

BUSINESS AS (UN)USUAL

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



VICTORIA PARK
COMMUNITY HOMES



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Those of you who would consider yourselves avid followers of Victoria Park Community Homes Inc., and its affiliates (collectively, “Victoria Park” or the “Organization”) over the past few years, would have a deep appreciation for the size of the shoes I’ve had to fill in replacing Steve Holman as Chair of the Board this past year. Steve not only dedicated six years to Victoria Park as one of its Board Members, but served as Chair through three of those years

– and was ever an ardent supporter of the Organization, its management team and staff, and the cause to which they’ve committed themselves.

2020 was not without its challenges – but with them came its fair share of triumphs. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 marked the expansion of Victoria Park’s service platform to other affordable housing providers, the continued roll-out of key capital and maintenance projects, the near completion of the ambitious 150 Bronte Street building project with leasing scheduled to start in 2021, and an exciting undertaking to establish – together with Hamilton East Kiwanis Non-Profit Homes Inc. – the Caledon Community Collaborative, which plans to add 300+ affordable new homes to

the greater Hamilton area. With regards to COVID-19, the impact to Victoria Park reached far beyond executing on a work-from-home strategy; the Victoria Park management team tirelessly worked to ensure that all of our buildings – many of which, would be considered dense – were continuously clean and safe for both Victoria Park’s tenants and its employees. Much of Victoria Park’s 2020 success is owed to its exemplary management team, lead by Lori-Anne Gagne, Victoria Park’s Chief Executive Officer – who, I’d like to add, was the proud recipient of the 2020 Sybil Frenette Outstanding Leadership Award, presented by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association.

In reflecting on 2020, I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow board and committee members for the time they’ve poured into numerous meetings this past year – much of it likely came with some difficulty, as they themselves had to adapt to the ‘new normal’ brought on by COVID-19, whilst navigating the blurring lines between time scheduled for their primary occupations, their families, and the time that they voluntarily committed to Victoria Park. Thank you.

As housing scarcity – and more specifically, affordable housing scarcity – becomes an even greater national concern, the mandates of organizations like Victoria Park need to be continuously evaluated; and as we near the end of one long-term strategic plan, and embark on crafting a new one, I

think every board member, committee member, employee and supporter of Victoria Park can find pride in the fact that Victoria Park not only provides affordable housing, but has actively participated in growing affordable housing stock in its communities. Again, this praise truly belongs to the exemplary staff and management of Victoria Park.

To our Service Managers and stakeholders, as much of Victoria Park’s success hinges on your support, the Organization’s 2020 accomplishments truly started with you. As always, Victoria Park is thankful for your ongoing partnership, and for effectively supplying to the Organization the tools for growth; Victoria Park looks forward to productively and collaboratively working with you in 2021 and beyond.

It has been an honour to serve as Chair through 2020 – a year of remarkable change and growth – and I can’t wait for you to turn the page, and read on about Victoria Park’s 2020 accomplishments.

