



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

Thanksgiving Message

Dear Friends of THA:

This has become a good time of year to catch you up on news from the Tacoma Housing Authority. Those who have been receiving these emails from me for some years know this is also a good time for us to thank you. On behalf of THA's Board of Commissioners and staff, I write to thank you and all of THA's partners and colleagues who share this work with us and make it possible. We are grateful to you.

This past year was lively, and challenging, for THA. THA remains the South Sound's largest provider of housing assistance to needy households. We do that in three main ways. We build, buy and rebuild properties that we then lease at affordable rents. We serve about 1,600 households that way. In partnership with hundreds of landlords, we serve another 3,600 households by helping to pay their rent on market rate apartments or homes. All this is the main part of our work. It is challenging, especially since our funding is inadequate, and unpredictable. Yet, it is not the hardest part of our job. The world knows how to house people when it tries. The world knows how to develop and redevelop real estate. It knows how to manage and rent properties. It knows how to design and manage rental assistance programs. Yet the world does not know nearly as much about the other part of THA's work: to provide this housing in ways that also gets two other things done: help work-able people prosper so their time with us is transforming and temporary, certainly for parents but emphatically for their children because we do not wish them to need our housing when they grow up; and help our community develop equitably so that low income people experience it as a place that is "safe, vibrant, prosperous, attractive, and just." What I like about THA is its efforts to find out how to do that.

Here is a sampling from our work in 2014 and a peek ahead to 2015:

- **THA's EDUCATION PROJECT**

It was a year of progress, evaluation and planning for THA's Education Project. This project is an experiment. It seeks ways to spend a housing dollar not only to house families but also to improve school outcomes of their children, and improve the outcomes of the schools that serve low-income children. You can learn more about this innovative effort at our web site [here](#). We are doing this work in collaboration with Tacoma Public Schools, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Sequoia Foundation, Building Changes, City of Tacoma, Pierce County, and nonprofit service organizations in Tacoma. We are very fortunate to have such interested and capable partners. The project has several elements to it. Here is some news about some of them:

~ ***McCarver Elementary School Housing Program***

McCarver Elementary School is a very important school in Tacoma. It opened in the 1920s. Many Tacoma leaders have been alumni. It was the nation's first magnet school in service to a voluntary racial desegregation plan. Today McCarver faces some notable challenges. Its student population is among the poorest in the region, possibly the state. It serves more homeless than any other elementary school in the region, probably the state. Its educational outcomes are what we have come to expect, and accept, from such a school. What caught our eye was the annual turnover

rate among the students. Prior to this program, the turnover rate ranged between 100% and 179% annually. The year before the program began it was 107%. This population is not transient because of occupation. It is not a farmworker population. It is not a military population. The population of students is transient because of homelessness, deep poverty and the associated family challenges. Such mobility is ruinous to educational outcomes for the children who come and go and for their classmates who must sit there and watch it happen. A year's worth of planning between THA and the Tacoma Public School District led to the present pilot program. It has five parts: (1) THA provides rental assistance to up to 50 homeless families with a child enrolled in McCarver's kindergarten, first or second grades. Their 85 children constitute about 20% of the school. The assistance started high, paying most of the rent, and tapers down to zero after five years. (2) The program asks the parents to make three commitments: keep their children enrolled at McCarver, support their children's education (regular attendance, homework support, attending parent, teacher, student conferences and attending PTA meetings), and invest in their own employment and education; (3) The program and nonprofit service partners provide close supportive services to help the parent do this; (4) The School District invested to transform McCarver into an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program to raise standards for the whole school; and (5) third-party evaluation tracks an array of metrics. Our web site shows the report for two years' worth of data. It is quite positive. McCarver's transient rate is down to 74%. The cohort children increased their reading scores by 22%, three times faster than other cohorts. The average family earned income has doubled. We will shortly have three years' worth of data. THA and Tacoma Public Schools will shortly assess whether the data justify expansion of the pilot to cover other elementary schools in Tacoma with ruinous transient rates attributable to homelessness and housing instability. If so we will spend much of 2015 planning the expansion and changing the model to account for what we learned at McCarver.

