A DECADE OF CHANGE

Public Space for the Common Good

Reimagining
the Civic Commons

PHILADELPHIA AKRON
MACON CINCINNATI
DETROIT LEXINGTON
MEMPHIS SAN JOSÉ
MINNEAPOLIS | ST PAUL
CAMDEN CHARLOTTE

Ten years ago, five foundations asked themselves a fundamental question: could investments in parks, libraries, trails and community centers connect us to each other, improve well-being and rebuild trust?

In response, these foundations formed Reimagining the Civic Commons and made an initial investment in local multi-disciplinary teams in very different cities across America. A decade later, 11 cities and counting have built a unique and effective model that leverages public space investments for the common good.

In Akron, public spaces have connected residents and bolstered small businesses, becoming a model for reversing post-industrial urban decline. In Detroit, a new park, greenway and revitalized commercial corridor have helped residents feel hopeful and safe in their neighborhood. In Memphis, reimagined riverfront assets now draw more than a million visitors each year who reflect the true diversity of the city. Each city has done this in its own way, starting from a shared model and set of outcomes, adapting them to meet their local contexts.

During a tumultuous time in America, 10 years have taught this movement that outcomes work if you fully commit to them; that high-quality public space can attract people across divides of income, race and beliefs; that institutions and governments working together can accomplish ambitious things for their people; and that the value created by reinvigorated public space can support local small businesses and longtime residents.

We offer these lessons in reimagining public space as a roadmap to a more prosperous, sustainable and equitable future for all.

Growing Resilience Through the Commons

A decade on, the Philadelphia story demonstrates how a civic commons approach can strengthen resilience through welcoming green infrastructure.

With its centuries-long commitment to public space dating back to founding father William Penn, Philadelphia was an apt place to launch the Reimagining the Civic Commons pilot in 2015. The success of this initial work sparked a shift toward neighborhood-wide approaches to a stronger, more resilient public realm.

Among the first projects was the Discovery Center, a public nature and birding sanctuary, built on the East Park Reservoir to welcome the community after decades of disinvestment and separation from the nearby Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. Out of this came deeper community collaboration and programming: a partnership with the Strawberry Mansion Community Development Corporation expanded stewardship of civic assets — cleaning and greening vacant lots into new community spaces. This partnership also produced The Yard, a small, resident-designed pocket park that turned a once-vacant rowhouse backyard into a flexible cultural commons. Located near the John Coltrane House, The Yard honors the neighborhood's jazz legacy, hosting performances, special events and everyday community gatherings.

Parkside Edge was first an underutilized, neglected plot of empty lawn within West Fairmount Park before a $5.4 million renovation installed rain gardens, trees, walking paths, lighting and seating that made it feel both inviting and safe. More investment followed: pedestrian improvements in East Parkside slowed traffic and created safer connections to the park, and the neighborhood is now a priority location for Philadelphia's groundbreaking "Tree Philly" urban reforestation plan.

Built as the home and botanical garden of botanist John Bartram in 1728, Bartram's Garden has reinvented itself into "Southwest Philadelphia's living room" — a free, welcoming public space for the surrounding neighborhood. That shift shows up in its programming: free boating and biking programs and We Walk PHL, a weekly walking group that's part of a citywide initiative with the Parks Department and Department of Public Health. Coming soon is the FloatLab, a circular floating platform in the Schuylkill River that will give visitors the chance to come face to face with the river's rhythms and wildlife.

Philadelphia's approach to the civic commons shows that when civic assets are reimagined through design, programming and collaboration, they can serve not only as critical green infrastructure but as the connective tissue of a more resilient and welcoming city.

80%
of Strawberry Mansion residents feel connected to neighborhood public art & cultural events





"Our public spaces are stronger today because of the values Reimagining the Civic Commons has instilled since 2015.

- Kathryn Ott Lovell
Original Convener, Philadelphia Civic Commons



91% of participants in We Walk PHL reported improved mental health and **86%** reported forming relationships that lasted beyond the program





↑28%
trust among Summit Lake residents in local institutions



“I would never have dreamed that I would want to come down to Summit Lake again.

