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INTRODUCTION

The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) has been serving the Akron and Summit County community for over 80 years. AMHA has earned a national reputation as a model public housing authority, as indicated by its accreditation by the Affordable Housing Accreditation Board. Furthermore, for two decades the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has designated AMHA a high performer. AMHA leadership believes in the organization's internal tagline, "more than just housing." Through decades of community partnerships and innovative programs, AMHA's services to improve resident quality of life have been a hallmark.

AMHA and its peer agencies around the country have weathered many challenges over the years. The electronic age has brought efficiency and measurement to a level not seen before; construction innovations have added amenities and operating cost savings; and the amount of collaboration and partnerships among community partners has never been greater.

In contrast, already-high construction costs are mounting and political threats to the preservation and expansion of affordable housing have never been greater. Congress has slashed budgets year after year. Cuts in Washington, DC have threatened federal programs that assist people in poverty, including those residing in public housing. Further cuts could come to pass as political changes occur in Washington and budget priorities shift.

These changes are having a local impact. AMHA currently has a waiting list of over 40,000 families. Demographic shifts, such as the rising numbers of elderly people and special needs populations, will have a broad impact on community housing needs for years to come.

AMHA began a strategic planning process in 2020 to better deal with the shifting environment in which public housing operates and set a course for the future. Its intent was to minimize reaction to the obstacles of the day and maintain focus on long-term goals and objectives. The final product, this 2021–2025 Strategic Plan (the Plan), provides a long-term focus on high-level, broad goals over the course of the next five years. It will help AMHA use limited resources to better address affordable housing and client service needs.



METHODOLOGY

The year-long strategic planning process consisted of an environmental scan; engaging with the Board of Trustees, staff, residents and community partners through surveys; and a strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis and focus groups to gather input. AMHA used all of this to develop this comprehensive Plan, which provides direction for the next five years.

Environmental Scan

For the environmental scan, AMHA evaluated different strategic plans. Included in these were HUD's national strategic plan; four state and county strategic plans; seven Ohio Housing Authority strategic plans; eight strategic plans including the city of Akron and the different organizations that serve Akron and two other cities, Barberton and Stow; and seven different community partners' strategic plans. These strategic plans focus on four main themes. The first is economic opportunity through resident services (e.g., economic self-sufficiency, education, workforces) and development (e.g., high opportunity areas). Another common theme is effective internal and external communication (e.g., public/private partnerships, community engagement and awareness). The third common theme is public and private partnerships through agencies, donors, stakeholders and community organizations. The final common theme is quality of life through housing choice (e.g., high opportunity areas, preservation and redevelopment), housing quality (e.g., health) and social services (e.g., accessibility to resources).

Engaging with the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees (the Board) played an active role forming the Plan. The Board participated in all the surveys and multiple working sessions through the process. AMHA held a visioning session with the Board and leadership to determine if the current mission and vision continued to align with Board and leadership priorities. The visioning session feedback informed the updated mission and vision statements. The Executive Director presented the new mission and vision statements to the Board for informal comment.

Subsequently, the Steering Committee, made up of leadership, formed goals and objectives based on feedback from the employee, community and resident surveys; the SWOT analysis; the environmental scan; and a review of progress under the previous strategic plan. The Director's Office (DO) presented draft goals and objectives to the Board. It also scheduled a second working session to determine which goals and objectives to keep from the previous plan and which new ones to add. The Board focused on new proposed goals and objectives, including diversity, equity and inclusion. Leadership participated with the Board in a discussion of the goals and objectives, and incorporated the feedback into final goals and objectives for the Plan. The goals and objectives became the basis for formulating focus groups to develop action items.

Focus groups created the action items under each of the goals and objectives. The Executive Director presented these as a part of the Plan to the Board for formal approval.

Surveys

AMHA sent out electronic and hard copy surveys to residents, staff and community partners to gather input on the agency. Seventy-four employees responded to the staff survey, 84 residents responded to the resident survey and 37 community partners responded to the community partner survey. Common themes that emerged are that AMHA does a good job of providing affordable housing, has good community relationships and partnerships, has a caring staff, cares for the residents, and has a good resident service program.

SWOT Process

AMHA held 14 SWOT sessions initiated the SWOT process with meetings. Of the 14 sessions, the first three were conducted in person. Due to COVID-19, however, AMHA conducted the remaining SWOT sessions virtually. The policy and planning advisor led all the sessions. The in-person sessions featured four large Post-It® Notes for each SWOT category mounted on a wall, and participants wrote their thoughts on a regular Post-It® Notes and placed them on the corresponding large sticky note. Participants then worked together to sort the Post-It® Notes into common themes under each SWOT category. Once common themes were determined, participants then ranked the common themes and Post-It® Notes from most important to least important. The virtual sessions were conducted using Zoom and an online platform Miro. The virtual platform allowed us to conduct the same activities just through a virtual platform. Participants would type anonymous responses for each SWOT category on virtual sticky notes, then rated and ranked participant responses from most to least important using Miro. When there were technical difficulties, participants either emailed their responses or left them anonymously in the office. After all sessions were conducted all comments and rankings were then put into an excel spreadsheet to perform further analysis and determine what the common themes were for each SWOT category.

Employee Survey II

AMHA sent a second survey via email to employees based on information gathered from the SWOT sessions. Sixty-seven employees responded to the survey. The questions included: What could AMHA do to positively affect the lives of our residents? What should AMHA prioritize to positively affect the satisfaction of our staff? On what does AMHA spend too much money? In which area should AMHA increase community partnerships? Popular responses include: help with finding jobs for our residents, maintain health benefits and spend less money on paper and mental health/stability partnerships.

