

Housing Authority of the City of Erie



**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2023**

**Annual Report to the Board of the Authority  
On the Goals and Objectives for 2023**

**February 20, 2024**

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The Mission of the Housing Authority of the City of Erie is to provide safe, decent, and affordable housing for lower-income families, elderly, and persons with disabilities; and to foster among the residents we serve, economic self-sufficiency, a sense of community, and pride in the neighborhood where they reside.

To further the Authority's Mission, the Board formally established Goals and Objectives for 2023. The following annual report will give the status as of December 31, 2023, on our progress in carrying out the mandates in your resolution, dated 2/20/2023.

2023 was a year where HACE worked hard to accomplish our mission of housing individuals and families in safe, quality, and affordable housing. HACE staff faced the challenges of maintaining a high occupancy rate while addressing the on-going problem of the increasing number of participants having difficulty with maintaining rental payments. HACE maintenance staff and local contractors continued the process of making much needed capital improvements in both vacant and occupied HACE properties.

HACE has bid out several capital projects in 2023. Supply-side problems while improving continued to cause time delays in several projects resulting in the need to extend contracts. Despite these delays, work totaling over \$4,000,000 was completed in 2023 including replacement of all entry doors in Harbor Homes and Harbor Homes Annex, complete bathroom renovations in 68 Harbor Homes units, façade renovations at Schmid Towers, replacement of sliding glass doors at Friendship Apartments, upgrade of the electrical delivery system at Better Housing along with the replacement of furnaces and air conditioning in all 52 units, replacement of stoops and handrails at Harbor Homes Annex and Pineview, roof replacement at Pineview, façade work at multiple scattered sites, metal roof installation at 25 scattered sites

During the past 12 months, HACE has seen steady occupancy in public housing occupancy at 96.1%. On December 31<sup>st</sup>, HACE occupancy was at 95.7%. We expect occupancy to improve in 2024 despite the efforts of HACE staff to address tenant accounts receivable.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is serving 69 more families as of December 31<sup>st</sup> than were being served on 1/1/23. The Voucher utilization rate is at 94.9%. of the 95% expected from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The HCV program opened a new waiting list in June of 2021, adding over 2,000 applicants. The HCV waiting list will be reopened in May/June of this year. HACE implemented an incentive program for landlords that provided cash incentives to landlords for adding new units to the Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 (HCV) program thereby increasing the number of available units to HCV participants. HACE also implemented a security deposit assistance program for new HCV participants.

HACE staff continues to stay focused on improving the occupancy percentage in public housing, bringing units that had been offline for long periods of time back online and transferring residents who are over and underhoused. All these factors caused the unit turnover time to increase from 109.89 to 127.25. Despite that 240 units were made ready for rental in 2023. 2023 saw 200 individuals and families move out of public housing and 198 move-in, a net loss of 2. We expect this trend to improve but still be a challenge in 2024 because of HACE addressing transfers and residents with large rental payment balances.

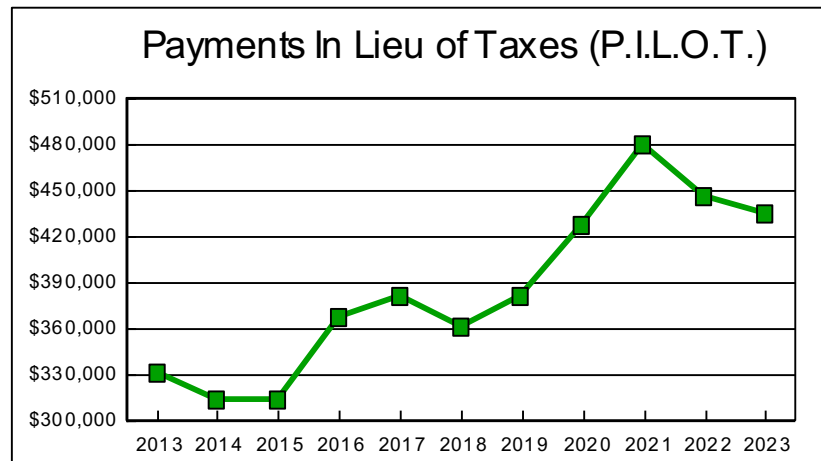
In addition, HACE has continued its goal of reducing the number of residents who are determined to be over or under-housed by focusing on transferring residents to appropriate size units for their family composition.

As of December 31, 2023, the Authority was providing housing assistance to 3,144 families, the same number of families from 2022. A total of 403 new families, elderly, and persons with disabilities received housing assistance. This is an increase of 19 individuals/families in 2023.

Our housing inventory, while in good condition for its age, needs on-going maintenance and capital improvements. HACE staff have developed a two-year capital budget to address issues in every Amp group.

2023 was the 5<sup>th</sup> year HACE owned the Better Housing properties. In 2022, HACE utilized funds from two PHFA PHARE grants to replace windows in all 52 units with new windows and security screens, replaced all wooden entry doors with steel reinforced doors and upgraded the electrical delivery systems from 60 to 100 amps. The remaining PHARE grant monies from the first two PHARE grants along with HACE reserves was used to install new furnaces and add air conditioning in all 52 units. HACE received a 3<sup>rd</sup> PHARE grant that will be used in 2024 to undertake exterior façade improvements, replace front stoops, replace siding on the buildings and sheds, replace an unused parking lot with green space, restore curbs and install 450 feet of wrought iron fencing. These grant monies along with monies from the multi-family and non-federal reserve accounts are being utilized to bring the Better Housing Properties up to modern-day standards. The most recent Management Occupancy Review in 2024 earned praise from the reviewer and an expectation of continued improved scores. HACE also received Multi-family property rental subsidy increases for Better Housing East and West totaling over \$64,000 for 2024.

The Authority is also proud of the fact that, although tax-exempt, we did contribute **\$436,087** to local taxing bodies in lieu of real estate taxes during 2023, down slightly from \$446,542 in 2022 but higher than the six-year average of \$413,500. The reason for the decline was increased utility costs and a slight drop in public housing occupancy which is the formula HUD uses to calculate the Payment in Lieu of Taxes amount. In addition to PILOT payments, the Authority continues to pay the City of Erie a portion of the cost for six City of Erie police officers assigned to public housing community policing along with paying a portion of the funding to allow the City to sponsor a full 12 - week summer swim program at the Rodger Young Pool. The Authority also pays Erie County government for a portion of the cost of an adult and juvenile probation officer and for services provided by the Erie County Library at our two on-site youth libraries. The total value of these contracts with the City of Erie and Erie County for 2023 was \$765,485.



**GOAL 1 - CONTINUE ON-GOING HUMAN RESOURCES PROGRAM THAT MAINTAINS PROCESS FOR BOARD AND STAFF RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESSION.**

**Objective 1 – Revise and Update HACE Personnel Policies. (Completed)**

HACE Board members are updated monthly on all changes in policies and procedures. The HACE Board receives an update on all program initiatives monthly including a monthly Executive Directors report. Synopsis and Board meetings are held the third Thursday and fourth Monday of each month.

In 2023, the HACE Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan and maintenance charge list was revised. A plan for developing a protocol for Project Basing Vouchers was begun in late 2023 and will be submitted to the HACE Board in 2024.

**Objective 2 – Continue training and orientation of HACE Board members and staff about HACE policies, procedures, and programs. (Significant Progress)**

Three current HACE Board members were submitted to Mayor Schember for renewal of their five-year terms. Board members Bishop Brock, Patricia Mickel and Ned Smith were approved by Mayor Schember for terms that will extend them to March 2028. All HACE Board members have terms through at least 2026.

On-going training has been conducted with staff to assist them in their current positions and for possible advancement. Twice monthly meetings are conducted with Maintenance supervisors and managers.

The Safety Committee was certified after a year-long process utilizing assistance from Erie Insurance. This certification was renewed in 2023. They continue to meet monthly.

The HACE HR Department has initiated an on-line staff support program in partnership with our healthcare consultant HUB. There is no cost to staff and services including personal finance, mental health counseling and physical health questions are available.

**Objective 3 – Have on-going succession plan for upper-level administrative staff. (Significant Progress)**

In 2022, the HACE Board met with the Executive Director to discuss succession plans for the Executive Director position. The HACE Board interviewed Deputy Director Dusti Dennis to begin the process of succession once the Executive Director submits a retirement notice to the HACE Board. All administrative positions are discussed on a yearly basis to insure that succession is in the forefront of future planning.