- Sandy Saulsberry
Summit Lake resident leader



In Ohio & Erie Canal Park, **74%** of residents feel their neighborhood has changed for the better in recent years

Downtown has seen **600** new housing units and **60%** increase in residents

Rebuilding Trust, Reawakening Pride

Through 10 years of collaborative public space work, Akron has knit together three once-isolated neighborhoods, revitalizing public life, rebuilding trust and reawakening civic pride.

Summit Lake, Ohio & Erie Canal Park and downtown Akron are connected by the Ohio & Erie Canalway Towpath Trail, a recreational path running nearly 100 miles through northeastern Ohio. All three neighborhoods faced significant disinvestment over recent decades, but intentional co-creation and co-stewardship of high-quality public spaces is catalyzing a new narrative.

Summit Lake faced decades of hardship, despite its location near a lake once prized for recreation and later used as an industrial dumping ground. Believing that changing residents' perceptions of the lake was key to its restoration, the Akron Civic Commons team prioritized trust-building above all else — quickly adopting resident ideas that helped draw people into formerly neglected spaces. The team started with small high-quality pilot projects, paving the way for bigger investments, including a new park on the lake's north shore, a nature center, as well as a 2.5-mile trail that circumnavigates the lake. Today, Summit Lake is both a place for neighborhood gathering and a draw for visitors from across greater Akron.

Midway along the towpath, the Ohio & Erie Canal Park neighborhood has undergone its own transformation. A new playground was built in partnership with resident volunteers in addition to a fitness circuit, public art and upgraded athletic courts. Along with physical improvements, regular programming like a summertime outdoor concert series and a pickleball training academy supports robust public life in this now-everyday gathering space.

While many American downtowns have struggled in recent years, investment in Akron's public realm and cultural programming has fueled a burgeoning central city, drawing small businesses, new apartments and new residents. The $17 million transformation of Lock 3 park — with its new performance pavilion and landscaped gardens — has become a visible symbol of civic investment and pride, drawing 130,000 attendees to events in 2025 while welcoming everyday civic life.



Akron has become a model for how mid-sized cities can make their downtowns more vibrant and prosperous.

AKRON

Repair Through Public Space

Despite its small population, Macon, Georgia is an outsized example of how an integrated community-led approach to the public realm leads to a more engaged, equitable city.

The Macon Civic Commons team focused on the damage wrought by the construction of Interstate 75 through Pleasant Hill — a historically Black neighborhood established in 1879 — which eliminated the community's commercial core and reduced its population by more than half. A team of local government, non-profits, foundations and community members worked to enhance Pleasant Hill's public realm through a master plan with capital upgrades to open spaces like Sheftall Legacy Park next to the interstate. They also improved connections to downtown and the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail network by building the Walnut Street Connector multi-use path along with catalyzing resident-led programming.

The work in Pleasant Hill is part of a number of public space efforts in the city's urban core, kicked off by the Macon Action Plan. Cotton Avenue Plaza has been transformed from a car-centric, inaccessible space to a vibrant pedestrian plaza. The new Bicentennial Park is a gateway to Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park, which is seeking full U.S. National Park status — the first for Georgia — and its coming affiliated Muscogee (Creek) Cultural Center. The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail has expanded to connect neighborhoods, while the renovation of Rosa Parks Square, officially completed in 2025, now serves as a public space for the city and a venue for the people to freely assemble directly across from City Hall.

Building on successful action-oriented planning efforts downtown, the Macon team expanded the approach of resident-led programming, encouraging the Pleasant Hill community to join the work of revitalizing the urban core and leveraging a wide range of local creativity, skills and expertise. To kickstart public space activations, the Macon team distributed mini-grants to Pleasant Hill leaders and organizations in 2026 to quickly fund community-led programming like pop-up movie nights and fitness events in parks — showing that grassroots approaches can often be more responsive to creative ideas without the burdens of bureaucracy.

This collaborative approach to planning, programming and execution leads to projects and innovations that a city or county government alone might not prioritize — and builds a larger network of champions for public space across Macon.



> “Pleasant Hill has shown us that meaningful public spaces are created with residents, not simply for them.
>
> **- Weston Stroud**
> Co-convener, Macon Civic Commons

80%
of parkgoers think Pleasant Hill will improve a lot in the next few years



Bike Walk Macon shows the possibilities for roadways as connective tissue for Pleasant Hill and beyond.