Krish Vadivale
Chair & President

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

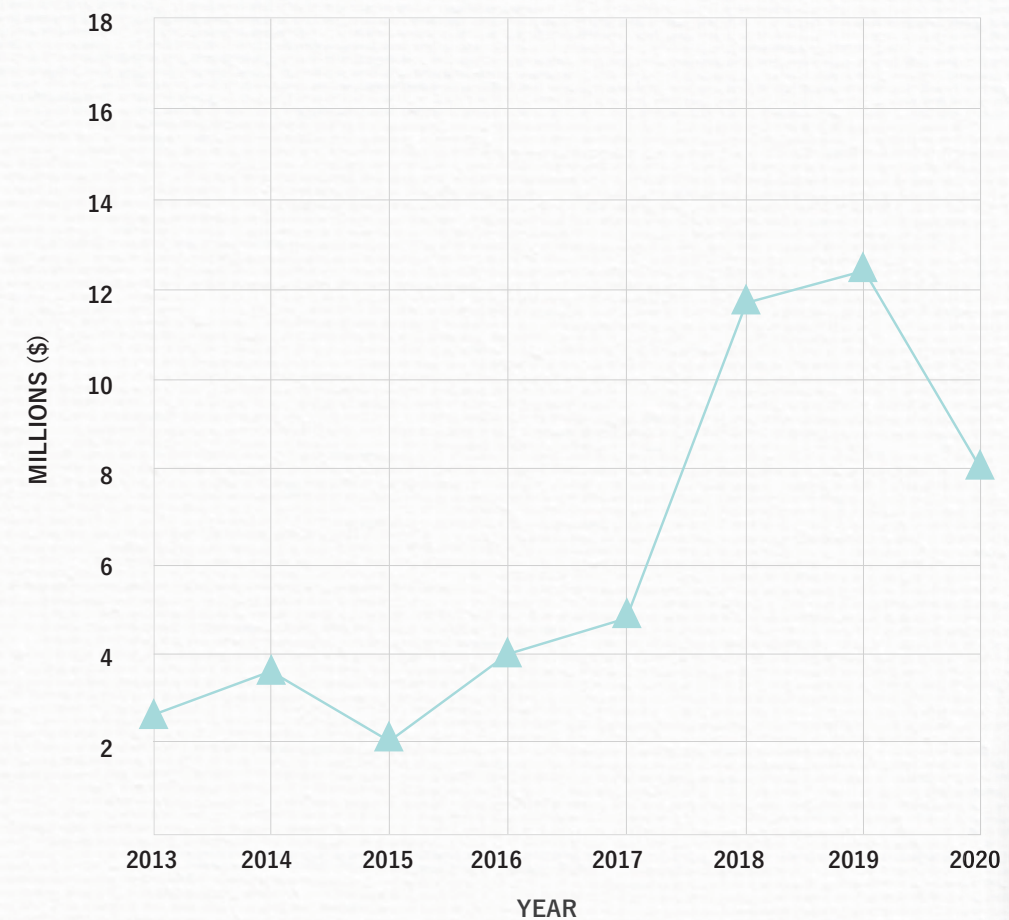
Well what a year 2020 turned out to be! You will hear a little bit later on how Victoria Park handled business as “un”usual due to the pandemic but I’d like to focus on our core services outside of COVID-19.

I consider 2020 a wrap-up year in many ways. It was the last year in our ambitious 3-year, people-centred strategic plan where we aligned our practices with the people we serve. It was also the final year of our most aggressive, 3-year capital repair plan where we were catching up on the substantial backlog of repairs and renovations that had accumulated due to funding constraints. Both of these plans were forward-thinking and ambitious and we knew they would challenge our team but as always, the Victoria Park Board of Directors and staffing team pulled together to get it done. Let’s look at some specific accomplishments under each core pillar of service.

CAPITAL ASSETS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Under the leadership of our P. Eng and Manager of Capital Assets and Infrastructure, Rizwan Zaeem, Victoria Park was incredibly busy during 2020 and the years just prior completing numerous large-scale rehabilitation projects at a number of our property locations. The Capital Assets teams prides themselves on restoring aging buildings and properties so residents have pride and comfort in their homes. These capital projects have a much larger impact on the broader community in that we support local trades and businesses that do the work. In other words, over the past 3 years we have contributed over \$30 million into our local economies.

CAPITAL SPENDING (2013-2020)



RESIDENT & PROPERTY SERVICES

As if dealing with a world-wide pandemic wasn't enough for this team to concentrate on, 2020 was also the year that many Service Managers started to implement their changes to the Housing Services Act. The changes specifically dealt with the marketing of units and number of offers made to someone on the centralized waiting list as well as changes to how rent geared-to-income calculations would be implemented. Under the leadership of our Chief Operating Officer, Charlene Thornhill, our RPS team had to make many adjustments to our processes and procedures and be flexible enough to adapt to each Service Manager's unique roll-out. Their professionalism during these changes has been exemplary.

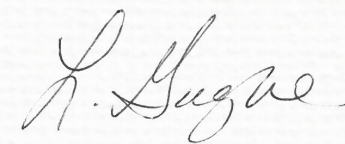
FINANCE

One of the most unique aspects of Victoria Park Community Homes is our commitment to re-invest every possible dollar back into affordable housing and that applies to our sister corporations as well. We re-invest into our Replacement Reserves so that we can adequately maintain the structures, we re-invest into development so we can add additional affordable housing stock and we re-invest in our residents providing an internal subsidy over and above government subsidies while maintain a place for them to call home. With our Chief Financial Officer, Veronica Fowler's oversight, Victoria Park is always looking to a future of sustainability, growth and reinvestment into our communities.

