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## **2017- 2020 Strategic Plan**

The Portsmouth Housing Authority  
PHA Housing Development LTD.

**Adopted December 14, 2016**

## **Portsmouth Housing Authority History and Mission**

The Portsmouth Housing Authority was established by the City of Portsmouth in 1953 to address the shortage of safe, sanitary and affordable housing for low income people in the city. The PHA built its first development at Gosling Meadows in 1959 and by 1973 had developed six different public housing properties in the City with a total of 421 apartment units. The PHA also played the ongoing role of Property Manager after these properties were developed.

During this time, the PHA was also tasked as the lead agency for two major Urban Renewal projects in the city. The Vaughn Street and Marcy Street projects impacted more than 200 different commercial and residential properties in the city. While controversial, both of these projects were among the first in the nation to add a preservation component to Urban Renewal, the most celebrated of which led to the creation of the historic Strawberry Banke Museum.

Throughout the 1970's the PHA expanded the services it offered to its mostly senior citizen residents. During this time the PHA sponsored and managed a variety of service programs including a Respite Care Program, Meals-on-Wheels, the Portsmouth Senior Center, Senior Transportation Services and a variety of recreational programs for the children and families who call PHA properties their homes.

Beginning in 1996, the PHA began redeveloping historic properties in the city using the Low Income Housing Tax Credits and a variety of public and private financing. This mixed finance model was used for the redevelopment of the former Atlantic Heights School, Cottage Hospital and Lafayette School which together added an additional 60 units of affordable senior housing in the City. This model was also used to modernize the aging Ridgewood Apartments which would become Wamesit Place, home to one-hundred Portsmouth families.

The PHA also operates a Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program which provides portable subsidies for qualified families to rent privately owned affordable housing. Currently the program manages 406 vouchers being used with 164 landlords throughout the region.

The PHA is an independent Special-Purpose local government entity that is governed by a six member Board of Commissioners. These Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor of Portsmouth and serve five-year terms. The PHA also has an affiliated 501(c)3 non-profit organization PHA Housing Development LTD. which serves as the General Partner of PHA's tax credit portfolio. Together, these organizations appoint an Executive Director who is responsible for the day to day operation of the organization.

## **Purpose of Strategic Plan**

In 2015, Portsmouth Housing's Commissioners, Directors and staff agreed on the need for a comprehensive Strategic Plan to help guide our priorities over the next 3 to 5 years. This was informed by internal and external pressures on both the organization and the residents we serve.

Some of these internal pressures included growing pains associated with technology and modernization improvements, staff succession planning, new accounting requirements, changes in the job market, the increasing challenges of managing an increasingly diverse population. The external pressures being placed on the PHA included a changing policy environment, continued fiscal constraints, a growing demand for services and an aging population.

We also acknowledged the value of an organization that is both aspirational and realistic. We believed that having thoughtful stated goals and objectives would allow us to focus our resources on top priority objectives, plan for staff recruiting and training, inform budget decisions and bring clarity to the core values that guide us.

We agreed that the plan should be aspirational in its goals, but realistic in its objectives and strategies. We also agreed that a new plan would help us better communicate our priorities in order to gain support from residents, staff and the greater community.

Above all, the most important purpose of creating a strategic plan is to give focus to our core values which is to keep the interest of our residents, no matter what their goals or needs are, in the forefront of all that we do.

## **The People We Serve**

Approximately 1,000 people call Portsmouth Housing Authority properties their home. Our 606 owned and managed housing units are spread among twelve different developments throughout the city and our Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program serves an additional 400 families. The PHA is the largest Housing Authority per capita in New Hampshire, housing nearly 5% of the total population of the City. Over 85% of these residents earn less than 30% of what HUD classifies as “Extremely Low Income”.

All PHA residents are unique with different goals, aspirations, abilities and challenges. The needs of these residents vary widely with the age, disability, presence of children, absence of one or more parents, physical and mental health, income, proximity to family and countless other factors.

Many of our residents suffer from overall poor health due to substance abuse, lack of medical care, transportation, home care services, legal aid, food aid, benefits assistance, job training higher education counseling and so much more.

While many of our families only live in subsidized housing for a short time, many others remain stuck in a state of chronic scarcity and are dependent housing subsidies most of their lives and often into the next generation or beyond. Nationwide, studies show that more than half of the people who are born into the lowest 20% of income earners will never make it to the middle 20% and will never experience the security and opportunity for upward mobility that is afforded to the middle class.

Still there are others who do break this cycle of persistent scarcity by building assets, building credit, improving their health, taking advantage of educational opportunities and making good use of the resources around them. This growth can take place without any guidance or delivering of any services to these residents, while others prosper because they were provided with and encouraged to use the wide variety, although sometimes scarce, governmental, non-profit or faith based services that are designed to alleviate poverty.

The PHA also houses several hundred Senior Citizens in Portsmouth. These seniors are typically not pursuing opportunities for upward mobility, but instead are seeking safe, comfortable and permanently affordable housing that helps to improve the quality of their life in their later years.

The PHA also houses hundreds of people with physical, mental and developmental disabilities. In fact, while it is not a specific part of our mission, the PHA is the most critical part of the mental health system in the region due to the fact that services for people who suffer from mental illnesses are nearly impossible to provide to people without stable housing.

## **Community Leader Interviews**

Executive Service Corp. (ESC) consultants interviewed 49 individuals for this project in February and March, 2016. These consisted of twenty-five face-to-face interviews, twenty interviews by phone, and four returns of written surveys.