Hello my name is G. I am looking for apply for section 8 asap I am a full time student and taking care of my little two sisters. I am 20 years old and I am renting a room from a friend but I am facing an eviction right now. I receive tanf at the moment so dshs gave me the choice to pay my rent here or I look for a new apartment and they will pay my deposit. So I am seeing if I can get on section 8 and be able to get a place so we can have a home. If you would be able to call me my number xxx-xxx-xxxx I am up at 8 o'clock but if you can call and leave a message and I will get back right away.

Thank you.

- G

[email to THA, July 16, 2014]

~ ***Tacoma Community College Housing Program***

Tacoma Community College (TCC) is the region's largest post-secondary educational institution, with over 14,000 enrolled students. It is justifiably proud of the warm welcome it offers to low-income students. Many of them are the first in their family to attend college. Many of them have families of their own. Yet, a worrisome number of them are homeless. This is a serious barrier to their academic success. In response, in September, TCC and THA launched a program that will provide rental assistance to homeless TCC students, and their families, for up to three years, on two conditions: (1) they remained enrolled; (2) they make academic progress toward a degree that TCC determines is adequate. We began this program serving 25 students. We will track various metrics. The outcomes will determine if we continue, curtail, or expand the program.

~ ***Savings Account Program for the Children of New Salishan***

We will spend this next year designing, fund raising and launching a program to establish savings accounts for the children of New Salishan, THA's largest community. New Salishan has its own elementary school, Lister Elementary. This program will establish savings accounts for all children who enroll in Lister's kindergarten class. The program will hold the account. For the first 6 years, through fifth grade, it will resemble a traditional individual development account. This means it will match the family's deposits into the account up to an amount that our fund raising success will determine. We hope to match up to \$400 annually. The match stops in 6th grade, when the student moves to First Creek Middle School (next to Salishan). At that point, it becomes an incentive program. The program's counselor and the student will devise an individualized plan with academic milestones from 6th grade through high school. Milestones will reflect where and how the student needs to focus. They may include attaining a certain attendance, reaching a certain grade point average, signing up for the state's College Bound Scholarship program, which will pay for college tuition, taking college preparatory courses, taking the PSAT, taking the SAT or the ACT, applying to a post-secondary program, filling out the FAFSA, graduating from high school and enrolling in a post-secondary program. As the student reaches each milestone, the program will make a further deposit into his or her account, with an additional small cash payment to the student. If and when the student completes the journey, the account balance will be available for his or her educational and training purposes. We hope to raise enough money so that a student who participates fully will end up with \$7,000 upon high school graduation. We undertake this effort with the expert guidance of the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED). Its research reports that low-income children with even modest savings in such accounts are several times more likely to attend college. It does this by helping students and parents think more positively about the future. The main enemy is despair. Yet even the most ambitious of such programs does not have a plausible chance to raise enough money for tuition. Fortunately, that is not such a problem in Washington State. Here we have the College Bound Scholarship Program that will cover most tuition costs at public institution rates. The remaining barriers that defeat many low-income children are the non-tuition expenses, especially housing, and the lack of support. This Salishan program seeks to help with both.

Hello.

My name is K. I am 22 years old and am looking for help. My boyfriend and i both are trying to find a place to live but we cant seem to find anything we can afford. I am 5 months pregant and only work 20 hours a week at Safeway. He works 40 hours a week at ML. With his child support, truck payment, insurance payment, and other bills we are having a hard time finding a place for our family. I was wondering what i can do to get some assistance. We are staying with friends right now and I would really like to have my own place for my son. If you have any qustions my number is 253-xxx-xxxx.

Thanks.

- K

[email to THA, October 13, 2014]

In these and in other initiatives, we seek ways to spend our housing resources not only to house a family but also to improve educational outcomes for their children and the schools that serve low-income children generally. When it works, it becomes a very good use of a housing dollar.

- **THA's INVESTMENT IN RAPID REHOUSING FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AND HOMELESS YOUTH WITHOUT FAMILIES**

In 2013, THA and Pierce County signed two innovative contracts. One has THA provide up to \$1 million annually to fund the county's rapid rehousing program for homeless families with children. The other contract has THA provide \$250,000 for similar services for homeless youth without families.

