75th Annual All-America City Award
Denver, Colorado
June 7–9, 2024

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June 7, 2024

All-America City Award
Hilton Denver City Center
1702 California St.
Denver, CO 80202

Greetings:

As the Mayor of the City and County of Denver, it's my pleasure to welcome the 2024 All-America City Award event participants to the Mile-High City. The City of Denver is honored to serve as the host city for the 75th anniversary of the National Civic League's All-America City Award, the nation's most prestigious community-wide designation.

This year, the award is spotlighting communities that are finding innovative ways to equitably engage community members in activities that strengthen local democracy. With this focus, the National Civic League hopes to learn more about the impactful efforts of American communities in fortifying democracy during these critical times.

By recognizing inspiring examples of civic engagement and cross-sector collaboration, the All-America City Award reminds us of the potential within every community to tackle tough issues and create real change. I congratulate each of the participants for being finalists for this prestigious designation and for contributing to a community that has demonstrated collaboration, innovation, engagement, inclusion, equity, and impact. We urge you to take full advantage of this time in Denver to tell your story, bond with your community's participants, and learn from your fellow finalists.

On behalf of the City and County of Denver, please accept my gratitude for your dedication to bringing your entire community's unique voices to the table. I wish all of you a successful and productive event!

Sincerely,

Mike Johnston
Mayor

COLORADO
Governor Jared Polis

June 7, 2024

Greetings!

On behalf of the State of Colorado, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 75th anniversary of the National Civic League's All-America City Award.

The National Civic League's All-America City Award celebrates examples of American civic innovation by inviting communities from across the country to apply for recognition based on the strength of their civic capital - the formal and informal relationships, networks, and capacities that enable communities to solve problems and thrive. Each year, over 500 people from 20 finalist communities share how their communities are working together to tackle challenges and create real change.

I commend each of you for your commitment to collaborative problem-solving and thank you for your dedication to improving your communities. Democracy is strengthened when local actions and innovations intentionally involve residents in community decision-making.

Once again, Colorado is privileged to host civic leaders from towns, cities, and counties across our great nation. We are confident the 2024 All-America City Award Event will be a transformative experience that will inspire you with new ideas and equip you with new tools as you head back home. You have my best wishes for an enjoyable and celebratory experience.

Sincerely,

Jared Polis
Governor

Tailored Community Solutions

Better Public Meetings

Communities across the United States are challenged by making public meetings more civil, deliberative and productive. The Center will help local institutions gauge their civic infrastructure, implement better engagement practices in public meetings and hearings, measure the progress of these efforts through an Engagement Scorecard and Civility Index. This option includes a civic infrastructure scan and guidance on participant recruitment, digital engagement around meetings, and new formats for the meetings.

Civic Infrastructure Scan

The Scan examines the strengths and gaps in the support structure for local democracy, including the recent history of engagement, skills and capacities present in the community, the state of local online and in-person networks. Each scan consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews with key local leaders, followed by media and social media analysis, desk research, and recommendations on overcoming weaknesses and capitalizing on civic assets.

Charter Revision Guidance

Our **Basic Level Guidance** provides a comprehensive assessment of the current charter, reviews state open meetings laws, and conducts interviews with stakeholders both inside and outside of government. Recommendations are then crafted based on these findings.

For a more involved approach, our **Premier Level Guidance** encompasses all elements of the basic package, and goes a step further by incorporating extensive community visits, substantive public engagement for charter "visioning," and the flexibility to add extra services tailored to the unique needs and interests of your community. For instance, you can opt for a Government Finance Officers Association (GFoA) review to enhance the financial management aspects of the charter.

Data Collection and Evaluation

The League can help with administering processes to collect and evaluate data in multiple ways. This can include qualitative and quantitative analysis, surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews, a pre- and post- Civic Infrastructure Scan and assessment, as well as outcomes analysis.

Engagement and Collaboration Improvement

We can provide on-the-ground assistance to help communities renovate their civic infrastructure, including the work described above, plus strategies for:

- Digital engagement
- Advancing equity and measuring progress
- Engaging youth and older adults
- Assisting neighborhoods and local online networks to build community, involve more people, and connect with the government
- Skill-building for staff, elected officials, and a diversity of community leaders
- Crafting and implementing strategic plans

Email **democracyinnovation@ncl.org** to discuss your local challenges and find the right solution for your community.

2024 All-America City Finalists

in alphabetical order by city/county/region

Boulder, Colorado

Danville, Virginia

Edinburg, Texas

Henderson, Kentucky

High Point, North Carolina

Jacksonville, North Carolina

La Marque, Texas

Lakewood, Colorado

Lexington, Kentucky

Monroe County, Indiana

Monrovia, California

New Orleans, Louisiana

Newport News, Virginia

Oakland, California

Punta Gorda, Florida

Roanoke, Virginia

Saginaw, Texas

Seattle, Washington

Watkinsville, Georgia

Wilton Manors, Florida

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Event Agenda

75th All-America City Award Event
Strengthening Democracy through Local Action and Innovation

Hilton Denver City Center
1701 California Street, Denver, CO 80202
June 7-9, 2024

Thursday, June 6, 2024

6:00pm – 8:00pm **Registration** *Lower Level 2*

Friday, June 7, 2024

7:30am – 4:00pm **Registration and Help Desk** *Lower Level 2*

7:15am – 7:45am **Finalist Delegation "Captain" Briefing** *Mattie Silks*
Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day's agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League's partners.

8:00am – 4:15pm **Finalist Presentation Rehearsals** *Colorado Ballroom*

11:00am – 12:30pm **Finalist Roundtable:** *Denver Ballroom*
Finding Practical Solutions to Shared Challenges
Communities nationwide face diverse challenges, but also possess a wealth of community-based resources to address them. In this interactive workshop, attendees will engage in facilitated conversations and brainstorm solutions to shared concerns. Rotating between tables participants will explore topics such as youth engagement, voting and elections, civic education, creating belonging amidst political divisions, tension and violence at public meetings, economic vitality, public safety, climate resilience, among others.

12:30pm – 2:00pm **Lunch on your Own**

2:00pm – 3:00pm **Equity at the Ballot Box: Empowering Every Voice** *Colorado A-B*
Join us for an interactive panel discussion about empowering atypical voters through innovative tech tools and community-led approaches. In this session, we'll explore how to support infrequent and underrepresented voters by centering their needs and experiences in engagement efforts. ActiVote will uncover common misconceptions and pitfalls in voter education, highlighting key takeaways to avoid inadvertently disenfranchising voters. The Denver Foundation will discuss their efforts to invest in and build the capacity of trusted community organizations working to register and mobilize new and low-turnout voters from historically underrepresented communities.

3:15pm – 4:15pm	**How Can AI Strengthen Your Community Engagement?**	*Colorado A-B*

We know that Artificial Intelligence poses all kinds of challenges – but what are the positives? What are some ways in which you can use AI-powered tools to gather and use data, deal with mis/disinformation, find allies and resources, and understand what residents want? This session will explain, for the not-necessarily-technologically-savvy person, some of the basics about how AI works and how it is being used. The session will cover the categories of tools that are available to local civic leaders, what they can and can't do, and how you might use them as part of an overall strategy.

4:15pm – 4:55pm	**Civic Action Fair Setup**	*Denver Ballroom*

Communities are invited to bring their booth materials from storage and set up in the Denver Ballroom for the Civic Action Fair. Each community will be assigned a designated table positioned along the perimeter of the room.

5:00pm – 6:00pm	**All-America City Opening Ceremony**	*Colorado Ballroom*

Join us as we kick off the 75th annual All-America City Award Event. Mayor Mike Johnston will take the stage to speak to the vital role of local action in fortifying democracy. Emcee Derek Okubo will join us for an electrifying celebration of this year's finalists. Don't miss out—come cheer on your community as we start the weekend in style with a special presentation from this year's Hall of Fame Inductee.

6:00pm – 7:30pm	**AAC Civic Action Fair and Anniversary Reception**	*Denver Ballroom*

Tour exhibits of this year's finalist communities, learning about their history, culture, and more. Bring local items to swap! We'll also be celebrating the 75th anniversary of the All-America City Award!

Saturday, June 8, 2024

8:15am – 8:45am	**Finalist Delegation "Captain" Briefing**	*Mattie Silks*

Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day's agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League's partners.

8:00am – 4:00pm	**Registration and Help Desk**	*Lower Level 2*

Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day's agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League's partners.

9:00am – 10:25am	**Jury Presentations (Block 1)**	*Colorado Ballroom*

Boulder, CO; Danville, VA; Edinburg, TX

10:35am – 11:35am	**An Interactive Demo of the Theatrical Production, City Council Meeting**	*Colorado Ballroom*

How can tools from live theater lead us toward better public meetings and more creative organizing? How do we perform power, and who gets to play which roles? A participatory theater work followed by a facilitated discussion, City Council Meeting draws on a five-city performance, the accompanying book The City We Make Together and a new curriculum called School for Participation, created by Aaron Landsman and Ebony Noelle Golden.

11:45am – 12:55pm	**Jury Presentations (Block 2)**	*Colorado Ballroom*
	Henderson, KY; High Point, NC; Jacksonville, NC	
1:00pm – 2:00pm	**Lunch on Your Own**	
2:05pm – 5:05pm	**Jury Presentations (Blocks 3 & 4)**	*Colorado Ballroom*
	La Marque, TX; Lakewood, CO; Lexington, KY; Monroe County, IN Monrovia, CA; New Orleans, LA, Newport News, VA	
5:30pm – 7:00pm	**An All-America Night of Entertainment and Celebration**	

5:30pm – 7:00pm **An All-America Night of Entertainment and Celebration**
Join a conversation about the state of democracy with city leaders and help us celebrate this year's recipient of the prestigious All-America Leader Award. Following these highlights, immerse yourself in the Cultural Entertainment Showcase, where talented individuals and groups from finalist communities will dazzle the audience.

Sunday, June 9, 2024

8:00am – 8:30am **Finalist Delegation "Captain" Briefing** *Mattie Silks*
Daily in-person briefings are an opportunity to go over the day's agenda and for delegation captains to learn about collaboration opportunities with the League's partners.

9:00am – 12:00pm **Jury Presentations (Blocks 5 & 6)** *Colorado Ballroom*
Oakland, CA; Punta Gorda, FL, Roanoke, VA
Saginaw, TX; Seattle, WA; Watkinsville, GA; Wilton Manors, FL

12:00pm – 1:30pm **Lunch on Your Own**

1:30pm – 3:30pm **Festival of Ideas**
During the jury's deliberation period, finalists will engage in an informative exchange with their peers. Each community will showcase one of their projects, offering an invaluable opportunity to explore other finalist initiatives and gain insights on implementing these innovative ideas in your own community.

Group 1: (Denver 1-2)	**Group 2:** (Colorado C-D)	**Group 3:** (Colorado A-B)	**Group 4:** (Denver 4)	**Group 5:** (Denver 3)
Seattle, WA	Newport News, VA	High Point, NC	Danville, VA	Punta Gorda, FL
Oakland, CA	Lakewood, CO	Roanoke, VA	Monrovia, CA	La Marque, TX
New Orleans, LA	Monroe County, IN	Edinburg, TX	Henderson, KY	Wilton Manors, FL
Lexington, KY	Boulder, CO	Jacksonville, NC	Saginaw, TX	Watkinsville, GA

3:45pm – 4:45pm **Elected and Appointed Officials Dialogue** *Denver 5-6*
Calling all elected and appointed municipal officials! Join us for an interactive session aimed at fostering idea exchange and problem-solving for local challenges.

5:30pm – 6:30pm **Pre-Awards Reception (light hors d'oeuvres)** *Denver Ballroom*

6:30pm – 8:00pm **Awards Ceremony** *Colorado Ballroom*
Don't miss the big reveal! The ten 2024 All-America Cities/Counties will be named, along with the winners of the Youth Award, Social Media Award, and Civics Quiz. Don't miss this thrilling announcement! Featuring remarks from Mayor Malik Evans of Rochester, NY.

8:00pm – 9:30pm **Awards Celebration and Music! (light hors d'oeuvres)** *Denver Ballroom*
Join us for the closing reception featuring a lively DJ and dancing! Let loose and make the most of your final evening at AAC—everyone's invited!

Thank You!

Jury Members

- Wendy Willis (Jury Foreperson), Executive Director, Kitchen Table Democracy
- Simeon Banister, President & CEO, Rochester Community Foundation
- Michelle Barsa, Principal, Building Cultures of Belonging, Omidyar Network
- T.C. Broadnax, City Manager, City of Austin, TX
- Kristen Cambell, Chief Executive Officer, Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement
- Tracy Colunga, Civic Engagement Director, Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University
- Mason Evans, Colorado Youth Advisory Council Member
- Kyle H. Hybl, President, Chief Executive Officer, and Trustee, El Pomar Foundation
- Harry Nathan Gottlieb, Founder, UnifyAmerica
- Siddharth Nareddy, Colorado Youth Advisory Council Member
- Frederick J. Riley, Executive Director, Weave: The Social Fabric Project, The Aspen Institute
- Mary Thomas, President & CEO, CFLeads

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- Rochester, NY
- San Antonio, TX
- Tallahassee, FL
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AAC Event Support

A special thank you to the application review committee, youth award interviewers, keynote speakers, and our spirited volunteers!