**Objective 4 – Continue to build an organization/team of employees that is diverse and reflective of the City of Erie population and the residents of our community. (Significant Progress)**

HACE does an excellent job maintaining a diverse workforce that is reflective of the community.

**Objective 5 – Continue required training programs for administrative, clerical and maintenance staff. (Significant Progress)**

Fair Housing Training for all staff was completed in 2023. All new HACE staff are required to complete 29 hours of on-line HUD and Housing Authority-related training prior to ending their probationary period.

On-going HUD and Horizon training is provided to all staff with incentives provided to staff who complete approved training programs. Training for the 2023 Horizon updates were completed in 2023.

All current staff receive monthly training from Network Technologies on cyber-security. Our recent review with Network Technologies staff indicated that HACE has made substantial progress in staff related cyber-security training.

**Objective 6 – Develop Process for evaluating staff beginning with top level administrative staff, managers, and maintenance supervisors. (Progress)**

Goals and Objectives were provided to all managers and maintenance supervisors by 2/1/23. Written evaluations were completed on a portion of the administrative staff. In 2023 programmatic goals and objectives were established for the Deputy Director, Controller, Resident Initiatives Coordinator, Associate Director of Compliance, Maintenance Superintendent and HR Coordinator.

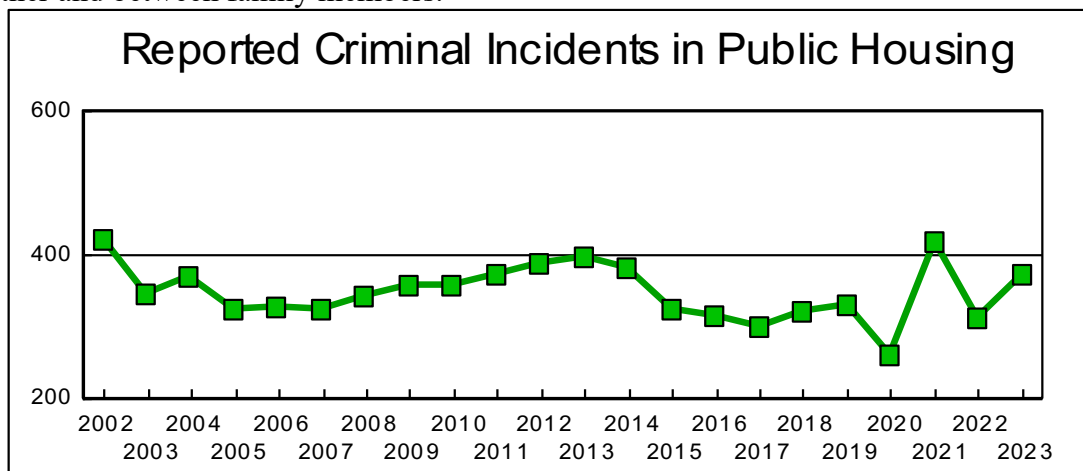
**GOAL 2 - IMPROVE LIVABILITY OF PUBLIC AND SECTION 8 HOUSING**

**Objective 1 – Reduce reported crime by 2% from 2022 (Progress)**

In 2023, the Housing Authority recorded data on criminal activity in public housing neighborhoods based

on calls for service to the COPPS unit that work in our neighborhoods 16 hours a day, seven days a week; and from the Erie Police Bureau reports on calls for service when the COPPS unit was not on duty. The bulk of all calls for service are responded to by the COPPS officers. In 2023, the number of incidents reported from all sources was 373 up 19.2% from 313 in 2022. There were 45 incidents (up from 42 in 2022) in the four senior buildings, Friendship- 19 (14 in 2022), Schmid- 23 (28 in 2022), Ostrow- 3 (0 in 2022) and Curry/Schell-0 (0 in 2022). In 2023, there were 70.4 incidents/1,000 residents in public housing, up from 58.8 incidents/1,000 residents in 2022.

The majority of incidents continue to be domestic, and people related crimes that involve residents who know each other and between family members.



In August 2022, the Authority and the City of Erie approved its tenth two-year contract to provide six police officers assigned to two shifts between noon and 4:00 a.m. The current contract expires on August 31, 2024. Two new officers have been assigned to the program. One of the assignments was the result of a former Quebec officer being promoted to the supervisor of the new Crisis Intervention Unit. Sgt. Tom Covatto continues to be the supervisor for the Quebec Unit. He has been with the C.O.P.P.S. program for 22 years.

In 2023, the Authority continued utilization of security cameras in all our developments to monitor incidents of inappropriate and/or criminal behavior. 147 incidents were resolved in 2023 with evidence recorded on the cameras. HACE completed replacement of security lighting with new LED lights in the family developments and inside senior buildings hallways and common areas.

The deployment and utilization of 227 security cameras throughout our family and elderly developments is a major tool for solving/preventing problems. Several more cameras were replaced in 2023, with ones that have multiple lenses allowing for a broader camera range.

Due in large part to the presence of these officers in 2023 we continue to see low violent crime rates in our neighborhoods. Serious crime continues to be low, totaling 21 down from 25 incidents in 2022 (assaults- 13, burglary – 3, drug offenses – 0 and weapons violations – 5).

Most of the reported crimes involve individuals who know each other (domestic related) and mental

health situations. This is a trend that HACE staff and the C.O.P.P.S. program will continue to work together on going forward. Beginning February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024, a security guard will be assigned to Schmid and Friendship Apartments, Monday through Sunday from 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m.

The Housing Authority Resident Initiatives Program in partnership with SafeNet and the Community oriented Police and Probation Program (COPPS) continued its Lethality Assessment Program in public housing for victims of domestic violence. The goal was to provide an assessment tool to the COPPS officers that will tell them the danger level of the situation and allow for them to connect the victim with a counselor immediately if necessary. Mayor Schember has commented several times that the HACE COPPS program is a model for how community policing should be done throughout the City of Erie.

The Erie Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Dan Spizarny, Deputy Chief William Marucci, and Quebec Unit Supervisor Sergeant Tom Covatto, have been extremely responsive to the needs of our residents. In 2023, monthly coordinating meetings were held with key HACE staff and all partners in the C.O.P.P.S. Program. This continues to be very effective in identifying and addressing quality of life issues for our residents.

In 2023, forty-nine (49) abandoned/unregistered/unlicensed vehicles were submitted to the City of Erie Police Department for removal from Authority property with the assistance of the C.O.P.P.S. officers. The problem with abandoned vehicles has declined through the years due to more systematic enforcement of parking regulations.

In January 1998, the Authority contracted with Erie County to provide an adult and juvenile probation officer dedicated to public housing sites. The Community-Oriented Probation Services has contributed to the improved conditions in our neighborhoods. The Probation Department's presence has acted as a deterrent against individuals who are on probation from causing problems in HACE neighborhoods. In January 2024, the County signed a one-year extension of the probation services contract through January 31, 2025. HACE continues to work with Erie County, Pennsylvania and Federal Probation and Parole to monitor individuals leaving prison who list a HACE address in their required housing plan. This has virtually eliminated the illegal housing of state and federal probationers in public housing.

The fencing, security cameras and recently installed LED security lighting has helped to deter criminal activity in all HACE neighborhoods and buildings. New Led lighting is being installed at entry doors of all scattered site houses.

The Authority adopted a Trespass and Banning Policy in 1998 in a joint venture with the Erie Police Department and the Erie County District Attorney's office. Individuals with prior criminal records, who were causing problems on Authority property, were identified, warned, arrested, and prosecuted for defiant trespass. This effort was continued in 2023, to exclude six (6) more individuals who had caused problems on HACE property and met the criteria for inclusion on the trespass and banning list. **Currently, 171 individuals are on the Banned List.** The Banned List is one of our most effective tools in reducing the presence of convicted criminals in public housing neighborhoods. Residents who allow banned individuals to visit or reside in public housing are subject to eviction. In 2005, the Board adopted an appeals procedure for individuals to be removed from the list. In 2023, one (1) individual who was deceased was removed from the Trespass and Banning List.