These contracts help to solve a problem at THA. Homeless families cannot get into the mainline HUD housing programs that THA administers. As a way to intervene into crisis, THA is not very relevant. When a homeless family comes to our door, we must explain that we work off of hideous waiting lists and that they are usually closed. If a waiting list happens to be open on the day a family inquires we will invite the family to apply. But then we will explain that the wait will be years. Even if we could hand a family a housing voucher on the spot, it would still be a month away from housing. We must do the paper shuffle for its enrollment in our program. The family would still have to find a landlord willing to rent. The family must have the money for move in expenses. We would still have to inspect the apartment or home. Homeless youth have all these problems plus the added ones of youth and inexperience that prevent them from even coming to our door. Moreover, the rapid rehousing data also tell us that for purposes of crisis intervention, a voucher's deep permanent housing subsidy is not a good use of resources, for two reasons: there is no way to tell which family will become or remain homeless without assistance; 85% of homeless families do not need a deep, permanent subsidy in order to stabilize. In all, THA's mainline programs are not an accessible or efficient way to serve families and youth in crisis.

Dear Sir or Madam,

My daughter and I are currently residents of Tacoma, and need to investigate Section 8/assisted housing.

I'm currently drawing unemployment benefits and have only managed to stay employed for approximately 20 months out of the last 42, with 11 of those months part-time employment. As an older adult, and it has become increasingly difficult to find work and support my 14-year-old daughter.

Are you accepting names to your waiting list?

- H

[email to THA July 12, 2012]

This led us to do a rough calculation with the county. If we redirected \$1 million of our dollars to rapid re-housing programs, THA would serve 120 fewer families on our rental assistance program, about a 3% reduction. Yet, with that money, the rapid rehousing data suggest that the county could stabilize 300 – 350 homeless families, or about 30% of the homeless families with children who surface in Tacoma seeking assistance. If this is true, this would be another good use of a housing dollar.

There is another aspect to these contracts that is crucial and that excites us as well. It concerns the data we will collect and the evaluation we will undertake. This information will help fill a gap in the nation's rapid rehousing data. That data show that 85% of homeless families will stabilize with the shallow and temporary housing subsidy and supportive services from a rapid

rehousing program. Yet those studies define stabilization to mean only that the family does not return to shelter within 12 months of the last assistance payment. Those studies do not reveal the quality of the stabilization during that time. For example, it would count as stable a family who did not return to shelter but instead slept in a car or moved from couch to couch. For this reason, our contract will have the county track these families and their housing status during that 12-month period following the end of the last payment. In these ways, our contracts will teach us a lot that will determine if we continue, curtail or expand the investment. We look forward to significant progress, and data, in 2015.

● **REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT**

No update about THA's real estate development would be complete without a word about New Salishan. If you know about THA you probably know about this ambitious project. It is our HOPE VI redevelopment that we began in 2002. We tore down 200 urban acres of 855 old, worn out public housing units. We have built a new neighborhood of 1,350 apartments and homes for sale, with important community buildings and green space, all on an award winning design, with new infrastructure and wrapped by a 250-acre regional park. It is the largest residential redevelopment in the city's history. It is one of the largest of its kind west of the Mississippi River. It cost \$300 million, mostly from private sources. Getting this done has been THA's preoccupation for the last 12 years. While it is not quite finished, we can see the end of it. This year we are pleased to report brisk homes sales by our home development partner, D.R. Horton, the nation's largest homebuilder. Those sales have elicited D.R. Horton's interest in purchasing our remaining 70 finished lots. That denotes confidence in Salishan, in THA and in Tacoma.



With Salishan in hand (mostly), THA is envisioning the next 5 years of its development activity. In important ways, this means a return to the Hilltop. That is timely because the city has plausible hopes that the Hilltop, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, will blossom. We already think this neighborhood is the housing bargain of the west coast. It is also about to get a light rail line connecting it to downtown and transit hubs.