Showing a desire for more public investment, **91%** of Pleasant Hill Open Streets participants support more government spending on public spaces

“The infrastructure investments planned in the Beekman Corridor are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect Cincinnati’s neighborhoods.

- Councilmember Meeka Owens
City of Cincinnati





800+
participants on the 2026 Tour de CROWN bike ride

More than **80%** of local residents feel the trail will have a positive impact on their neighborhoods



81% of neighborhood residents support more funding for public spaces

A Path to a More Equitable Future

In Cincinnati, a once-stigmatized waterway and an unused railroad corridor are becoming connected assets — linking nearby neighborhoods to the waterfront and to each other, opening a path toward more equitable development.

Cincinnati joined Reimagining the Civic Commons in 2022 with a focus on Mill Creek, which flows through a series of neighborhoods on the west side of the city known as the Beekman Corridor. Once deemed the most polluted waterway in America, Mill Creek has been cleaned up and transformed into a point of local pride, offering opportunities for fishing, boating, nature walks and educational field trips. Now, the greenway along Mill Creek — a key segment of the city's 34-mile CROWN biking and walking trail on the west side — is coming to life. Reconnection efforts are already underway, even ahead of the final purchase of the unused railroad corridor needed to complete the trail. Once finished, the six-mile greenway will link neighborhoods that have been separated for decades from each other (and from the rest of the city) by a challenging topography, highways and railroads.

These moves by the Cincinnati Civic Commons team have improved community access to the creek and added new amenities, ranging from an additional waterway entry point and pocket park to the city’s first kayak rental kiosk.

The work has also led to cleaner sidewalk connections to the trail and even sponsorship of a farmer's market for the communities along the Beekman Corridor. The team's wider advocacy efforts regularly invite people to get outside — kids, families and local elected officials alike — to experience the creek and the future trail by foot or bike. The Mill Creek Alliance has organized canoe trips to familiarize families with the waterway, knowing that getting into the water is a great recreational experience and one of the best ways to create advocates and support for the mission in the future. Events like Canoes & Conversations and Meet the Candidates rides have elevated awareness and interest in the future of Mill Creek and excitement about the coming greenway — solidifying the importance of the waterway and civic infrastructure to policy makers.

The civic commons work is a unique opportunity to drive equitable investment that benefits residents — and deliver a win for all of Cincinnati.



A Meet the Candidates ride in 2025 attracted 60 riders and seven candidates running for City Council, five of whom were subsequently reelected.

CINCI

A Blueprint for Thriving Neighborhoods

In just one decade, Detroit's Fitzgerald neighborhood has shown how layered investments in the public realm can rekindle social and economic vibrancy.

Over the last ten years, the Detroit Civic Commons team — residents, nonprofits, city agencies and multi-sector investment partners working across silos — has transformed vacant lots and underutilized assets in Fitzgerald into a vibrant, inviting network of public spaces. A new park and greenway mean every resident now lives within a half-mile walk of a nature-rich public space.

Along McNichols, a nearby commercial corridor, a redesign effort has prioritized people and public life. The corridor is now home to a storefront community hub run by neighborhood advocacy group Live6 Alliance, alongside a growing roster of locally owned small businesses.

The work has been a true collaborative effort, with residents intentionally included every step of the way, from hiring locals to lead data collection to prioritizing Black developers and small business owners for the McNichols corridor. The team has also hosted more than 500 community meetings and events, giving neighborhood residents more frequent ways to connect with one another.

Perceptions of safety in Fitzgerald have grown tremendously, and public life has become more diverse: the income and racial diversity of visitors to Ella Fitzgerald Park and the McNichols corridor has increased significantly, meaning people who share these public spaces are far more likely to come from different backgrounds than before.

The overwhelming majority of residents now feel far more hopeful about the neighborhood's future — a remarkable shift after decades of disinvestment. By combining a high-quality, connected public realm with deep community input, the Civic Commons team has improved how residents feel about where they live, which has contributed to a thriving neighborhood. Fitzgerald represents a blueprint for how to invest in public space to achieve social and economic vibrancy.



The McNichols corridor has been officially designated as a Michigan Main Street by the State of Michigan.

97%
of residents feel hopeful about the neighborhood's future





"We are witnessing a truly catalytic approach to place-based development.

