

New Housing Commissioners

The GRHC governing board recently welcomed two new commissioners. We are pleased to introduce resident Housing Commissioner Michael Bernier and our newest board member, Jamon Alexander. Details on page 2!

Introducing Our New Look

The GRHC has undergone an organizational rebranding initiative and has a new logo that's designed to better reflect our agency mission of bringing affordable housing to West Michigan families. Details on page 3!

Community Partners Bring Vaccine Clinics to GRHC Sites

The Housing Commission has partnered with the Black Impact Collaborative and Cherry Health to provide COVID vaccine clinics at our agency-owned housing sites. Details on page 5!



GRAND RAPIDS
HOUSING COMMISSION

NEWS

Spring/Summer 2022

Longtime Housing Commission President Bobbie Butler (holding certificate) celebrates her retirement after the Commission's March meeting with, from left, Commissioners Michael Bernier and Betty Zylstra, Commission Vice President Monica Steimle-App, GRHC Executive Director Lindsey Reames, and Commissioner Patrick Miles Sr.



Commissioner Butler in 1983

Housing Commission President Bobbie Butler retired from the commission on March 31 after 45 years of exceptional service and leadership; she joined the Housing Commission in 1977 and has been President since 1980.

Bobbie has been instrumental in the development and oversight of many major housing and client services initiatives undertaken by the GRHC over the years, including the development of Ransom Tower Apartments, the Scattered Sites program, Hope Community, Mount Mercy Apartments, the redevelopment of Campau Commons Apartments and Creston Plaza Apartments, the conversion of Sheldon School to Sheldon Apartments, the development of Antoine Court

Apartments and the establishment of our Family Self-Sufficiency, Resident Services and Section 8 Homeownership programs.

“Commissioner Butler has represented the Housing Commission as a champion for housing equity in the local, state, regional and national arenas,” notes GRHC Executive Director Lindsey S. Reames. “We are grateful for all she has contributed to our agency, the people we serve and the Greater Grand Rapids community.”

In addition to her service with the GRHC, Bobbie has worked to advance equity and equal opportunity within our city and state in many other roles; she served as the City of Grand Rapids Community Relations Director from 1970 to 1976 and was the Director of the City's newly created Equal Opportunity Department from 1976 to 1988. Bobbie was responsible for creating the City's

first Affirmative Action Plan, the first Contract Compliance Program, the first Sexual Harassment Policy and the first municipal Minority/Women-Owned Business Enterprise Program in our state. In the latter part of her career she served as the Equal Employment Opportunity Director for the State of Michigan in the Department of Corrections, where she wrote and implemented the State's first Diversity Program.

Bobbie's volunteer activities have included service with the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies, the YWCA of Grand Rapids, the NAACP, the Grand Rapids Urban League, Project Rehab, the Michigan Women's Foundation and the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce "Leadership Grand Rapids" talent development program.

See additional board news on page 2!

New Housing Commission President

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission elected officers during its April meeting.



Monica Steimle-App is the new commission President. A board member since 2016, Monica has extensive knowledge of issues related to housing and housing affordability. She is employed as the Executive Vice President of Property Management for Rockford Construction. In addition to her service on the Housing Commission, Monica also serves on the boards of the Hispanic Center of West Michigan, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. and BOMA West Michigan, a building owners and managers association.



Betty Zylstra has been elected commission Vice President. Betty has served on the Housing Commission since 2000, many years as Vice President. She is the retired Director of The Salvation Army - Booth Family Services, was instrumental in bringing Habitat for Humanity to our area and was the first Executive Director of the local Habitat for Humanity office.

In addition to her service on the Housing Commission, Betty is a past president of the Home Repair Services board and has also been active with Baxter Community Center, the Grand Rapids Urban League, the Dispute Resolution Center and Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women (GROW).

Community Center to Be Renamed in Honor of Bobbie Butler



In appreciation for all she has contributed to our agency and community, the Grand Rapids Housing Commission will rename the Creston Plaza Community Center after retired board President Bobbie Butler. A special event celebrating the establishment of the Bobbie Butler Community Center will be held this summer—an invitation with complete details is coming soon via U.S. Mail!

Welcome, New Commissioners!



The GRHC is pleased to welcome community advocate and activist Jamon Alexander as the newest member of our governing board.

Jamon is the President and CEO of the West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology (WMCAT), leading that organization's work to provide equal access to opportunity; he has also served as the Director of Workforce Development at WMCAT, growing the nationally recognized program that offers career training and support to adults seeking living-wage careers in the health care industry.

