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Orange Housing Authority earns high marks for its performance

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has given the Orange Housing Authority its highest marks in recent memory for strong performance.

The Orange Housing Authority scored in the 90th percentile of housing authority's nationally for its complete management performance according to the federal "Public Housing Assessment Score," which evaluates the agency's performance in such categories as physical, financial, capital and overall management.

The assessment evaluates the status of each property supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This measurement is used to underline good practices by each housing authority and draw attention to inefficiencies.

Since 1998, all public housing authorities across the nation are required to participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's annual assessment.

In 2005, the Orange Housing Authority scored as low as 49 for its overall management operations, putting the agency in jeopardy of losing federal and state resources. In the latest assessment, the Orange Housing Authority scored an impressive 92, higher than most other housing authorities in the state and nation. This is the second year

in a row the Housing Authority has been ranked as a "High Performer."

During Walter McNeil's leadership, as executive director, the Orange Housing Authority has been able to responsibly develop safe and decent affordable housing for its residents, while ensuring the responsible use of its resources.

"(The Orange Housing Authority) has proven over time to be a trusting steward of state and federal money for the community," McNeil said. "We are extremely proud of our progress, to date. Our most recent federal score underlines the quality work we are doing here."

The Orange Housing Authority and the Orange Housing Development Corporation have worked collaboratively to revive the East Ward's community, a neighborhood once ridden by crime and violence. Their success is evident throughout Oakwood Avenue, Parrow Street and North Parrow.

One prime example is the redevelopment of the Dr. Walter G. Alexander Court Public Housing Development. In 2010, the Orange Housing Authority was awarded tax credits and financing from the New Jersey Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency with a total value of

\$23.3 million to revitalize the buildings.

The redevelopment resulted in a \$32 million total investment for the first two phases of the project, comprising 114 residential units, 48 affordable housing units for seniors and 66 affordable housing family units.

In 2013, the New Jersey Housing Mortgage and Finance Agency awarded the Orange Housing Authority another \$7.4 million in tax credits to complete the redevelopment with an additional 42 units and a 4,500-square-foot community room.

"Because of the hard work of many, hundreds of families now have a safer and more nurturing place to raise their children in Orange," said Coram Rimes, Jr., chairman of the Orange Housing Authority Board of Commissioners. "We are certainly pleased with our latest HUD score, but not satisfied. More work is needed as we march toward becoming the top housing authority in the nation."

The Orange Housing Authority offers 250 residences, 642 "Section 8" vouchers, 114 tax credit units and is constructing 42 more. The public agency is committed to improving the community by buying properties, improving their worth and stabilizing streets and neighborhoods.

