

Valdosta/ Lowndes County 2024

Final
Recommendations

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▶▶ Message from Georgia Forward

GeorgiaForward has been bringing together statewide thought leaders to talk about the future of Georgia since 2010.

From these conversations, the leadership-action program **Young Gamechangers** was born, and after ten successful programs across the state, the work of **Young Gamechangers** has had over a **\$32 million** impact on the state of Georgia. We are proud to work with companies, governments, nonprofits, institutes of higher learning, and other business and civic leaders to grapple with their community's most persistent challenges.

Since early in 2024, 45 of Georgia's best and brightest have been working in Valdosta/Lowndes County to develop big idea recommendations for community challenges. These young professionals, between the ages of 25 and 40 from a variety of sectors across the state, were divided into groups to work on the four challenge questions crafted by the local steering committee. The group met in Valdosta three times over the course of the eight-month program and worked for countless hours to learn, research, collaborate, and reflect on the "game changing" ideas they developed. The recommendations that follow are the result of next generation

Georgia leaders thinking outside of the box to creatively solve problems for one community. This product would not be possible without the invitation to bring **Young Gamechangers** to Valdosta/Lowndes County by community leadership, the guidance of the local steering committee, the enthusiasm of the class, the willingness of local leaders to be open and honest, the engagement of our **Young Gamechanger** alumni, and the support of our sponsors. Thank you to everyone who has played a part in making the 2024 **Young Gamechangers** program possible. GeorgiaForward and the Georgia Municipal Association is excited to see which recommendations most resonate with the community and which ones will be implemented first! We look forward to a continued partnership as these ideas come to life over the next several years.

Sadie Krawczyk
MANAGING DIRECTOR
GEORGIAFORWARD



45 of Georgia's best and brightest have been working in Valdosta/Lowndes County to develop big idea recommendations for community challenges



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Section 1

Team Green

Challenge Question:

How can Valdosta create and maintain sustainable parks, trails, and green spaces for all in our community?

Team Green

Introduction

According to our interactions with community leaders, one overall obstacle is the ability to work together as independent but connected organizations to address the neighborhood’s green infrastructure issues. Green Infrastructure (GI) is defined as “an interconnected system of natural areas and open space that conserves ecosystem values, helps sustain clean air and water, and provides benefits to people and wildlife” ([Georgia Forestry Commission](#), n.d.) Previous initiatives to enhance green infrastructure have been present, but divided. Members of the city and county may also be unaware of

the advantages of focusing on green infrastructure in terms of equity, quality of place, quality of life, economic development, and general community health. Getting the community and leaders to support green infrastructure investments may be difficult due to competing interests and limited funds. As Valdosta and Lowndes County continue to develop their commercial and residential sectors, another difficulty is to balance this growth with safeguarding green infrastructure, which developers must keep in mind the environmental impact and importance of maintenance and sustainability.



Team Members

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The Greater Lowndes 2030 Comprehensive Plan included a community assessment that highlighted issues regarding the natural and cultural resources of the county (South Georgia Regional Development Center, 2005). One main concern was the disappearing rural scenery, which is considered one of the most attractive features of the community. As rural areas develop into commercial and residential areas, natural green spaces are gradually dissipating, and environmentally-sensitive farmlands, wetlands, and floodplains are particularly vulnerable.

Protecting the natural resources of greenways and blueways as the new highways, promoting community connection, equity, and holistic community benefits (Tornes & Rosepiller, 2024). In addition, environmental pollution in streams and lakes have dire consequences on residents' wellbeing. Lack of ordinances results in difficulty preserving trees, vegetation, and landscape and leaving the county at risk for losing its most precious resources. The plan also highlighted opportunities for growth including: a) establish a connected network of green-space and parkland, b) establish parks and recreation programs, c) protect historic resources, and d) create places for arts, activities, and performances (p. 8). In addition to creating and preserving green spaces, sustainability has been a major challenge. Severe weather had a tremendous impact on the loss of trees and pollution of the Withlacoochee River, which endured 6.7 million gallons of groundwater and sewage spillage (Thomas, 2024).