**Objective 2 – Reduce fires and risks of injury and property damage. (Achieved)**

In 2023, the Authority had 1 fire in public housing resulting in property damage of \$29,737. There were no deaths in 2023.

The Erie Fire Department conducted their annual fire safety talks at our elderly buildings during October, fire prevention month. All public housing and Section 8 units have smoke detectors. All the detectors were inspected and tested in 2023.

**Objective #3 – Develop preventative maintenance program. Evaluate materials utilized by maintenance to ensure quality and longevity. (Substantial Progress)**

Over the last three years all materials used to do rehab work in vacant units have been evaluated for quality and longevity. This has resulted in changing floor replacement to laminate flooring, using solid core doors on the inside of units, replacing kitchen cabinets when needed with soft closing solid wood cabinets, and changing all entry door locks to deadbolt only locks. In 2023, HACE maintenance staff began replacing the plumbing in adjacent units that are behind kitchens cabinets replacing the cast iron piping with PVC piping. This should reduce overtime maintenance calls for clogged and leaking pipes.

HACE has continued the bedbug preventative program begun in 2022 including the monthly spraying of all community spaces and quarterly canine inspections in all high-rise buildings.

Work order maintenance staff as part of their protocol are instructed to check all health and safety areas when completing any work orders. (ex. Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors)

**Objective 4 - Maintain response time for tenant-generated work orders to two (2) workdays or less. (Achieved)**

In 2023, the Maintenance Department received **8,423** tenant-generated work orders (down from 9,030 in 2022), plus 1,290 emergency work orders, down from 1,485 in 2022. 1,447(2022-1,465) extermination work orders were completed. The average response time for routine tenant-generated work orders was 1.52 days, down slightly from the 1.74-day response time in 2022.

**Objective 5 – Maintain “curb appeal” standards for all public housing communities including development of standards for areas outside living spaces. (Significant Progress)**

The Authority strives to create a positive public image of its housing, by keeping it clean, neat, and well maintained; and by promoting neighborhoods that are visually attractive to our residents and the visiting public. This includes grass cutting and edging of all HACE properties by lawn care professionals. To ensure a positive impression, the Authority will continually monitor its developments for achievement of the highest “curb appeal” standards. HACE staff have begun housekeeping inspections on a regular basis. In 2023/2024 HACE continued contracting out its snow removal at the four high-rise buildings.



The HACE Maintenance Superintendent has also continued the tree/shrubbery maintenance program, removed multiple dead and dying trees and trimming shrubs as part of the vacant unit turnover process. HACE staff have also established a regular schedule for trimming trees and cleaning gutters. All new roof installations include gutter guards. This has been very helpful in addressing potential damage to HACE properties and leaves clogging gutters.

In 2023, HACE continued to use cement board siding and metal roofs on selected properties to improve the outside appearance. We installed 25 metal roofs in 2023.

**Objective 6 - Complete annual inspections and requisite follow-up on all public housing and Section 8-assisted units to assure all units are decent, safe, sanitary, and in good repair. (Achieved)**

2,098 residential units owned and managed by the Housing Authority were inspected in 2023. To obtain inspections that conform to the HUD protocol, the Authority contracted with *The U.S. Inspection Group* to perform all our annual public housing inspections. Better Housing properties were added to the units to be inspected.

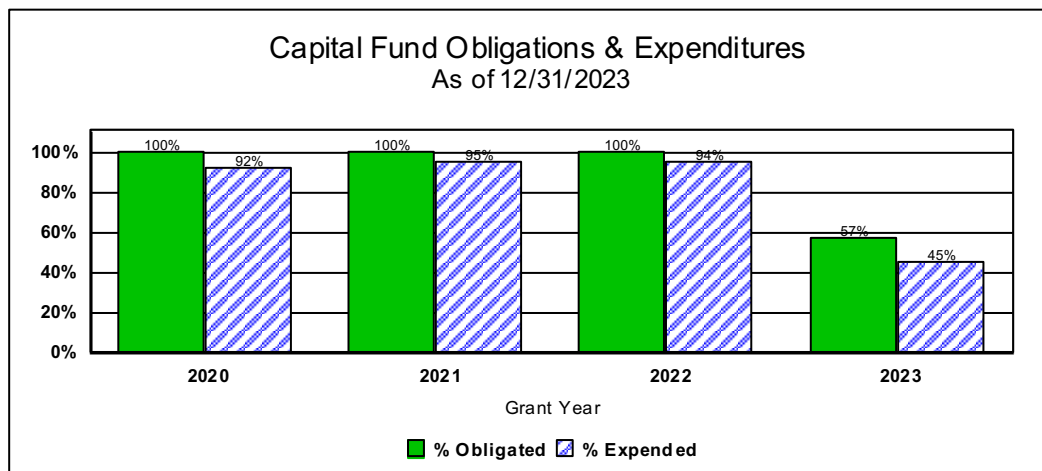
All privately owned units in the Section 8 voucher program scheduled for inspection were inspected at least once during 2023 to assure compliance with HUD's Housing Quality Standards. A total of 1,123 initial, annual, biennial and complaint-inspections were conducted on Section 8 units. In 2020, the HACE Board of Commissioners approved biennial inspection of some properties, which reduced the number of units required to be inspected yearly.

As stated earlier, HACE staff will focus on addressing housekeeping issues and damage to units prior to a unit becoming vacant. Managers are now required to inspect all units when a resident submits a notice to vacate and not after they move out.

**Objective 7 - Develop annual update to Agency Plan; and maintain Capital Fund obligation rate. (Achieved)**

Contracts totaling \$7,272,111 for capital improvements were awarded in 2023. On 2/17/23 HUD approved our 2023 Capital Grant in the amount of \$6,543,486. The Authority continues to exceed the required Capital Grant obligation rates for all open phases of Capital funding. The Authority is given two years to obligate and three years to expend each year's funding. In 2023, the Authority contracted and began work on approximately \$7.2 million in capital improvements, including replacement of flooring in over 200 units, French drain installation in multiple properties, replacement of all roofs in Pineview and six roofs in Harbor Homes, replaced shingle roofs with metal roof in 25 scattered sites, replacement of all entry doors at Harbor Homes and Harbor Homes Annex, window replacements in the John E. Horan Garden Apartments, electrical updates and furnace replacement at Better Housing (central air conditioning installation is contracted and will be completed in 2024), sliding glass door replacement at Friendship Apartments, façade work and entry door replacement on the 13-8 westside scattered sites, replacement of twenty stoops and handrails at Harbor Homes Annex and Pineview, 68 complete bathroom replacements were done in Harbor Homes, replacements at major façade and brick work at Schmid Towers (balcony replacement will be completed in 2024), exterior painting of the entire Agnes

Priscaro and Eastbrook developments, and sealing and striping of all HACE parking lots except Harbor Homes which will be completed in 2024.. Lead-based paint abatement continued at Harbor Homes in 2023. Two new contracts for the abatement of additional units were awarded in 2023 and work will be started, and the final work will be completed in early 2024. The C.O.P.P.S. and Home Plus programs plus a percentage of administrative staff salaries are all funded out of the Capital Fund.



The 2023 update to the Agency Plan was completed and approved by the HACE Board on 12/18/23. It was submitted to the Department of Housing and Urban Development on January 15, 2024.

**Objective 8 -Maintain current level of resident satisfaction with living conditions in public housing. (Achieved)**

The HACE Resident Satisfaction and Safety Survey was completed in the fall of 2022 and a new survey is scheduled to be bid out and completed by the fall of 2024.

**Objective 9 - Recommend capital expenditures from reserve budget for Board approval. (Significant progress)**

Capital projects as part of a two-phase two-year capital improvements plan were completed by HACE staff. HACE staff and Roth Marz representatives will meet in February 2024 to develop Capital work projects for 2024/2025. The major projects will be a total roof replacement at Friendship Apartments, window replacement at the John E. Horan Garden Apartment and parking lot repairs at Harbor Homes. Over \$7,000,000 in capital work was awarded in 2023.