Focus Groups

Focus groups developed action items for each objective developed in the planning process. Each objective had its own focus group led by department heads. Groups had a single chairperson or multiple chairpersons if two departments shared the objective. Directors facilitated focus group members in brainstorming and developing action items for each objective. Focus groups met for as long in duration and as many times, as was necessary to develop comprehensive action items with sufficient detail in regards to purpose and direction.

Implementation

Directors are responsible for implementation and reporting on progress related to action items in the Plan. Directors are allowed the discretion to manage their processes independently. Directors may create more detailed action plans with deliverables in order to manage staff members and hold staff members accountable for progress. The DO requires informal quarterly updates at leadership staff meetings to ensure continued progress and focus on Plan goals, objectives and action items. Additionally, directors

must develop formal annual progress reports after the completion of each plan year. The formal reports will be presented to the Board in summary form and details will be included in the agency Annual Report.



AMHA DEPARTMENTS

Board of Trustees

The Board, as a body, is Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority. Through a majority vote, the Board takes action as AMHA and is responsible for making policy; monitoring the performance of the agency; representing the agency; and approving budgets, grant awards, contracts and plans, including this Plan.

Director's Office

The DO, in cooperation with the Board, establishes and monitors policies and procedures, determines budget and spending levels, develops long-range plans in conjunction with other agency departments and responds to public inquiries. The DO represents the agency; works with federal, state and local governments and advocacy organizations; and ensures collaboration with local nonprofits and partner organizations. The DO works with leadership to establish annual goals and assure compliance with applicable federal and state laws. The DO is responsible for the appointment of all employees.

Construction Department

Maintaining the long-term viability of AMHA's many neighborhoods and varied housing stock is the principal focus of the Construction Department (Construction). Construction establishes and implements a long-term capital improvement program designed to improve the physical condition of existing neighborhoods and assist in upgrading maintenance and operations management. To develop a capital plan dedicated to providing viable neighborhoods and quality homes for the community's low-income families, it is essential that Construction communicate and consult with residents, management divisions and local government jurisdictions. Construction is also responsible for procurement and adherence to procurement regulations.

Finance Department

The Finance Department (Finance) oversees the fiscal operations of AMHA and its affiliated entities. Finance safeguards assets, creates operating budgets and provides financial information to the management team and other stakeholders. Finance also processes employee payroll. Finance coordinates the inventory needs and purchasing of materials for the site managers, as well as oversees the work order intake for all properties. Finance oversees the Management Information Systems team in regards to being responsible for AMHA's infrastructure, which includes computers, cell phones, telephones and voicemail, printers and copiers, scanners and fax machines, and ensuring the systems are available and functional at all times.

Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) Department

The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) administers housing assistance to approximately 5,200 low-income households. Voucher holders enter into leases with property owners in the open market and into a client relationship with AMHA. Property owners and managers enter into a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract with AMHA, thereby agree to rules governing their participation. The HCVP has three divisions. Contracting and leasing works with applicants the Housing Placement Office refers and with owners and managers for the initial participation in the HCVP. Inspections assures that properties in the program meet basic livability standards. Continued Assistance assures client participation in the program by helping them meet their obligations and initiates cancellations when a client fails to meet said obligations.

Housing Operations Department

Housing Operations oversees the approximately 4,700 housing units AMHA owns in Summit County. Property Management staff has management, maintenance, janitorial, clerical and supervisor support to manage, operate and maintain the properties in good condition. The Recertification Office assists residents to comply with tenant obligations as well as calculating rent based on resident income.

Housing Placement Department

The Housing Placement Department (Placement) is responsible for processing applications for Housing Operations and HCVP. Placement maintains wait lists, and selects, determines eligibility of and places applicants for admission to programs. Placement also processes client transfer requests and maintains a transfer wait list.

Human Resources Department

Human Resources Department (HR) oversees recruiting, hiring, benefits administration, compensation, training, tuition reimbursement, labor relations and contract negotiation, coaching, discipline, grievance handling, personnel record keeping, attendance tracking, assisting with temporary staffing needs, legal compliance with employment and labor laws and employment policy development and administration.

Legal Department

The Legal Department (Legal) is responsible for all legal matters, including administrative hearings, evictions, litigation, contracts, collections, employment matters, real estate, and business transactions. Legal represents AMHA, advises and interprets laws, policies and procedures in the many areas that affect AMHA.

Real Estate Department

The Real Estate Department is responsible for AMHA's real estate acquisitions and dispositions. It also handles any real estate issues affecting the AMHA's nearly 1,000 parcels, such as easements, commercial leases and HUD restrictive covenants. The Real Estate Department also directs all components of AMHA's real estate development, including planning, contract and regulatory agreement negotiation, due diligence, financing and design.

Resident Services Department

The Resident Services Department (RS) connects residents to supportive services that positively impact their quality of life. RS helps organize resident councils; provides guidance in coordinating and conducting meetings, activities and special programs; and assists in preparing newsletters, flyers and other communication. RS also processes resident requests for reasonable accommodations. RS implements the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program and Jobs Plus programs to assist families in achieving economic independence. RS oversees the Early Childhood initiative, including the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program and Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) program, to prepare children 0–5 for kindergarten. RS manages the digital inclusion initiative ConnectHome Akron that seeks to provide equitable internet access to housing residents. Service coordination through RS assists with housing stability, health and wellness, and assists in meeting families' quality of life needs. RS manages the day-to-day operations of AMHA's 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity, Building for Tomorrow (BFT), and the REACH Opportunity Center at Summit Lake.



MISSION, VISION & VALUES

MISSION

The Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority provides quality, affordable housing and services as a platform to develop people, property and community.