These individuals represented dozens of organizations including City Government, regulatory agencies, human services providers, as well as Portsmouth Housing's Commissioners, Directors and Staff. The following are findings from this process:

- Community leaders report quality of working relationships with PHA staff is excellent and the assessment of the quality of service provided by PHA is described as good to excellent.
- Some individuals observe that there are human services available in the communities that do not reach varying numbers of eligible PHA residents.
- Some residents report that their "quality of life" falls short of what they hope for. This should be properly assessed through survey.
- There is pent-up need for housing in Greater Portsmouth among low-income individuals and families. The 350-400 families and individuals on our waiting list is testament to this.
- Work still needs to be done, first to understand and then to address the needs of low-income families, senior citizens and people with disabilities.
- We need to communicate more clearly on the role the PHA can play as advocate for housing and related services from State and Federal funders.

The organizations these contributors represent are all important partners in supporting our residents and as such, were instrumental in informing this strategic plan.

## **Additional Inputs**

Throughout the strategic planning process members of the committee reviewed a variety of articles, reports and statistical sources to help provide input to the plan.

In addition to this literature review, the plan was also informed by immersing ourselves in Portsmouth Housing neighborhoods through community meetings, special events and by an overall presence in the community. This qualitative study helped us understand the current state of relationships between our staff and our residents and gave us ideas to foster more trust, a greater sense of equality and an increased sense of ownership in their communities.

All of these inputs forced us to listen intently to our residents, leading us to a better understanding of the impact of individual behavior as well as the collective impact of the on the culture and social capital of the communities.

We learned about the challenges and high costs of living in chronic state of scarcity and helped us develop ideas and strategies that will help improve access to resources, reframing of goals and expectation, empowering residents to make positive changes in themselves and their communities, providing easy access to information and creating the slack that is needed for people to pursue a brighter future.

## *Goal One*

Create a culture of caring, open and empathetic staff and neighbors and for PHA staff and leadership to hear from and understand PHA residents, their ideal good and improving Quality of Life.

### *Objective 1-1*

Create a culture of caring, open and empathetic staff and neighbors and for PHA staff and leadership to hear from and understand from PHA residents, their ideal good and improving Quality of Life.

### *Objective 1-2*

Based upon the findings that are a result of Objective 1, determine what is currently being done well and what needs to be improved on for our residents as a result of PHA staff, partner or community involvement.

### *Objective 1-3*

Encourage, educate, motivate and empower residents to work together and take ownership of their community.

### *Objective 1-4*

Improve the PHA's organizational, financial, regulatory and fundraising programs to support additional Quality of Life improving activities.

### *Objective 1-5*

Increase resident enrollment in personal development and job training programs.

## **Goal - 2**

To encourage strong partnerships with organizations and individuals that will serve to support our residents and strengthen the capacity of the PHA.

### *Objective 2-1*

Continually identify partners who can help serve the needs of our residents.

### *Objective 2-2*

Develop a comprehensive external communications plan with the goal of reaching partner organizations and the wider Portsmouth community.

### *Objective 2-3*

Evaluate partnerships for the purpose of securing funding for initiatives aimed at PHA residents.

### *Objective 2-4*

Connect partner networks for collective impact.



## **Goal 3**

To achieve operational excellence through improved efficiencies, staff development and best practices in housing authority management.

### *Objective 3-1*

Evaluate business processes, practices and costs to create continual and measurable improvements.

### *Objective 3-2*

Implement a Continuous Improvement Plan.

### *Objective 3-3*

Invest in staff training.

## **Goal Four**

To grow and preserve the supply of affordable housing in Portsmouth.

### *Objective 4-1*

Add to or preserve affordable housing units by building, redeveloping and acquiring properties to preserve permanent affordability.

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**Process Mapping** – [asq.org/quality-process/2003/01/problem-solving/a-simple-process-map.html](http://asq.org/quality-process/2003/01/problem-solving/a-simple-process-map.html)

**Failure Mode Effect Analysis** – [asq.org/learn-about-quality/process-analysis-tool/overview/fmea.html](http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/process-analysis-tool/overview/fmea.html)

## **Acknowledgements**

Portsmouth Housing is grateful for the experienced and engaged PHA Board of Commissioners, PHA Housing Development LTD. Board of Directors, Portsmouth Housing staff and the volunteers of the Strategic Planning Team that worked over the past year on this project.

### **The Portsmouth Housing Authority Board of Commissioners:**

Mrs. Ruth Griffin, Chair  
Mr. John Leith, Commissioner  
Mrs. Amy Schwartz, Commissioner  
Mr. Gibson “Mike” Kennedy, Commissioner  
Mr. Tom Ferrini

### **PHA Housing Development, Ltd. Board of Directors**

The Portsmouth Housing Authority also has an affiliate non-profit organization, PHA Housing Development, Limited which develops new affordable housing in Portsmouth and the surrounding region. Both boards are affiliated but operate independently. The Ltd. Board is comprised of five members; two from the Portsmouth Housing Authority and three members appointed at large.

Mr. M. Kevin MacLeod, President  
Mr. John Leith, Director  
Mr. Timothy “Ted” J. Connors, Director  
Mr. Jack Blalock, Director

### **2016 Strategic Planning Committee**

Commissioner Mike Kennedy  
Commissioner Amy Schwartz  
Director Ted Connors  
Ms. Kristin Jeffrey, Community Member  
Ms. Jennifer Pyke, Resident  
Ms. Valerie Labrie, Finance Director  
Ms. Norma Bosen, Deputy Director