**GOAL 3 - PROVIDE HOUSING ASSISTANCE TO MORE FAMILIES/INDIVIDUALS**

**Objective 1 - Achieve 98% occupancy in our public housing inventory.**

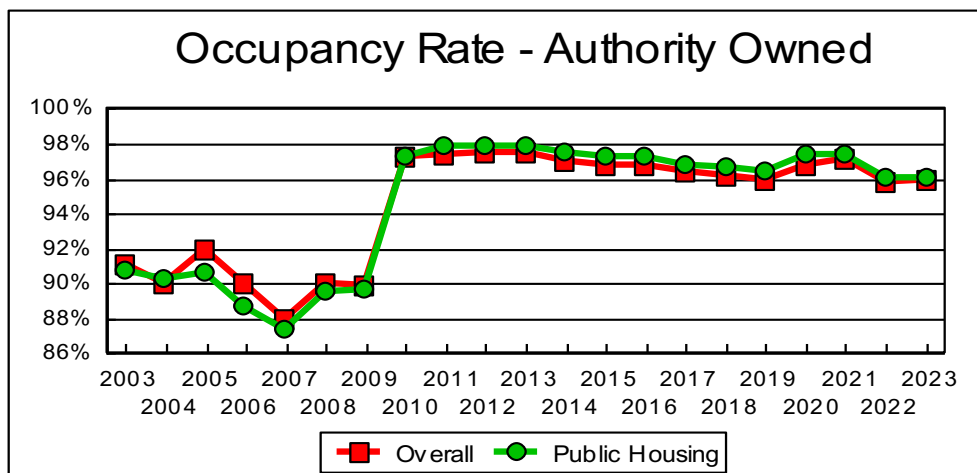
**(Substantial Progress)**

The Authority averaged **96.08% occupancy (public housing) in each month during 2023**, down from 96.10% in 2022. On December 31, 2023, the public housing occupancy rate stood at 95.65%. up from 95.2% on December 31, 2022. In 2023, the Tenant Selection Office processed 1,038 applications and **housed 235 new tenants up from 218 in 2022**. In addition, 44 families up from 39 in 2022 were transferred in 2023 to units that better met their family size. **On December 31, 2022, the overall occupancy rate was 95.5% up from 95.2% in 2022. A total of 2,076 units were in occupancy at year-end, down from 2,077 at the same time in 2022.** We are meeting weekly with Tenant Selection staff to efficiently speed up the process for housing new move-ins when a unit is ready. Four of seven AMP groups were at or above the 97% goal for 2023. Four of the seven AMP groups are currently above their year-end average as of December 31, 2023.

Rent-up time (the time between a unit being ready and occupied) in 2023 was 16.71 days up from 16.56 in 2022 and above the 5-year average of 12.74. Procedures for improving the rent-up time discussed at weekly meetings between tenant selection and the Deputy Director. The average tenant move-out to ready was 110.5 days in 2023 up from 93.3 days in 2022. In total the HACE turn-around rate for vacant unit to occupancy was 127.25 a 17.36 day increase from 109.89 days in 2022 and above the five-year average of 106.21 days.

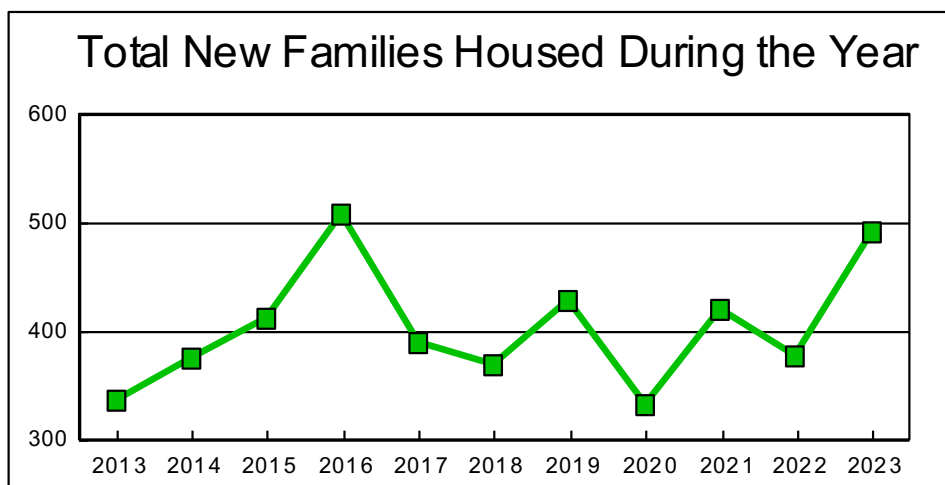
HACE, under the Deputy Director, is continuing a process with the HUD Pittsburgh Field office to remove units with extensive damage from the rent-ready list helping to reduce the unit turnover time. These units require scheduled contract work or extermination. As of 1/29/24 twenty-five (25) units are currently approved by HUD for deferment. These units are to be modernized in 90 days or reported to the Executive Director with a completion date. This process has greatly reduced the amount of time that any unit is off-line.

**In 2023, five (5) applicants were made eligible for housing assistance after completion of the Credit/Budget Counseling Program.** Since its inception in 2001, 723 applicants have completed the counseling program, making them eligible to receive housing assistance.



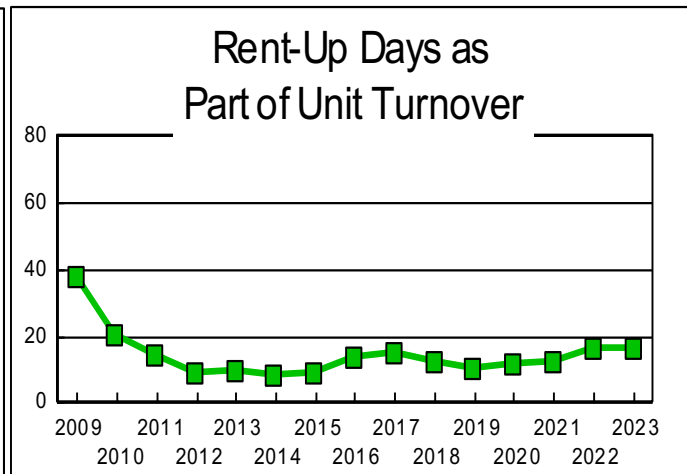
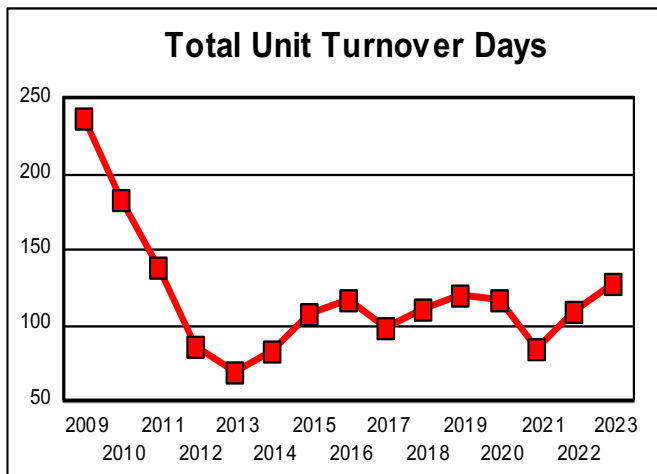
**Objective 2 – Maintain Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 utilization rate at 1,100 units. (Progress)**

**In 2023, the Housing Authority utilized 94.9% of funding available to us for the Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 Program.** The number of families receiving assistance at December 31, 2023 was 1,070 up by 1 from December 31, 2022. **We were able to help 257 new families/individuals in 2023 up from 161 in 2022.** There are currently 227 individuals on the HACE Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 waiting list. HACE staff will be making recommendations to the HACE Board in 2024 concerning preferences and project-based vouchers to better utilize voucher funds.



**Objective 3 - Decrease vacancy turnover rate. Continue deferred unit program. (Not achieved)**

In 2023, the Maintenance staff of the seven asset management groups made a total of 240 units ready for occupancy down from 255 in 2022. **Turnover time—the number of days from the move-out of one tenant to the move-in of another averaged 127.25 calendar days, up from 109.89 days in 2022.** In 2023, the period from a make-ready to apartment rental increased from 16.56 to 16.71 days in 2023.



**Objective 4 - Provide supportive services to non-profits with special needs populations. (Achieved)**

In 2023, the Authority continued to provide supportive services funding at two Section 8 project-based developments that serve special needs populations. *Columbus Square Apartments* and the *Lodge on Sass* received funding for two caseworkers to assist the residents of those facilities. These caseworkers are helping to assist residents in obtaining social services allowing them to maintain their housing for longer periods of time.