- Jermaine Ruffin
Senior Vice President, Neighborhoods, Invest Detroit

71% of residents say they feel safe in the neighborhood at night – compared to just **35%** nearly a decade ago

↑$61K
neighborhood home values



Advancing a Citywide Culture of Connection

In Lexington, Kentucky investments in a slate of high-quality assets have drawn in people and businesses, energizing public life downtown — inspiring policies that prioritize civic infrastructure and a culture of connection across the city.

The Lexington team's approach began with Town Branch Commons, a 2.5-mile linear park opened in 2022 that runs through the city's urban core, connecting downtown to a 20-mile network of bike and pedestrian trails. A well-designed and innovative public space project, Town Branch Commons serves multiple purposes: it is a multi-modal greenway, provides stormwater management and cooling tree canopy, and advances equity by reconnecting a historically Black community on the East End to greater downtown.

To build upon the greenway investment, the Lexington team created and activated a system of adjacent civic assets, including a new playground and splash pad for Charles Young Park, a longstanding East End neighborhood landmark. A sea of surface parking was turned into Gatton Park on the Town Branch, which anchors the trail on the west end of downtown and is the first public-private parks partnership of its kind in Lexington. Phoenix Park, in the heart of downtown, was transformed through a robust, community-wide design process from an underutilized, unwelcoming space into a vibrant gathering spot. Adjacent to the downtown Central Library branch, it has become a popular site for families who now linger in an area they used to avoid.

The success of managing these assets as a connected portfolio has shown leaders and residents the power of investments in civic infrastructure: the city's 20-year comprehensive plan now includes walkable, affordable neighborhoods, parks and climate goals, improved road safety policies that prioritize all users through a Complete Streets approach, and in 2024 voters approved a tax levy that generates $8 million annually for parks.

Today, the Lexington Civic Commons team is building on this support to develop and implement policy that will guide the city's growth for decades to come, all while engaging and educating residents about the benefits. Public space pilot projects currently underway in four different areas of the city are inviting everyday residents to help develop and test new ideas, giving them a bigger role in shaping their city's future.



> "The civic commons efforts have catalyzed a new approach to our public realm citywide."
>
> **- Lisa Adkins**
> President + CEO, Blue Grass Community Foundation

↑45%
visits to the Central Library since Phoenix Park's transformation





61% of Lexington voters passed a ballot measure to establish a dedicated Park Fund supported by property tax, delivering **$8 million** in annual funding for public spaces

Lexington invested 26% of its federal American Rescue Plan Act funds into parks and public spaces.



LEXINGTON

How Public Space Built Common Ground

In a Black-majority city starkly divided by race and income, 10 years of investments in public space are bringing people together in ways that overcome those divisions.

For decades, few public spaces existed where Memphians of different backgrounds could gather. In 2016, the Memphis Civic Commons team set out to change that, creating a series of connected public spaces designed to build human interaction and bridge divides of race, income and belief, in service of a thriving, vibrant downtown. The team focused first on the Fourth Bluff: four overlooked blocks along the Mississippi River, comprising two parks, a library and a trail, long marked by outdated historical references.

The work began with the removal of Confederate monuments, followed by pilot programs and redesigns intended to invite socioeconomic mixing. River Garden — a vacant space once named for a Confederate official — underwent a $1.6 million transformation with features and activities clustered to spark friendly "bump-ups" among strangers, and staff reimagined as welcoming "River Garden Rangers." Fourth Bluff Park was similarly redesigned, and both parks began to host regular programming: weekly yoga, Sunset Skate, Firepit Fridays, swing dancing and Grizzlies playoff watch parties. Cossitt Library, once slated for closure, has been revitalized into a nationally recognized institution with a café, a podcasting studio and a flexible performance space; its Innovators in Residence model delivers programming designed and hosted by local creatives.

Inspired by the efforts in the Fourth Bluff, nearby Tom Lee Park was transformed into a stunning 31-acre Mississippi riverfront public space honoring Memphis hero Tom Lee and imbuing his spirit of courage, generosity and humanity through its design, public art, staffing and programming.