As part of his work to help ensure equity in our community, Jamon has led fundraising and volunteer efforts for the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, the Spectrum Health Foundation, the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Foundation and the Heart of West Michigan United Way. He also serves on the Grand Rapids Chamber's Create Great Leaders Council, is a KConnect trustee and is a member of the Kent County Essential Needs Task Force.

In 2014 Jamon received the Community Advocate Award from Grand Rapids Young Professionals; he was a Grand Rapids Business Journal "40 Under 40" honoree in 2013, 2015 and 2019. Jamon earned a bachelor's degree in Public and Non-Profit Administration from Grand Valley State University.



The Grand Rapids City Commission recently approved the appointment of Leonard Terrace Apartments resident Michael Bernier to the vacant resident seat on the Grand Rapids Housing Commission.

Mike has called Leonard Terrace home since 2014 and has been a dedicated volunteer in support of resident activities. He is Leonard Terrace's Resident Assistant, lending his neighbors a hand on nights and weekends when Asset Management staff are out of the office. He has donated his time and talents to the Leonard Terrace Meals on Wheels Dining Center since its opening in 2017 and spearheads Meals on Wheels on-site services at Leonard Terrace. During the pandemic Mike distributed meal boxes to residents and now manages the recently reopened weekday lunch meal service. He also lends a hand with snow shoveling and sidewalk salting.

Mike is a Vietnam veteran and traveled throughout the United States and Canada during a 40-year career as a trucker hauling wind turbines.

The Housing Commission is grateful for Mike's willingness to serve and looks forward to benefiting from his experience and knowledge of tenant issues.

GRHC Undertakes Rebranding Initiative

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission has a new look thanks to an organizational initiative designed to develop branding that better reflects our agency mission of bringing affordable housing to West Michigan families.



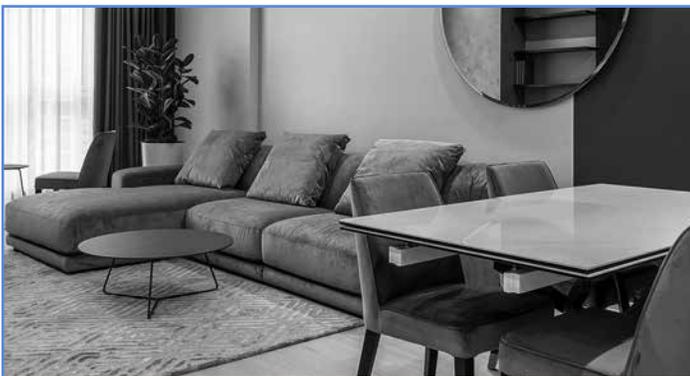
The decision to launch a rebranding initiative arose out of the Housing Commission's new focus on enhancing community partnerships in order to meet our area's critical affordable housing needs.

The GRHC worked with local firm Dog Ear Marketing to develop a logo and branding strategy that focuses on the importance of housing and housing partnerships within the Greater Grand Rapids community. Incorporated within a variety of layouts to meet print and digital design needs, the new logo mark incorporates several building shapes to illustrate the diverse affordable housing options offered through GRHC programs as well as the diversity of households and housing needs represented within our service area. The linking of the house shapes and bridge imagery within the design signify the many community partnerships that support GRHC efforts to bring not only affordable housing but also supportive services to the families we serve. The logo also incorporates river imagery, emphasizing our identification with and commitment to the Grand Rapids community. The mark is designed in shades of blue, representing stability and reliability as well as the power inherent in the concept of "home."

Founded in 1966, the GRHC operated with technical and administrative support from the City of Grand Rapids until the agency established itself as an independently administered entity and employer of record in 1996; we have continued to use the City logo mark during the ensuing 26 years. Our agency anticipates that our rebranding will support the Housing Commission's efforts to alleviate confusion regarding our relationship with local government and differentiate our services from those offered under City programs while reinforcing our affordable housing emphasis, local roots, collaborative working style and continuing commitment to support our area's Regional Consolidated Housing & Community Development Plan.

The GRHC is currently transitioning all print and digital communications to the rebranded design, with the goal of a full transition by summer 2022.

HCV Program Adapts Policies to Allow Greater Flexibility for Families Seeking Housing



New Shared Housing Policy Expands Unit Options

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program has expanded the "special housing types" for which program participants are eligible to receive a rental subsidy to include shared housing.

Shared housing is a single unit occupied by an assisted family and another resident or residents. The shared unit includes separate private space for each assisted family as well as common space for use by all occupants of the unit.