Part of THA's role is to spur this investment with catalytic projects that embolden others to invest and that set a high design bar. Our work also helps to ensure that when the Hilltop does develop, it does so equitably and with room for all incomes. Toward this end, I am pleased to announce that on August 25th THA cut the ribbon on Bay Terrace Phase 1. This was our first large post-recession project! We demolished 104 worn out and unsightly public housing apartments on three Hilltop blocks. We intend to build (in two or three phases) 150 to 190 apartments in midrise buildings, town homes and cottage homes, along with green spaces and a community building, all on new infrastructure. Phase 1 has built 70 apartments, including a four-story apartment building and a community center that hosts a Tacoma Public School District Head Start class – the only one

outside a school building. As with all THA real estate developments, Bay Terrace has ambitious goals:

- ~ more housing in an appropriate density that serves the City's comprehensive plan
- ~ more apartments affordable to a wide range of incomes, with a focus on the neediest
- ~ more apartments accessible to persons with disabilities
- ~ community buildings and outdoor play and gathering spaces
- ~ financially sustainable operations

- ~ environmentally responsible features and improved tree canopy (The community center and the townhomes achieved a LEED Gold designation. The mid-rise got LEED Silver.)

- ~ attractive design (At THA we think both ugly and lovely are contagious. We seek to set a high design bar for others to consider. We especially feel the responsibility to show that the higher densities directed by our city's comprehensive plan can look attractive.)

We are now in the hunt for the financing for Bay Terrace Phase 2.

We are also well into the design stage for Hilltop Lofts. This will have us build 50 or so apartments above retail on MLK Avenue at a signature corner across from Community Health Care's new and impressive Hilltop Family Medical Clinic.

This fall we broke ground on Prairie Oaks Apartments. This project will provide 15 apartments of permanent supportive housing for homeless families with a disabled person, plus community space and office space for our service partner, LASA (Living Access Support Alliance). This project is notable. It is our first development outside City of Tacoma. That makes sense because THA draws nearly half its housing customers from outside Tacoma. Serving them in their own community is preferable. Prairie Oaks is also our first project developing land owned by another organization. LASA owns this land but needed a partner with a development capacity. THA was pleased to do this for two reasons. First, LASA is a sister social justice agency that shares THA's mission. Second, doing so allows THA to earn a developer fee that supports our other work. We expect to cut the ribbon on Prairie Oaks in the spring. We are also discussing doing similar development work for other nonprofits.

Hello my name is E. I have applied for sec 8 about 4 maybe 5 months ago as i know that it can take years before my name reaching the top of the list. I wanted to know how could i become part of the HUD program. As to which i do have a 3 yr old daughter and we currently live with a relative. i have low income. But as to the living situation i was asked how soon will i be able to be on my own... I have applied for many jobs but haven't received call backs i recently attend school at tcc I'm truly trying my best to provide for me and my child, but i desperately need housing assistant. Please contact me email or phone (253) xxx-xxxx.

- E

[email to THA, November 10, 2013]

- **INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY OF FOSTERING OR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND SENIORS**

Many Lights, an innovative nonprofit organization in Washington State, and THA seek to develop a community to house families who are fostering or adopting children. It would provide them with high quality, affordable housing. The families would be able to offer each other support for the parenting challenge they have each undertaken. Importantly, the community would also include seniors who, by living there, agree to serve as “grandparents” in support and respite caregivers. In this way, the development provides valuable housing and support for the families and a meaningful and purposeful role for the seniors. Many Lights models its intentions after a very successful community in Portland called Bridge Meadows. To learn more, click [here](#). THA owns seven undeveloped acres that might be a very good location. The present challenge is the customary one – arranging the financing. We hope 2015 will prove encouraging for this inspiring project.

- **CHANGING HOW WE SERVE PEOPLE**

Two year ago, we launched our new Housing Opportunity Program (HOP). HOP was the first large step in changing what we provide to households receiving our rental assistance. In general, HOP provides a somewhat lower rent subsidy than the regular housing voucher program. This allows us to serve more families. We began planning this effort three years ago when we judged that the short and midterm budget weather out of Congress was likely to be stormy for programs that serve poor people. Indeed, in 2011, Congress passed the Budget Control Act of 2011. That Act set a schedule for spending cuts known as “sequestration” to begin in 2013 unless Congress adopted an alternative. Full sequestration cuts would have taken about \$3 million out of THA’s operating budget of about \$45 million. There are only a few ways to take \$3 million out of THA. We cannot take a significant portion of it out of staff costs, which total about \$5.5 million. If we reduced this amount by \$3 million, we would cripple ourselves and important services we provide. We cannot take it out of our portfolio of rental properties. Rental property is not like housing vouchers, food stamps, public assistance or Social Security that public agencies can hand out until the money runs out, and then politely tell people to go away. When the money runs out on rental property, the property will still be on the ground the next morning filled with tenants and families and next door to neighbors to whom THA, as landlord, owes important obligations. The only plausible way to take \$3 million out of THA is by substantially reducing our largest expense: our rental assistance programs. We spend over \$30 million annually in rent checks to private landlords on behalf of voucher holders. And there are only two ways to reduce that spending by \$3 million. First, we could terminate over 300 families. THA’s board of commissioners has no appetite for this. THA has never removed a family from its programs for lack of funding and the board does not wish to start. The second way is to “thin the soup”. This would ask every family on our programs to accept less from us so we

