



**Stacy L. Spann**  
***Executive Director***  
**March 4, 2020**

## **2020 ANNUAL STATE OF THE AGENCY**

Good afternoon and welcome. For the record, my name is Stacy Spann and I'm the Executive Director of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County. Commissioners – as is custom each year, my Executive Director Report for this month will serve as a "State of the Agency" – a report of where we have been and where we intend to go over the next year.

On that note, I want to begin by recognizing our new Chair, Commissioner Roy Priest; our new Vice Chair, Commissioner Fran Kelleher; and our new Chair Pro Tem, Commissioner Rick Nelson. I eagerly anticipate all we aim to accomplish together under the leadership of this accomplished triumvirate.

Last week, Commissioners Priest and Kelleher were sworn in for their first full terms on the Commission. If you didn't watch their February 11<sup>th</sup> interviews with the County Council, I suggest you take the opportunity to watch the video on the Council's website. When you do, you will see, as the Council did, the depth and breadth of experience and true vision we are gaining by retaining Commissioners Priest and Kelleher for our Board.

I also want to recognize our outgoing Chair, Commissioner Jackie Simon. Your steadfast guidance and commitment to mission have served HOC and our customers well through every issue, every transaction – we thank you and look forward to your continued service on the Board.

And I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to once again congratulate our 2020 Honor Roll and Special Recognition honorees.

Earlier this evening, we celebrated volunteers from The Tacy Foundation, as well as Ms. Anika Yardi and Mr. Brandon McCloud for their outstanding efforts on behalf of the thousands of individuals and families we serve each day. Without their passion and commitment, we simply could not fulfill our mission or support our customers at the level they deserve. For that, we thank you.

### What it Means to be a Houser

Each year, this event prompts me to reexamine what it means to be Houser. As Housers, we focus our work on just three things:

- Getting people housed;
- Keeping people housed;
- And helping people reach their fullest potential.

Helping families achieve long-term success in these areas requires connecting all members of a household to housing as well as a robust selection of services to meet their needs and goals. It means we at HOC must focus not only on **place** – the properties and communities we help build and support – but also the **people** – meeting them where they are on their housing, education, career and personal journeys.

### Community Connected Housing

As Housers, it is our duty to use every tool at our disposal to bridge the gap and connect folks to opportunities that not only foster but ensure equity and inclusion in our community. In doing so, we create what we call **Community Connected Housing** – housing in neighborhoods with strong employment, career advancement, educational and recreational access, that promote positive interaction between neighbors.

Furthermore, Community Connected Housing requires an approach that recognizes both the social and fiscal benefits of creating truly socioeconomically diverse communities. If you've paid attention to national or local politics lately, you've seen affordable housing emerge as a major topic for discussion and legislation.

One of Montgomery County's own – Delegate Vaughn Stewart – has introduced legislation inspired by the Vienna Social Housing Model, closely related to the mixed-income model HOC and Montgomery County have championed for many years now. It's a model that acknowledges the true value of diverse neighborhoods of individuals and families – how strategies around **people** and **place** work in tandem to create the kind of dynamic communities we **all** want to live in.

## How We Address Place

As we all know, **where** we live **matters**. It deeply impacts our growth and development as children and stays with us as we seek to age in place, in communities that keep us connected to healthcare and other essential resources. And in discovering the importance of place, we now know that the old Public Housing model – which isolated communities in pockets of poverty – simply does not work to help families climb the socioeconomic ladder.

Nothing demonstrates that more definitively than our joint ribbon cutting and groundbreaking celebration at Elizabeth Square in the fall. With the progress made at Elizabeth Square, HOC has successfully converted our entire Public Housing portfolio in favor of a more sustainable mixed-income model all while working to continue serving the same families and extending the depth and breadth of our affordable housing reach. Elizabeth Square demonstrates how we as an agency are re-imagining affordable housing while staying true to the value and practice of inclusivity that this County pioneered.

But we're not just breaking ground on new communities, we're ensuring that we invest in the communities we're already in. Completing the Year 15 buy back at Strathmore Court, The Metropolitan, Georgian Court, the Barclay Apartments and Stewartown Homes have allowed us to embark on recapitalization and renovation of these properties – ensuring we reinvest these communities while keeping units affordable for the long term.

Furthermore, the allocation of new Project Based Vouchers helped us serve customers, including many seniors, with deeper subsidies to help them stay in their communities – while a Project Based Voucher competition anticipated for this summer will ensure we create more housing opportunities for Montgomery County residents on the private market.