VISION

We envision a community that fosters individual development and growth through stable, affordable housing, empowering all to reach their full potential.

People- We envision a community where all have access to health, education and employment opportunities to position themselves out of poverty.

Property- We envision a community where our investments in Summit County stabilize neighborhoods and increase housing opportunities.

Community- We envision a community where minority and low-income families are treated equitably in their access to housing and services.

VALUES

Commitment to Excellence

AMHA strives to achieve excellence in all that we do.

Professional Integrity

AMHA is proud of our employees, one of our greatest resources; we set high expectations of a strong work ethic and respectful conduct at all times.

Social and Environmental Awareness

AMHA strives to ensure social justice and to be a trustworthy steward of the environment.

Alignment with Community Priorities

AMHA continues to develop multi-sector partnerships and cooperative relationships to establish opportunities that will enhance programs and services.



STRATEGIC PLAN

GOAL 1 – PRESERVE AND EXPAND QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Over half of the renters within Summit County pay more than 30 percent of their income toward rent. Currently, there are over 40,000 families waiting for either public housing or a housing choice voucher. AMHA has also identified many housing units in the community that are suffering from deferred maintenance and a lack of comprehensive capital investment. AMHA intends to pursue different ways of repositioning real estate assets in order to repair and preserve its existing portfolio.

OBJECTIVE 1.1: PRESERVATION OF EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

Action Item 1.1.1: Pursue and evaluate Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) and Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) as a repositioning tool for public housing properties.

AMHA estimates that it has \$372.9 million of capital needs throughout its portfolio and that it will receive approximately \$100 million in capital funds over the next 10 years. Without a substantial capital infusion into its housing infrastructure, AMHA would need to decide which properties are priorities for capital funds and which may deteriorate to the point of inhabitability. AMHA has an opportunity today to make long-term strategic decisions to preserve its public housing portfolio and improve resident quality of life. While public housing funding is now greater than in previous years, there is more funding stability through either the Project-Based Voucher (PBV) or the Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) programs. The stability of these funding sources will allow AMHA to more confidently predict revenues, prepare for capital investments and financially manage the properties for better long-term strategic planning. Additionally, converting the properties by leveraging capital funds with LIHTC could bring significant, much-needed investments to the properties. Converting and rehabbing these properties will create tremendous economic development opportunities within Summit County.

Action Item 1.1.2: Pursue and evaluate RAD and HUD Section 18 as a repositioning tool for public housing scattered site properties.

AMHA may strategically utilize RAD or the Section 18 program for its public housing scattered sites and other properties to convert old public housing to new housing choice voucher assistance. Converting scattered site units through the Section 18 provisions as Project Based Vouchers could generate additional rent revenue. AMHA could use revenue from scattered sites to preserve the supply of affordable housing, maintain supportive services provided to the residents and offset operational costs.

Action Item 1.1.3: Complete energy performance contract work.

Targeted improvements will include a portfolio-wide energy improvement initiative in partnership with its energy performance contractor to achieve annual energy savings. HUD approved Phase 4 of AMHA's energy performance contract in 2020. To receive the program's energy savings benefits, AMHA will upgrade interior and exterior common area lighting, apartment lighting and replace windows at four properties. These energy-saving measures will significantly improve resident comfort and safety.

Action Item 1.1.4: Continue lead remediation efforts for scattered site properties.

AMHA will prioritize its hazard remediation efforts for public housing and LHA scattered site properties. AMHA established a partnership with Summit County for expedited lead remediation that allows its programs to be symbiotic in lead abatement efforts instead of competing for resources. Lead containment and remediation is necessary to ensure resident safety. AMHA is committed to ensuring that all units containing lead are appropriately remediated and maintained.

Action Item 1.1.5: Pursue other funding sources for capital projects including but not limited to Emergency Safety Grants, Choice Neighborhoods, HOME, CDBG and other private funding.

Due to the limited funds available for modernization and capital improvements, it is necessary to leverage other sources. Pursuing other competitive funds may help address capital backlog and promote the comprehensive modernization of AMHA properties.

Objective 1.1: Expected Outcomes

- More funds leveraged for capital improvements/repositioning
- Increased units successfully repositioned
- Increased units in the process of repositioning
- Capital projects that target remediation and emergency work
- Capital funds spent within required timeframes

OBJECTIVE 1.2: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF VOUCHER OPPORTUNITIES

Action Item 1.2.1: Seek additional vouchers through the Housing Choice Voucher Program and other special programs.

The housing choice voucher waiting list has over 20,000 families. AMHA plans to apply for additional vouchers through Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) to provide supportive housing for homeless veterans, the Family Unification Program (FUP) for youth aging out of foster care and family reunification, the Mainstream Program for families with disabilities and Tenant Protection Vouchers (TPV) to protect tenants from displacement. Additional vouchers for homeless assistance will expand affordable housing options for low- and moderate-income families in the community.

Action Item 1.2.2: Seek new owners in high opportunity areas to take vouchers.

To enable property owners and agents greater participation, AMHA will review payment standards in zip codes of opportunity. AMHA will also evaluate them annually to determine if an upward adjustment would increase access to units in areas where voucher holders traditionally have not been able to access due to payment standards below market rents. AMHA will continue marketing outreach to those owners and agents so that participants have more options for housing affordability in better and more stable neighborhoods.

Action Item 1.2.3: Review and update the request for proposal for Project-Based Vouchers (PBV's) owners annually.

AMHA will strategically collaborate with local community groups to identify situations in which owners could use PBVs to meet the needs of low-income families. AMHA will stay abreast of community revitalization efforts, including new construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing, to locate potential projects for quality units in the PBV program.