Hi my name is D. I am a single mom domestic violence victim, have a 5 year old daughter and is homeless at this time. I need help with finding and securing a safe place for me and my daughter. I am starting to work at a local hospital this week and my daughter is starting to go to summer schools this week as week so I could work. We are couch surfing with a friend and their family at this time.
- D.
[email to THA, June 24, 2013]

can serve more families. That is how we managed the voucher funding crisis of 2004. That is also how the HOP program helped during the budget cuts of 2013.

We are glad we launched HOP in time for the budget cut of 2013. It was not a full “sequestration” cut but it did reduce our funding by about \$1.2 million. At a time when other housing authorities were cutting people from their programs or at least freezing the issuance of vouchers, the HOP savings allowed us to add families.

Under Congress’s present schedule, we must now anticipate that full sequestration cuts will begin on January 1, 2016. That would be a \$3 million cut for THA. THA’s board remains resolved not to terminate any households if possible but instead to manage the cut by extending the “soup thinning”. HOP was the easy part of this. We applied it only to people coming off our waiting list who previously received nothing from THA. For this reason, they did not experience HOP as a cut. Extending some version of HOP to the present voucher population will be harder because it will be a cut for those families. THA will spend 2015 studying, consulting and planning how and when to do this. In doing so, we will have the advantage of up to two years of experience with HOP. We are tracking metrics that reveal how families have managed with the lowered subsidy.

Hello, my name is S. I'm 19 and my boyfriends name is D. also 19. We have a baby on the way with no income and we are going to be homeless in the next two days. I've never had any help like this except food stamps. We need help. We are both looking for work but are having a hard time. If you could please call us with more info about getting us help that would be greatly appreciated. Thank you!
Are you accepting names to your waiting list?
- S.
[email to THA July 8, 2014]

We need to start this planning now rather than wait until we see if sequestration really begins in 2016, for three reasons. First, if we waited until 2016 we would not have time to react to budgets cuts with anything but mass terminations of families. It is relatively easy and quick to terminate families from the program. Planning an alternative that avoids terminations takes a lot of work to design and a lot of time to implement on a schedule that is humane and respectful to voucher holders and landlords. Second, we cannot responsibly bet that sequestration will not occur. To do that we would have to bet that Congress will be able to enact an alternative, and furthermore, that the alternative would be better for our programs and the people we serve. Third, even if we avoided the deep cuts in 2016, our longer-term budget forecast for these programs would remain gloomy. We need to be ready. Finally, if we make these changes and cuts never occur, we will then be able to serve more of the thousands of families who cannot even get on our waiting lists. That is a separate reason for thinning the soup.

HOP made other changes that we will now consider for the present voucher holders. Under the regular voucher program, the subsidy changes with the household’s income. If the household’s income goes down, the subsidy goes up. If the income increases, the subsidy decreases. The HOP rental subsidy is a flat amount that does not change as income changes. This eliminates the disincentive to increase earned income. It also makes the program easier to explain and understand, and less expensive to administer. Saving on administrative costs is important because we do not receive nearly enough money to administer the program. HOP also imposes a time limit for workable households. For them, the assistance will end after five years (with extensions for hardships).

During those five years, we will provide enhanced supportive services to help families increase their earned income and assets so they are more likely to be ready for the private rental market. We adopt time limits for several reasons. The main reason arises from our inability to adequately and fairly explain who gets help from THA and who gets nothing. The households we serve are few in number relative to the need. They are the lucky ones. They receive a deep, permanent housing subsidy. In contrast, tens of thousands receive no help even though they are just as needy. They must look in from the outside, lingering on long waiting lists, or even waiting to get on the waiting list. A time limit acknowledges that at some point it is someone else's turn. With time limits we anticipate the hard day ahead when a mother and her two children reach the end of their five years. Under HOP's rules, we will discontinue their subsidy. We will not like it, but we will do it because we know there is a mother just like her waiting her turn.