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- Donavan Pinner, past winner, All-America City Youth Award
- Sarah Rubin, Outreach and Engagement Coordinator, California Department of Conservation
- Hon. David M. Sander, Ph.D., City Council Member and Former Mayor, City of Rancho Cordova
- Daniel Schugurensky, Professor, School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University & Director, Participatory Governance Initiative
- Sean Smoot, Principal Consultant, 21st Century Policing LLC
- Antonella Valmorbida, former Secretary General, ALDA - The European Association for Local Democracy
- Michael Wenger, Senior Consultant on Race Relations and the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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2024 All-America Leader Award

Teree Caldwell-Johnson

All-America Leader
NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE

2024

In recognition of a lifetime of public service, the National Civic League is proud to posthumously present this year's All-America Leader Award to **Teree Caldwell-Johnson** and to name the award after her going forward. Teree was the living embodiment of the qualities this award was created to recognize, including inclusiveness, innovation, collaboration, equity, civic engagement, and community impact.

Teree dedicated 20 years of her life to Oakridge Neighborhood and Oakridge Neighborhood Services, a housing and human services nonprofit agency located in Des Moines, IA. Since 2006, she also gave her time and talents as an elected representative on the Des Moines School Board. Additionally, she served on the League's board of directors and was its president from 2022 to 2023.

Whether in her professional, civic, or personal endeavors, Teree was committed to improving her community and making this world a little more just and equitable. She will be deeply missed by her family, friends, colleagues, and the League.

Thank you for your service, Teree, rest in peace.

Rehearsal Schedule

All rehearsals will take place in the Colorado Ballroom

Friday, June 7, 2024

8:00am-8:20am	Boulder, CO
8:25am-8:45am	Danville, VA
8:50am-9:10am	Edinburg, TX
9:15am-9:35am	Henderson, KY
9:40am-10:00am	High Point, NC
10:05am-10:25am	Jacksonville, NC
10:30am-10:50am	La Marque, TX
10:55am-11:15am	Lakewood, CO
11:20am-11:40am	Lexington, KY
11:45am-12:05pm	Monroe County, IN
12:10pm-12:30pm	Monrovia, CA
12:35pm-12:55pm	New Orleans, LA
1:00pm-1:20pm	Newport News, VA
1:25pm-1:45pm	Oakland, CA
1:50pm-2:10pm	Punta Gorda, FL
2:15pm-2:35pm	Roanoke, VA
2:40pm-3:00pm	Saginaw, TX
3:05pm-3:25pm	Seattle, WA
3:30pm-3:50pm	Watkinsville, GA
3:55pm-4:15pm	Wilton Manors, FL

Presentation Schedule

All presentations will take place in the Colorado Ballroom

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Block 1
9:00am – 9:10am	Jury Introductions
9:15am – 9:35am	Boulder, Colorado
9:40am – 10:00am	Danville, Virginia
10:05am – 10:25am	Edinburg, Texas

Workshop Break

Block 2
11:45am – 12:05pm	Henderson, Kentucky
12:10pm – 12:30pm	High Point, North Carolina
12:35pm – 12:55pm	Jacksonville, North Carolina

Lunch

Block 3
2:05pm – 2:25pm	La Marque, Texas
2:30pm – 2:50pm	Lakewood, Colorado
2:55pm – 3:15pm	Lexington, Kentucky
3:20pm – 3:40pm	Monroe County, Indiana

Break

Block 4
3:55pm – 4:15pm	Monrovia, California
4:20pm – 4:40pm	New Orleans, Louisiana
4:45pm – 5:05pm	Newport News, Virginia

Sunday, June 9, 2024

Block 5
9:00am – 9:20am	Oakland, California
9:25am – 9:45am	Punta Gorda, Florida
9:50am – 10:10am	Roanoke, Virginia

Break

Block 6
10:25am – 10:45am	Saginaw, Texas
10:50am – 11:10am	Seattle, Washington
11:15am – 11:35am	Watkinsville, Georgia
11:40am – 12:00pm	Wilton Manors, Florida

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TURNOUT IMPROVEMENT	19%
SUSTAINED IMPROVEMENT	9%

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2024 All-America City Finalist Program Summaries

Boulder, Colorado

Sitting at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Boulder's 43,000 acres of open space and 75 miles of walking and biking paths contribute to a high quality of life for residents who enjoy the outdoors. However, high costs and local development policies designed to preserve a small-town feel and recreational amenities have contributed to an affordable housing crisis, limiting who can afford to live in Boulder.

The majority of Boulder's population is white, highly educated, and affluent, while Boulder's vibrant and diverse communities of color have often been left out of the narrative. To confront this issue, city staff have made a concerted effort to work with collaborating organizations over the past eight years to move away from decision-making processes and systems of power dominated by majority voices. Through a shift in the city's culture of community engagement and a focus on an action-oriented racial equity plan, historically excluded voices are now being lifted and brought to the forefront.

Ranked Choice Voting for Boulder's Mayor

In 2020, a group of community leaders in Boulder worked to introduce Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) to address rising political polarization and community divisions. RCV is a voting method that allows voters to rank election candidates in order of preference when there are three or more candidates. By redistributing the votes of the lowest percentage candidates to voters' second and third choices, the system reflects voter intent without the time and expense of a run-off election.

The Our Mayor Our Choice Ballot Measure committee collaborated with community stakeholders to place the RCV measure on the ballot and achieve its passage, with 78% of voters supporting the change to decide their mayor through ranked choice voting.

With a clear mandate from the community, efforts to change the system and educate voters began. The city clerk's office launched a communications campaign, including a voting guide, an informational web page and video, a blog post, press releases, and instructional webinars. They also provided an in-person opportunity to use a practice tool and ask questions at a citywide engagement event.

On election day, the Boulder County Elections Division provided updates on a dedicated RCV page so voters could witness the process and understand how their votes were counted.
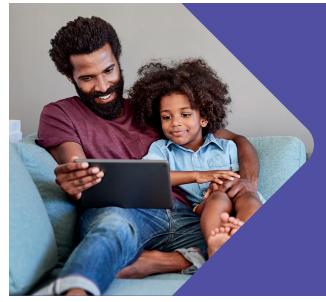
Post-election, a survey revealed high satisfaction with the voting experience, with 77% expressing satisfaction and 86% finding it easy to fill out their ballots. Boulder's RCV implementation received praise from FairVote for setting a gold standard for efficiency and transparency.

Community Connectors-in-Residence

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Boulder expanded its Community Connector engagement model, partnering with bilingual and bicultural leaders to bridge relationships between historically excluded communities and local government. The model transitioned from project-based to ongoing teams to address emerging concerns, distribute public health information, and facilitate broad input on projects and policy decisions.

Each Community Connector-in-Residence works closely with a community they naturally

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lead, focusing on addressing key issues such as housing, economic opportunity, and racial equity. Over three years, these connectors have played a pivotal role in gathering feedback from their respective communities, particularly on city projects and decisions. Through tailored sessions focused on building community power and amplifying voices, they have provided invaluable insights that have influenced the city's priorities, including the 2024 budget.

The impact of the Community Connectors-in-Residence program extends beyond feedback gathering. It has facilitated meaningful public engagement, with a notable portion of speakers at public hearings being connected to these connectors. As a result, the approved 2024 budget reflects the priorities identified by the community, with significant investments in affordable housing and health equity.

The Community Connectors-in-Residence program stands as a testament to Boulder's commitment to inclusive governance and equitable decision-making, showcasing the transformative power of community engagement in shaping the city's future.

The Racial Equity Instrument
The City of Boulder is deeply committed to promoting racial equity throughout its local government operations. This commitment involves striving to eliminate racial disparities and ensuring that everyone, regardless of race, can enjoy a high quality of life and access to opportunities. Key to this effort was the creation of the Racial Equity Instrument (REI), which guides the city in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies, programs, and budget decisions through a racial equity lens.

Over the past two years, the city has employed the REI on more than 20 projects, with the Equity and Belonging team and REI facilitators playing crucial roles. One notable application

of the REI was in the Civic Area Historic District proposal, marking the first use of the instrument in a historic preservation project. By using the REI, staff recognized the importance of elevating the narratives of historically excluded populations and ensuring a more inclusive historical perspective.

The impact of the REI can be seen in various aspects of the historic preservation project, such as the creation of a more balanced walking tour script and the development of an interactive Storymap. Through these efforts, the city aims to tell a more complete history of the area and recognize the contributions of marginalized communities.

Looking ahead, Boulder aims to integrate the lessons learned from this initiative into forthcoming projects, including the revision of historic designation guidelines. These ongoing endeavors underscore Boulder's continuing commitment to fostering racial equity and inclusivity in governance and historical conservation efforts.

Danville, Virginia

Located in south-central Virginia on the border of North Carolina, Danville's history is economically defined by its past as a southern mill and tobacco town. The collapse of these industries, occurring shortly after the turn of the century, left the city grappling with double-digit unemployment, a high poverty rate, and significant health challenges among its residents. But today, Danville stands as a beacon of resilience and transformation. No longer bound by its industrial past, the city has evolved into a thriving hub for local businesses, industry, entrepreneurs, and innovators, fostering economic growth and job creation. In an unwavering commitment to building a brighter future, Danville strives to create a city where everyone can discover opportunity, security, and an enhanced quality of life.

Grass Roots Empowerment and Action Training (GREAT)

Although the Danville police department had already begun engaging the community and building trust with residents through the development of personal relationships and neighborhood outreach, the murder of George Floyd added a new dynamic, one that called for a deeper understanding of the city's most diverse and economically challenged neighborhoods.

The police department collaborated with a diverse coalition of grassroots activists and clergy to create a new training for Danville officers. The Grass Roots Empowerment and Action Training (GREAT) consists of training modules and immersive experiences that delve into Danville's civil rights history and facilitate meaningful dialogue within marginalized communities, addressing issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and income disparity. During the course of the training, officers hear directly from community leaders and residents about what matters most in their community.

Familiarizing officers with the needs and assets of communities inspired the requirement that each police training class develop a service project. Service projects have included providing Thanksgiving dinners to residents of a housing complex and establishing school resource stations to provide students with toiletries, shoes, clothing, and other items.

In addition to GREAT, Danville's Police Department has implemented various community engagement programs.

- Buses and Buddies: Officers greet students getting off buses, fostering positive interactions and providing supplies.
- Community Overwatch: Officers visit housing complexes, providing fresh produce with a local food pantry.
- Convenient Conversations: Officers engage with shoppers at convenience stores, answering questions and offering resources.
- H.E.A.R.T. walks: Officers and partnering agencies visit areas after traumatic events to provide support and address concerns.
- Lunch Buddies: Officers join students for lunch, providing an opportunity to address concerns and build relationships.
- Pass the Perspective: Group meetings where officers educate citizens about personal safety and listen to citizen concerns.
- P.E.A.C.E. Community Center: Police-operated youth and community center providing a safe space for interactions and tutoring.
- Positively Pretty: Program teaching health, hygiene, self-esteem, and confidence building to middle and high school aged females.
- Youth Police Academy: Three-week summer program introducing children to police department divisions and activities.

These efforts have contributed to a 35-year low in violent crime, reflecting the success of community-oriented policing strategies.

Student Voices on School Board

Danville students wanted to have a role in how policy decisions were made for their schools and advocated to have representation on the school board. The school board agreed, ushering in a new era by appointing four teenagers as student representatives.

Principals from each of the two Danville high schools nominate two students who receive final approval from the school board. The students must be rising seniors and serve a year-long term.

As representatives, these teenagers act as liaisons, bridging the gap between the student body and the board, offering insights and perspectives crucial for informed decision-making. Their responsibilities include attending regular open meetings and undertaking assignments, such as research and data collection, as directed by the board.

The student representatives serve in an

advisory capacity and do not vote or attend closed meetings. The school division provides the meeting agenda and other public materials to the student representatives in advance of each open meeting.

For Danville, this moment signifies not only a step toward greater inclusivity, but also a recognition of the invaluable perspectives that students bring to the table.

Heart the Park

Recognizing that existing parks didn't meet all the needs of all residents, the Danville Parks and Recreation Department launched the "Heart the Park" campaign to bolster neighborhood park benefits by bringing residents into the planning process.

The first community event took place at Doyle Thomas Park, located in a low-income neighborhood a few blocks from the downtown area. The event featured a scavenger hunt for hearts in the park, prizes, tennis demonstrations, participatory art display, music, s'mores, and a firepit.

At the event, Parks and Recreation staff showed residents illustrated examples of park additions or improvements that work toward goals that community members have already identified for the parks. Participants gave feedback and signed up to be a part of future planning activities. City partners and local organizations co-hosted the event and showcased how they are available with support and resources for healthy living and community building.

Two more "Heart the Park" events took place at neighborhood parks located in the western and southern sections of the city. Following the kickoff events in the three neighborhoods, Parks and Recreation staff continued throughout the year to share information and seek input on park improvements. Suggested improvements included things such new swings, sidewalks, basketball court renovations, event lawns, bike racks, and picnic shelters.

With new information in hand, the Parks and Recreation Department worked with Virginia Tech to produce park renderings and cost estimates of the resident-proposed amenities. The projects are awaiting funding.

Edinburg, Texas

Edinburg stands out as one of Texas' fastest-growing regions, experiencing unparalleled population expansion over the past decade. This rapid growth has brought both opportunities and challenges, particularly regarding the city's aging infrastructure. Over the last two decades, Edinburg has undergone a remarkable transformation into a vibrant and livable urban center, boasting an array of commercial, educational, recreational, medical, and governmental facilities. This evolution has significantly enhanced residents' quality of life and economic prosperity, fueled by a pro-business ethos that drives overall development.