The evolution of downtown Memphis and its riverfront continues. The new world-class Memphis Art Museum is under construction, with plans underway for plentiful public space including a plaza shared with Cossitt Library. Thousands of new apartments have been built or are planned, signaling the rising desirability of downtown and spurring a revitalization of the city's core — one that welcomes and connects visitors and residents alike into public places. And while downtown revitalization boosts the local economy, the deeper legacy is a stronger, more connected community.

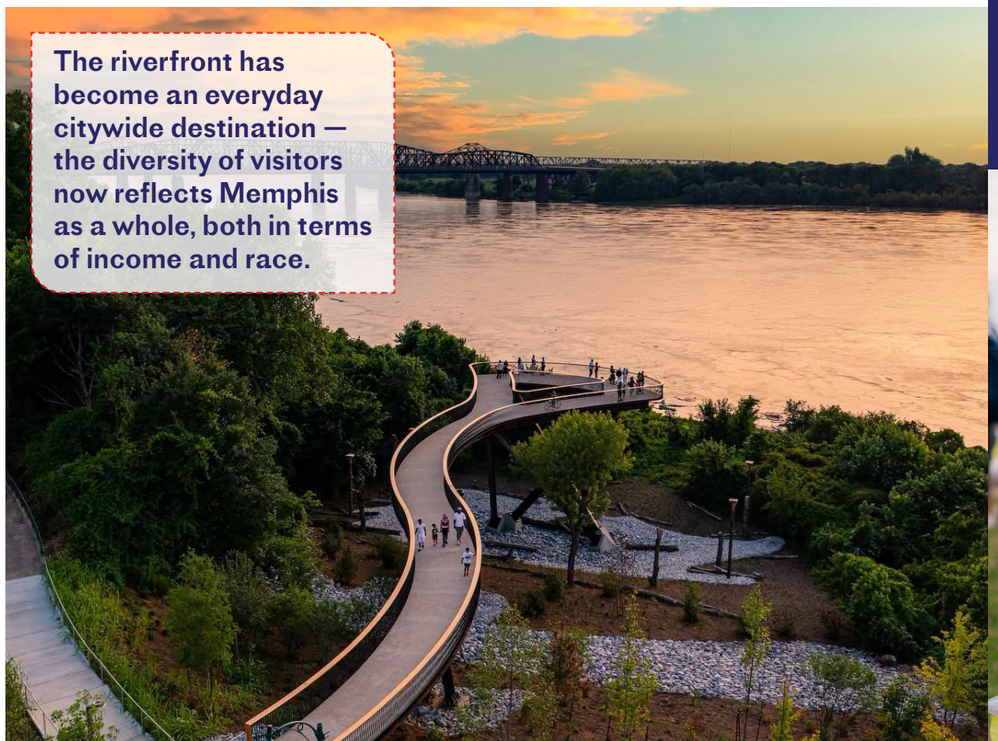


"When people gather, businesses grow, jobs are created and neighborhoods thrive.

- Mayor Paul Young
City of Memphis

Diverse public life flourishes on the riverfront with yoga drawing more than **5,000** participants a year, from **37** zip codes





The riverfront has become an everyday citywide destination — the diversity of visitors now reflects Memphis as a whole, both in terms of income and race.



2 out of 3
parkgoers report meeting someone new

74%
of visitors feel the neighborhood has changed for the better

“

In a city as diverse as ours, shared public spaces are how we become a cohesive community.

- Councilmember Michael Mulcahy
City of San José





25,000+
spectators at a FIFA World Cup watch party in San Pedro Square

↑20%
year-over-year increase in Guadalupe River Trail visitorship



Reviving Public Assets, Energizing Downtown

In the diverse, sprawling Silicon Valley city of San José, public space investments are invigorating the downtown — breathing new life into a collection of civic assets that everyone shares.

The San José team has pursued a multi-pronged effort of programming, maintenance, public art and upgrades to a collection of existing spaces as a downtown revitalization strategy — and it's working. There are new levels of public life, more welcoming moments for social interaction and opportunities for connection to nature right in the heart of the city.

Arena Green, a public space adjacent to the downtown sports arena, had been in decline for more than a decade. After major upgrades, it now hosts regular yoga classes, a PlayHub sports equipment library and family events that are bringing people back to the park. Along with capital improvements, elevated maintenance is a visible sign of the growing stewardship of Arena Green and the entirety of Guadalupe River Park.