CORPORATE & LEGAL

I opened my message to you by indicating that 2020 was the third year of our strategic plan. One of our key accomplishments in 2020 was the publication of our Client Service Standards to confirm our commitment of providing the highest level of customer service and to set out what each and every stakeholder can expect from Victoria Park. Another great addition to our tool box was the roll-out of our Quality Control Checklist. This tool is meant to be an annual report card providing a comfort level to all our Boards of Directors that your properties and people are being treated well.

As always, I sincerely thank the Board of Directors for their guidance and never-ending support and to the staffing team at Victoria Park who excel each and every day on our shared journey. In addition, we thank our government partners who recognize the uniqueness of Victoria Park and support our vision for the future.



Lori-Anne Gagne
Chief Executive Officer



Business As (Un)usual

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live, we work, and how we interact with one another across the world. The everchanging dynamics of the situation forces every company and organization in the world, including Victoria Park Community Homes, to be quick on their feet and adapt to the new challenges overnight.

OUR PRIORITIES

From the beginning of the pandemic we established a COVID-Taskforce that met twice a week tackling the challenges we face as an employer to our staff, and as a property manager that provides a home to our residents. “Our focus was to keep everyone safe including our staff, our residents that live in our buildings, and our contractors. Health and safety is a main focus for us”, said Tracey Csordas, the Chair of the COVID-Taskforce.

“At the beginning of the pandemic, all our maintenance and capital work was put on-hold. When the Provincial government issued the first lockdown, we immediately reduced the number of office staff, and pulled-back on all unit inspections, site inspections, and non-essential maintenance. Within a day we had our office down to five people.” We refocused our staff’s efforts so that no one would be laid off and this is something we are very proud to have achieved.

HEALTH & SAFETY OF OUR RESIDENTS

Health and safety of our residents has always been important to us even before the pandemic. To further ensure their well-being, we stepped up our cleaning schedule on high-touch surfaces, added sanitizing stations, reduced our unit-entry maintenance to essential services only, and communicated and educated our residents by posting signs and providing links to online resources on our website.

“With safety measures, we were one of the first providers to open up our reception at the head office. We made use of technologies such as tablets and 2-way audio doorbell devices for our front office so residents that did need to speak to us in person could do so safely,” said Petr Bakus, part of the COVID-Taskforce. “They would ring the door bell, look through the protective plaque glass, and communicate with our receptionist in a safe and protected area.”

Communications is key to ensuring the health and safety of our residents. “We

immediately set up a COVID-19 News & Resource section on our website, providing resources on health protocols, government guidelines and response framework, VPCH pandemic updates, and income support resources like CERB (Canada Emergency Response Benefit)”.

With everyone being asked to stay home for an extended period of time, and with concerns of the mental well-being of residents that live alone; our management team and our staff began initiating wellness calls to our residents.

One of our residents Susan said, “We had a delightful call from Patti this morning to check how we were doing during COVID. So lovely to hear from her! I was quite touched by your caring and investment in our health and how we are doing during this period of time. Thank you”.

Our personal reach-out through the wellness calls was a demonstration of our caring and was appreciated by those we spoke to during this time.

HEALTH & SAFETY OF OUR STAFF

“One of the biggest challenges when the flags were raised back in March was convincing everyone this was happening and that this was real,” recalls Charlene Thornhill, Chief Operating Officer and member of the COVID-Taskforce. “Sending everybody home was somewhat, for many, scary and sad. However, our staff embraced it and our managers began deciding what are the core essential duties required for continual operation of the organization and what work can be done remotely.”

Implementing physical distancing and safety measures within our offices was critical. We immediately closed all side entry doors, created barriers between desks, implemented contactless service at the front reception, and encouraged all on-site offices with no capacity for social distancing to remain closed.

We updated our unit-entry policy, workplace safety procedures and pandemic response plan. We established back-up roles and cross-training to prevent department outbreaks that might put a hold on operations across the organization and stopped all non-essential maintenance work.