- An assisted family may share a unit with other household(s) assisted by the HCV program or unassisted household(s).
- The owner of a shared housing unit may live in the unit but cannot receive housing assistance. The resident owner may not be related to the assisted family.
- If approved by the GRHC, a live-in aide may live with the family to care for a person who has disabilities.

For more information about the GRHC's shared housing policy:
www.grhousing.org/pdf/sec8plan_15.pdf

Voucher Payment Standard Increases to 120 Percent of Fair Market Rent

The Housing Commission recently approved increasing the Housing Choice Voucher program voucher payment standard from 110 percent of the HUD-established "fair market rent" (FMR) to 120 percent of FMR. This change is designed to make HCV program participants searching for units more competitive in our very tight rental market. To view current payment standards:

www.grhousing.org/voucher-program-faq.php#vps

Grand Rapids Housing Commission Human Resources Update

Staff Transfer



Jose Capeles has transferred from a position as Housing Choice Voucher Manager to a new Business Intelligence Analyst position within

the GRHC's IT department. In his new role Jose will focus on data analysis, work flow process mapping and creating data "dashboards" to help inform management decision making.

Welcome, New Employees



Marisa Amble is a new Office Assistant at the main office. Marisa has also held this position as a temporary employee. Prior to joining our

team she worked as an Office Assistant for York Creek Apartments, and she has also worked in customer service for CVS Pharmacy.



Karen Czurak is the new Financial Analyst at the main office. Karen comes to the GRHC from the Robert Half agency where she was assigned to

assist Grand Rapids Community College as an Accounts Payable/Administrative Assistant to the Vice President of Operations. She has also worked as a Branch Manager for Community West Credit Union. Karen has an associate's degree in Business Administration from Davenport University.



Angela Davis is the new Office Assistant for Campau Commons Apartments and the Scattered Sites program. Angela brings more than 15

years of office experience to our team. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in photography from GVSU.

More new employees

Rufus Granderson is a new HCV Coordinator at the main office. Rufus comes to the GRHC from a 25-year career with Kent County where he was a probation officer. He has a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Cornerstone University.



Kelly Hamlett is a new Office Assistant at the main office. Kelly was an HCV Coordinator with the GRHC for more than ten years and has extensive

knowledge of our programs. She has also worked as a Job Developer with the Gerald R. Ford Job Corps Center.

Madelyn Johnson is a new HCV Coordinator at the main office. Prior to joining our team Madelyn worked as an Intake Coordinator for Arbor Circle. She has also worked for Cherry Health.



Ufoma Johnson is the new Asset Manager for Adams Park, Antoine Court and the Scattered Sites program. Ufoma comes to the GRHC from

Lansing Housing Commission where he held a similar asset management position; he has also worked for a public housing authority in Georgia. Ufoma is a Western Michigan University grad and is currently attending Wayne State University where he's working on a master's degree in Urban Planning and Development.



Latasha Maberry is a new Resident Services Specialist for Hope Community. Latasha comes to the GRHC from a client services position at Wedgewood

Christian Services, and she has also worked for Pine Rest Christian Services. She has a master's degree in Criminal Justice from Ferris State University.

Leah Paauwe is a new HCV Coordinator at the main office. Leah comes to the GRHC from Catholic Charities where she was a Family Support Worker. Leah has expertise in finance and money management; she holds a bachelor's degree from Ferris State University.

Lauri Parks is a new HCV Coordinator at the main office. Lauri has held administrative positions with nonprofit, governmental and membership organizations, including the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute, the City of Grand Rapids and the Grand Rapids Bar Association. She has a Master of Public Administration degree from GVSU.

Nick Washington is the new Maintenance Technician for Antoine Court and Creston Plaza Apartments. Nick has more than 14 years of experience in residential and commercial construction, dry wall repair/installation and carpentry. He is the owner/operator of Unique Concept LLC.



Russell Williams is the new Custodian for Ransom Tower Apartments. Russell's work history includes custodial positions at Enviro-Clean in

Holland and Carson City Hospital, and he has also worked on the freight team at Home Depot in Okemos and as the Frozen/Dairy Manager for Saran Family Foods in Saranac.

View the employment opportunities currently available with the GRHC:

<https://www.grhousing.org/employment-opportunities.php>

GRHC Partners with Black Impact Collaborative, Cherry Health to Host On-Site Vaccine Clinics

The Housing Commission has partnered with the Black Impact Collaborative and Cherry Health to provide COVID vaccine clinics at our agency-owned housing developments. The GRHC Resident Services team has brought in additional community partners to offer residents information and support.

During late winter and early spring the Collaborative provided clinics at all GRHC developments that serve seniors and people with disabilities. In addition to vaccines and free face masks and COVID-19 test kits, the clinics featured raffle prizes provided by the Black Impact Collaborative as well as a wealth of helpful information from partner organizations, including...

