

# PRESS RELEASE



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## Housing Authority of Baltimore City Finishes 2021 with Perkins Somerset Oldtown Development Plan Blossoming

*The first new building opened this year with financing already approved for several more*

**(BALTIMORE | December 29, 2021)** – The Housing Authority of Baltimore City’s (HABC) rebuild of the Perkins Somerset Oldtown (PSO) community in East Baltimore moved into full swing in 2021 with the first of many new apartment buildings opening, financing secured for five more phases, and demolition completed on the first section of the historic Perkins Homes.

The opening of 1234 McElderry Street in September on the site of the former Somerset Homes marked the culmination of years of planning and marked the first 104 apartments in the plan. Financial closings for the next two phases on the Somerset property also took place recently, setting the stage for another 264 apartments and a rebuilding of the street grid. The restoration of the network will allow McElderry and Jefferson Streets to run through the neighborhood, connecting the Johns Hopkins Hospital campus to the east and Oldtown to the west.

Speaking of Oldtown, HABC has completed the financial closing for the first phase in the redevelopment of that community. The plan will lead to the reestablishment of the 400 block of Gay Street as an easily accessible commercial center for pedestrians and include 63 mixed-income apartments. The plan also includes a small business and entrepreneur incubator hub.

“After all the planning leading up to our \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods Initiative grant from HUD three years ago, it is so gratifying to see buildings being completed and the work moving forward,” said HABC president and CEO Janet Abrahams. “We knew from the outset PSO would dramatically affect the lives of hundreds of families, not just with new homes but community amenities like parks, rec centers, and a school that make up this plan. Even before all that happens, sharing the joy of the new residents at 1234 McElderry at the grand opening reminded us of why we and the City of Baltimore feel so committed to delivering what we promised.”

One of those new residents is Sadie Wragg, who had lived at the antiquated Perkins Homes for 14 years before transferring to her new home.

“It’s very exciting for me to move into a new property that they have built,” said Wragg, who works in security. “My new unit is very beautiful, and I’m blessed. I want to thank HABC for the process of building a new community for people like me in need of housing. It has been a journey. I was on the waiting list for public housing for five years, but I have patience. I encourage anyone who’s on the waiting list to be patient. Your turn will come.”

Housing Authority of Baltimore City | 417 East Fayette Street, Baltimore, MD 21202

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Unfortunately, the demand for affordable housing in Baltimore far outweighs supply, but the work goes on to develop as many opportunities as possible. In 2021, HABC completed the Hollander Ridge development, 94 individual homes for families scattered throughout the city. Through partnerships with various developers HABC was able to preserve nearly 300 affordable units through the Rental Assistant Demonstration conversion.

HABC's Housing Choice Voucher Program helped more than 1,000 new households move into homes in 2021. Overall, the program, in which families pay 30% of their income toward rent, ended the year with 18,177 households being supported. As the year neared its close, HABC was working with the City on issuing 278 Emergency Housing Vouchers to help homeless and other vulnerable populations find and lease places to live.

Once again, HABC dealt with COVID-19 this year in an assertive way, joining with area healthcare providers to operate testing and vaccination clinics at our properties. The agency also participated in a program with the Maryland Department of the Environment & the Baltimore City Health Department that evaluates the wastewater at HABC sites to detect elevated COVID levels, using that information to test residents at sites where levels are higher than normal. This encouraged a coordinated response to set up immediate testing and some cases additional vaccine clinics at our properties. In addition, HABC in August became the first government-related agency in Baltimore to require employees to be vaccinated. The mandate proved effective, with more than 90% of HABC employees vaccinated. The remainder had either medical or religious exemptions or left the agency.

"Like everyone, we would like to see the end of the pandemic, but we will continue to work through it without disrupting our plans or progress," Abrahams said. "We are extremely excited about 2022 as we watch the rest of Perkins come down and the beat of construction go on. I am grateful to our many development, social services, and job training partners. We also appreciate our strong relationship with Baltimore's Department of Housing and Community Development and the support of Mayor Brandon Scott and his administration."

### **About HABC**

HABC is the fifth largest public housing authority in the U.S., providing quality affordable housing for more than 23,000 households. The agency creates diverse and vibrant communities, provides opportunities for self-sufficiency, and builds pathways for strong partnerships. #bmoreHABC

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