Putting non-essential maintenance work on-hold was at first challenging for some of our staff. They take pride in their work and are accustomed to having all their maintenance work done. “Some of our maintenance staff wanted to complete other work while performing essential maintenance, but the Taskforce had to push back due to safety concerns. We made sure our staff understood that this is not a performance issue, but a health and safety issue”, said Tracey.

SHARING OUR LESSONS LEARNED

During the pandemic we were proactive in how we continued our operations safely. We established and revisited policies, procedures and maintenance guidelines.

Housing providers in other regions reached out to us for the policies and procedures we established, and Victoria Park was asked to present our unit entry policy and share what we’d learned and how we were handling the situation. We were commended on that.

“In non-profit housing, we’re always resilient and we don’t bail in any crisis, this pandemic included. We learned that we have exceptionally strong staff, that form a really good team here at Victoria Park; pulling together when faced with any challenge. We did really well with what we were given. We stayed steps ahead; focused on

COVID-19 challenges, the wellness of our staff and contractors, and the well-being of our residents.”

We’re in a fast-changing environment right now. What was good for COVID-protocols yesterday may not be suitable for today, and we’re all learning and adapting together to this new norm.

As an organization providing homes to families and as an employer providing jobs and careers for our staff, we’re proud of how we handled the pandemic in 2020. We’re confident that we will continue to provide a safe workplace and home for our community in 2021.

“IN NON-PROFIT HOUSING, WE’RE ALWAYS RESILIENT AND WE DON’T BAIL IN ANY CRISIS, THIS PANDEMIC INCLUDED.”





PATTI THOMAS

“IT’S NOT JUST A JOB PUTTING PEOPLE INTO APARTMENTS AND NEVER SEEING THEM AGAIN.”

After three decades placing residents into Victoria Park ‘s homes, everyone knows Patti. “The tenants know me, because I put around 95% of the people who live here now into The Village,” says Patti Thomas, our Senior Rental Coordinator. The Village, formerly called Queen’s Terrace, is VPCH’s high rise apartment building in downtown Hamilton housing 437 families.

Patti started her Victoria Park career as an Assistant Rental Coordinator on December 12, 1990. Throughout the past 30 years, not only did she help tenants move in, her kids grew up in the community in the Village as well. “Both my daughter and her kids, my son, his girlfriend and their first-born

son lived here too. My daughter lived here for around 10-12 years and my son lived here for 3-4 years. My kids know everybody.”

Patti also has a special bond with the people living here. “It’s not just a job putting people into the apartments and never seeing them again. I’ve been invited for lunch and I’ve had meals with families. I know the kids here. When they’re walking to Hess Street School, I get hugs from them all the time.” Hugs, and lots of them are something Patti shares often, “I do have some tenants out there that always hug, and we see each other on the street, we hug! That’s just what I’m about and what they’re about. That’s the kind of relationship with people I have here.”

“I remember when I first started, I thought it was great! I mean the first person I met was Betty who was the cleaning lady, and she also lived in the building. The atmosphere, and everyone working here is welcoming and everyone gets along” Patti recalls. “I still remember we were still using typewriters, and carbon copies!”

Victoria Park was a smaller non-profit in the 90’s and Patti recalls what it was like. “We started to build new properties, there were probably around six of them, maybe around 1992. Victoria Park wasn’t as big as it is right now. We grew probably a little bit in the 90’s to add more properties on by more developments, but we

didn’t go outside the box as much as we are doing now. The past 6-7 years the company has grown a lot, in a good way.”

“THE PEOPLE I WORK WITH, THE RESIDENTS I AM WITH, THAT MAKES THIS PLACE.”

To work for the same organization for 30 years, there must be something right about the workplace, and for Patti, it is the people. “The people I work with, the residents that I am with, that makes this place. I am happy with my job, I feel safe here, why would I go somewhere else?”

For the next 45 years at Victoria park, Patti hopes to see “a lot more building, because there’s a lot of people who don’t have homes to live in. Access to housing and the waiting list is over 6000 applicants. We need more Rent-Geared-to-Income built, probably more RGI than market but we should always have a blend of everything.”

For Patti herself, “I just want to be with my family, take care of them, help them; the grandchildren especially. GG is gonna be here.”

Patti plans to retire in 2023, but even then, she wants to continue as part-time, or volunteer at the Circle of Friends, the English as a Secondary Language Program just down the hall at 155 Queen Street in Hamilton.