**Objective 5 – Continue to update and improve Housing Authority Web Site Interactivity. (Significant Progress)**

In 2003, the Authority launched its web site ([www.hace.org](http://www.hace.org)). The site includes information about the Authority, our housing, personnel, services, and news. The site was redesigned in 2023 and HACE staff worked to make news on the rotator current. Engel and O’Neil changed the format allowing HACE staff to update it on a regular basis and for it to become user friendly and more interactive for residents. Section 8 owners can now access their accounts, and families can now apply for public housing on-line. **During 2023 there were 63,835 visits to the website, compared to 63,390 visits in 2022. There were 36,478 unique users in 2023 compared to 33,370 unique users in 2022.**

The large increase was the result of residents being able to apply for public housing and Section 8 on-line and to do required recertifications and updates on-line.

Engel/O’Neil is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a 2-year contract to provide public relation services for HACE. Engel and O’Neil updated the website, increased utilization of the Facebook pages by sending regular notices, completed three newsletters, and completed a 2024 Calendar.

HACE also renewed its contract with a program called One Call that allows HACE to send out text, voice mail and e-mail messages to residents by development or Authority-wide messages. This has proven to be an invaluable tool in getting information out to residents in a timely fashion. We have seen a substantial

increase in utilization of social service programs because of One Call.

In early 2023, HACE staff began utilizing an on-line program called Cyracom which provided instant on-line translation services in multiple languages. Cyracom provides an in-person translator within minutes. Tenant selection, the C.O.P.P.S. program, the managers and our Resident Initiatives Coordinator have found this service to be very valuable.

**Objective 6 – Maintain Veteran’s Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program utilization at 98%. (Achieved)**

At December 31, 2023, the VASH program utilization was 98% up from 71% at December 31, 2022. The VASH program was able to provide housing for 26 new veterans in 2023, up from 22 in 2022.

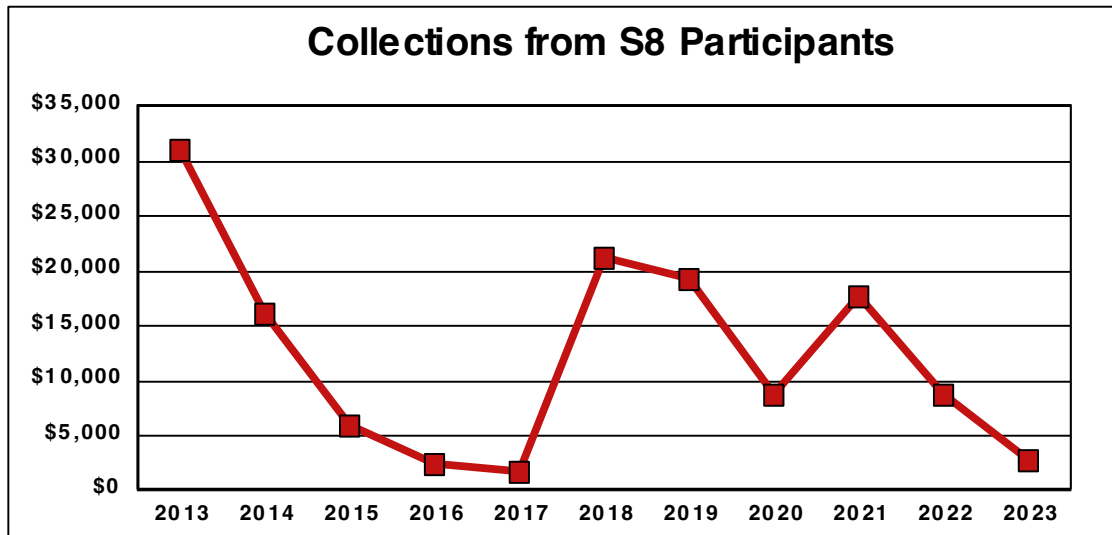
**Objective 7 – Improve utilization of Foster Care to Independence Program (Achieved)**

HACE currently manages 14 HUD Foster Youth to Independence Vouchers. As of 1/3/24, thirteen (13) participants are utilizing vouchers. Like the VASH program HACE is limited to referrals from an outside agency, in this case it is the Office of Children and Youth.

**GOAL 4 - OPERATE ALL PROGRAMS EFFICIENTLY WITHIN BUDGETARY LIMITS; AND IMPROVE STAFF PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFECTIVENESS**

**Objective 1 - Collect 99% of annual charges by December 31, 2023. (Achieved)**

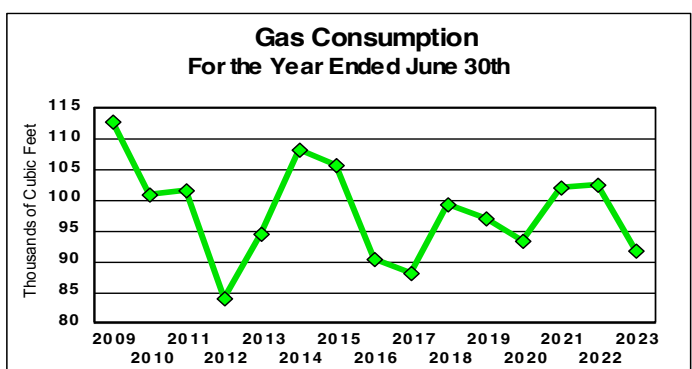
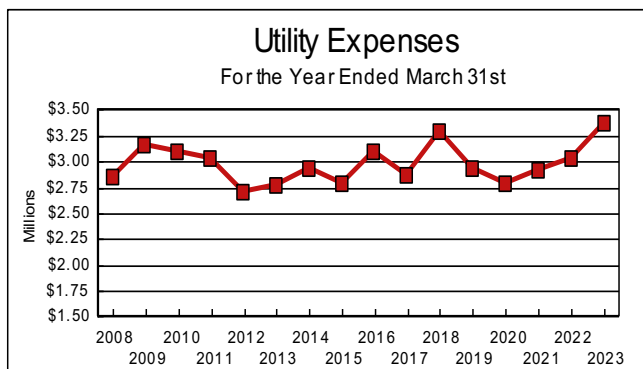
**The Authority collected \$9,531,469 or 101.69% against a rent-roll for all units of \$9,372,634 in 2023. Total cash receipts were up \$430,209 over 2022.** The Authority collected 96% of all charges in 2023. This collection record was accomplished by a variety of strategies; primarily, maintaining high occupancy in all programs and HACE staff working with tenants who fall behind in rent. Also, the Authority collected **\$39,186 from ex-tenants who left owing money.** Under the Authority’s policy, no one who owes money from a prior tenancy can be on the Authority’s active waiting lists. Section 8 staff also identified **13** Section 8 participants who had not reported all their family income. Agreements were signed with these participants resulting in **repayments totaled \$2,687.** The Authority continued, for the 34<sup>th</sup> year, its positive-incentive *Early Bird* program, where tenants who pay by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month get a chance at a Gift Certificate each quarter during the year. In 2023, the payments by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month were **75%** over the base year, 1989.



The Authority continues to encourage residents to pay rent through automatic debit of their checking account. In 2023, 491 residents selected this rent-paying option, an increase of 5 from 2022. In 2023, 62% of our residents paid their rent before the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month. This is down from 63% in 2022.

**Objective 2 - Reduce utility consumption and expense. (Progress)**

For the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, the expenditures for utilities were up \$340,863 from the same period in 2022. Natural gas expenses decreased, and electrical expenses increased 32% due to increased supply rates resulting from the market volatility. Water and sewer expenses decreased slightly due to decreased consumption and the timing of quarterly invoices.



Energy efficient entry doors were installed in all of Harbor Homes Annex, Harbor Homes and multiple scattered sites. New energy efficient windows were installed in Harbor Homes Annex, and on the eastside of the John E. Horan Garden Apartments. LED security lights are being installed at the entry-doors of all vacant units.

Spray foam insulation was installed in one building at Dombrowski.

New roofs were installed at Pineview. Twenty-five (25) metal roofs have been installed at scattered sites.