Action Item 1.2.4: Utilize non-competitive selection of PBV projects when available and when AMHA is the owner as allowed under the law.

To assist with the repositioning and preservation of properties and ensure a more stable revenue stream, AMHA will use noncompetitive selection for units AMHA and affiliates own. This method may also help very low-income families to access new developments that another agency has approved through a competitive method.

Objective 1.2: Expected Outcomes

- New awards of additional vouchers
- Increased use of vouchers in high opportunity areas
- Increased housing assistance payments distributed
- More applications for PBVs
- More PBVs awarded
- More landlords accepting vouchers
- Increased baseline renewal funding

GOAL 2 – MAINTAIN OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE WHILE PURSUING INNOVATION AND EFFICIENCIES

To achieve AMHA’s goals and work within fiscal constraints, internal operations must be efficient and effective. AMHA strives to be among the best-performing housing authorities in the nation and is committed to the sound management of scarce resources. As stewards of public funds, AMHA continually seeks processes to improve efficiencies and implement cost-effective practices. To promote efficiency, AMHA will prioritize innovative approaches to operations and management and seek new funding streams to create an economy of scale.

OBJECTIVE 2.1: ASSESS AND IMPROVE AGENCY PERFORMANCE

Action Item 2.1.1: Maintain an excellent record of clean audits, regulatory compliance on various programs conducted by the federal government and implementation of industry best practices.

A steward of public funds must operate transparently and ensure that documents and performance are of the very highest quality, reflecting guidelines established by monitoring agencies. Specifically, AMHA will continue to strive to maintain its high-performer status under HUD’s Public Housing Assessment System and Section Eight Management Assessment Program and accreditation with the Affordable Housing Accreditation Board. Additionally, AMHA will maintain and pursue additional distinctions by the Government Finance Officers Association.

Action Item 2.1.2: Review and evaluate current business processes and update as needed.

As AMHA emerges from a health emergency, it is now more important to review business processes in order to improve efficiencies and incorporate lessons learned. AMHA will develop business processes that ensure compliance and streamlining in the context of a new, safe operating environment, including formalizing standard operating procedures (SOPs) and establishing a new business continuity plan. This will make AMHA more resilient as an agency, keep staff members and clients safer and maximize the utilization of technology.

Action Item 2.1.3: Create processes that ensure compliance and streamlining: formalize standard operating procedures (SOP) to include list of responsible parties and roles.

As AMHA increases its participation in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program, Multifamily Project Based Rental Assistance, Project Based Voucher and Community Development Block Grant programs, formal written procedures will incorporate the nuances of those programs into AMHA operations.

Action Item 2.1.4: Explore and determine technology needs for efficiencies and its impact.

As clients, staff and the community become increasingly technology dependent, efficiencies could be achieved to allow for easier digital access and safer application information distribution. The expanded use of technology to interact with applicants and employees, as well as electronic record retention and the use of remote video technology, allows for AMHA to update workflow and business processes.

Objective 2.1: Expected Outcomes

- Public Housing Assessment System high performer designation
- Section Eight Management Assessment Program high performer designation
- Financial audit with an unmodified opinion
- Government Finance Officers Association Certificate of Achievement for annual report
- Government Finance Officers Association Budget Award
- Affordable Housing Accreditation Board accreditation renewal
- Public housing occupancy greater than 98%
- Tenant accounts receivable to net tenant ratio less than 1.5
- Accounts payable to monthly operating expenses ratio of less than 0.75
- Public housing operating reserve balance of at least four months of expenses
- New, formalized written operating procedures
- Decreased reliance on paper with a paperless environment and workflows

OBJECTIVE 2.2: IMPROVE AGENCY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Action Item 2.2.1: Develop an agency wide communication plan.

Communication plays an essential role in the success in the workplace and for AMHA residents. An agency-wide communication plan will present solutions to the issues related to effective and efficient information distribution. The plan will also feature a communication feedback mechanism to assess how AMHA communicates with its employees and residents.

Action Item 2.2.2: Maintain an AMHA publications inventory.

The inventory of publications and associated communications working group will share communications across departments to assist in developing consistent messaging through various publications regardless if it is for landlords, residents, staff or the community. This will also promote efficiency and reduce duplication by having various departments share stories and materials instead of having to develop their own.

Action Item 2.2.3: Develop a formal publicity and media policy.

Housing Authorities are known to have a stigma around what they do and the people that they serve. Social media has become a game changer in how people communicate in today's society. A media policy will help ensure a positive community and media outreach by developing a formal process and procedure for press releases, media events and inquiries to help ensure a positive public perception.

Action item 2.2.4: Create uniform branding and consistency both internally and externally and determine a branding approach for BFT and AMHA.

Uniform branding is crucial to AMHA because it can change how people perceive AMHA and the non-profit BFT. Uniform branding will help alleviate the confusion that many partners, community and residents have in the correlation and connection between AMHA and BFT.

Objective 2.2: Expected Outcomes

- Increased consistent messaging
- Increased social media presence
- More efficient internal and external communications
- Improved community knowledge of BFT and AMHA
- Increased exposure of resident stories about their self-sufficiency

OBJECTIVE 2.3: DEVELOP, SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN A HIGH-PERFORMING, PROFESSIONAL, INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

Action Item 2.3.1: Establish consistent training and onboarding program for new hires.

A consistent training program will increase employee confidence and belief they are doing their jobs properly. AMHA will assess this by gathering feedback through an employee survey. Additionally, AMHA will follow up with new hires during their 45, 90 and 120-day evaluations to ensure their training has included areas identified on relevant training checklists. Leadership will hold managers accountable for working with the trainer and employee to review training progress as shown in the training checklist.