Despite these strides, persistent challenges remain, with over a quarter of the population living below the poverty line, significantly higher than the state average. Yet, Edinburg remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering continued growth and development, while simultaneously striving to provide exceptional opportunities for both residents and businesses. Central to this vision is a dedication to meaningful civic engagement, serving as the cornerstone for collaborative and equitable solutions to address these challenges head-on.

An Inclusive Community within Everyone's Reach

The City of Edinburg recognizes the vital role parks play in improving residents' quality of life, yet acknowledges disparities in access, particularly among citizens with mobility challenges, and cognitive and physical disabilities. Over the past five years, concerted local action and collaboration have worked to address these issues, ensuring equity and inclusion in park infrastructure for all residents.

In response to community feedback and extensive engagement efforts, Edinburg's Parks and Recreation Department addressed the lack of accessible play structures at parks by installing grant-funded inclusive infrastructure at 8 parks spanning the community.

Building off this momentum, the city and community partners began planning the first all-inclusive park in Edinburg to further close the gap of all-inclusive infrastructure. During the planning and design stages, the city knew that meaningful engagement was critical and collaborated with parents of children with disabilities and relevant community stakeholders to plan what would become Beethoven Park at Vanguard Academy.

In March 2022, the Beethoven Park at Vanguard Academy officially opened, offering all-inclusive features including:
• Fully-ramped access to playscape
• Inclusive We-Go-Swing
• Communication station that has sign language, Braille, Spanish and English
• Strategically-placed handholds, footrests and back supports
• Restrooms with an adult changing table

Additionally, the city opened an all-inclusive splash pad and continues to prioritize inclusivity in all recreational infrastructure.

There's No Place Like Home
With a doubling of its population since 2000, Edinburg prioritized creating a sense of belonging to welcome and fully integrate its new diverse residents.

Through cross-sector partnerships and resident-led initiatives, the city created a lively cultural festival scene, becoming a regional destination for diverse events such as the Filipino Festival, Juneteenth Jubilee, Frida Fest – A Women's Empowerment Festival, Edinburg UFO Festival and Conference, South Texas International Film Festival, Los Muertos Bailan Festival, and more.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic the bustling festival scene halted overnight. In response, the city adapted, embracing virtual cultural festivals, concerts, and film festivals to maintain community connections and support its creative industries.

Local artists also applied for and were accepted to be part of the "Arts for EveryBody" campaign, part of the One Nation/One Project initiative, to improve community health and resilience through the arts. This national program brings together artists, local governments, and community health providers to foster equitable recovery and well-being. It will premiere collaborative art works in 18 cities and towns across the country, serving as a public health initiative to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a catalyst for community well-being, and a workforce development program for artists.

After the devasting pandemic, Edinburg has bounced back to become a creative, tolerant community with open, inviting festivals and events that give a voice to the growing diversity in Edinburg.

Building for Tomorrow's Future Today!
Edinburg faces a challenge of responsibly managing its diverse and expanding population. The city aimed to ensure inclusive progress by actively engaging its community with initiatives like the Edinburg 2040 project. The visioning effort involved extensive public outreach, including surveys (available in English and Spanish) and bilingual town hall meetings, to gather input from residents. Town halls were hosted in different areas of Edinburg, at different times and languages, to reach diverse and traditionally underserved populations. Edinburg 2040 sought to incorporate modern technology and broader outreach methods compared to past engagement efforts.

The city's diverse population, predominantly Latino, necessitated tailored approaches to civic engagement and decision-making. The Edinburg 2040 project resulted in the

formation of several committees focusing on key priorities identified by residents, such as transportation, public safety, and arts and culture. These committees met regularly to develop strategic plans aligned with the community's needs and aspirations. The project's outcomes included the allocation of funds for various initiatives, such as improving neighborhood connectivity, enhancing transportation infrastructure, and increasing disaster preparedness.

By actively involving citizens in decision-making processes and implementing their feedback, Edinburg aimed to build a stronger, more resilient community that reflected the collective vision of its residents. Through continuous collaboration and engagement, Edinburg is navigating its rapid growth while preserving its cultural heritage and meeting the evolving needs of its residents.

Henderson, Kentucky

Henderson, Kentucky, faced economic decline and stagnation in the early 2000s, leading to population loss and dwindling hope. However, recent years have seen a remarkable transformation, with bustling downtown activity, significant job growth, and major infrastructure investments. Development interest is at a three-decade high, but disparities in the inner city persist, with neglect resulting in mistrust toward local government. Henderson's "Inner City Improvement Plan" aims to address these issues through funding, equity, and community involvement.

Spotlight on Public Safety

In the past few years, Henderson, Kentucky, was grappling with concerns about public safety and crime when the Public Safety Committee sought to address this issue. Consisting of various city officials, residents, and stakeholders, the committee began its mission in February of 2023 under the Inner-City Improvement Plan (ICIP). Given a broad mandate to explore proposals for enhancing the inner-city area, the committee engaged in extensive dialogue and research to identify key priorities.

The ICIP efforts revealed a strong public demand for enhanced public safety measures, with initiatives such as the expansion of the Flock Camera System receiving significant support from the inner-city community. Consequently, the city decided to double the number of flock cameras and strategically place them throughout the inner city.

Another impactful proposal, the HERO Project, aims to address police department staffing shortages by partnering with the local housing authority to offer free housing and utilities to new officers. This initiative seeks to incentivize officers to live within the community they serve, fostering closer relationships with residents. Additionally, the committee proposed providing doorbell cameras to inner-city residents free of charge, enhancing home security and safety. Plans are also underway to address deficiencies in domestic violence victim housing, creating a haven with support services.

The overwhelming public interest in improving public safety has underscored the importance of these initiatives. While privacy concerns were acknowledged, resident surveys demonstrated that the pressing need to safeguard the inner-city community took precedence. As initiatives continue to unfold, Henderson is poised to become a model for urban revitalization and community empowerment, shaping a brighter and safer future for all residents.

Revitalizing Letcher Street Corridor

For a decade, efforts to revitalize the Washington Street and Letcher corridor in Henderson have brought about significant progress and extensive community involvement. Initially plagued by dilapidated buildings and neglected infrastructure, the corridor has experienced a remarkable transformation driven by strategic initiatives

Discover Henderson...

and collaborations between the public and private sectors.

One pivotal action was the establishment of the Audubon Kids Zone, a collaborative effort aimed at enhancing educational and social outcomes for children in the area. Situated at the corner of Letcher and Powell Street, this initiative demonstrated a commitment to fostering long-term positive change within the inner-city community.

Additionally, the creation of East End Park brought newfound amenities and recreational opportunities to residents, including a splash pad and mural painted by students from the School of Fine Arts program. These enhancements not only beautified the area, but also contributed to its functionality and appeal.

Additionally, the conversion of an old school into income-based senior apartments showcased the power of public-private partnerships in revitalizing neglected spaces. This multimillion-dollar reinvestment preserved historical elements while addressing contemporary housing needs, resulting in a resurgence of occupancy and aesthetic improvements.

Looking ahead, economic development initiatives, including tax moratorium expansions and small business startup incentives, are poised to invigorate the corridor further and stimulate entrepreneurial activity. Ongoing community involvement and strategic planning will position the Washington Street and Letcher corridor to emerge as a vibrant hub of commerce and community pride, symbolizing the city's dedication to inclusive growth and revitalization.

Beautification and Special Projects Committee

The Beautification and Special Projects Committee, composed of diverse city stakeholders, spearheaded three significant initiatives in Henderson.

One major beautification/blight issue in Henderson's Inner City stemmed from overflowing waste bins and animals dispersing loose trash in alleyways. After much discussion and feedback from the committee and residents, the committee helped provide the initiative and reasoning to move forward with providing uniform trash cans to all residents. In late 2023, the city's sanitation department outfitted the entire city with large, lidded trash receptacles that are both attractive and secure, keeping animals at bay.

Next, a group of inner-city residents approached the Beautification Committee with another project in mind. Anthony Brooks Park was very outdated and didn't provide much utility for the children of the area. The committee took it upon themselves to totally revamp the park and has applied for a grant to fund the improvements. Signs are pointing strongly toward receiving the grant and starting construction in 2025.

The last project resulted from prominent members of Henderson's Latino community bringing up the need for more inner-city soccer fields. The Beautification and Special Projects Committee was already looking at locations and concepts for multi-sports courts, so discussions started to intensify to try to tackle both projects on the same site. The committee made a pitch for multi-sport courts, and the city has already entered negotiations to acquire ten acres of land in the heart of the Inner City to add 2-3 soccer fields and 2-3 multi-sport courts.

High Point, North Carolina

High Point, renowned as the Home Furnishings Capital of the World, has a storied history dating back to the early 1900s, when it emerged as a hub for furniture production. Today, it remains vibrant, boasting prestigious institutions like High Point University and events like the High Point Market. With a population nearing 115,000, the city preserves a small-town ambiance while embracing progress and innovation.

At the same time, High Point understands that investments must prioritize its people. This commitment to equity is evident through initiatives such as city rebranding, strategic planning, and the establishment of a reparations commission to rectify historical injustices. Looking forward, High Point aims to cultivate an inclusive environment where every resident can thrive, acknowledging the pivotal roles of creativity, innovation, and collaboration in shaping the city's future.

High Point City Rebrand

The rebranding of High Point aimed to cultivate civic pride and inclusivity by addressing its outdated public image. The city collaborated with CivicBrand to refresh its identity, engaging diverse voices and ensuring broad community ownership.

High Point faced challenges of geographical fragmentation and lack of civic buy-in, hindering active participation in democratic processes. To address this, the rebrand focused on crafting a cohesive narrative that transcended divides and aimed to create a 'seamless city' where residents from all backgrounds felt connected and empowered.

The Brand Taskforce, comprising key stakeholders, conducted extensive research and community engagement initiatives. Over 12 months, the Taskforce, alongside a team from CivicBrand, conducted research at numerous 'activation events' across High Point's geography, including businesses, breweries, nonprofits, after-school facilities, and co-working spaces. The Taskforce also created more than ten focus groups for roundtable discussions and hosted a variety of conversations with residents and citizens via podcast and documentary recordings that captured both the progress and process of the strategic rebranding. This extensive community engagement resulted in four brand pillars:

• High Point is the Center of Design
• High Point is a Movement of Makers

• High Point is Inspiring Creatives
• High Point is Kind & Inclusive

These pillars will serve as a litmus test to ensure each decision preserves the city's collectively crafted identity. As a result of these efforts, High Point residents now feel a personal connection to the city's brand, leading to increased participation in civic events across diverse communities.

Thrive HP

In response to the racial unrest of 2020, City of High Point leaders spearheaded the creation of a groundbreaking minority entrepreneurial initiative aimed at addressing systemic disparities through reparative resource allocation.

Historical racial segregation and discriminatory practices across the nation and in High Point have perpetuated economic disparities, limiting minority access to capital and opportunities. Thrive addresses these barriers by providing educational initiatives and mentorship programs and by advocating for minority representation in leadership roles. By facilitating networking opportunities, Thrive aims to bridge gaps in access to influential networks and foster a more inclusive business landscape.

Thrive officially launched in August 2021, garnering support from local financial institutions and registering 577 members. Through partnerships with over ten community organizations, Thrive hosts annual summits, workshops, and the Thrive Grant program, offering grants of up to $15,000 to empower entrepreneurs and stimulate economic growth with the goal of reducing disparities.

Thrive members also benefit from their partnership with the Chamber, gaining access to established programs and events like Leadership High Point and the esteemed State of the City address. This collaboration enables members to stay informed about local trends

and news directly from city staff and elected officials, strengthening their ties to the broader business community.

Thrive's holistic approach fosters collaboration, increases access to resources, and cultivates a supportive ecosystem, inspiring future generations of entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds.

The Greater High Point Food Alliance

In 2015, High Point ranked as the number one metropolitan area in the United States for food hardship. In response, local High Pointers established the Greater High Point Food Alliance (GHPFA) to tackle food insecurity.

GHPFA engaged in public discourse and increased neighborhood participation to identify upstream issues such as:
- Lack of access to fresh foods
- Lack of food preparation knowledge
- Lack of community voice in solution identification

GHPFA hosted an inaugural 2015 Food Summit, attended by 500 people, and subsequent annual summits, which yielded significant outcomes.

- The Growing High Point & Adopt-A-Lot program transforms vacant lots into urban farms, leasing them from the city for $1.00/ year.
- The Farmers in Training program trains individuals in urban farming and provides startup cost support.
- Growdega operates a refrigerated produce truck traveling to food deserts weekly.
- High Point Farmer's Market incentivizes SNAP beneficiaries to purchase from local farmers by providing tokens worth twice their spending.
- Strategic food pantries and community gardens address food deserts and provide fresh produce.
- GHPFA's Food Finder app offers resources such as food pantries, community meals,

and mental health providers.
- GHPFA became an Emergency Food Provider during COVID-19, distributing funds and essential supplies to local food pantries and schools.
- Homegrown Heroes educates families on nutritious food preparation.
- Youth Food Summits and library programs engage students in nutrition education and gardening.
- YWCA's Teaching Kitchen offers classes and partnerships for adult food education and preparation.
- Walk to the Store Day spreads awareness by challenging community members to walk to the nearest grocery store from food deserts.
- The Growing Towards Leadership program offers leadership development for local food providers.
- The Food Security Fund program provides small grants for community food projects.