The river is recovering as well. In 2024 the city passed a “no encampment zone” policy, relocating hundreds of people who were living in tents along the Guadalupe River Trail to interim housing, pairing the move with a “cash for trash” program, housing assistance and wrap-around services.

Tens of thousands of cleanup hours from city staff and volunteers have led to a healthier waterway: native salmon have returned and a new kayak tour program drew more than 100 participants to the riverbanks for its first outing.

SoFA Pocket Park, created from a former parking lot, is a charming public garden operated by a local food-justice organization and available for community events. Emerging food entrepreneurs are invited to use the park as a low-cost al fresco eatery. Stitching Districts, a series of public artwork that functions as wayfinding, has added visual whimsy and delight to the streetscape. And since it closed to car traffic, San Pedro Square's role as a gathering spot has been supersized — especially in 2026, when it hosted Super Bowl, March Madness NCAA and World Cup watch parties that brought thousands into downtown to nearby businesses and eateries.

Through targeted, collaborative strategies, San José is reviving downtown and showing what's possible in building a vibrant, more connected future for its residents.



Ensuring Healing and Prosperity for All

In Minneapolis-St. Paul, the Civic Commons team has planted the seeds for authentically addressing inequities, building trust and helping future generations realize a healthy, shared prosperity for all.

In response to the need for reparative work after experiences of unrest and trauma exacerbated longstanding racial, social and economic injustices, a diverse group of Twin Cities community members and organizations are developing public realm solutions to create vibrancy, connection and resilience. This includes realizing a vibrant Black commercial corridor near a future light rail line, reviving and sustaining a commercial district in a diverse, working class neighborhood undergoing major roadway construction and the reimagining of a destroyed police station and other precinct buildings into civic assets for growth and healing.

The upcoming Blue Line light rail planned for the West Broadway area is an opportunity to create wealth building, employment, housing, environmental and cultural opportunities for the residents of North Minneapolis' historically Black communities — which will be truly transformative for the neighborhood.

In St. Paul's Payne-Phalen community, a historically low-income neighborhood, the Civic Commons team is assisting the redevelopment of the area's Arcade Street commercial corridor into a pedestrian-friendly destination and supporting thriving environmental, social and business initiatives. The local Black Business Network is helping Arcade Street's small businesses with marketing and increasing awareness of the district, with Food Truck Fridays drawing new visitors to the neighborhood every other week.

A challenging yet powerful mission to reimagine the new uses for the former Third Precinct police station — burned down during the 2020 racial reckoning protests — in Minneapolis' Longfellow neighborhood gives residents, civic leaders and other stakeholders a chance to take charge of what might rise in place of the police station, ensuring whatever emerges becomes a symbol of hope, justice and restoration. Initial engagement work on the project will inform a larger city strategy to transform police precincts into community safety centers, to improve the relationship between residents and the police force. The Civic Commons team is guiding an important, ongoing conversation with the city to ensure that resident desires remain in the forefront as these institutional structures evolve.

Through prioritizing residents' voices in their communities and their futures, the Twin Cities is making progress towards healing and shared prosperity.

450+ community members participated in the engagement process to redevelop East Lake Street in the Longfellow neighborhood





"I believe that Reimagining the Civic Commons is one of the best opportunities to solve the ingrained racism and injustice in the Twin Cities.

- Paul Bauknight
Convener, Minneapolis | St. Paul Civic Commons



The Minneapolis | St. Paul Civic Commons team hosted a compelling Learning Journey for practitioners, including lessons on reparative work in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood.

Black Business Network's 2026 Food Truck Fridays have drawn more than **150+** visitors to the Payne-Phalen neighborhood every other week





“

Camden’s parks and trails are visual and experiential metaphors of the decency, grit and soul of our residents.

- Mayor Victor Carstarphen
City of Camden

91% of surveyed parkgoers say local parks have a positive impact on the surrounding neighborhood





84%
of surveyed parkgoers say the surrounding neighborhood has improved

Welcoming Spaces, Safer Communities

Camden, New Jersey’s transformation highlights how investments in public space can impact the entire city.

Once known as a dangerous city, Camden has experienced a sharp decline in violent crime through the collective efforts of residents, community organizations, local government and the Camden County Police Department. At the same time, the city’s revitalized public realm has played an important role in strengthening community cohesion and improving resident perceptions of safety.