- Advocates for Senior Issues
- Alternatives in Motion
- Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan
- Community Food Club
- Disability Advocates of Kent County
- GVSU Health Care Center at Mount Mercy
- Hometown Pharmacy
- The Rapid

The partnership is planning to offer additional clinics at our senior communities based on resident needs for vaccines and booster shots. Many thanks to the Black Impact Collaborative, Cherry Health, the GRHC Resident Services team and all of the organizations and volunteers who are joining forces to help our residents, our staff and our community stay safe and healthy!



Photos from the Mount Mercy clinic, clockwise from top right: A nurse from Cherry Health administers a COVID-19 booster; volunteers from the Black Impact Collaborative with prizes donated by the group; Liz Barnett from the Area Agency on Aging offers a resident information about community resources; another booster administered; GRHC Resident Services staff welcome clinic attendees

Health & Unity in the Community

Health/Resource and Family Fun Fair!

June 24 | 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Campau Park, 51 Delaware St. SW



The Black Impact Collaborative and many other community organizations are partnering with the GRHC to bring a free “Health and Unity in the Community” event to the Campau Commons neighborhood! This event is open to all and will feature a COVID-19 and flu vaccine clinic as well as refreshments, games and prizes.

Family Self-Sufficiency Program Helps GRHC Residents Save Money to Reach Financial Goals

The Grand Rapids Housing Commission Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program helps households that participate in a GRHC affordable housing program set goals and build savings to achieve economic self-sufficiency and a stronger financial future.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, the FSS Program offers participants an opportunity to accrue funds in an escrow account when an increase in earned income increases the portion of monthly rent a household pays. Participants have used these savings to start an emergency fund, pay off debt, purchase a home, and even start a small business.

The FSS Program also helps participants identify community resources that will empower them to reach their financial goals.

Available services and resources include:

- Credit repair education and counseling
- Financial management education
- Preparation for home ownership
- Transportation services
- Child care services
- Job training, job placement assistance

How the FSS Program Works

Families that participate in the GRHC's affordable housing programs generally pay 30 percent of household income toward rent; so an increase in earned income results in an increase in the monthly rent the household pays.

When the head of household enrolls in the FSS Program, the GRHC opens an interest-bearing escrow account for the family in which we deposit roughly the amount of the rent increase each month.

For example...

- An FSS Program participant pays rent of \$100 per month at the time of enrollment in the program.
- Participant gets a job or a pay raise and monthly rent increases to \$150.
- The \$50 monthly increase is matched and deposited into an escrow savings account.
- Participant completes the FSS Program contract and receives the escrowed funds!

Average escrow award in 2021: \$10,476



Many FSS Program participants use their escrowed savings to buy a home

How to Participate in the FSS Program

- Complete and submit the GRHC's online Family Self-Sufficiency Program Self-Referral Form here: <https://www.grhousing.org/fssSelfReferral.html>
- Sign an FSS Program contract that outlines the responsibilities of both your family and the GRHC.
- Meet with your GRHC FSS Coordinator to set goals and get information about community resources.
- When you or a member of your household finds a job or gets a raise that increases household income and your share of monthly rent, the GRHC deposits funds into a savings account that is held in escrow for your family—the deposit amount usually equals the amount of the rent increase.
- Once you complete the FSS Program, you receive the escrowed funds. Savings accrue for up to five years, but participants who meet program requirements can graduate early.
- Under some circumstances you can withdraw funds from your escrowed savings in order to make progress toward goals, for example, to finance a car needed for work, or to receive training that will help you or a family member land a higher-wage job.
- To successfully complete the FSS program:
 - All household members must be free of DHHS cash assistance for the last 12 months of participation.
 - The head of household must have ongoing employment the last full year (52 consecutive weeks) of participation.
 - Your household must be in good standing with the GRHC and your landlord.

Homeownership Program Orientations to Be Held at Wyoming Public Library

The GRHC is pleased to announce that our quarterly Section 8 Homeownership Program Orientation meetings are returning to the Wyoming Public Library, 3350 Michael Avenue SW in Wyoming. The Homeownership Program empowers Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher recipients to use their rental subsidy toward home mortgage payments.