I must emphasize a final point about some of these changes. We will study them carefully. We will consult widely with families, landlords, advocates, community partners and anyone else willing to share the burden of the hard policy and budget choices we face. I am confident that together we will find an appropriate balance of the many conflicting interests and factors. However, whatever plan we choose will not be a reason to celebrate. It will not be easy to ask needy families to pay more. We would not make some of these choices if there were not so many other equally needy households waiting or if we were flush with cash to serve them. Yet, we must make our choices with the market we face and the resources we have to face it.

My name is M. I lost my apartment due to domestic violence and moved into my parents house and now their house is being foreclosed on how do I go about getting on the section 8 listing so me and my son do not become homeless?

- M.

[email to THA, May 7, 2012]

- **THA's METH PLAN**

In my report last year, I described our struggle with methamphetamine contamination in some of our apartments. We have learned more than we ever wished to know about meth. We do not think we had a disproportionate problem. We do seem singular among public and private landlords in the vigor of our response and in the regard it shows for a landlord's obligation both to protect the health of our tenants and staff and to comply with Pierce County's rules governing testing and remediation, the nation's strictest. This last year we refined THA's "meth plan". We did this in close consultation with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, attorneys from Northwest Justice Project, and others. The plan is responsible, mindful of the due process rights of tenants, and effective. Our tenants are thanking us for it and the greater peace and safety in their communities that they attribute to it. The plan expresses THA's high standards of stewardship. The plan is also costly. We have struggled to afford it. We received critical financial help this year from the state legislature and the EPA. I am pleased to report that we are well through our meth problems. Yet no landlord, as selective as they may try to be, can ever feel free of meth or other similar contaminations. Americans just use too many drugs. Nevertheless, we have learned responsible ways to address the issue and reduce it to manageable and affordable levels.

- **HOUSING AND CHILD WELFARE COLLABORATION**

In 2012, THA and sixteen other Washington State housing authorities and four nonprofit private housers signed an innovative memorandum of understanding with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), our state's child welfare agency. This MOU created a collaboration that would have the housers put affordable units and housing vouchers at the disposal of local child welfare staff for use when in their judgment it would be necessary and effective to do one of three things: (i) prevent the need for a child's foster care placement; (ii) speed up a child's return from foster care placement; (iii) save a teenager who is aging out of foster care from beginning his or her adulthood as a homeless person. DSHS in turn commits to providing supportive services to these families or youth when necessary to help them find or keep housing. Importantly, these services will be available even after the dependency case closes. Arranging those continued service has been a challenging part of the implementation. Yet, the collaboration is launched in at least six localities, including Tacoma. We expect 2015 will reveal what works in the collaboration and what may need additional adjustment. We remain hopeful. If it works to prevent or shorten a foster care placement, and save the state foster care costs, or help a young person succeed after foster care, it would be a very good use of a housing dollar.

- **BETTER ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS**

THA continues to make notable improvements in the efficiency of its service and our use of technology and data. We now take all applications on-line. This saves us hundreds of hours previously necessary to enter the data from paper forms. Our customers are now able to do more business with us on-line, such as reporting changes in their income. We are also making expanded use of GPS technology to monitor our rental assistance programs and how they affect residential patterns in our city. In 2015, we must change our business software system because our present vendor will no longer supports our system. Anyone who has lived through such a software conversion knows it can be expensive, time consuming and risky. When it goes wrong, it becomes an experience you would never wish on your friends. We hope to use the occasion and the investment it will require to become still more efficient and effective.

Greetings,

My family and I are in need of a home. We are currently living in my mom's house. I am a single mom or 3 kids. My eldest son is disabled and in a wheelchair. We live in 3 bedroom house with 3 other adults. My boys share a room and my daughter and I sleep in the garage. Can you please lead me to the correct department if there is help available.

- P.