Action Item 2.3.2: Establish a mentorship program for employees that want to advance.

Oftentimes employees want to advance, but simply do not know how to position themselves to do so. A mentor could advise an employee, empower them in relation to personal development and help them identify and achieve career goals.

Action Item 2.3.3: Establish a leadership development program.

Leadership development training will help management and non-management employees who want to advance to leadership positions identify and cultivate the necessary skills and abilities. This includes taking advantage of external leadership programs as well as providing in-house leadership opportunities.

Action Item 2.3.3: Develop job-specific training programs and cross training for all staff.

Job-specific training improves performance and reduces costly and time-consuming errors. Intradepartmental and interdepartmental cross training will allow AMHA to be more flexible as an agency. It will also give AMHA employees more diverse skill sets to perform their jobs well and understand their relationships to the workings of other departments.

Action Item 2.3.4: Provide training to develop a culture of empathy and understanding.

This includes events and trainings, such as implicit bias, bridges out of poverty and trauma informed training. These trainings reinforce that all humans, regardless of their identities, deserve dignity and respect. They also help employees better understand and appreciate differences.

Action Item 2.3.5: Provide a comprehensive orientation for employees to understand all areas of the agency.

Increased awareness by employees of AMHA as a whole and what AMHA does will help job performance and help cultivate a well-rounded employee. This also creates opportunities for advancement as well as provides supervisors a better understanding of where to use an employee's skill set.

Action Item 2.3.6: Prepare residents for employment by creating a job-training program.

Section 3 of the United States Housing Act provides preference for employment opportunities for low-income individuals. Recipients of housing assistance may have an excellent understanding of how the programs work as a basis for employment.

Action Item 2.3.7: Provide options for employees to improve health and wellness.

Support for various health-related activities, as well as incentives for employees to make healthier lifestyle decision and creating pathways for employees to be healthier provides benefits directly and indirectly. Wellness programs can reduce health risks, health care costs and absenteeism, while increasing productivity, employee retention and morale.

Objective 2.3: Expected Outcomes

- Increased training and development hours
- Increased number of employees participating or completing mentorship
- Stable rate of new hires
- Stable rate of promotions and transfers
- Stable rate of end of employment and retirements
- Increased participation in wellness initiatives

OBJECTIVE 2.4 PROMOTE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) WITHIN AMHA

Action Item 2.4.1: Promote DEI throughout the hiring process, including applicant recruiting, interviewing and hiring.

AMHA is passionate about its commitment to an inclusive workplace that values and promotes diversity. AMHA knows that vigilance is required to educate staff members and continue developing socially conscious hiring and promotion practices. There is strength in differences and these differences are crucial to fostering growth in both the organization and the community. The ultimate goal of having socially conscious hiring and promotion practices is to more closely reflect the community AMHA serves. Diversity promotes a variety of opinions and perspectives and leads to more creative problem solving and innovation. Inclusion of historically excluded groups enables us access to a larger and fuller pool of talent and maximize success in attracting the best candidates. AMHA also fundamentally believes that an equitable and just system that provides equal access to opportunities recognizes that all groups independent of identity have talent.

Action Item 2.4.2: Promote DEI in decisions relating to employee advancement, leadership and career development opportunities.

The danger of systemic biases in relation to performance management practices is that people may not currently be aware that they exist organizationally. To ensure fairness to existing employees, diversity equity and inclusion in pay, promotion and opportunity for advancement ensures identification and addressing of root causes for diversity issues at the management level. A review committee that conducts a thoughtful analysis of employment data to review for implicit bias and fairness. This will promote the equity horizontally across departments as well as vertically from staff to management.

Action Item 2.4.3: Foster a culture of inclusion and cultural awareness.

Company culture drives an organization because it determines how people do things and behave. Culture drives performance and fosters team chemistry. AMHA will create and nurture an environment where DEI is a primary focus. To promote an environment where everyone feels valued, AMHA will encourage, facilitate activities and conduct comfortable and safe training that will focus on institutional drivers of inequities, including institutional and structural racism.

Action Item 2.4.4: Review and revise policies and procedures to upromote DEI.

By explicitly defining diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, AMHA may begin to understand how to locate potential biases and implement simple, focused steps toward reducing them. Applying these definitions to AMHA policy review will assist in identifying systemic bias and ensure all policies and procedures foster diversity, equity and inclusion.

Objective 2.4: Expected Outcomes

- Increased diversity and equity in applicants
- Increased diversity and equity in employment interviews
- Increased diversity and equity in hires
- Increased diversity and equity in employee promotions
- Increased diversity and equity in employee retention
- Increased trainings provided promoting a culture of awareness and inclusion

GOAL 3 – IMPROVE RESIDENT QUALITY OF LIFE

Housing is the foundation of poverty alleviation, but housing alone cannot lift individuals out of poverty. Change happens when individuals have equitable access to high quality opportunities, such as education, childcare, self-sufficiency resources, community support, health and wellness, job training, transportation and other catalytic services. Engaging partnerships across systems and sectors will provide high-quality programs and services that empower all to reach their full potential.

OBJECTIVE 3.1: UTILIZE BUILDING FOR TOMORROW (BFT) TO SUPPORT SERVICE PROGRAMS AND EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES

Action Item 3.1.1: Create infrastructure for long-term fundraising success.

Developing a comprehensive fundraising plan will include focusing on goals and objectives and establishing timelines and staff assignments. The plan will take into account program needs, past giving and staff capacity in order to build an internal infrastructure. The organizational goal will align with fundraising goals to ensure success.

Action Item 3.1.2: Raise sufficient resources and support to sustain programs.

