

Housing Authority of the City of Erie

History and Organization

Originally established by City Council in 1938, to address the housing needs of low-income families, the Housing Authority of the City of Erie has had a long and distinguished history.

The Authority is organized under the provisions of the Pennsylvania Housing Authorities Act of 1937, as an independent public, non-profit corporation to “provide dwelling accommodations for persons of low income.” The Authority has a five-member, unpaid governing Board of Commissioners appointed by the Mayor of the City of Erie for a five-year term. Each member serves at the pleasure of the Mayor and can be re-appointed. Commissioners make policy decisions on current and future programs, determine how those programs are to be administered, and obtain and protect monies needed to keep the programs operating.

It is estimated that over 60,000 families and individuals have been assisted through various Housing Authority programs since our first development was opened in 1941. On an annual basis, the Authority provides housing assistance to over 2,900 Erie households. Total people served in 2006, exceeds 7,000, about six percent of the city’s population.

The early history of the Authority, 1938-1964, saw the development of large areas such as Franklin Terrace, Harbor Homes, Lake City, Erie Heights, and Harbor Homes Annex. These five developments contained a total of 1,096 units. With the exception of the Harbor Homes Annex, each was a product of the Post-Depression, World War II, state and federal housing construction programs. The Annex (1964) was specifically built to provide a housing resource for Erie’s urban renewal relocation programs.

The two decades, 1971 through 1996, were growth and modernization years for the Authority. During that period, 1,148 new units were built. These include large buildings designed specifically for the elderly (Schmid Towers, Friendship, Ostrow, and Curry/Schell Apartments), smaller family developments with no more than 50 units, and 343 single-family houses scattered throughout the City.

During this period, the Authority also obtained more than \$100 million from the federal government to modernize the entire inventory of 1,024 units constructed from 1941-1964. Complete new interiors and exteriors brought these units up to modern-day standards. Furthermore, the stereotyped “project” look of public housing was eliminated.

The Authority has been recognized five times by the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies for the design excellence of our modernized family developments.

While most of the money the Authority spends (with the exception of rents collected from tenants) comes directly from the federal government, and while most of the programs it administers are federal, its Board members are not federal officials. They are local officials whose job is defined by, and activities governed by, state and local law.

The Executive Director and other key staff of the Authority are appointed by the Board. The staff, which currently numbers 62 full-time employees, is responsible for carrying out the priorities established by the Board. Staff is also responsible for day-to-day activities, including processing applicants for housing, rent collection, and maintenance.

The Authority's staff is divided along functional lines—administration, management, maintenance, and admissions. In addition to the Executive Director, the Authority employs a Controller, Maintenance Superintendent, and four managers. The Authority's administrative and clerical staffs are covered by the provisions of the Pennsylvania State Civil Service law. Maintenance and clerical employees have separate collective bargaining contracts with the Authority.

Although many changes have occurred during the past 68 years, one thing has remained constant: the Housing Authority's primary mission—*To provide safe, decent, and affordable housing for lower-income families.*

From 1989 through 2002, the Authority received funds from the federal government (HUD) to eliminate illegal drugs and related criminal activity from public housing. These funds were used for a variety of strategies that include prevention, law enforcement, and intervention. Erie Police Department crime data show a significant downward trend in criminal activities in public housing communities where these strategies have been implemented. Since 2002, these services have been continued and funded from the Authority's operating budget.

Comprehensives Grant Program funds (Capital Fund) are being used to address physical problems in target areas that enable crime to occur. These include site lighting, security doors and windows, and changes in vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns.

Most of the drug and crime elimination strategies are carried out through subcontracts with responsible agencies and contractors.

Recently, the Authority signed new contracts with the City of Erie for community-oriented policing, and Erie County for community-oriented probation services.