In seven years, the city improved from being number one in the ranking of food hardship to 14th, showcasing the tangible results of dedicated community engagement.

Jacksonville, North Carolina

Jacksonville, home to United States Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Air Station New River, boasts a stable population and a robust economy, marked by flourishing housing developments, small businesses, and franchises. Yet, fostering a sense of community and civic engagement poses unique challenges in a city where residents, particularly Marines, frequently rotate out every two years.

Recognizing these challenges, city leaders collaborated with the faith community to launch Jacksonville's One City initiative. This endeavor aims to cultivate a compassionate and inclusive environment, fostering tolerance, belonging, and civility among all residents. The initiative encourages collective action towards building unity and cohesion, driving Jacksonville toward continuous improvement and success.

1 Jacksonville
OneCity
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A great place to live, work & play

Uptown Development & Sports Complex

The City of Jacksonville, in collaboration with Onslow County and Jacksonville Onslow Economic Development, conducted a study to identify businesses attracting people to the community and pinpoint weaknesses leading residents to travel elsewhere for services and recreational opportunities.

One notable outcome was the identification of recreation and sports tourism as critical sectors for improvement. This led to the city purchasing 400 acres for local recreation. To maximize the potential of this expansive parcel, the city convened a team of experts and engaged in robust community consultations to develop a comprehensive plan.

Community engagement for this planning process was extensive, involving meetings, surveys, and town halls to gauge community needs. Resident input revealed a large population of youth participating in traveling sports programs who are unable to compete locally due to a lack of recreational facilities. The engagement of the Marine Corps population revealed a lack of quality meeting space for their annual Marine Ball festivities.

Community input resulted in a plan for a multi-use facility that will include indoor recreation space, conference and meeting space, and special events space. Additionally, the uptown development concept will incorporate mixed-use development with housing, retail shops, restaurants, and office space. The development will also feature a soccer complex with nine fields, open space, designated passive park areas, wetland recovery spaces with boardwalks, outdoor recreation opportunities, and an outdoor amphitheater capable of seating approximately 7,500 people.

Comprehensive Youth Engagement

Jacksonville supports youth engagement through four primary projects, with each providing opportunity for community input and involvement.

1. The New River YMCA offers diverse programs like after-school activities and sports, aiming to foster youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Through an innovative funding partnership, the city, county, Board of Education, and the State of North Carolina have developed a plan to build a new facility, including an aquatics center, to better serve the community.

2. The Boys and Girls Club expanded to an underserved neighborhood in Jacksonville, repurposing a community center with city and YMCA support. Launched in 2023, the new location offers mentorship and exploration opportunities, aiming to engage local youth and empower them in national programs.

3. The Chill Zone, part of Jacksonville's Downtown Renovation project, aims to provide a dedicated space for teens from Jacksonville and surrounding areas to gather and interact. Programs will be designed by and for teens, with city staff acting as mentors rather than directors. The facility will feature a performance stage, café, arcade, E-sports stations, and more, creating a centralized hub supported by the city and community. Open daily after school, it will host Jacksonville Youth Council meetings and offer free transit passes to members for easy access.

4. New River Institutes at Sturgeon City offers a summer program for local high schoolers. Taught by local educators, it covers marine biology, sciences, safety, and arts. Stemming from efforts to restore the New River, the program teaches environmental stewardship and community collaboration, aiming to inspire future leaders in conservation and community involvement.

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One Place Child Advocacy Center

One Place, formerly known as the Onslow County Partnership for Children, is a nonprofit dedicated to ending child abuse by connecting families with resources and programs.
One Place partners with community and government organizations to improve the lives of children and families by connecting them with high-quality resources for childcare, early education, and child abuse prevention and intervention. More directly, One Place partners with the City of Jacksonville Police Department and with the Onslow County Sheriff's Department to provide much needed services to the victims of child abuse.

Over 25 years, One Place has positively impacted the lives of children and families in Onslow County, providing support services and high-quality childcare. However, as the population of Onslow County has continued to grow, so has the need for children and family support services. In order to serve the growing population, One Place recognizes the need to grow their team and their facilities. To make this possible, the organization worked together with several local, regional, and state partners to create a funding plan to build a new $25 million facility. This community support underscores the dedication to fighting child abuse and supporting all children and families. The new facility, located next to the Jacksonville Commons Recreation Complex and Fire Department Station 4, will enhance community pride and cohesion.

La Marque, Texas

The City of La Marque, nestled strategically in Galveston County, has undergone a remarkable transformation in its relatively brief 70-year history. Today, La Marque stands as the second-fastest-growing city in the county, boasting approximately 20,000 residents and 14.3 miles

of I-45 frontage, positioning it favorably for continued growth and accessibility.

La Marque embodies a strong sense of community where local government and residents collaborate closely to drive economic growth, celebrate cultural diversity, and improve overall quality of life. What sets La Marque apart is its responsive local government, which actively listens to residents' concerns and implements initiatives to meet the city's expectations. Through various programs, initiatives, and technological advancements, La Marque is pioneering small city governance, proving that community-driven change can have a profound impact, regardless of size.

Safe City Initiatives

La Marque's Safe City Initiative, launched in 2022, aims to make the city the safest place in Texas over a five-year period. Central to the initiative is a multi-tiered plan focused on community-oriented policing, fostering collaboration between the police, local businesses, and residents, to combat crime and build trust. An essential piece of this plan is the Community Watch Program, aiming to ensure safety in neighborhoods, near businesses, and across public spaces. The city operates nine active community watch areas, with plans to expand to 15 by 2026, each supported by assigned officers to address residents' needs. This proactive approach underscores the city's commitment to prioritizing community safety and setting a precedent for proactive engagement in safeguarding its residents.

Police training and data-driven decision-making are also priorities. Initiatives like the CompStat program and the Eyes on La Marque initiative provide seniors with doorbell cameras and bolster public safety and community health. Additionally, the La Marque Police Department's pursuit of the Texas Law Enforcement Recognition Program holds officers to a high standard, creating trust within the community.

Federal grants have facilitated an increase in the number of police officers and allowed for specialized training. Additionally, partnerships with organizations like the Resource Crisis Center have enabled the implementation of youth advocacy programs like the "Be Strong" initiative, promoting violence prevention and empowerment among young girls. Collaborations with entities like the Boys and Girls Club, Community in Schools coalition, and Big Brothers & Big Sisters coalition further demonstrate the city's holistic approach to community safety, engaging youth, and fostering a sense of responsibility for collective well-being.

La Marque Television

Created to address a communication gap, La Marque Television (LMTV) engages residents, businesses, and nonprofits with comprehensive updates and original programming. Evolving from Channel 16 to YouTube broadcasting in 2019, LMTV quickly became a pioneering live-streaming platform. Funded by Public, Educational, and Governmental (PEG) sources,

equipment upgrades ensure seamless production and streaming.

Segments on LMTV like "Two-Minute Tuesday" and "Mayor's Message" offer insights into city operations, fostering transparency and community engagement. Two-Minute Tuesday provides concise weekly updates from the city manager, covering various city initiatives and community events. Similarly, the Mayor's Message offers operational updates following biweekly council meetings, simplifying complex motions and decisions into easily understandable terms for residents.

LMTV also works with local businesses and non-profit organizations to do a segment called Shine On. This segment interviews community-based business owners and gives them a cost-free opportunity to showcase how they operate within the community. The Shine On segment promotes neighborhood establishments and strengthens community bonds.
LMTV also makes it easier for residents to participate in civic life by live-streaming council meetings and budget sessions. Multilingual support and accommodation for residents with disabilities ensures accessibility and inclusivity. The channel also broadcasts cultural events like the Juneteenth Gala and Christmas Parade to encourage community participation and celebration.

With plans for expansion and ongoing improvements, LMTV remains a vital tool for enhancing communication and fostering civic participation.

Engaging Residents in Allocating Funding
In June 2021, La Marque received $4,291,405 in ARPA funds to aid in the city's recovery and development in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the unique opportunity to involve citizens directly in the allocation of these funds, the city embarked on an innovative project aimed at democratizing the decision-making process. The primary objective was to empower young and diverse populations, providing them with a platform to voice their opinions and priorities for their community's development.

La Marque deployed an online simulation tool, Balancing Act, designed to facilitate public participation in budgeting and resource allocation decisions. Through this platform, residents were invited to rank various projects according to their priorities. This approach not only educated participants about the complexities and trade-offs inherent in budgeting processes but also ensured that their voices were directly reflected in the city's planning and development strategies.

The top-voted projects in the budgeting project reflected the community's concern for essential infrastructure and public safety improvements. This direct feedback provided the city with valuable insights into the priorities and needs of its residents, enabling a more targeted and efficient allocation of resources. Following the budgeting process, the La Marque city manager proposed to the council that the majority of the ARPA funds be allocated according to the community's preferences. This move not only demonstrated the city's commitment to inclusive governance, but also set a precedent for future initiatives aimed at involving citizens in decision-making processes.

Lakewood, Colorado

The City of Lakewood, Colorado, is a vibrant and thriving community nestled between the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains and the state capital of Denver. As Colorado's fifth largest city, Lakewood's growth over the past decade has necessitated the city actively involving residents in shaping a shared vision for the community's future.

One key aspect of Lakewood's success lies in its innovative approach to civic technology and community-centric initiatives. Over the past decade, the city has become a leader in leveraging technology to engage the

community and keep residents informed. Tools such as Lakewood Together and Lakewood Speaks showcase a commitment to transparency and elimination of barriers to civic engagement.

Lakewood is working toward a future built on inclusivity, sustainability, and continued community engagement. By elevating community voices Lakewood aims to create a city where every resident feels heard, valued and proud to contribute to the ongoing story of the community.

Lakewood Together
Lakewood Together, launched in 2016, is an online public engagement platform initiated by the City of Lakewood to promote transparency, innovation, and community involvement. It provides a space where residents and local government collaborate, share ideas, and strengthen democracy through local initiatives.

Developed in partnership with Bang the Table/Engagement HQ, Lakewood Together facilitates civic engagement by allowing residents to participate in city projects and initiatives at their convenience through digital tools. Many projects on the platform originate from residents' suggestions, demonstrating the city's commitment to involving the community in decision-making processes.
Since its launch, Lakewood Together has garnered significant engagement, with nearly 400,000 visits and active participation from thousands of residents in surveys and discussions. Residents have influenced various community plans and initiatives, providing valuable input on transportation improvements, safety measures, and other aspects of city life.

Lakewood Together prioritizes inclusiveness and equity by offering multilingual support, screen-reader accessibility, captions on any videos shared and by promoting a variety of in-person and online engagement opportunities, including meetings with available translators.

Today, Lakewood continues to leverage Lakewood Together as a crucial tool for shaping a shared vision through robust public engagement strategies. The platform remains integral to promoting collaboration, transparency, and inclusivity in local governance, ultimately contributing to a stronger and more interconnected community.

Sustainable Neighborhoods Program
The Sustainable Neighborhoods Program, initiated by Lakewood in 2012, began as a grassroots endeavor to engage residents in promoting sustainability within their communities. It evolved from a pilot project into a model adopted by cities nationwide, forming the Sustainable Neighborhoods Network. This program motivates residents to play an active role in improving the quality of life in their neighborhoods and minimizing their environmental impact by engaging in workshops, projects, and events, leading to certifications for their contributions. The program's emphasis on community initiatives, such as community gardens, free little libraries, potluck-style events and youth initiatives serves to build strong community bonds that uplift everyone.

Lakewood's program has seen significant participation, with over 11,000 residents involved in various sustainability projects. The program has now expanded to 10 neighborhoods and has garnered interest from other municipalities, leading to its adoption in Denver, Wheat Ridge, and Fort Collins. The program, now a nonprofit, fosters collaboration among residents, businesses, schools, and nonprofits to advance sustainability. It innovatively leverages community resources to address local challenges and encourages diverse projects tailored to each neighborhood's needs.

The program is unique in measuring the impact of neighborhood initiatives on climate change, with areas that excel attaining Outstanding Sustainable Neighborhood status. In so doing,

the program brings residents together for a cleaner, greener future and has earned recognition and inspired similar initiatives nationally, highlighting its role as a catalyst for broader sustainability efforts.

Lakewood Speaks

Lakewood Speaks has revolutionized civic engagement and accessibility to public meetings in the city. The online platform provides a transparent and user-friendly space for residents to review agendas, comment on specific items, access meeting recordings, and contribute to decision-making processes. This transformative tool has seen an 800 percent increase in meeting participation, becoming a dynamic hub for community involvement, transparency, and inclusive governance.

Through this program residents can actively participate in discussions and decision-making, regardless of whether they are able to attend in-person meetings. It also promotes transparency by making meeting agendas readily accessible to all Lakewood residents and removes barriers to community involvement, redefining engagement with constituents.

Comments made on the Lakewood Speaks platform are publicly accessible and taken into consideration for important decision-making processes, ensuring a diversity of perspectives are considered. The site also indicates how many of the City Council or Planning Commission members have read the written comments for their respective meetings, providing an additional layer of transparency.

The program has significantly increased engagement among younger demographics, addressing historical underrepresentation in civic affairs. Moreover, it promotes information sharing among local organizations, businesses, and residents, leading to higher meeting attendance and greater civic involvement.

