 to COVID and pneumonia...I am hopeful my son and I will be better than ever because I know she is watching and guiding us all the way." - Ashley G.



Sheila and her two sons at the Franklin Heights Community Clean Up Day April 3, 2021

"In 2020, my biggest challenge was not working. COVID-19 is really scary. People dying, people I know dying, it's really scary. **Biggest challenge was also getting to know myself the past year, especially when we had the lockdown. Made you think about life a lot, goals, where you really want to be in life, and how to get things accomplished.** It's crazy how you were planning your future and then one big thing happens, and this time it happened to the whole world...I am looking forward to a healthy life, to accomplish the goals I have. I am also excited for my daughter to start college and also one day I want to be a home owner. I also had an opportunity to get another job this year so I'm grateful for it. Praying that the world will come in peace and there will be a solution for COVID-19. I thank God for everything I have. I'm glad for the help from FSS, knowing someone is there to help you reach your goals." - Allonia A.

"I have learned many things this past year 2020...Since having to sit at home I have used this time to go back to college and trying to be able to open up a food truck business, praying by the end of this year. **The hardest part of 2020 was not seeing my children in person. Thank God for video visits! I miss the big hugs and cooking together in the kitchen and sitting around talking and playing games.** I do look forward to things changing soon and I can do all of that with my children and go to parks and Skyline Drive. They can even come and watch me graduate in the beginning of 2022. **I am ready for life to happen again.**" - Ramona A.

Executive Director's Corner



"Success is not one thing but many things working together". Marie Dressler

Many thanks to our community partners, residents, program participants, and HRHA staff for all the small and big wins these past four months. These include the initiation of the Kelley street community garden, assisting a family in becoming a homeowner in the City, receipt of signed authorization from HUD of HRHA's MTW designation, recent vaccination clinics at Lineweaver and Commerce Village apartments with over 90 residents receiving their vaccinations, clean-up activities in the FH properties, development of an online feedback feature for our website, lease up of over 30 new families, and our continued success of housing over 1000 families nightly. These are just some of the many accomplishments that would not be possible without our community partners and Authority's staff.

As we look ahead, I am excited about all the different changes and new opportunities designed to improve families' self-sufficiency outcomes, expand housing opportunities, and improve Authority owned housing stock. In service,

- Michael Wong

Staff Highlight: Suzi

HRHA manages a variety of programs, grants, and initiatives. We serve hundreds of families through housing vouchers, programs like Family Self-Sufficiency, and city-wide campaigns. Through 2021, we plan to highlight members of the HRHA team who make this work possible.



1. When did you start at HRHA and what brought you to the Housing Authority?

I was originally hired temporarily to cover for an employee on maternity leave. I was later called back to support procurement and accounting functions for the remodeling of Franklin Heights (2008). Years before I had worked for the construction manager and working again for him and in construction was an offer too good to pass up..

2. What is your role with HRHA?

Currently, my title is procurement specialist. I order office supplies, maintenance supplies and occasionally put together bid packages for bigger purchases. I also help out the accounting department on a regular basis..

3. What project or partnership have you been most proud of during your time with HRHA?

The remodeling of Franklin Heights is something I am very proud of. The transformation of the units was quite amazing. Purchasing and planning for 60 units at a time is work I am proud to have been a part of. I am also very proud of our efforts to keep everyone safe during the pandemic. It was a very scary time and it was nice to feel like we had done everything we could to keep each other safe.

4. What do you love to do outside of work?

I enjoy spending time with my husband and our two adult children. I love to read, knit, and embroider. I even got my sewing machine out of the closet and made masks last year! This time of year I am spending my weekends in the woods by the campfire.

5. Are there any upcoming projects or partnerships that you are excited about?

Having HRHA chosen to participate in the Move to Work program is quite the honor. I am also very excited about the Community Garden on Kelley Street. I believe both of these programs will promote better communication among neighbors, staff, and residents. It is important to feel like you belong to a community.

6. What do you wish more people in our community knew about affordable housing, our families, or the voucher program?

I wish more people would view housing assistance not as a hand-out but as a leg up. In a country as prosperous as ours there is no reason for anyone not to have a safe, clean place to sleep. If you own property, please check out the voucher program! It is virtually impossible to get a job if you have no place to shower, to prepare for an interview or to receive mail. Affordable housing is the first step to getting people back on their feet.

Welcome Kim and Anton!

HRHA is pleased to welcome Kim Haines and Anton Overby to the team. Both bring a suite of experiences that support their roles and an eagerness to work on affordable housing and homelessness in our community.

Kim Haines – *Community Development and Grant Coordinator*

Kim grew up in Winchester and, after much moving around the country, was determined to return to the Shenandoah Valley. She moved to Harrisonburg in 1999 with her husband Jay Hotchkiss. They have a son, Jack, a daughter, Carson, and two dogs. She taught high school in Kenya as a Peace Corps volunteer, has worked for many local nonprofits, and worked as a writer and editor.

Anton Overby – *Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Administrator*

Anton comes to the Valley by way of New Orleans, where he managed and analyzed data for the Algiers Charter group of schools from 2015 to 2020. Firmly believing that the power in data lies in the people and relationships it represents, he looks forward to contributing to projects that bridge the gap from spreadsheets to the actual streets.



Harrisonburg Redevelopment & Housing Authority

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Website



www.harrisonburgrha.com

Facebook



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

HRHA Board of Commissioners

HRHA is governed by a seven-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.

Meeting location/access will be posted prior to meetings and in line with local health guidelines.

+ Michael Wong, (Not a commissioner)

Executive Director/Secretary-Treasurer

+ Dany Fleming - Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2023

+ Costella Forney – Vice Chair

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

+ Scott Gallagher – Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2020

+ Christine Fasching Maphis - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2022

+ Kevin Coffman - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2023

+ Luciano Benjamin - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2024

+ Gil Colman - Commissioner

Term Expires: November 29, 2021

Thank you for building a garden with us!

We are incredibly grateful for the support of so many individuals and organizations in developing, building, and launching the Kelley Street Garden. We built the garden with a community build day on April 17 and the garden launches with a planting day May 15. Thank you for opening opportunities for growing food and community for our residents.

Jones Garden Inc, JMU Dining - Aramark, Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners, Voluntary Gas Tax Group, Lowes, Black Bear Composting, Soil Health Technologies, Neff Lumber, Designs by Landon Heavener