The needs of AMHA residents are diverse and ever changing. BFT must have various funding streams to manage life-changing programs. These funding streams will include government funding, foundation grants, corporate funding, special events and individual giving. Diversifying funding streams helps for long terms sustainability and can help with new need that may arise from time to time.

Action Item 3.1.3: Align marketing messaging between AMHA and BFT.

Aligning marketing messages will eliminate confusion between the programs AMHA and BFT manages and funds, which may be a barrier to achieving fundraising goals. A marketing plan based on strategic marketing, fundraising and branding goals will help ensure that the community and funders are aware of BFT's successes.

Action Item 3.1.4: Educate and train board and volunteers how to communicate and raise money effectively for BFT.

A culture of philanthropy is important throughout AMHA. Training regarding BFT's function will empower staff and board members to provide information for grants, pass along possible donor information and speak about BFT's philanthropic needs in the community.

Action Item 3.1.5: Improve donor relations through coordinated donor communications.

Creating a multi-step stewardship plan, including an annual fund, will help AMHA retain donors currently involved with BFT. It will also assist in the recruitment of new individual donors who are not yet aware that their personal priorities align with BFT's goals.

Objective 3.1: Expected Outcomes

- Increase funds raised for operations and reserves
- Expanded opportunities that increase the knowledge and understanding of BFT
- Increase donor base
- Increase donor information distribution

OBJECTIVE 3.2: ENSURE RESIDENT HOUSING STABILITY

Action Item 3.2.1: Increase lease/program compliance that prevents eviction.

Evictions can have a lasting negative impact on housing outcomes. Residential stability in affordable housing provides an ideal platform for delivering a variety of health and social services. These services positively influence numerous life outcomes, including education, health and employment. Lease and program compliance, however, contribute to a significant percentage of evictions or program terminations. AMHA will evaluate current processes and procedures that may affect lease and program compliance and implement necessary changes to remove barriers for AMHA residents and participants. AMHA will annually review and revise these changes to reduce evictions, lessen the burden for residents and increase housing stability. In addition, AMHA will realize cost savings in unit turnover to support future property improvements, and thusly, contribute to housing stability.

Action Item 3.2.2: Strengthen communication/supports between housing programs, resident services, participants/residents.

Increased communication between property management and resident services is a team approach to intervention. The communication streams are important to ensure that a family does not “fall through the cracks.” This will lead to greater success rates of families remaining in their units and achieving self-sufficiency goals.

Action Item 3.2.3: Address non-housing basic needs at application, move in or voucher issuance, maintenance/inspections and Resident Services follow up.

The earlier that AMHA can assess applicants or residents’ needs, the quicker AMHA can respond and provide a continuum of wraparound services for resident and housing stability. Early intervention lessens the risk of families starting a downward spiral after being affected by life events. AMHA aims to assess destabilizing life events at the earliest point possible and quickly establish case management strategies.

Action Item 3.2.4: Promote a strong sense of community within AMHA properties.

People are more likely to feel a sense of belonging if they are emotionally connected to neighbors and staff members. Fostering relationships will make residents feel happier and possess a deeper sense of community, which in turn will help them access support that is available in the community. The outcome is greater housing stability.

Action Item 3.2.5: Improve support for special populations including those in needs of accommodations, suffering from domestic violence, or need language assistance to take advantage of the federal programs.

Removing barriers and offering support to special populations alleviates the stress and anxiety that contributes to housing instability. AMHA understands that AMHA clients have different challenges in their lives and it is important to show empathy and assistance, regardless of the circumstances. AMHA hopes to provide equal access and opportunity to the most vulnerable community members.

Objective 3.2 Expected Outcomes

- Reduced number of evictions, end of participations and lease terminations
- Reduced number of hearings
- Increase settlements
- Increased self-sufficiency and decreased participant stability concerns for managers

OBJECTIVE 3.3: ENHANCE RESIDENT PROGRAMMING AND INITIATIVES

Priority Area: Education

AMHA will continue to invest in youth through its early childhood education, Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) programs to increase kindergarten readiness and academic achievement. Educational achievement leads to better economic prospects later in life and helps families be upwardly mobile across generations. Supporting the success of children and reducing education inequalities allows the community to benefit from the next generation's talents. Investment in pre-kindergarten programs mitigates the impact of income inequalities on children as they begin school.

Action Item 3.3.1: Provide early childhood education opportunities through the PAT and SPARK home visitation programs

Education inequalities begin well before students enter the school system. Performance gaps by social class begin in the earliest years of children's lives and fail to narrow over time. Children who start behind, stay behind. Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) works with families from the mother's pregnancy to each child's fifth year to make sure the children have the opportunities they need to succeed. Parents as Teachers is a home visitation program that provides child and family partners to assist parents in becoming their child's first and most important teacher for kindergarten success. SPARK Parent Partners work collaboratively with parents and children to complete fun, motivational educational activities so families have needed support for their children's kindergarten readiness in reading and math.

Action Item 3.3.2: Develop partnerships with providers to provide after school programming.

AMHA will collaborate with local public school districts and nonprofit organizations to provide on-site, high quality, opportunities outside of school hours. This will increase leadership development, emotional and social supports and graduation and attendance rates.

Priority Area: Health

AMHA will provide programming to improve resident health and wellness initiatives, including infant vitality, maternal health, childhood asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Residents living in low-income neighborhoods or communities have an increased risk for mental illness, chronic disease, higher mortality and lower life expectancy. Some population groups living in poverty may have more adverse health outcomes than others. For example, the risk for chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity, is higher among those with the lowest income and education levels. In addition, older adults who are poor experience higher rates of disability and mortality. In addition to the aforementioned programming, AMHA will facilitate our partner community health workers to provide services to our residents and help address health disparities that prevent positive life outcomes.