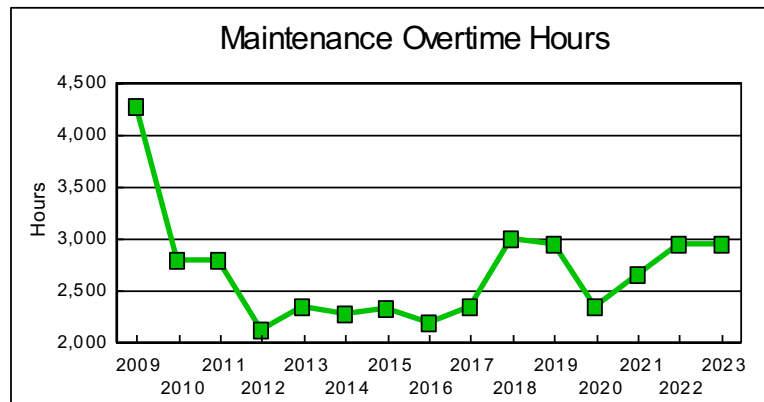
Just installed 98% energy efficient furnace and high efficiency condenser units at Better Housing.

The vehicle leasing has resulted in HACE utilizing much more fuel-efficient vehicles in its fleet.

**Objective 4 – Limit operating expenses to rental income collected and projected HUD subsidies. (Achieved)**

The operating expenses for the federally assisted public housing program totaled \$16,333,884 for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, up from \$14,879,850 in 2022. Operating income was \$17,922,738 and \$1,588,854 more than the expenses.

For the 12-month period ending December 31, 2023, maintenance overtime decreased from 2,965 hours to 2,954 (-.005%) from 2022 level. The overtime hours were slightly above the eleven-year baseline (1996-2006) average of approximately 2,800 hours.



**Objective 5 - Maintain fiscal operations and management operations so there are no audit findings. (Achieved)**

The independent audit for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, contained no audit/financial findings.

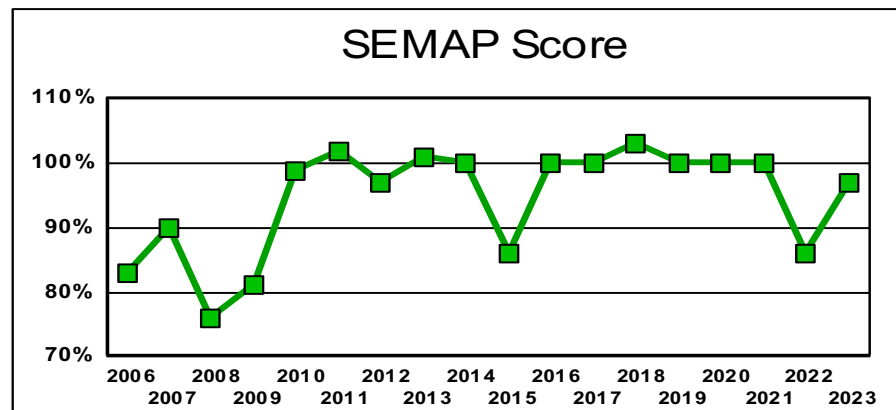
**Objective 6 - Reduce employee absenteeism. (Achieved)**

Paid time due to sickness, disability, and workers compensation leave decreased from 3,324 hours



in 2022 to 3,027 hours in 2023 (a decrease of 297 hours). Thirty-nine (39) of seventy-one (71) employees went through the entire year without missing one hour of work due to illness, disability, or off-the-job injury. This represents 55% of the Authority’s full-time workforce. The employees had an overall attendance rate of 98% in 2023, missing an average of five and one-half (5.5) days due to sickness, disability, or work-related injuries. The Authority continues its employee incentives for not using sick leave; employee training and education; implementation of a work safety committee that meets monthly; referring all workers compensation injuries to the St. Vincent Occupational Health Center, and a light-duty program for injured employees. There were two (2) Worker’s Compensation claims in 2023 totaling 177 hours.

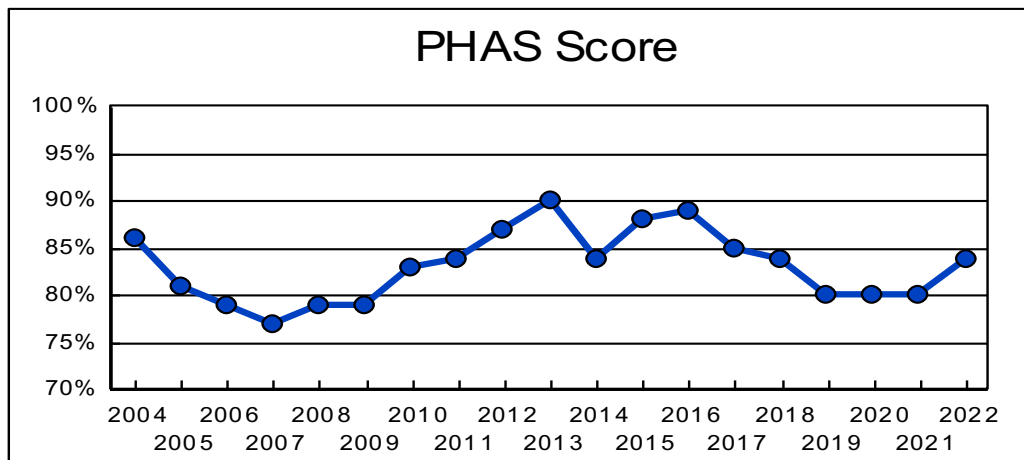
**Objective 7 – Achieve HUD’s high performance on Section 8 Housing Assessment System.  
(Achieved)**



In 2023, the Housing Authority received a score of 97% achieving the **HUD High performance** designation.

**Objective 8 – Achieve high performance status on Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS)  
(Significant Progress)**

In 2023, HUD awarded HACE a PHAS score of 84 (A 4-point improvement).



**Objective 9 – Continue quality control for all HUD programs; and improve staff proficiency in use of verification tools; and continue tenant fraud detection in all programs. (Significant Progress)**

Section 8 and public housing quality review and assurance for 2023 were conducted by the Associate Director of Compliance and the Tenant Selection Coordinator. All clerical and management staff have been certified to perform HUD’s Enterprise Income Verification (EIV) background checks. HACE staff are currently completing Fair Housing Training.

In 2023, the Authority identified 76 new cases of probable tenant fraud in the public housing program that resulted in repayment agreements totaling \$95,234. Also, 13 new cases of probable participant fraud in the Section 8 program resulted in repayment agreements totaling \$31,180.

**Objective 10 – Continue Implementation of Strategic Plan for 2020 - 2024 (Progress)**

In 2014, the Housing Authority retained a consultant to assist us in the preparation of a five-year strategic plan. The plan was approved by the Board in March 2015. It was updated in 2021. A review of the updated plan will be undertaken by the HACE Board and Senior staff in 2024. An RFQ will be developed to hire a consulting firm to assist in the development of the 2024 – 2028 Strategic Plan.

**Objective 11 – Utilize Associate Director of Compliance to review operations in management offices to ensure compliance with HUD requirements and HACE policies. (Substantial Progress)**

The position of Associate Director of Compliance has been instrumental in improving policy revisions as well as the consistency of adhering to these policies in the management offices. Over the past year she has set up a monthly report for monitoring repayment agreements, audited the FSS escrow accounts finding several inaccurate balances which had to be corrected manually, addressed late re-exams in PIC and as a result significantly reduced the number of outstanding re-exams, revised the public housing lease, increased training for staff through a contract with Nelrod for On Demand training, and continuously updates HACE forms and letters for compliance with HUD rules and regulations. In addition to the

procedures and policies she has revised, she continues to review files at all the management offices and has significantly improved our Management & Occupancy Review scores of the multifamily properties.

All HACE offices are now conducting daily operations uniformly.

**Objective 12 – Continue to revise and update HACE procedures and policies to comply with HUD requirements. (Substantial Progress)**

In 2023, the HACE Associate Director of Compliance and Deputy Director revised the HACE Public Housing Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan (ACOP) which was adopted by the board. A revised ACOP was sent to all offices and included on the HACE website.

HACE also updated the Maintenance Charges which were posted on the HACE website.