CHARLENE THORNHILL

“I GREW UP HERE, MY KIDS GREW UP HERE WITH ME. IT’S JUST ALWAYS BEEN A PART OF MY LIFE.”

“Social housing was very new to me, and I didn’t know anything about it.” Our Chief Operating Officer Charlene Thornhill recalls her first day working at Victoria Park Community Homes. “Did you know that Patti and I started in the same year in 1990?” Charlene asked, referring to Patti Thomas, who started at the company in the same year.

From a little town with 6000 total population called Wainfleet, Ontario, Charlene started her first career in affordable housing in June 1990 as Property Manager Support/Reception. “I still have my original hire letter. It was an entry admin position.”

“I still remember we were using this archaic system called Filbitron, and all the management software was on there. I remember them very well. The arrears report would be printed once a week, printed on papers with those little holes on the side where you have to rip them off. That’s how we used to track arrears.” Charlene is laughing as she recalls “those days”. “Times have changed, but we’ve

done well with change” she explains. “We were heavy into development at that time and shortly after I started, we took over two of our buildings 831 Queenston and 1 Hamilton Street. I remembered we had a lot of property openings and a lot of grand openings and ground breaking ceremonies.”

However, there are things that have never changed. “When I first started it was great with a lot of fun good people in the office. Everyone just gets along very well. And throughout the years it has been the same - great people, good consistent people, or else I would have left!?”

In her memory lane, there were funny moments. “Y2K was a big deal in 1999. That was when we got rid of the Filbitron and moved to Yardi. I still remember because the management software was going to explode! When you think back, that was funny and insane.”

But there are moments that were hard to swallow, especially projects that are close to heart. “I remember there was one time when we did lose a property contract that I was pretty attached to; that one really hurt. That was a sad moment for sure.”

“This is a company that I’ve grown up with, I had my family grow up with. In the 2000’s when I had my kids, I remember a lot of the times on the weekends I would pack up the kids and go down to the office to try and get some work done. The kids would

“TIMES HAVE CHANGED, BUT WE’VE DONE WELL WITH CHANGE.”

run around, draw pictures, and leave them on everybody’s desk.” Victoria Park has been a big part of her life. “I grew up here, my kids grew up here with me. It’s just always been a part of my life.”

In 2023, Charlene plans to retire together with Patti. But like Patti, she doesn’t want to fully leave Victoria Park. “I’ll miss the people the most; the tenants and the staff. Both Patti and I are fighting over becoming reception relief when we retire. When the reception calls in sick, or books a vacation, we can come in and cover the reception!” Charlene jokes, or is she?

Charlene envisions the company will continue to grow in the right direction. “Lori-Anne (our Chief Executive Officer) will take VPCH and run with it. We will be bigger and stronger. Her ideas are endless. There’s going to be growth and she will lead the ship.”

Personally, she has great hopes for the future of Victoria Park. “I hope in the next 45 years, we will continue

to have that good name to build on. To build on what we have and continue to have a good reputation.” She adds, “I really like our strategic plan right now, which is to become the employer of choice, the property management company of choice, the housing provider of choice; that we’re the provider the tenants are picking, the employer that people are looking for jobs and that they want to work for us. It is all about the people.”



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, INSIGHT, AND EXPERTISE IN SERVING ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT VICTORIA PARK COMMUNITY HOMES.

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Michael Hackl *Vice Chair*

Lisa DuPelle *Secretary*

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Marsha Forth

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Laurie & Todd Coles
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Petr Bakus
Vincenza Wall

10 YEARS

Ewa Arnister

15 YEARS

Antonia David-Yap
Gail and Brian Stadnicki

30 YEARS

Charlene Thornhill
Patti Thomas

35 YEARS

Gerry & Margie Couture

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Benjamin Smith
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Joanne McIntosh

Leslie-Ann Wilson
Lyla McNeil Rogers
Mark Jackson
Sara Lange
Syed Asghar
Tracey Csordas

FAREWELL

Phil & Karen Deveau

AUDITOR'S SUMMARIZED FINANCIAL STATEMENT

See the Summarized Financial Statement on our
website at vpch.com/aboutus/annualreports

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