Action Item 3.3.3: Continue programming that promotes infant vitality and maternal health.

Summit County is a priority area for infant mortality for racial minorities. Black infants are two times more likely to die before their first birthday as compared to White infants. These infants are also three times more likely to die from complications from low birth weight as compared to White babies. Lastly, Black mothers are twice as likely to receive prenatal care too late (i.e., in their third trimester) or not at all as compared to White mothers. Infant mortality rate is the most sensitive indicator of societal health as well as being a key marker of maternal and child health. It can serve as a crude indicator of the overall health of a community, health disparities existing in a community and availability of and access to health care. AMHA will continue collaborating with community agencies in support of programming that promotes infant vitality and maternal health. More specifically, AMHA's Parents as Teachers Program contributes to the increase in healthy pregnancies and improved birth outcomes that ultimately supports strong communities, thriving families and healthy, safe children who are ready to learn.

Action Item 3.3.4: Continue programming that focuses on chronic disease prevention and management.

The top five causes of death in Summit County and among those living in or near AMHA developments are, in order: heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, stroke and nondrug-related and drug-related accidental deaths. In all cases, the age-adjusted death rates are far higher for those in or near AMHA developments than for Summit County as a whole. The gaps are the widest for nondrug-related accidents and chronic lower respiratory disease, being 2.5 times and 1.9 times greater than the county totals, respectively. AMHA will collaborate with community health programs and initiatives to support prevention and wellness efforts that focus on improving the whole person, body and mind, and reducing lifestyle risk factors and routine behaviors that can negatively affect health.

Action Item 3.3.5: Ensure senior families with disabilities have access to the community resources needed for independent living.

AMHA's senior and disabled programs help the elderly population age in place, delaying their moves to assisted living. AMHA knows that social isolation can directly affect housing stability and strives to make life-sustaining connections to improve AMHA resident quality of life.

Priority Area: Economic Self Sufficiency

AMHA will expand workforce development and self-sufficiency initiatives through the implementation of the Jobs Plus Program, expansion of the Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS) and mobilization of the Section 3 resident employment program. AMHA will also assist residents in increasing financial empowerment by providing and facilitating access to banking, credit and financial coaching.

Action Item 3.3.6: Implement Jobs Plus program

The Jobs Plus Program is a local, place-based, job-driven approach to increasing earnings and advancing employment outcomes through work readiness, employer linkages, job placement, educational advancement technology skills and financial literacy for public housing residents. The extended view is to replicate successes, lessons learned and best practices at other sites in the AMHA housing portfolio and, possibly, for voucher participants.

Action item 3.3.7: Expand the FSS program.

The FSS program helps motivated individuals and families fulfill their goals, leading to financial independence. Service coordinators help participants find better paying jobs, increase their income, get bills under control, increase credit scores, create and build a savings (escrow) account and obtain access to resources for self-sufficiency. AMHA will apply annually to maintain the FSS program.

Action Item 3.3.8: Implement changes in Section 3 to increase workforce development opportunities

AMHA will make the following changes to realize greater employment opportunities for AMHA clients and residents: strengthening partner relationships and hiring a staff member dedicated to Section 3 initiatives and assisting residents in being hired by community partners.

Action Item 3.3.9: Provide resources for residents to improve their financial wellness.

As residents increase their income and move beyond public assistance, it is critical that they have the tools and skills to manage the loss of benefits and transition to self-sufficiency. AMHA will assist residents in accessing financial resources that help them become financially empowered.

Priority Area: Digital Divide

Digital connectivity with broadband internet has become a necessity. With the onset of the pandemic, many residents, including senior citizens and families with disabilities, were without digital access. Many health care visits went virtual and families and school systems highlighted a need for connectivity to facilitate remote schooling and remote work options. AMHA will work to increase broadband access for residents as a gateway to taking advantage of education and employment opportunities and maintaining health and wellness.

Action Item 3.3.10: Provide residents and low-income families better access to connectivity, devices and education

Public housing and low-income residents need digital access and skills in order to break the cycle of poverty and create financial independence. Since 2017, AMHA, through its ConnectHome Akron Initiative, has been committed to digital equity and access for all. ConnectHome Akron is a collaboration for the purpose of narrowing the digital divide for individuals and families who live in AMHA housing. The

initiative brings residents affordable broadband access, electronic devices, technical training and other digital literacy programs.

Objective 3.3: Expected outcomes

- Increase SPARK and PAT children served
- Increase FSS savings accumulated
- Increase Jobs Plus enrollments
- Increase the total residents served
- Increase opportunities for high quality preschool experiences
- Increased percentage of program participants who begin kindergarten on track for success (Kindergarten Readiness Assessment scores)
- Increased after school program opportunities
- Increased referrals and access related to health and wellness
- Increased attendance at health and wellness events and programs
- Increased program participants that obtain and maintain employment
- Increased number of new bank accounts
- Increased access to high speed internet
- Increased access to digital devices

GOAL 4 – IMPACT COMMUNITY CHANGE

AMHA will build support for equitable, affordable housing as a key component of a vibrant, sustainable community through public information, engagement and advocacy that supports the advancement of Summit County’s low-income residents.

Objective 4.1: Recruit Minority and Women Owned Businesses (MWBEs) for Business Opportunities.

Action Item 4.1.1: Increase distribution of business opportunities for MWBEs.

The Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) has built a strategy around increasing awards to MWBEs. Utilizing the Chamber’s newly minted catalogue of area MWBEs, as well as the state’s minority contractor list, may increase response to AMHA solicitations from MWBE contractors. Electronic distribution and placement of solicitations on the website will make advertisements more accessible.