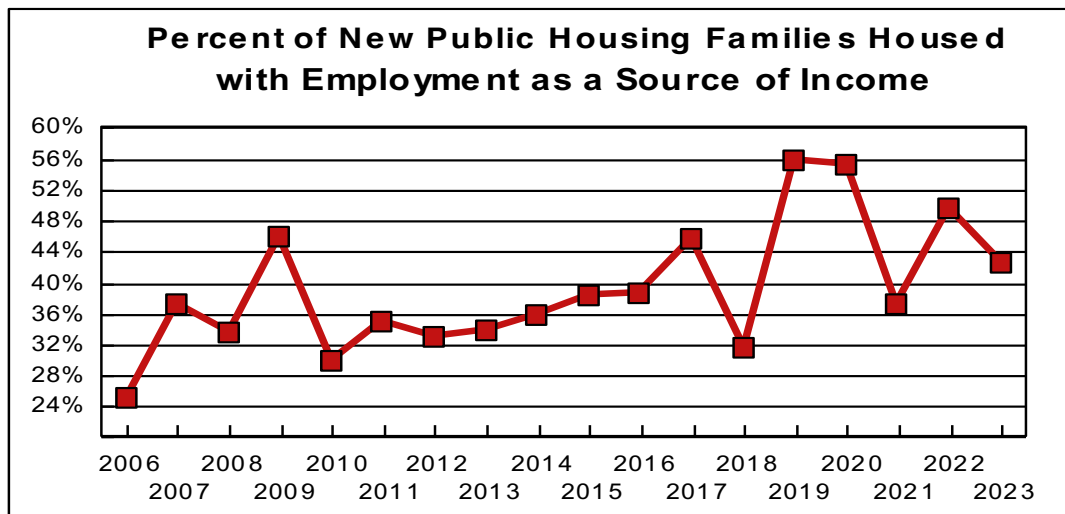
**GOAL 5 - ENHANCE SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC HOUSING / SECTION 8 TENANTS AND PROMOTE GREATER SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND PRIDE AMONG RESIDENTS**

**Objective 1 – Provide housing to a cross section of the low-income population to obtain a broad range of incomes in housing and promote economic diversity resulting from employment. (Progress)**

**Objective 2 - Maintain the ratio of public housing/Section 8 tenants who have employment as source of income. (Progress))**

**In 2023, 1,298 families had employment as a source of income. This was up from 1,092 families in 2022.** There were 971 (+228) public housing households and 327 (-22) Section 8 households employed at December 31, 2023. This is a total net increase of 206 from 2022. Of the families newly housed in public housing in 2023, 109 (46%) of 235 families had employment as a source of income. In 2023, 169 working families enjoyed the benefits of the Authority's flat rent or ceiling rent, which caps the household rent, regardless of income. These data reflect an overall improvement in the Erie economy.

In 2023, 184 Public Housing and 278 Section 8 Residents were on minimum rent.



**Objective 3 - Maintain HomePLUS Program at Schmid Towers and Friendship Apartments. (Achieved)**

In 1997, the Authority contracted with the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC), to implement the HomePLUS Program at Friendship Apartments and Schmid Towers. The program provides case management and supportive services to many residents of both buildings. From January 1 to December 31, 2023, 35 initial assessments were completed. Of the residents identified with service needs, 228 have accepted services. Annual reassessments were performed on 321 residents of the two buildings (some residents are assessed twice yearly). Direct services (e.g. home support, personal care, and chore services) have been provided since August 1, 1998, and, at present 64 residents are receiving direct services. GECAC estimates that 228 residents have been maintained in their homes because services are adequately meeting their needs. Additionally, 93 residents (46 Schmid and 47 at Friendship) are nursing home eligible and have been given a waiver from the Commonwealth to receive nursing home services in their public housing apartments. GECAC estimates that 59 residents would be immediately at risk of losing their independence without HomePLUS services.

**Objective 4 – Continue Community Policing focus of C.O.P.P.S. Program. Contract with City of Erie to approve a 2-year C.O.P.P.S. contract effective 8/1/22. (Achieved)**

Two new officers were assigned to the C.O.P.P.S. Program in 2023. Officer Marc Bellotti left the C.O.P.P.S. Program to become the supervisor of the newly created City of Erie Police Crisis Unit.

C.O.P.P.S. officers attended all HACE neighborhood events, participating in food distribution programs and offering special programs to seniors.

The HACE Board of Commissioners approved a new 2-year contract with the City of Erie to continue the C.O.P.P.S. program for the period of 9/1/22- 8/31/24. HACE staff will meet with City of Erie Bureau of Police representatives in March/April to begin discussion on a new 2-year contract.

**Objective 5 – Work with residents to improve the image of public housing. (Achieved)**

The Authority encourages beautification efforts by residents who reside in our family communities. The annual Garden Contest continues to attract many participants.

In August 2022, HACE signed a two-year contract with Engel/O’Neil to continue to provide public relation services. They completed a redesign of the HACE webpage, update the HACE Facebook page on a regular basis, completed three newsletters and the 2024 Housing Authority Calendar. They were instrumental in increasing coverage of HACE activities both in print and on television.

**Objective 6 - Maintain maximum participation in the Section 8 and Public Housing Family Self-sufficiency programs. (Progress)**

All current providers of social services for our residents are required to have a comprehensive self-sufficiency goal for participants and to coordinate activities with inter-agency team members. Quarterly meetings with the E.F. Smith Quality of Life Learning Center (QLLC) and the Multi-Cultural Resource Center (MCRC) together with monthly reports result in the monitoring of their progress in assisting residents on their journey toward self-sufficiency. **In 2023, five residents obtained employment through the two learning centers. This does not include the 57 youth that obtained summer employment through the partnership with Erie County and the E.F. Smith Quality of Life Learning Center.**

In January 2023, HACE was awarded a third three-year HUD ROSS grant to provide one Family Self-sufficiency Case Managers to coordinate the Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 Family Self-Sufficiency Program. She is contracted through MCRC to provide case management services to public housing and Section 8 residents.

**Objective 7 - Encourage Homeownership for Section 8 and public housing residents. (Progress)**

As of December 31, 2023, there were thirty-seven (37) families enrolled in the Section 8 Family Self-Sufficiency Program. Of those twenty-two (22) have a cash escrow account. The total number of Section 8 FSS graduates in 2023 was one (1). The total cash escrow paid out to Section 8 graduates as of December 31, 2023, is \$493,711. The total escrow cash assets, including current Section 8 participants and graduate’s equals \$531,294.

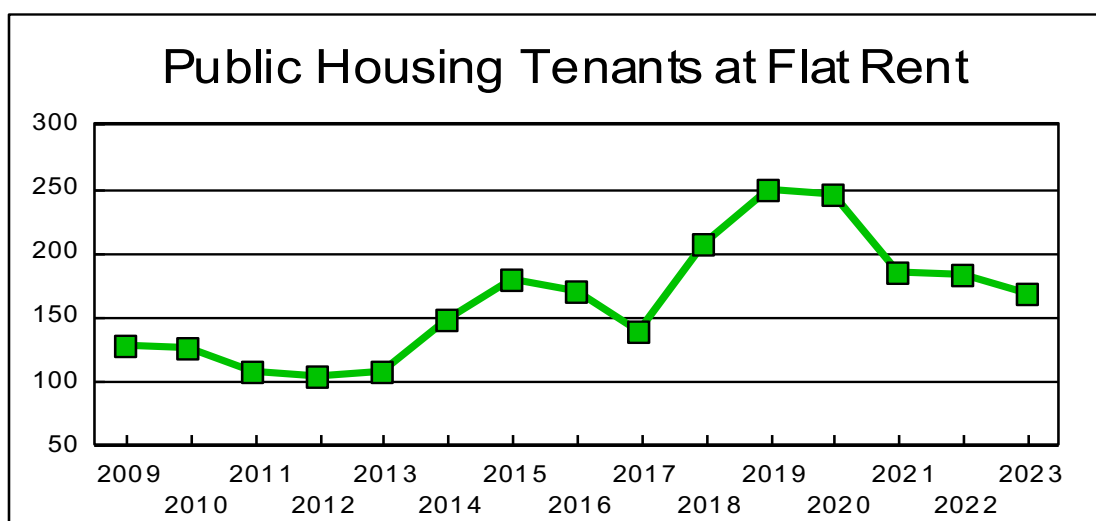
As of December 31, 2023, there were forty-eight (48) families enrolled in the Public Housing Family Self-Sufficiency Program. Of those 48 participants, 36 have a cash escrow account. The total number of Public Housing FSS graduates in 2023 were eleven (11). The total cash escrow paid out to graduates as of December 31, 2023, is \$529,217. The total escrow cash assets, including current participants and graduates equals \$704,000.