Lakewood Speaks has had a substantial impact, evidenced by the remarkable increase

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in meeting participation and high citizen satisfaction. Its success has prompted other municipalities to rethink their approach to public engagement, highlighting the platform's role in strengthening democracy and fostering community involvement.

Lexington, Kentucky

Lexington, Kentucky, a city of over 320,000, is one of the state's primary economic engines. As the "horse capital of the world," and home to the "finest farmland the commonwealth has to offer," Lexington is leading the way for a vastly growing agriculture industry, balancing rural and urban needs with a booming economy, low cost of living and high quality of life.

Like many cities, Lexington has seen its share of challenges. In 2020, Lexington was one of many cities across the country that experienced racial unrest. Demonstrations

remained peaceful, as community leaders listened to those expressing concerns, leading to Lexington's establishment of the Mayor's Commission for Racial Justice and Equality.

Each day, the city is committed to setting new goals and building on past progress. To best meet residents' needs, the city government is reaching out with new technology and through new community partners.

Addressing Systemic Racism

In response to racial and social justice unrest, the Mayor's Commission for Racial Justice and Equality was formed in Lexington in June 2020. Comprised of a diverse set of community members, the commission aimed to dismantle systemic racism through the work of five subcommittees: Education & Economic Opportunity; Housing & Gentrification; Health Disparities; Law Enforcement, Justice, & Accountability; and Racial Equity. The commission issued 54 recommendations in their report to address racial disparities, and the city has implemented many of them.

Additionally, the Clean Slate Lexington Expungement Clinic and Job Fair initiative aims to dismantle barriers, combat stereotypes, and foster a more inclusive society, offering services to expunge past non-violent criminal convictions, thereby removing obstacles to gainful employment. Since its inception, the initiative has provided assistance to over a thousand Lexington residents, enabling them to clear their records and regain access to education, jobs, housing, and voting rights. By partnering with fair-chance employers, the initiative not only enhances individuals' employability and quality of life but also addresses employment gaps and contributes to the community's tax base.

Lexington is home to many small communities that were developed by freed black people just before and after Emancipation. Known as hamlets, these were places where schools, churches, cemeteries, and grocery stores were

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developed and built. Hamlets were places where community was formed, and in many cases continues today.

The city hosts a campaign called "A Sense of Place" to celebrate Lexington's historic hamlets, recognizing their contributions to the city's history. Efforts include restoring landmarks like the Rosenwald School and preserving the rich history of these communities before it fades away.

CivicLex

CivicLex, a pioneering nonprofit organization, dedicates itself to enhancing civic engagement and community cohesion across five key areas: civic education, local news & reporting, improving public spaces, fostering relationships, and transforming civic participation.

In promoting civic education, CivicLex partners with schools to conduct workshops on city

budgeting and local government operations. It also leads teacher externship programs aligning with city agencies, alongside hosting civic expos to connect students, community groups, and local government. CivicLex's news staff comprehensively covers all local government meetings, providing free reporting distributed widely online, through newsletters, and in collaboration with local media outlets.

Collaborating with stakeholders, CivicLex engages residents in shaping public spaces, exemplified by the Imagine New Circle Road project. This initiative garnered resident perspectives, leading to securing a federal grant for critical safety improvements.

Furthering community cohesion, CivicLex organizes inclusive events such as pancake breakfasts and crafting gatherings, fostering connections across diverse backgrounds and facilitating interactions with city staff. CivicLex also collaborates with civic institutions

to pioneer innovative governance models. This includes embedding artists in local government for improved communication, facilitating marginalized communities' engagement in greenspace policy, and enhancing Lexington's Urban County Council meetings and public comment processes through digital engagement tools and streamlined procedures.

Blue Grass Community Foundation

The Blue Grass Community Foundation (BGCF) is a cornerstone of Lexington's democratic ecosystem, leveraging philanthropy to address pressing challenges through collaboration with residents, nonprofits, funders, and government. BGCF's stewardship of the Reimagining the Civic Commons network underscores its leadership in transforming public spaces to foster community cohesion and belonging.

A standout initiative is BGCF's involvement in the (Re)Imagining Cheapside project, which addresses historical racial injustices. This grassroots-led effort aims to build inclusion and healing on the site of a former slave auction adjacent to the Historic Lexington Courthouse. BGCF's support for placemaking and community engagement endeavors, centered on Black leadership, has catalyzed the Lexington Black Prosperity Initiative (LBPI). This locally led funding initiative, 100% Black-led, focuses on strengthening Lexington's Black community by addressing long-standing issues resulting from deliberate underinvestment.

Additionally, BGCF is committed to nurturing the next generation of civic leaders and philanthropists through initiatives like BGCF365. Participants, with ages in their 20's to 40's, contribute one dollar per day to a collective fund supporting city needs. This self-governing initiative provides educational events and networking opportunities, empowering young contributors to shape Lexington's future. BGCF's holistic approach underscores its dedication to inclusive community development and leadership cultivation.

Monroe County, Indiana

In Monroe County, traditional approaches such as "3 minutes at the microphone" and strict adherence to Robert's Rules of Order have been the norm for decades. However, residents and community stakeholders have begun to recognize and point out the limitations of these methods, particularly for historically marginalized and disadvantaged populations.

Monroe County is now on a journey towards collaborative governance, demonstrating that these traditional bureaucratic approaches severely limit community members' voices and hinder two-way communication, confining topics, people, and discussions within rigid boundaries that impede genuine feedback, active listening, and productive conversations. Consequently, the community is exploring new public engagement processes and approaches that prioritize giving significant voice to

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underrepresented individuals, ensuring they are heard and integrated into decision-making.

Dialogue & Deliberation for Health

In response to a lack of engagement processes for garnering community input in health decision-making, Monroe County initiated a comprehensive community engagement strategy. Initially, 46 interviews were conducted with residents to build trust, understand health concerns, and identify individuals interested in further participation.

Subsequently, small group discussions in both English and Spanish, individual conversations, and online comment forms were utilized to gather personal health experiences. Identified community health concerns were integrated into an existing community health assessment and then deliberated upon in sessions with elected officials and other decision-makers to begin considering solutions. Community members also prioritized the results of the health assessment through professionally facilitated think tank discussions, which included a data walk consisting of large placards explaining community concerns and proposed solutions.

Three priority areas for action were identified during the think tanks:

1. Poverty and accessing health and social services
2. Inequity, discrimination, and bias
3. Substance use and mental health

A public kickoff event was held to present these priority areas and attract participants for eventual action teams.

Community Voices for Health Monroe County (CVHMC)

A challenge faced by Monroe County was to establish a fully inclusive and sustainable community engagement structure, supporting equity and diversity to address health issues and influence health decision-making and

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MCHEC includes members from marginalized groups, social service agencies, and elected officials. Notably, elected officials actively engage in MCHEC's committees, fostering inclusive policy discussions. Efforts were also made to engage elected officials through meetings and discussions on inclusive public engagement principles and Health in All Policies (HiAP) concepts. MCHEC focused on outreach to underrepresented residents, disseminating information about important community meetings and issues.

The project's outcomes include strong community support to continue the work independently, showcasing a ground-up approach to community-based research and policy-making that is unique in Indiana. The success of MCHEC aims to transform local decision-making and policies toward health equity.

Community Voices for Health Indiana

Monroe County faced the challenge of sharing what they learned from the CVHMC project with other communities in Indiana and beyond. To tackle this, they formed a Partners Council called Community Voices for Health Indiana (CVH Indiana).

The Partners Council was instrumental in sharing information, resources, and guidance with other Indiana communities interested in similar public engagement initiatives. This effort included the development of a comprehensive Toolkit for Communities, aimed at inspiring and assisting other communities in undertaking similar work. Additionally, a Report to the Community was created to outline the project's methodology, activities, and achievements, which was widely shared through presentations, social media, and electronic newsletters.

The CVHMC process served as a model for the Partners Council and was grounded in best practices in public engagement, community

policy. To tackle this, several actions were taken:

Initially, project teams and an advisory council were formed, consisting of community justice advocates, public engagement experts, health professionals, researchers, and members from underserved communities. An Implementation Team executed the initiative under the guidance of a Steering Committee.

The formation of the Monroe County Health Equity Council (MCHEC) emerged from discussions within the Advisory Council to sustain the project beyond its initial funding. MCHEC's mission is to reduce health disparities by facilitating public engagement in policy decisions. It convenes stakeholders, recommends solutions based on community input, and collaborates with local governments to integrate health equity considerations into policymaking.

health, and existing planning processes. The Toolkit and related processes were shared at various exhibitions, roundtables, and conferences, both locally and nationally, to facilitate broader adoption and replication by other counties and organizations.

Overall, the initiative successfully disseminated its approach and findings, providing valuable resources to support equitable public engagement and decision-making processes in communities beyond Monroe County.

Monrovia, California

Monrovia, a historic city nestled near the San Gabriel Mountains in Southern California, boasts a population of about 37,000 residents. Incorporated in 1887, it is the fourth-oldest city in Los Angeles County, offering a blend of urban amenities and natural beauty. The city's downtown and neighborhoods exude a welcoming small-town feel, complemented by opportunities in the thriving tech industry.

The community's shared values of diversity, history, and community engagement are reflected in its mission to serve residents and create a premier quality of life. Featured programs like the Monrovia Area Partnership, along with collaborations with local media and schools, promote a sense of belonging and civic involvement.

Monrovia Area Partnership Program
The Monrovia Area Partnership (MAP) program is a comprehensive initiative designed to revitalize neighborhoods and empower residents as leaders. Initially established in response to concerns about rising crime and blight in specific areas, MAP aimed to foster trust between residents and local government while improving neglected neighborhoods.
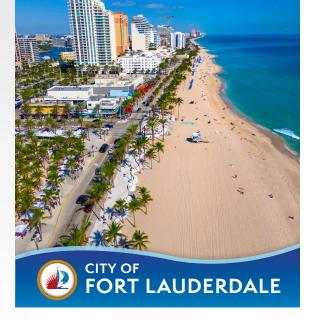
MAP implemented various strategies in partnership with local community members,

nonprofits, and churches. These efforts included organizing block parties, providing literacy and recreational resources, and offering home improvement grants and workshops to revitalize neighborhoods.

As the program progressed, it expanded its focus to develop residents' leadership skills. The MAP Leadership Academy was launched, offering a seven-week course covering topics like public speaking, community organizing, government basics, and code enforcement and public safety. Graduates of the academy have assumed roles in government and community leadership.

Building on this success, MAP extended its reach to youth with the MAP Youth Leadership Academy. This program educates Monrovia's youth on topics such as neighborhood compatibility, water conservation, emergency

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preparedness, transportation systems, and city budgeting. Over 200 youth have graduated from the academy, many of whom have gone on to serve in leadership capacities within local government and the community.

Community Media of the Foothills Partnership
For over 30 years, the City of Monrovia has partnered with Community Media of the Foothills (CMF) to deliver news, updates, and civic information through KGEM, its public access channel. This collaboration has expanded public education and government access while fostering community-led civic engagement.

Initially focused on covering city council and planning commission meetings, as well as city events, KGEM's partnership with CMF broadened content to include community-driven programming. This includes interviews with local election candidates, election coverage, and public service announcements. Additionally, community activists and citizen journalists committed to engaging marginalized groups have access to CMF's studio for filming and broadcasting.

CMF supports community-led programming by offering free studio time, equipment usage, and professional training in video production using high-quality cameras, lighting, and editing software. They also provide professional editing services for content suitable for their platform.

KGEM notably played a crucial role during the Black Lives Matter movement, hosting discussions on systemic racism and police brutality, including interviews between protesters and the police chief.

In 2023 alone, CMF produced 187 videos, broadcast 85 municipal meetings, and provided 62 pieces of field equipment to volunteer producers. They recently launched an internship program to educate youth about civic engagement and media.

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Monrovia Unified School District Partnership
In early 2023, students at a Monrovia elementary school returned from Christmas break to discover that the rose bushes on their campus had been removed without consultation. Concerned, they wrote a letter to the principal seeking an explanation.

The school seized this as a teachable moment, implementing a project-based learning approach to educate students about democracy and civic engagement. Collaborating with the city manager, the school district designed a third-grade curriculum centered on local government, policies, and community involvement.

As part of the project, students visited city hall and the community center, meeting with the city manager, city councilmember, and various city departments. Each department explained its services and engaged students in interactive activities.

Inspired by their experience, students conducted research on drought-tolerant plants to replace the removed rose bushes. One student even produced a "Breaking News" video featuring an interview with a firefighter to inform peers about the Fire Department's role.

The project also empowered students to improve recess safety and fun by conducting surveys, identifying problems, and creating and implementing official playground rules through student elections. The city recognized their efforts by displaying these rules on official signage.

This initiative's success led the district to update its third-grade curriculum to emphasize democracy and local governance.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Since its founding, New Orleans has been a diverse hub where people of various cultures and backgrounds converge for mutual benefit, engaging in trade, celebrating rich culture, and participating in economic and social activities. Unfortunately, much of this early prosperity was rooted in chattel slavery and Indigenous displacement. Despite this history, New Orleans residents have consistently fought for justice and unity.

During the 19th century, New Orleans had more free people of color than any other southern U.S. city. Indigenous people helped enslaved Black individuals escape to freedom, shaping today's Mardi Gras Indian traditions.

In recent years, New Orleans has faced challenges like Hurricane Katrina, the BP Oil Spill, and the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating racial inequities in wealth and opportunity, especially impacting children and families. Consequently, New Orleanians, including city leaders and residents, prioritize supporting children and families through featured projects aimed at advancing equity and opportunity.