Action Item 4.1.2: Review and revise procurement policy to promote increased MWBE participation.

AMHA will review the procurement policy to ensure that it is without systematic bias. Updating the policy to foster diversity, equity and inclusion will increase MWBE participation in the contracting process.

Action Item 4.1.3: Partner with community organizations to provide resources and direction to MWBEs.

Local resources are available to assist with minority contractor development. Potential vendors can access the Minority Contractor Capital Access Program, Urban League, Elevate Greater Akron, the Greater Akron Chamber and other resources. AMHA providing linkages to those programs should be beneficial in expanding MWBE participation.

Action Item 4.1.4: Host and attend events to educate about working with AMHA.

The federal and state procurement rules are complex and may be difficult for a new business owner to understand. MWBE contractors and new vendors, including startups, may be unfamiliar with requirements that apply to working with recipients of federal funds. Workshops and educational sessions will help businesses navigate the intricacies of bidding and working with AMHA.

Objective 4.1: Expected Outcomes

- Increased contracts and funds spent with MWBEs
- Increased bids received from MWBEs
- Increased knowledge of the procurement process and requirements

OBJECTIVE 4.2: INCREASE EDUCATION ON THE NEEDS OF LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING AT LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Action Item 4.2.1: Pursue leadership roles in state and national industry groups.

AMHA has positively impacted the lives of families in Summit County but AMHA's impact could go far beyond the borders of its operating area. Consistent with the AMHA mission, AMHA seeks to utilize its experience and expertise to positively impact families throughout the state and nation. Being an industry leader promotes awareness, and sharing perspectives nationally would help inform the local community of housing needs. Making information from national organizations available via links on the AMHA website will allow the work of national organizations to assist in advocacy. Raising awareness about AMHA, its work, its contributions to the community and the impact it has on the families and communities served will also help to influence policy on the federal, state and local levels.

Action Item 4.2.2: Continue to participate and contribute to legislative and regulatory reform efforts.

As a high-performing and accredited agency, AMHA can utilize its operational knowledge to contribute to the education of elected officials at the federal, state and local levels. AMHA will continue to respond as a subject matter expert in the field to regulatory and legislative notices and requests for information. AMHA is committed to providing valuable insight to HUD and program administrators in order to protect the interests of families AMHA serves. This action will educate local, regional and national audiences about housing needs in Summit County. A component of this is cultivating resident leadership to ensure the effective representation of new voices for quality affordable housing in communities throughout Summit County. This particular action will increase communication with elected officials, especially those in local government.

Action Item 4.2.3: Educate leaders about the need for resources for additional vouchers and public housing capital improvements.

Only one in four households eligible for federal housing assistance currently receives said assistance. Public housing infrastructure has been deteriorating without sufficient capital investment to repair buildings in decline. Educating the community about housing needs is essential to obtaining housing stability for low-income and vulnerable populations and reliable incomes for property owners. Investment in affordable housing spurs job creation generates economic growth and will preserve the housing stock for generations to come.

Action Item 4.2.4: Promote our own best practices.

AMHA aspires to become Summit County's resource for information and advocacy efforts in relation to affordable housing, and the leader of a broad coalition of regional partners. Sharing AMHA success stories and staff member knowledge reinforces the positive changes AMHA can make in the community. Expanding the visibility of affordable housing and concern about housing is a key component of a strong, sustainable region. Engaging the Akron/Summit County community in discussions on housing issues and solutions increases community interest, participation and education with respect to affordable housing. A speaker's bureau allows AMHA to share knowledge with the community. Publication of AMHA and resident success stories and encouraging program participants to advocate for the needs of low-income housing helps to spread positive influence.

Objective 4.2: Expected Outcomes

- Increased leadership presence at the local, state and national levels
- Influencing change through public comments on HUD guidance and notices
- Increased meetings with elected leaders
- Increased community speaking engagements

OBJECTIVE 4.3: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE OUR ABILITY TO BETTER SERVE OUR CLIENT'S NEEDS

Action Item 4.3.1: Establish an inventory of all partnerships across the agency and identify 'owners of the relationship'.

AMHA has multiple partnerships and is involved in community initiatives that benefit AMHA residents. AMHA will create an inventory of all partnerships across the agency to enhance internal and external communications, manage multiple partnerships effectively, hold both partners and AMHA accountable, increase liability and enhance data sharing efforts. AMHA will reevaluate this inventory annually.

Action Item 4.3.2: Evaluate sustainable partnerships that directly relate to AMHA mission and goals.

AMHA has a robust understanding of the needs of the community that it serves, which assists in targeting the strategic partnerships that are most beneficial to AMHA and the community it serves. High-priority community partnerships include relationships that are beneficial to three parties: the partner organization, AMHA and our residents. AMHA has multiple partnerships, but many do not demonstrate consistency or sustainability. Evaluating partnerships for sustainability will assist AMHA in making intentional and strategic decisions about the most beneficial partnerships to positively impact resident success and improve resident quality of life.

Action Item 4.3.3: Strategically pursue a strengthening or deepening of relationships.

AMHA will use current relationships and programs, such as Jobs Plus, Reach Collaborative and Choice Neighborhoods, as a framework to determine best practices to strengthen and deepen partner relationships. AMHA will improve communications, partnership expectations and data sharing to focus collective efforts to influence positive life outcomes. AMHA will continue to provide expertise and assistance to partners on specific boards and committees that align with AMHA's mission and objectives. Key components include recognition and appreciation of AMHA's strategic partners and leveraging AMHA's physical space to foster relationships.

Objective 4.3: Expected Outcomes

- Improved partnership expectations and clearly identified partnership roles
- Focus on data sharing agreements