Finally, we recognize the critical importance of meeting families where they are on the spectrum of housing need. It's why we look beyond rental opportunities toward creating pathways to homeownership for customers who are ready to embark on that journey.

In June 2019, DHCA dedicated \$1 million to Phase I of the Montgomery County Homeownership Assistance Fund administered by HOC. Before the end of July 2019, all funds were expended, providing 44 households with an average secondary loan of \$22,727. Households that received McHAF assistance had incomes ranging from \$45,000 to \$152,303.

The oversubscription led the County to its second commitment of \$1 million in Fiscal Year 2020 – helping to support more than \$4,500,000 worth of first mortgages for families pursuing homeownership in our community.

We're proud to continue this partnership with the County to provide homeownership tools to Montgomery County residents. We know Montgomery County is an exceptional place for families to live, work and grow and downpayment and closing cost assistance helps people take advantage of those opportunities.

At HOC, ***we are Housers*** – but that involves much more than the development of affordable housing. It takes more than tools that address the bricks and mortar to provide families with a pathway out of poverty. It means that when we serve a customer, we serve **the whole customer**, using housing as a platform to address their health, educational, workforce and myriad other needs.

#### **How We Address People**

Any successful approach for solving affordable housing issues also requires strategies for reducing poverty and increasing access to opportunity, focused on whole-family outcomes. Whole-family, or “2Gen” outcomes are at the center of education and housing. Leading research reveals children experience better life outcomes when they relocate to high-opportunity areas. Additionally, children of families who move using housing vouchers generate significantly greater earnings later in life.

Despite this evidence, we cannot solve multi-generational poverty solely by moving families to high-income communities. **Place alone is not a panacea.** Developing and maintaining service connections and programs focused on the comprehensive and interwoven needs of both parents and children is an equally important lever. This 2Gen approach calls for focusing on opportunity creation and addressing needs for both children and adults simultaneously.

In keeping with that principle, we at HOC continue to re-imagine our selection of services to include support for children as well as their parents and guardians. Moreover, we are working to ensure that these services are impactful and measurable. When families move to communities of opportunity, strong service connections to career, educational, and recreational resources are paramount in ensuring they can reach their fullest potential.

Providing families with the highest level of service requires taking a whole-family approach – focusing on creating opportunities for and addressing the needs of both children and parents in their lives together.

This approach recognizes that families come in all different shapes and sizes and that families define themselves and the goals they hope to achieve. It means recognizing and respecting that success looks different for everyone and requires meeting families where they are along that continuum.

HOC honors the diverse experiences of the families we serve by acknowledging that our customers are the experts in their own lives. Adult programming, such as our Family Self-Sufficiency and Fatherhood Initiative programs, center around (a) helping individuals identify goals; (b) creating a plan of action to accomplish those goals; and (c) offering customized supports along the way. These programs maintain elements of a whole-family approach, intentionally focusing on outcomes for both parents and children such as financial literacy, tuition assistance and healthy parenting skills.

As an agency, we are **LEADING** in how we provide customer programming and services that have impact at scale – not because of the individuals we touch, but how that interaction impacts how they show up in their communities and in their families. The community we help create is evident in Family Self Sufficiency participant, [Ms. Woinshet Sallah's story](#).

But providing stable housing and programming for parents **also** allows us to address child well-being. HOC Academy offers after-school tutoring, homework clubs, and a multitude of STEM enrichment opportunities that help kids focus on attaining their own goals. Earlier this afternoon, we honored volunteer Anika Yardi for her work with STEM and robotics programming and you heard how students' outlooks on their education and career paths were transformed from a single afterschool or camp experience.

While housing assistance gets families in the door, it is our ability to provide comprehensive 2Gen programming that puts them on the path to reaching their fullest potential.

As government resources for our work continue to diminish, we will have to work harder and smarter to develop housing and deliver services at a level our customers deserve. If we hope to remain leaders in innovation in the affordable housing and community development space, then we have to be willing to step outside ourselves think creatively about how to serve **more** residents of this county **better**.

As we embark on this new year ahead, we will not rest on our laurels. We will keep our focus on doing what's right. We will continue to provide more services and more convenience for our customers.

We will seek to help more people in our community get on solid ground through our programming and services coordination. And through it all, we will choose to lead and focus on **people**, as well as place.

Thank you for being part of the HOC community. On behalf of the entire staff, we look forward to an incredible year ahead.