[email to THA, July 27, 2014]

- **MTW UNCERTAINTY**

You may know that THA is a "Moving to Work" (MTW) housing authority. This is a special status that HUD confers on some housing authorities with the expectation that they will innovate. MTW status does not provide more money; instead, and critically, it makes the money more flexible and suspends some of the normal rules. That flexibility has made many of THA's initiatives possible, including those I describe above. There are 3,400 housing authorities in the nation. Only 39 of them are MTW. The Pacific Northwest has 6 of them: Alaska, Seattle, King County, Portland, Vancouver, and Tacoma. THA's MTW status has allowed THA to do what we

think is our best work and to manage some hard budgets without terminating families. However, the MTW flexibility faces some uncertainty. The MTW contracts with HUD expire in 2018. HUD has stated its willingness to extend those contracts to 2028. That is good. Yet, it seeks changes to the terms of the contract and to impose those changes now. We are waiting to see if some of those changes will limit the MTW flexibility in ways that would curtail some of the initiatives I describe in this letter. We hope the matter will clarify within the next few months.

Giving thanks means reflecting on this work, what it takes to get it done and why it is important. THA is a board of 5 community volunteers and about 120 staff people. THA includes our real estate development staff of project managers, tax credit and financial experts, planners, and construction managers who build, buy and rebuild properties. They work so our properties are well built, sustainable and attractive. THA's staff includes maintenance specialists who keep our properties in good shape. They include property managers and lease and occupancy specialists who manage a long waiting list, screen applicants, verify income and eligibility, turn and lease units, collect rent, enforce the rules and do the hundreds of other things it takes to manage a large and varied portfolio and population, many of whom come to us from challenging circumstances. Other staff manage THA's rental assistance programs, in partnership with hundreds of local landlords, serving another 3,500 households. THA's community service staff of caseworkers and program managers help seniors and disabled persons live independently. They help families stabilize after coming to us from trauma. Notable ones are homelessness and domestic violence. And they help people succeed not just as tenants but also as "parents, students, wage earners and builders of assets." THA also includes finance staff, accounting specialists, asset managers, risk managers, compliance officers, IT wizards, data and policy analysts, procurement specialists, human resources experts, clerks, and, perhaps most poignantly, receptionists who politely and respectfully welcome needy people who come seeking help that for the most part we are unable to provide because we are full. All of these staff do this work governed by numerous and exquisitely detailed rules and regulations and mindful of important if less precise community expectations. And they do it in five languages.

Hello I have a question, were in housing now but I cant afford the 700 rent with tanf income cuz im pregnant and no longer able to work the job I have this far in my pregnancy is their anyway I can get on a rental program such as section 8 or something like that before I loose housing on first?

- L

[email to THA May 9, 2014]

THA's work would not be possible without you: public and private funders, elected local, state and national leaders, their hardworking staff, lenders and investors, public program officers, architects, builders, suppliers, construction workers, financial advisors, auditors, legal counsel, grant writers, other housers, advocates, legal services attorneys, hundreds of private landlords, service partners, journalists, teachers and counselors, school district staff, police officers, community groups, and neighborhood organizations. Your efforts show how this work can be an exhilarating display of what an organized and intentional community can do.

I sometimes think of this work we all share as the never-ending effort to build this nation. Perhaps it is how we can understand President Lincoln when at Gettysburg, one hundred

and fifty-one years ago this month, he spoke of the “unfinished work” and “the great task remaining before us.” THA’s statement of values also talks of this work: “Work in service to others is honorable. We will do it honorably.” We are privileged to share this work with you.

Also in 1863, by proclamation, President Lincoln established the fourth Thursday of November as a day of national thanksgiving. On behalf of THA’s Board of Commissioners and staff, we hope your Thanksgiving holiday is peaceful and meaningful.

Cordially,

TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY



Michael Mirra
Executive Director

I am living on streets. I am in desperate need of a place to live in.

- F

[email to THA, June 6, 2014]

THA’s Vision Statement

THA envisions a future where everyone has an affordable, safe and nurturing home, where neighborhoods are attractive places to live, work, attend school, shop and play, and where everyone has the support they need to succeed as parents, students, wage earners and neighbors.

THA’s Mission Statement

THA provides high quality, stable and sustainable housing and supportive services to people in need. It does this in ways that help them prosper and help our communities become safe, vibrant, prosperous, attractive and just.