New Orleans City Seats

In 2018, the Mayor and City Council of New Orleans responded to community and civic leader initiatives by investing $750,000 in early care and education for economically disadvantaged children under age four through the New Orleans City Seats program, modeled after Early Head Start. By 2019, this funding doubled to $1.5 million, serving 112 children under three across six centers. In 2020, the program's budget increased to $3 million with continued support during the COVID-19 pandemic, but waiting lists persisted due to insufficient subsidies and limited early learning center capacity.

To address these challenges, the City Council unanimously voted to propose a new property tax to expand the City Seats program and transform access to early care and education in New Orleans.

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Elected officials from across the city came together alongside parents, educators, social workers, and advocates under the banner of the Yes for NOLA Kids campaign to educate voters about the measure. A newly emerging childcare provider-led advocacy group mobilized thousands of teachers, early learning center directors, and parents to understand the measure, educate voters about its impacts, and help get out the vote. The Power Coalition for Equity and Justice mobilized its massive grassroots organizing network to knock on doors, send text messages, and phone voters to educate them about the measure. These groups offered educational materials in childcare centers and houses of worship, provided mini grants for voter education, and offered rides to the polls.

On April 30, 2022, New Orleans voters overwhelmingly passed the proposal with 61% support, establishing the largest dedicated local investment in early care and education for infants and toddlers nationwide. Program expansion began in 2023, engaging 40 centers to serve 1,659 children, supported by City and state matching funds and ensuring a minimum wage of $15 per hour for participating teachers.

Mayor's Office of Youth & Families

The Mayor's Office of Youth and Families (OYF) was established in response to community calls to prioritize New Orleans' children. OYF launched various initiatives to promote youth leadership and address gaps in services:

- The Mayor's Youth Advisory Council engages youth in policymaking and government.
- The New Orleans Parent Leadership Training Institute is a 20-week program that enhances parents' civic skills to advocate for children. Alumni have become educators and policy fellows.
- The Pathways Youth Internship Program provides workforce readiness and personal development to justice-involved youth, offering paid internships and workshops.
- The Summer Success Initiative supports justice-involved youth with enrollment in summer programs for stability and employment access.
- The Junior Civic Leadership Academy focuses on leadership development for youth.
- The Mayor's Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Program provided $350 per month for 10 months to 125 opportunity youth.
- NOLA Readers 2.0 gives second graders engaging library and museum visits.
- The "Mayor for a Day" program allows student essay contest winners to shadow the Mayor.

OYF has also advanced coordination, provided data for improvements, mobilized resources, and forged partnerships. Since its inception, OYF has distributed $14.7M to community-based organizations and $1.3M in direct financial assistance to over 700 young people and families.

New Orleans Youth Master Plan

In 2017, New Orleans faced challenges with youth education, poverty, and exposure to violence. The multitude of organizations working to address these issues lacked coordination and resources, hindering their effectiveness. The Office of Youth and Families (OYF) was established to tackle these obstacles, emphasizing the importance of coordinated efforts and resource allocation.

The OYF led the development of the New Orleans Youth Master Plan, a comprehensive roadmap for creating a positive, youth-focused city. The plan was developed and implemented in three phases:

Phase 1 involved over 400 participants, including youth, parents, and community leaders, who used data from the NOLA Kids Data Book and NOYA Youth Well-Being Data Dashboard to design 30 cross-sector solutions for a 10-year plan.

Phase 2 engaged 56 cross-sector leaders and youth in a public process to prioritize 15 solutions with action strategies and metrics for immediate implementation over two years.

Phase 3 focuses on ongoing plan implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The Youth Master Plan outlines 30 solutions across six key areas and five developmental stages (from birth to 24) centered on Health & Well-Being, Space & Place, Learning, Economic Stability, Safety & Justice, and Youth Voice.

Since its adoption in 2021, the Youth Master Plan has made significant progress, including increased investments in youth programs, expansions in early childhood education, and initiatives to enhance youth well-being.

Newport News, Virginia

In Newport News, Virginia, a city adorned with world-renowned cultural attractions, museums, and vibrant performing arts centers, there's always something new to discover. With 36 parks providing a tranquil escape within this bustling hub for military, manufacturing, technology, and research industries, Newport News offers a harmonious blend of urban energy and natural beauty.

Newport News is actively tackling national issues at the grassroots level by prioritizing resident engagement in civic affairs. Through inclusive forums and dialogues, residents of all ages are empowered to participate in problem-solving and decision-making processes that shape the city's future.

Addressing the Gun Violence Epidemic

In 2023, Newport faced a tragic incident when a six-year-old brought a gun to school and shot his teacher, prompting a resilient and unified

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community response. This event spurred city leadership to intensify efforts against gun violence, recognizing it as a national epidemic.

A comprehensive Community Safety Assessment gathered insights from residents of all backgrounds to understand safety concerns holistically. Resident input was collected through bilingual surveys distributed by trusted local representatives in high-traffic areas and churches. The city also conducted in-person discussions and focus groups with youth in collaboration with public schools.

The assessment unveiled significant challenges, including mental health issues, poverty, and barriers to accessing community resources. Grants were awarded to local organizations implementing programs targeting individuals at high risk of gun violence, addressing critical needs such as food security, vocational training, education, arts, housing, mentorship, mental health support, conflict resolution, and family relationships. Regular meetings are held with grantees to address inquiries and monitor program effectiveness.

Additionally, the city established a new community center, organized youth recognition events, and implemented immediate school safety improvements, mental health investments, and additional school staffing. Through community partnerships and engagement with marginalized populations, Newport embarked on a transformative journey to combat gun violence.

Newport News Youth Justice Diversion Program

Newport News believes that people should not be defined by mistakes made in their youth. This belief led city leadership to craft legislation allowing the implementation of a youth justice diversion program.

In March 2023, the City of Newport News became the first jurisdiction in Virginia to operate a Youth Court, offering a restorative justice solution for early anti-social and delinquent behaviors. Young offenders (ages 11-17) are judged and sentenced by their peers, often resulting in community service, counseling, and restitution. The engagement of young volunteers in roles like defender, prosecutor, and juror facilitates learning, understanding, and dialogue. The only adult involved in this process is a practicing lawyer who acts as the judge.

The success of the Youth Court has inspired other organizations to develop programs aimed at reducing youth recidivism. Volunteers of America Chesapeake and Carolinas (VOACC) used a city grant to create the PeaceKeepers program, focusing on individuals leaving juvenile detention by providing comprehensive workforce development supports and trauma-informed case management services.

Additionally, the Second Chance Act Youth Reentry Program offers wrap-around reentry services to youth exiting the juvenile detention center. Through Second Chance, youth ages 10 to 20 have access to mental health services, substance use recovery, education and employment services, transitional housing resources, and other social supports designed to set them on pathways to long-term success.

CARE: Addressing the Mental Health Crisis with Compassionate Support

Newport News launched the Community Assistance Response (CARE) program to support those in mental health crisis and divert them from incarceration. A collaboration between the Fire Department, Police Department, and Community Services Board, CARE aims to reduce police involvement in nonviolent mental health situations.

Law enforcement faces significant challenges assisting individuals with mental illness. CARE allows officers to step back

during mental health crisis calls, sending a team of a paramedic and mental health provider instead.

When a crisis call comes in, the CARE team assesses the individual's needs and provides interventions, connecting them with appropriate resources like hospitals or mental health providers. This approach prevents unnecessary incarceration and keeps incidents off records, preserving employment and voting rights.

CARE collaborates with community organizations to raise awareness of available resources and address homelessness among individuals with mental health challenges by connecting them to support agencies.

Newport News' proactive investment in CARE reflects its commitment to saving lives and improving outcomes amid rising mental health issues. The program's success lies in its collaborative, person-centered approach, striving for sustainable change in the lives of those it serves.

Oakland, California

Oakland's history is marked by a legacy of passionate and skilled activism for racial justice, spanning from indigenous resistance against Spanish missions to contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, Moms4Housing, and efforts against ICE detention. Despite decades of organizing, many feel that city processes have not sufficiently supported the wellbeing and inclusion of diverse communities, who continue to face barriers to accessing services and participating meaningfully in civic engagement.

Progress against discrimination has been made, but underlying systems persist. Historic planning and policies harmed racially

representative areas, leading to distrust in city government. In response, Oakland established the Department of Race and Equity in 2016—perhaps the first of its kind—to address racial disparities and foster a vision of diversity and equity. This move acknowledges a need to undo harm and achieve racial equity, reflecting a city grappling with its complex legacy and striving for transformative change towards fairness and inclusion.

Citywide Inclusive Engagement Workgroup

A workgroup initially formed to address City of Oakland employee concerns regarding access to COVID-19 prevention services during the pandemic has evolved into a collaborative space for coordinating outreach and engagement efforts across departments. This initiative aims to enhance the city's communication and engagement practices with the communities it serves, particularly focusing on those facing barriers to accessing information and services due to limited internet connectivity and device availability.

Over 500 city employees have participated in the workgroup, with 125 currently active members. They have contributed to the creation of a virtual resource catalog, contact lists for community organizations, and training programs to enhance staff skills in engaging with underserved communities. The workgroup successfully advocated for the creation of the city's first Inclusive Engagement Officer position, which was filled after a rigorous hiring process.

Furthermore, the workgroup drafted an internal administrative instruction manual to formalize an inclusive approach to the city's engagement efforts, emphasizing best practices for equitable inclusion and data-driven decision-making. Currently, the workgroup is assisting departments in developing procedures for inclusive outreach and engagement tailored to their respective areas of operation.

City of Oakland General Plan Update

The Planning and Building Department of Oakland launched an equity change process in 2018, placing a priority on equity within the General Plan Update (GPU). Throughout this initiative, the Racial Equity Analysis Tool and Inclusive Engagement Guide have guided staff in maintaining an equity focus, applying an equity framework, and planning inclusive engagement across various planning areas including transportation, economic development, and housing.

During the GPU development, staff conducted a year-long consultation with community-based organizations serving populations affected by racial disparities. This consultation aimed to build relationships, co-create engagement agreements, and establish guiding principles for the plan. Utilizing virtual meetings, multilingual online surveys, and

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Capital Improvement Program

In June 2019, Oakland's City Council adopted the 2020-25 Capital Improvement Program (CIP), which marked a departure from past practices by incorporating community values alongside standard asset-based considerations. This initiative aimed to address racial and social inequities within the city through careful equity analysis in public outreach and project prioritization.

The updated CIP development methodology focused on three main themes: transforming the internal working structure, inclusive and proactive public engagement, and technical considerations like analytics and project prioritization.

Under the first theme, Oakland made organizational changes and provided staff training on racial equity to lay the groundwork for the CIP update. Two working structures were established to coordinate the transition, ensuring interdepartmental collaboration and approval of proposed changes.

For the second theme, the city devised a comprehensive outreach strategy to engage diverse communities, including intentionally locating meetings in areas with higher proportions of marginalized populations and translating materials into multiple languages.

Finally, technical considerations entailed revising project prioritization criteria to encompass community impact factors like public health and economic vitality. Community members actively participated in refining these factors and assigning their relative importance.

The results of these efforts demonstrated a significant increase in project engagement and implementation in communities of color, showcasing the effectiveness of equity-focused approaches. Oakland's revised CIP methodology serves as a model for other

social media, the city engaged communities effectively.

Community feedback was positive, with residents feeling engaged and listened to by the city. Many community recommendations were incorporated into the visioning process and plan elements. This success was made possible by the internal work of the Inclusive Engagement Workgroup, which prepared the city for collaboration and provided a shared language and framework for inclusive engagement, equity, and equitable outcomes.

Phase 2 of the GPU will focus on updating elements such as Land Use, Transportation, Open Space, and Noise, while introducing a new Infrastructure and Facilities Element. Staff are refining the engagement process for Phase 2 based on stakeholder input, aiming to enhance participation and inclusion in decisions affecting the community.

local governments seeking to integrate equity analysis into their capital planning processes.

Punta Gorda, Florida

The City of Punta Gorda is a historic town of 20,000+ residents situated along beautiful Charlotte Harbor. Its streets are lined with huge royal palms, beautifully restored period homes featuring wide verandas, brick lanes, streetlamps, and benches, creating an almost tangible old-Florida atmosphere. Nearly everything in Punta Gorda is waterfront, from hotels and shopping areas to parks and fine dining establishments. With bike paths connecting nearly all parts of the city and a climate that beckons outdoor activity, Punta Gorda is recognized as one of the most bicycle-friendly towns in the U.S.

The City of Punta Gorda faces challenges due to a limited tax base, hurricanes, floods, seasonal influx of residents, and population turnover. The city tackles these challenges by embracing partnerships and collaboration and is actively planning for the future by working to preserve its small-town character and promoting diversity, economic development, and sustainability.
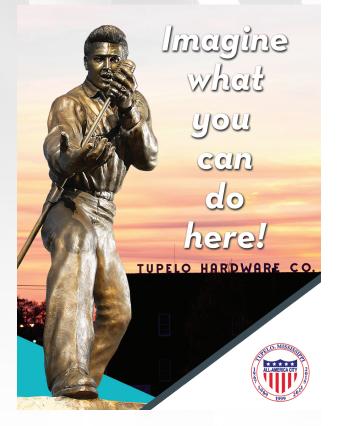
Punta Gorda Master Plan

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive vision, the City Council initiated the development of a citywide master plan. A kickoff event, "Punta Gorda: Journey to the Future," was held to set the stage for robust community involvement. The event's planning team ensured diverse representation from neighborhood, civic, and political groups, fostering collaboration among community members with differing viewpoints.