All orientation meetings start at 2:00 p.m. Space is limited and registration is required. Meeting dates:

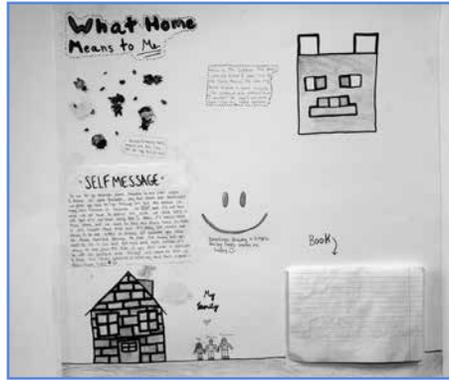
September 20

December 13

For more information:

www.grhousing.org/home-ownership-program.php

GRHC “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest Winners Announced



Winning GRHC poster contest entries, from left: grades K-5 winner, Dwayne Moore III; grades 6-8 winner, Kylee Pierce; grades 9-12 winner, Breanna Cervera. Congratulations to all!

This past winter the GRHC invited young residents in grades kindergarten through 12 to participate in the 2022 “What Home Means to Me” Poster Contest sponsored by the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO). NAHRO is a professional membership organization that represents more than 19,000 housing and community development agencies nationwide.

The GRHC sponsored a local poster contest that awarded a \$25 gift card to one winner in each of three age categories. Congratulations to: Dwayne Moore III, winner, grades K-5; Kylee Pierce, winner, grades 6-8; Breanna Cervera, winner, grades 9-12.

All eligible entries received were sent on to the state “What Home Means to Me” poster contest, and state winners will

be sent on to the regional poster contest; regional winners will be sent to the national contest, with national winners to be announced in October.

Many thanks to all of the children who shared their artwork and thoughts about home with us! View all of our contest entries on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Q-WDmizsMTE>

Units Available Soon at Four GRHC Senior Communities—And First Month Is FREE!

The GRHC anticipates unit vacancies at several of our affordable retirement communities. These comfortable one-bedroom units serve seniors ages 55 and older and people with disabilities. **For a limited time we are offering a “First Month Free” promotion at these developments, which include Adams Park Apartments, Leonard Terrace Apartments, Mount Mercy Apartments and Ransom Tower Apartments.**

A rental subsidy is available to eligible tenants, which means rent is generally no more than 30 percent of monthly income. All of our senior communities feature:

- Professionally maintained grounds
- Affordable rent includes utilities, major appliances furnished
- Smoke-free environment
- Community room, social events
- Laundry facilities on site, food pantry on site
- On-site supportive services
- On-site housing and maintenance staff
- 24-hour emergency maintenance

For more information, including photos, annual income limits, and a link to our online housing application:

www.grhousing.org/senior-apartments.php



Adams Park Apartments
1440 Fuller Avenue SE
Ages 62+, adults with disabilities



Ransom Tower Apartments
50 Ransom Avenue NE
Ages 62 and older



Leonard Terrace Apartments
1315 Leonard Street NE
Ages 55 and older; ages 55-61 must have a disability to receive a federal rental subsidy



Mount Mercy Apartments
1425 Bridge Street NW
Ages 55 and older; ages 55-61 must have a disability to receive a federal rental subsidy



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We Appreciate the Rental Property Owners Who Partner with Us!

The GRHC board and staff extend our sincere thanks to the more than 700 rental property owners who partner with us to meet the housing needs of low-income families. With your help we are making safe and affordable housing available to more than 3,700 households. We appreciate your being a part of the solution to the housing shortage that has been particularly difficult to navigate for families with limited incomes. You are truly helping to change lives for the better!



A GRHC Emergency Housing Voucher program participant completes lease paperwork.

Our staff also sends a “thank you” to the Rental Property Owners Association for affording the GRHC the opportunity to participate in this past winter’s RPOA Annual Conference and to all of the landlord members who visited our booth. We appreciate your input and enthusiasm for supporting housing equity in our community!

Community Centers Host “Meet Up and Eat Up” Summer Meal Program



Two GRHC family housing developments are once again offering children ages 18 and under free weekday lunches through the USDA-funded “Meet Up and Eat Up” summer food service program. The program is administered locally by the Grand Rapids Public Schools Nutrition Services Department and strives to ensure that children who rely on school meal programs during the school year don’t go hungry in the summer months.

The Campau Commons Apartments Community Center, 821 South Division Avenue (Division at Franklin), and the Creston Plaza Apartments Community Center, 1080 Creston Plaza Drive NE, are serving lunch Monday through Thursday, 12:30-1:00 p.m., through August 11. There is no enrollment or registration for this program; children can simply visit during the lunch period to receive a balanced meal.

Grand Rapids Housing Commissioners:

Monica Steimle-App, President; Betty Zylstra, Vice President; Jamon Alexander, Michael Bernier, Patrick Miles Sr.; Executive Director: Lindsey S. Reames

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