Two families were able to access their FSS Escrow accounts for down payment and closing costs. In 2023 there were 12 graduates from the Section 8 and Public Housing FSS programs. Since the inception of the Section 8/Public Housing FSS Program there have been one hundred and seventy-five (175) graduates

with fifty-four purchasing their own home. Escrow payments totaling \$1,235,294 have been awarded since the program's inception.

**Objective 8 - Continue flat rents that reflect market based on size, condition, and location. (Achieved)**

The Authority believes that the use of flat rents provides stability for our communities by giving working families an incentive to remain in public housing while they are getting on their feet economically. In 2023, the number of families who opted for the flat rent was 169 down from 183 in 2022. The Authority first adopted a flat rent schedule in 2004, based on market data. In 2014, Congress required HUD to change the way Flat Rents are calculated and revise them on a yearly basis.



**Objective 9 – Continue conversion of two learning centers to self-sufficiency, job development and employment training centers for public housing residents. (Progress)**

Both MCRC and the Quality of Life Learning Center (QLLC) continue to work with residents on improving job skills. The job market has changed markedly in the past several years with HACE residents utilizing temporary agencies to obtain both temporary and permanent employment.

Both agencies continue to provide valuable services to HACE residents and receive multiple referrals from HACE staff for family support and assistance with rent payment issues. MCRC helped residents obtain over \$1,000,000 in tax payment returns in 2023. In 2024, HACE partnered with MCRC to continue a VITA Tax preparation program after the program was dropped by the prior provider.

QLLC worked with 57 young people to obtain summer jobs. This funding has been cut by the County for 2024.

Both agencies continue to have strong ESL and GED programs. It is important that as we move forward that both agencies increase their focus in providing family support services that assist residents in maintaining their stable housing situation.

**Objective 10 – Revise and distribute 2022 Resident Survey tool to assess resident needs. Contract with local organization to develop, distribute, and analyze data from resident survey. (Progress)**

The 2022 Resident Survey was administered in August through October. There was an over 40% response rate from residents. New this time was utilizing MCRC staff to administer part of the survey over the phone. A report on the results of the survey was presented at the 2023 February Board meeting. The 2024 Resident Survey will be conducted July through August.

**Objective 11 – Complete evaluation process of all HACE social service programs to determine if they are meeting programmatic requirements and if the services, they require are still necessary to meet the goals of assisting residents in moving towards self-sufficiency. (Achieved)**

The Category 1 Consulting Firm completed evaluations of ten HACE program partners. Category made a presentation to the HACE Board and copies of the individual reports were distributed to the eight program providers. Overall, the findings indicated that all of the program partners provided valuable services to HACE residents, they are meeting their established programmatic goals and that they understand and follow the HACE mission.

**GOAL 6 - IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOODS SURROUNDING PUBLIC HOUSING COMMUNITIES**

**Objective 1 – Establish development account to be utilized as investment capital to expand and improve low-income residents’ access to quality and affordable housing. (Significant Progress)**

HACE partnered with three organizations to improve low-income neighborhoods and address issues such as chronic homelessness.

HACE donated \$20,000 to Community Shelter Services (CSS) to build its 2<sup>nd</sup> HACE sponsored Tiny Home. CSS has a goal of building 12 Tiny Homes to assist in reuniting homeless families and those with special needs. The first HACE sponsored Tiny Home was specially outfitted and then occupied by a hearing-impaired individual.

HACE is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a 3-year commitment to Eastside Renaissance to provide support for their efforts to revitalize the Parade Street Corridor from 6<sup>th</sup> and Parade to 14<sup>th</sup> and Parade. Most of the funds have been used to revitalize residential properties, two of which have been added to the Section 8 properties for rent list.

HACE donated \$50,000 to the E.F. Smith Quality of Life Development Corporation towards the purchase of former Burton School Building for future use as a community center housing a medical center, adult education programs and a variety of community service programs and activities. Erie Insurance contributed \$50,000 to the \$110,000 purchase price of the building.

**Objective 2 – Identify public and private partners to participate in neighborhood community development initiatives. (Progress)**

HACE staff is continuing to work with the Erie Supportive Housing Group to address the chronically homeless situation in Erie County. Established goals include the building or rehabbing of a 50-unit facility to provide housing for chronically homeless individuals along with identifying 100 scattered sites to be used for housing.

**Objective 3 – Continue acquisition of properties near public housing that are available and/or in distress. (No action)**

No properties were purchased in 2023.

**Objective 4 – Develop strategy for the utilization of vacant land at Erie Heights and the properties adjacent to Harbor Homes that would generate non-federal funds for other HACE initiatives. (Progress)**

A non-profit was created to work with HACE to develop future projects benefiting low-income families.

**Objective 5 – Develop relationships with community leaders and businesses in neighborhoods surrounding public housing that could provide employment opportunities for public housing residents. (Progress)**

HACE has a strong relationship with community leaders in the areas surrounding HACE properties. The E.F. Smith Quality of Life Learning Center purchased the Joyce Savocchio Industrial Park in late 2018. HACE staff will work with QLLC to ensure that HACE residents benefit from any projects undertaken at the Industrial Park. Work has begun on a Aquaponics facility at Savocchio Park that when completed will offer employment to HACE residents.

**Objective 6 – Continue renovations of Better Housing to bring the properties up to the modern-day standards expected of HACE properties. (Significant Progress)**

The Housing Authority purchased Better Housing properties (52 units) on January 10, 2019. This provides stability in an area where the Housing Authority has significant investment. HACE was awarded a PHFA PHARE Grant in 2020, allowing us to move forward in completing much needed upgrades to the properties including in this case replacement of all windows and security screens. In 2021, HACE was awarded a second PHFA grant total \$300,000 that will be used to upgrade the electric delivery system to each unit. HACE has applied for a 3<sup>rd</sup> PHARE grant to complete façade and property upgrades in Better Housing. In 2023, HACE was awarded a 3<sup>rd</sup> PHARE grant for \$250,000 that will be utilized to do outside façade work on the properties.

To date new entry doors, new security windows and screens, an upgrade of the electrical delivery system and installation of new furnaces and air conditioning have been completed or will be completed by Spring 2024.



**Objective 7 – Research and apply for funding sources to assist HACE in pursuing development projects and renovating current properties such as Better Housing and Erie Heights. (Achieved)**

HACE was awarded a 3<sup>rd</sup> PHARE grant of \$200,000 that will bring us closer to completing Better Housing renovations bringing the properties up to modern-day standards. These projects along with the work being done on vacated units have made a real positive difference.

**HACE received a \$1,000,000 Lead-based Paint Grant in 2019 for the removal of lead-based paint in up to 67 units in Harbor Homes. (Substantial Progress)**

The last two contracts have been awarded and projects will be completed by the summer of 2024. At that time the Lead-based paint grant will be closed out.

**Personnel Changes**

The Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 Inspector was replaced in March 2023. The position was filled by an in-house promotion from the HACE Maintenance Department.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the IBEW contract will be completed August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Negotiations will begin in May 2024.

**Review of management office procedures and policies.**

- The Associate Director of Compliance continues to work with all management offices. She inspects/reviews office procedures that ensure HUD compliance and uniformity. We have seen a great deal of improvement in completing recertifications as scheduled. These reviews continue quarterly.
- HACE staff continue to improve transfer, deferred unit, and unit turnover procedures.  
  
HACE staff continue to be required to complete updated HUD policy and procedures training and computer/software security training.
- HACE staff continue regular meetings with Horizon staff to work through problems with Public Housing Software system. Horizon updated their system in late 2023. The changes have been challenging for HACE staff. A meeting with representatives from our Horizon software provider to discuss HACE concerns is scheduled for February 2024.
- The HACE maintenance and purchasing department continues to assess products being used in HACE properties to ensure their quality and long term usage.