The master planning process began with extensive outreach—through meetings, phone calls, and interviews—to city departments, elected officials, and community groups to ascertain key challenges and opportunities

to be addressed in the master plan. Next, a public design charrette gathered feedback and built consensus on key priorities for the city's future. Over 700 community members participated in these efforts.

The resulting master plan outlined five major focus areas, including making downtown vibrant, celebrating Charlotte Harbor, diversifying housing, promoting walking and biking, and encouraging strategic commercial development. Ten key priorities were identified, ranging from attracting visiting boaters to improving walkability and supporting commercial development.

Progress has been made, with the approval of comprehensive plans, development of form-based codes, and implementation of initiatives like residential parking permits and affordable housing projects. The city remains dedicated

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to preserving its small-town charm while fostering diversity, economic growth, and sustainability.

Citizen's Academy

The City of Punta Gorda Citizen's Academy was established to connect with newer residents and demonstrate government functions and services. The Citizen's Academy offers an inside look at government operations, increasing transparency and leading to a deeper understanding of city departments' functions.

The Academy involves a free, eight-session course of interactive classes designed to provide insight into city government and develop future leaders who are well-informed and civically engaged residents. During the eight sessions, participants learn about the roles and responsibilities of various city departments and the services they provide to the community. Through presentations and facility tours, participants gain a better understanding of the role of Punta Gorda city government in residents' quality of life.

The program utilizes city council members, department heads, and staff as ambassadors for the city. Participants receive hands-on experience and often become advocates for city projects, contributing answers to questions raised on social media or volunteering to serve on committees. The success of each session is measured through participant surveys assessing overall impressions, program layout, helpfulness of handouts, meeting expectations, and engagement with departments before the class.

Twenty-two Citizen's Academy graduates are currently serving or have served on boards, committees, or the city council.

The Southwest Florida Vietnam Wall

The transformation of Veterans Park in Punta Gorda into a premier destination for honoring veterans was a collaborative and transformative process that unfolded over several years. It began with the establishment of the park as a Veterans Garden in 1996, driven by the community's desire to honor those who served the nation.

Over time, the park underwent significant enhancements, starting with the relocation of the Military Order of the Purple Heart memorial in 2012 and the installation of the Freedom Fountain in 2013. These early developments laid the groundwork for more ambitious projects, including the creation of the Vietnam Wall of Southwest Florida.

The vision for the Vietnam Wall emerged in 2013, spearheaded by the Vietnam Wall of Southwest Florida Inc. This nonprofit organization embarked on an extensive

fundraising campaign, raising over $625,000 in cash and in-kind contributions. Led by dedicated community members and veterans, the project aimed to create a 50% replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in D.C., engraved with the names of service members who perished during the Vietnam War era.

The park's evolution was marked by intense community engagement, including partnerships with various veteran groups, service clubs, and local organizations. City staff provided crucial support, offering design assistance, labor, and landscaping expertise to enhance the park's aesthetic and functional aspects.

Fundraising efforts, including the sale of memorial bricks and community sponsorships, were instrumental in financing the project.

Today, Veterans Park stands as a testament to community collaboration and dedication, drawing visitors from far and wide to pay tribute to America's military personnel.

Roanoke, Virginia

In the heart of Virginia's Blue Ridge, Roanoke has become the largest city in Southwest Virginia. Roanoke's historical diversity has been a source of challenges but is also a foundation for many triumphs and successes. Over the past decade, the community has undertaken a transformative journey, confronting historical challenges head-on.

Roanoke's history bears the weight of industrial disinvestment and a legacy of racist systems and neglect that have left segments of the population behind. With a response that transcends acknowledgment of these historical disparities, Roanoke is embracing a visionary 2040 Comprehensive Plan that prioritizes equity considerations, aiming to address root causes rather than superficial issues.

Roanoke envisions a city that overcomes its history of disinvestment and racial disparities by embracing transformation to become a hub of diversity, technology, innovation, and well-being.

Star City Strong Recovery and Resiliency Advisory Panel

Over the past decade, the City of Roanoke, like many cities across the country, has faced numerous challenges: a global pandemic, inflation rates not seen in over forty years, limited access to fresh, healthy food, increases in homelessness, political divisiveness, increased violence, and the ongoing impact of climate change. In 2021, Roanoke received over $64 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and took a unique approach to determining their use.

To ensure both immediate relief and long-term transformation, Roanoke established the Star City Strong: Recovery and Resiliency Advisory Panel, which conducted interviews and held focus groups with 100 individuals representing a diverse range of perspectives. Based on these interviews, data, and public hearings, the advisory panel made recommendations to the city council that would support the community's recovery and build resilience by investing in projects and initiatives benefiting people, places, and governance.

One notable allocation was $2.6 million to Habitat for Humanity's Partners in Prosperity program, aiming to add or renovate 18 homes in Roanoke's Belmont-Fallon neighborhoods, along with providing workforce development opportunities.

Additionally, a $2.5 million grant to the Local Environmental Agriculture Project (LEAP) enhanced food distribution infrastructure and expanded programs like Harvest Bucks to serve vulnerable populations.

Lastly, a $10 million grant to Goodwill Industries led to the creation of Melrose Plaza, a community hub featuring a grocery store, wellness center, and educational facilities, addressing essential needs in Northwest Roanoke.

Community Inclusion Programs

The City of Roanoke faced significant challenges in supporting its immigrant and refugee population due to language barriers and cultural differences, with nearly half of its residents having limited English proficiency. Effective communication became crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading the city to partner with language service providers and establish bilingual support positions to ensure vital health information reached all residents.

Beyond pandemic needs, the city launched the Welcoming Roanoke Plan to address ongoing

challenges like disconnection, language barriers, and limited job opportunities among immigrants and refugees. This plan introduced innovative programs, including the Language Access Plan, which provided comprehensive language services such as on-demand interpretation and translation, ensuring equitable access to city resources.

The My City Academy empowered refugees and immigrants by offering essential knowledge about city services and fostering leadership skills for civic engagement.

The city also organized cultural events like the Nowruz celebration, offering opportunities for community building and bridging cultural divides. The Community Inclusion Program Coordinator is also working with Roanoke's new Afghan residents to make recreational services more culturally appropriate.

These efforts earned Roanoke the Certified Welcoming designation from Welcoming America, affirming its commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming community.

Interwoven Equity/Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board

The Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board (EEAB), established as part of City Plan 2040, aimed to tackle two key challenges: drafting a comprehensive plan for the city's future and promoting equity and empowerment for all residents. Roanoke has faced historical issues, such as under-resourced neighborhoods, generational poverty, and racial segregation, leading to inequitable outcomes and health disparities. Over time, the city's demographics have shifted significantly, highlighting the need for inclusive policies. The city's vision for 2040 emphasizes diversity, inclusivity, and opportunities for all, acknowledging past injustices and aiming for interwoven equity.

To address these challenges, City Plan 2040 involved extensive community engagement,

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empowering residents to shape the future of Roanoke. The EEAB played a crucial role in this process, focusing on equity priorities outlined in the plan. The board worked on initiatives like renaming public spaces to reflect the city's values, such as Henrietta Lacks Plaza, and advocating for renaming federal buildings to honor civil rights leaders like Reuben E. Lawson. Additionally, the EEAB facilitated increased civic engagement through public hearings, allowing residents to voice their concerns and perspectives.

The city's planning department also pursued zoning reforms aligned with equity goals, aiming to expand housing opportunities and remove regulatory barriers. Engaging residents through various channels, including open houses and virtual meetings, demonstrated a commitment to transparent and inclusive decision-making. While the EEAB lacks decision-making authority, its role in

facilitating dialogue between residents and officials has been transformative, paving the way for collaborative efforts to advance equity and empowerment in Roanoke.

Saginaw, Texas

Saginaw, situated in the rapidly expanding Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, has a rich history dating back to its settlement in 1882 by the Thurmond family. The establishment of a local railway stop in the late 1800s spurred industrial growth, particularly in grain storage and milling. Today, Saginaw is home to the world's largest grain storage facility.

Officially incorporated in 1949 with 1,700 residents, Saginaw has since grown to about 25,000, with projections estimating a population of 35,000 by 2040. This growth has brought diverse age groups, ethnicities, and educational backgrounds to the city, resulting

in significant commercial, residential, and industrial development, necessitating resident engagement to develop a shared vision for the future.

Saginaw has prioritized community engagement, utilizing initiatives like the Citizen Bond Committee to involve residents in decision-making processes and aligning city services with community values. These efforts have led to the development of new amenities such as restaurants, parks, and community facilities.

Saginaw Public Library Adult Education Program

The Saginaw Public Library's Adult Education Program enriches the Saginaw community by providing a free, diversified, and accessible educational program for adults. Staff and volunteers leverage diverse talents to cater to individual learner needs, promoting inclusivity and cultural awareness. The program offers classes and tutoring in adult literacy, English as a second language, GED preparation, U.S. citizenship preparation, and basic Spanish.

Online and in-person offerings ensure flexibility and accessibility for all learners. Collaboration with local schools and businesses enhances resources and outreach, while community events celebrate cultural diversity and foster dialogue.

The program's success is evident in its growing enrollment, with representation from an expanding array of countries and demographics. Notable achievements include presentations at statewide symposiums and media recognition for the program's impact.

The program's impact extends beyond individual learners, shaping the broader community by empowering residents to pursue education and contribute to the community's progress. The forthcoming new library building promises expanded opportunities and resources, signaling a bright future for continued growth and community engagement.

Garage Gab Program

The Saginaw Comprehensive Plan prioritized continuous engagement to inform residents about new developments and educate them about the city. Traditional Town Hall Meetings, while valuable traditional engagement mechanisms, presented accessibility and inclusivity challenges. In response, Saginaw introduced the "Garage Gab" program.

The Garage Gab program brings community engagement directly to residents' driveways, fostering genuine conversations and feedback in a familiar setting. By bypassing traditional town hall meetings, Saginaw aims to meet people where they are, enhancing the quality of interaction and sense of community. Residents can host Garage Gab meetings by signing up online or calling the city, providing a platform for candid discussions and promptly addressing neighborhood concerns.

This approach has led to tangible improvements, with issues like missing street signs and park maintenance being swiftly resolved based on resident input. The program has also strengthened bonds among residents, elected officials, and city staff.

Additionally, Garage Gabs serve as recruitment opportunities, raising awareness of city jobs and attracting potential applicants. Neighbors involved in Garage Gabs become advocates for accurate city information and community cooperation.

Looking ahead, Saginaw plans to expand Garage Gabs to historically underrepresented communities, including Spanish-speaking residents and those living in apartments, to ensure diverse voices are heard in decision-making processes.

EMS-ISD & City of Saginaw Collaboration

Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District (EMS-ISD) and the City of Saginaw

have established dynamic collaborations to enhance educational opportunities, foster community engagement, and support economic development initiatives. Through strategic partnerships with various city departments and organizations, EMS-ISD leverages collective resources and expertise to meet the diverse needs of students, families, and the broader community.

EMS-ISD collaborates with the city administration on initiatives such as the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council, which allows students to actively participate in civic affairs and community projects, and the Student Apprenticeship Program, providing summer apprenticeship employment for students to learn about local government jobs.

The collaboration extends to the Saginaw Library, where EMS-ISD's annual cultural events highlight students' cultural heritage and diversity. Additionally, EMS-ISD facilitates collaboration with retired faculty, who contribute valuable knowledge and resources to support academic programs and initiatives. Many retired educators volunteer in Saginaw Library's Adult Education GED classes.
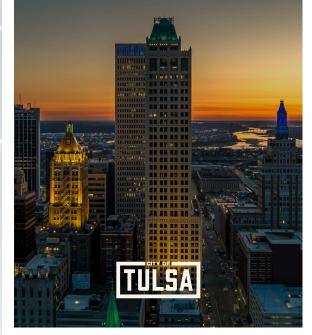
EMS-ISD recognizes the importance of planning not only educational goals but also infrastructure. Specifically, the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee evaluates strategies and priorities to meet Saginaw's growing population needs. By engaging stakeholders through meetings, surveys, and forums, the committee promotes transparency and community ownership, recently recommending a $659.1 million multi-proposition school bond election for November that focuses on safety, growth, facility maintenance, and equitable learning environments.

Seattle, Washington

Like many big cities, Seattle enjoys ample visibility and fame. Yet for residents, Seattle

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is less a big city and more a collective of neighborhoods and cultural communities. Since 1994, city leaders and residents have embraced a growth strategy modeled on urban villages. This strategy concentrates new housing and jobs in compact, walkable mixed-use areas along major transportation arteries, aiming to protect Seattle's human scale, history, aesthetics, natural environment, and sense of community amidst growth and change.

However, with a growth rate of 21.1%, limitations and unintended consequences of this growth strategy have surfaced. In fact, there is concern that this approach, developed to respect community, has reinforced a historical pattern of segregation and exclusion through economic and physical displacement.

To address these challenges, along with climate change and the pandemic, Seattle is

developing the One Seattle Comprehensive Plan, emphasizing broad and deep community engagement to empower underrepresented voices in policy processes.