Over the past decade, Camden has seen nearly $100 million of investment into parks and public spaces across the city. On the heels of this significant capital investment, the local Civic Commons team launched a pilot of collaborative programming and elevated maintenance at four recently revived public spaces — Elijah Perry Park, Whitman Park, Cooper’s Poynt Waterfront Park and Roosevelt Plaza Park — to test a new operating model that could eventually scale citywide.

Regular events and activations at these spaces — like World Cup watch parties at Roosevelt Plaza Park and Lunchtime DJ Socials downtown — have emerged through collaboration across a variety of nonprofit, community and private sector partners.

These invitations to gather have given the community much-needed options for recreation and connection, and bolstered the public perception of safety by bringing people together day and night.

Research shows that investing in a clean, well-managed public realm changes both how safe people feel and how safe a place actually is. The Civic Commons team is prioritizing the maintenance and upkeep of these civic assets, alongside community park cleanups that encourage stewardship and resilience. Local residents hired for Yellow Jackets cleaning crews are now a familiar sight at the four parks — a visible, everyday presence that builds trust, draws more people in and further reduces the opportunities for crime to occur.

By working cooperatively to nurture well-tended, well-programmed parks and public spaces where families feel safe, children can play freely and neighbors can be together, Camden is growing into a more welcoming and connected city.



Cooper’s Poynt Waterfront Park is a symbol of the Camden renaissance, built on the site of a former state prison.

CAMDEN

Public Space for Diverse Civic Life

In its first year of Reimagining the Civic Commons, Charlotte is supporting improvements to connect residents and strengthen the collective identity of the city's Historic West End.

The construction of local freeways severed this collection of neighborhoods from the rest of the city and brought disinvestment and social stigma to the area. The Historic West End is now diverse in terms of resident income and race, but lacks compelling places for people to connect with others across that diversity. The Charlotte Civic Commons team's work is focused on activating a portfolio of key civic assets to connect people, strengthen cultural identity and expand programming in ways that sustain and enrich these neighborhoods now, and into the future.

A set of well-tended greenways connects the Historic West End to Uptown Charlotte, attracting a wide variety of people from the West End neighborhoods and beyond. The team has engaged Mecklenburg County, which manages the trails, to add site-specific seating stops to encourage greater social interaction among visitors. It has also launched the design of an amphitheater space at the county-run Seversville Park on the greenway to encourage larger groups to connect, linger and enjoy the area's plentiful tree canopy.

Five Points Plaza (a public space developed and owned by the City of Charlotte and located adjacent to Johnson C. Smith University) was not fully used as an everyday space despite hosting a popular seasonal splash pad and amenities like a stage and swings.

To encourage nearby neighbors to spend more time in the plaza, the local team established a regular rhythm of activation with monthly Savory Saturday brunches and Popsicles & Play, in addition to a series of popular annual events like the Five Points 5K, BBQ & Blues festival and holiday tree lighting. A new shade structure is in development to ensure this community hub is comfortable year-round.

The Ritz at Washington Heights, a city-owned pocket park opened in 2021, recently developed a negative reputation for petty crime and antisocial behavior tied to a neighboring nuisance business. To address the problem, city staff closed the Ritz temporarily and refreshed the space with upgraded plantings and seating, while at the same time, a local community development organization is seeking a new anchor tenant better suited to the park-adjacent location. Paired with resident-led programming and family-friendly activities, the collaborative effort is recasting the Ritz as a neighborhood asset, while improving perceptions of safety in the community.

The effort in Charlotte is forging new partnerships between the city, county and community leaders to advance public spaces for civic life and lasting impact in the Historic West End.

The Historic West End is incredibly income diverse: **47%** of households earn less than $60K annually, **33%** earn more than $100K and **21%** earn in between





"Our Civic Commons work allows us to shape the future of our neighborhoods together.

- Shannon Hughes
President, Five Points Community Collaborative



46% of Historic West End residents are Black, **13 percentage points higher** than the city as a whole



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William Penn Foundation

Reimagining the Civic Commons is a national initiative to advance ambitious social, economic and environmental goals through revitalized and connected public spaces.

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