Tribal & Urban Native Representation and Political Engagement

The City of Seattle is home to a diverse and thriving community of roughly 46,000 American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people from Indigenous communities nationwide. Tribal Nations and Tribal beneficiaries often hold a unique political status and corresponding special relationship intended to provide for the health and well-being of the Tribal Nations. Yet, their efforts have been chronically underfunded, contributing to disproportionately high incidences of disease, comorbidity, and mortality.

Tribal Nations and urban Native communities

have sought to address these challenges through legal action, collective advocacy, and social change movements that call on the government to uphold trust and treaty obligations, engage Tribal Nations as governmental partners, and advance the health and well-being of all residents. In 2021, in response to steadfast advocacy by Tribal and urban Native leaders, the City of Seattle created and funded an Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC) to advise on policies, budgets, programs, services, and projects directly affecting Indigenous populations.

Comprising nine compensated members nominated by tribal councils and urban Indian organizations, the IAC includes Indigenous youth and elders. Its effectiveness is demonstrated by its collaborations with city offices and departments and the hosting of a public civic dialogue to explore how Native cultures and values can inform public transit planning.

Additionally, the city convened its first Tribal Nations Summit in 2023 to discuss priority areas such as housing, natural resources, and public safety. The Summit resulted in city commitments to 23 initial actions that better uphold the sovereignty and treaty rights of Tribes, build regional partnerships, and improve outcomes for Native residents.

People's Academy for Community Engagement (PACE)

Seattle prides itself on its civic engagement, with a high level of community involvement demonstrated by high levels of volunteerism and civic participation. At the same time, a participatory culture does not equal access to decision-makers and understanding of civic engagement. To address this, the People's Academy for Community Engagement (PACE) program was launched over a decade ago, offering leadership development for emerging community leaders. While initially successful, PACE began to lose participants from historically underrepresented communities

and faced criticism for its lack of cultural relevance and specific advocacy skills.

In response, PACE has evolved into a more responsive civic education program, partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs) to tailor the curriculum to the needs of Native, Black, Latinx, and API communities. These partnerships have enabled PACE to address topics like power dynamics, generational wealth, environmental justice, city grants, and the city's budget in culturally relevant ways. The program has seen significant interest, with a rise in applications and completion rates.

PACE alumni have gone on to serve in various capacities, including on boards, commissions, and within city departments, showcasing the program's impact. Additionally, PACE has facilitated community actions, such as disaster preparedness simulations and empowerment initiatives for Urban Native participants.

Overall, PACE has shifted from a traditional civics training program to a community capacity-building tool, emphasizing relationship-building, shared vision, and collective power.

Co-Designing Community-Centered Utility

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) relies on highly skilled engineers to provide essential services like clean drinking water, stormwater management, and waste collection. Historically, community outreach, especially to underserved groups, lacked depth and was often perfunctory.

In 2018, SPU signaled a cultural shift when it announced its aspirational vision to be a Community-Centered, One Water, Zero Waste utility. To support and drive this change, SPU developed its 2021-2026 Strategic Business Plan (SBP) through a comprehensive and collaborative process. SPU reviewed customer feedback studies and gathered input from review panels and employees

through workshops, focus groups, and online surveys. Additionally, the public engagement plan included in-depth interviews with 52 community and business leaders, distribution of a short survey, and outreach at community and cultural events in multiple languages.

For the SBP Update in 2024, SPU collaborated with Community Liaisons (CLs) from the Department of Neighborhoods to co-design engagement strategies, resulting in increased responses from non-English speakers and more diverse outreach. The CLs brought cultural insights and practical engagement ideas, leading to innovative tools like emoji-based surveys and interactive posters.

Following the adoption of the SBP, South Park, a predominantly BIPOC neighborhood, experienced severe flooding. SPU responded with Community Liaisons providing support in multiple languages and coordinating relief efforts with community-based organizations. While infrastructure repairs are ongoing, SPU recognizes the importance of community preparedness and is collaborating across city departments to develop climate justice initiatives.

Watkinsville, Georgia

The City of Watkinsville is seeking to rebuild civic bonds by investing in strategies that connect residents to one another and to the city. These efforts are exemplified in the city's new tagline, adopted in 2021: "Come. Connect. Create."

'Come' implies that Watkinsville, a town of 3,385 residents as of 2022, is a welcoming place for visitors or those relocating their homes or businesses. 'Connect' speaks to a commitment to community engagement and intentionality in creating infrastructure that allows citizens to gather in non-digital ways. The tagline ends with 'Create,' offering an opportunity for people to imagine what they can create in Watkinsville, whether it's

a family, art, or a new business. Ultimately, people are invited to "Come. Connect. Create." in Watkinsville.

Miracle League/Playground of Possibilities
Despite a longstanding partnership with Extra Special People (ESP), Watkinsville lacked outdoor recreational facilities where children of all abilities could play together in a safe, inclusive, and accessible environment. In response, ESP proposed a Miracle League Ball Field and a fully ADA-accessible "Playground of Possibilities." To realize this vision, a committee of community stakeholders was appointed in 2019 to discuss project scope, identify priorities, and review design plans.

Input from the public was gathered through six public sessions and a park survey sent to over 1,000 residents, resulting in 321 responses. With the city contributing $440,000 and ESP pledging $1.5 to $2 million, the project

commenced. ESP's Big Hearts – A Ball for All, involving local businesses and citizens, raised substantial funds, complemented by a $150,000 contribution from the Oconee County government.

Community involvement was central, with public workdays allowing hands-on participation. The Miracle League Ball Field and Playground of Possibilities, offering inclusive recreational opportunities, opened in June 2022 at Harris Shoals Park, previously home to a limited-access "braille trail," a rundown ball field, and an aging wooden playground. Additionally, an ADA-accessible path was extended deeper into Harris Shoals Park, enabling easier access for strollers, wheelchairs, and walkers.

On game days, residents enjoy snacks donated by a local convenience store at a concession stand staffed by older ESP participants trained

in retail sales. The impact of the project is already evident, with increased daily activity at the site and positive feedback from users.

Rocket Field

Rocket Field, with a history spanning over 100 years, once served Watkinsville well as a venue for various sporting events and festivals. Over the years, a lack of proper maintenance resulted in aging infrastructure, preventing it from being a viable community gathering spot.

In 2022, through a partnership leveraging city funds, private donations, and community support, Rocket Field underwent a transformative redevelopment. The initiative, spearheaded by a private benefactor alongside the city and healthcare stakeholders, aimed to revitalize the field. Public engagement played a pivotal role, with input sessions refining plans to incorporate amenities like pétanque courts and a stage/bandstand, catering to the desires of older residents and enhancing inclusivity.

The redesigned Rocket Field now boasts a full-size softball and little league field, upgraded facilities including a scorer's box, concession stand, and restrooms, built-in bleachers, LED field lighting, and a new scoreboard. The design also reclaimed space for open play and additional parking.

The makeover has contributed to a sense of community belonging, with little league games and recreational spaces bringing community members together.

Thomas Farm Preserves

For years, Watkinsville residents and Oconee County citizens noticed the scenic land beyond the ponds on Simonton Bridge Road, yet were unaware of its potential. Following extensive discussions with the landowner, the city capitalized on a rare opportunity to secure and preserve this 100-acre property for public use, preventing excessive development and traffic congestion along the Simonton Bridge corridor.

During the fiscal year 2024 budget process, the City Council proposed a modest property tax increase to finance the purchase and maintenance of the Thomas Farm Preserve. The public overwhelmingly supported this initiative thanks to multiple comment opportunities and input meetings. A diverse 23-member Steering Committee, including residents with expertise in forestry, biking, and wildlife conservation, was assembled to develop a Master Plan for the preserve. Community suggestions, such as incorporating a community garden and additional parking, were incorporated into the plan.

A diverse array of community members and conservation experts contributed to ensuring the preserve would be accessible and enjoyed by all. The collaboration extended to local architecture firm SPG, which donated a reduced-cost master plan, and ongoing discussions with other community partners for future site development.

Through innovative financing strategies and partnerships, including leveraging funds from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) at a low interest rate, the city successfully acquired and preserved this vital greenspace. This acquisition not only preserves critical watershed and pastoral areas but also establishes the largest publicly owned greenspace in South Oconee County, enhancing environmental sustainability and public health.

Wilton Manors, Florida

Wilton Manors, also known as "The Island City" due to its miles of natural waterways, is an internationally renowned LGBTQ+ destination and community in Southeast Florida. With just over 11,000 residents, the city publicizes itself as a welcoming, inclusive, and diverse place—open to everyone regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or any other label. Wilton Manors regularly partners with LGBTQ+ organizations and is home to the Pride Center

at Equality Park, Broward County's and South Florida's premier gay and lesbian community center.

Embracing the LGBTQ+ community may be what Wilton Manors is best known for, but it is not the community's sole identity. Four distinct neighborhoods have been actively involved in the political process for years, with city officials regularly meeting with neighborhood representatives and strongly encouraging public participation to ensure residents have input and direction in shaping the vision for their city. Strong levels of public engagement, a welcoming culture, and a steadfast vision make Wilton Manors a tight-knit community.

Wilton Manor's Police Department Safe Place Program

In response to the alarming rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and threats of violence nationwide, the Wilton Manors Police Department (WMPD) took proactive steps to ensure the safety and inclusivity of its community by launching the 'Safe Place Program' in October 2023.

The program was established to create a network of safe havens for members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as any resident or visitor of Wilton Manors who may be victims of crime, harassment, or feel endangered. Participating establishments signal their commitment to safety by displaying the Safe Place decal, indicating it is a location where individuals can await police assistance free from immediate threat until officers arrive. Participating businesses receive training on how to provide a safe haven, communicate sensitively with victims, and contact WMPD for assistance.

One of the key objectives of the Safe Place Program is to encourage the reporting of bias crimes and incidents. By providing a designated safe haven where victims can await police assistance without fear of immediate harm, the program aims to address concerns about underreporting and increase community trust in law enforcement.

Currently, 45 local businesses actively participate in the program, demonstrating a collective commitment to combating discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community.

City of Wilton Manor's Sustainability Program

Wilton Manors faces significant challenges due to climate change and rising sea levels. Over the past century, sea levels in South Florida have risen by 8-10 inches, and projections suggest an acceleration due to global climate change, particularly impacting low-lying areas like Broward County.

In response to these challenges, proactive measures and community engagement have been crucial. The city has committed substantial resources to reduce its carbon footprint and enhance resilience, recognizing the vulnerability of its island location surrounded by the Middle River and the Atlantic Ocean. A key sustainability effort is the Wilton Manors/Oakland Park Joint Climate Action Plan, a collaborative effort between neighboring municipalities to mitigate climate change impacts and enhance infrastructure resilience. The plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 1% annually until 2028 while improving community resilience without compromising business operations.

Additionally, the city has undertaken a Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment, funded by the Resilient Florida Grant Program, to identify high-risk areas and vulnerable infrastructure. This assessment involved extensive data analysis and collaboration with a diverse steering committee of experts and community representatives.

These initiatives highlight Wilton Manors' proactive approach to addressing climate change and sea level rise through sustainable policies, community engagement, and strategic planning to safeguard the city's future against environmental impacts.
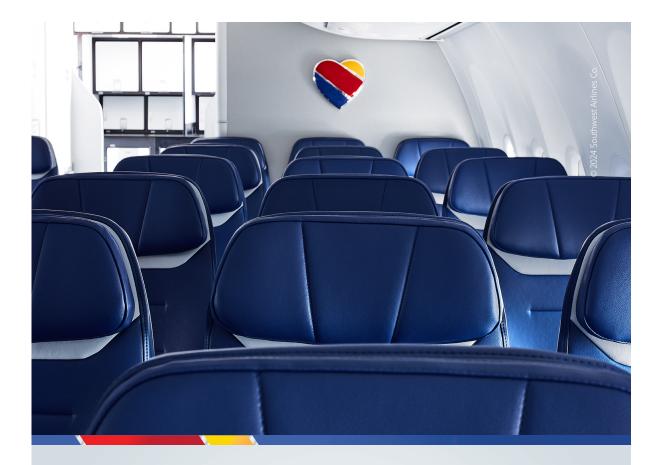
Reclaiming our Main Street – Wilton Drive

Wilton Manors, a small city encompassing just two square miles and surrounded by water, is bisected by Wilton Drive, a one-mile stretch of road. Over the past three decades, this area has evolved into an urban village, characterized by its thriving arts and entertainment scene. However, Wilton Drive faced significant challenges related to pedestrian safety, accessibility, and overall urban design. Wilton Drive was designated as a state-owned road, meaning it primarily catered to vehicular traffic, neglecting pedestrian and cyclist needs.

In response, the City of Wilton Manors embarked on efforts to enhance safety and transform Wilton Drive into a pedestrian-friendly thoroughfare. Although purchasing the road from the state was deemed cost-prohibitive, city officials pursued alternative solutions, inspired by the national concept of Complete Streets, emphasizing safety and accessibility for all users.

The turning point came in 2015 when the City Manager seized an opportunity to partner with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) following a successful lane elimination project in a neighboring city. This collaboration, bolstered by federal funding, allowed for key improvements, including lane reductions, sidewalk expansions, and additional crosswalks.

A crucial aspect of the project was extensive community engagement, involving over a dozen public meetings to gather feedback on landscaping and streetscape design, empowering residents and businesses to shape the project.

The completion of the project in 2023 marked a milestone, significantly enhancing safety, accessibility, and aesthetic appeal along Wilton Drive. The transformation has created safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, stimulated economic activity, and contributed to public health and sustainability goals.

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