By focusing on the creation and sustainability of parks, trails, and green spaces in the Valdosta community, our Team Green has developed three big ideas to address the Challenge Question:

- 1. Interconnectivity between Current Ecosystems:** Establish an interconnected network between parks in the City of Valdosta.
- 2. Parks Revitalization:** Rejuvenate existing green spaces by incorporating sustainable and equitable features that upgrade park quality, and benefit the community and environment.
- 3. Valdosta Eco-Adventure in the Horizon:** Create and implement a comprehensive master plan for outdoor recreation and quality-of-place initiatives.

Big Idea #1: Interconnectivity between Current Ecosystems

Description

The aim of the interconnectivity between current ecosystems project is to establish an integrated network between the parks and green spaces of Valdosta-Lowndes County. Currently, there is a disconnection between the parks and recreational areas of the city and county, some being rural and desolate while others are highly trafficked and in pristine shape. The basis of the project is to connect the parks and green spaces to allow for an ease of access to all the areas, dispersing the concentration of visitation to specific areas, that process will organically create equitable access throughout all areas. Once all parks and green spaces become integrated into one uniform system of management and maintenance, the system will evenly distribute resources, unlike the current state of parks and green spaces throughout the city. Valdosta is home to some of the most highly attended sports events and conferences throughout the state, but some areas of the city are neglected and disconnected from their resources of maintenance and community participation.

This project would create a quality of life improvement for the majority of Valdosta-Lowndes county residences. As a byproduct of that improvement, increasing access to some of the historically low-income areas of the city and county. This interconnectivity project would allow for a growth of the

city, as well as integrate into a larger statewide system, thus allowing for an exponential growth of the parks, green spaces, and recreational areas.

The execution of this project for the city of Valdosta would potentially increase its attractiveness across the state and nation to bring in a potential resident that is more active and integrated into the community. Naturally with the increase of community resident participation and usage, that byproduct would naturally increase business and profit margins for the small businesses and tax revenues for the city and county governments.

Big Idea #1: Interconnectivity between Current Ecosystems

Scope of the Initiative

The scope of this project would include all the parks and green spaces within the City of Valdosta city limits and a limited number within neighboring counties outside city limits. The project will utilize current spaces, green infrastructure, and roadways to limit costs of installing new trails and pathways. Scope of work to be completed would include but not limited to:

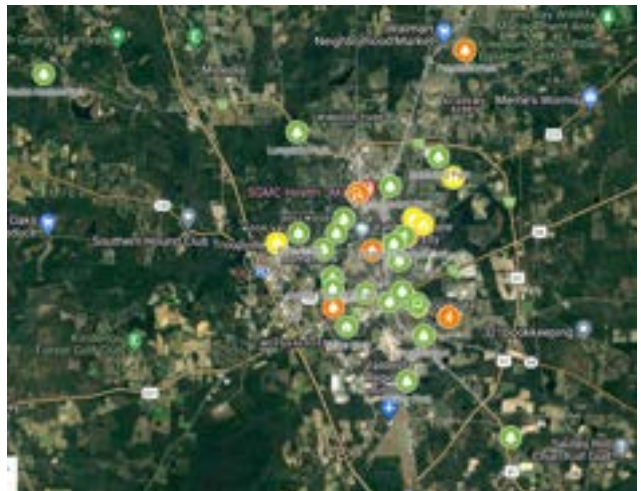
1. Assessment of Current Green Spaces and Infrastructure:

- ▶ Inventory and mapping of existing parks, trails, natural areas, and community spaces. Identifying their current maintenance plans, annual costs, and community usage rates.
 - i. Requesting bids for a potential partnership for a civic engineer to assess the current state of the parks and green spaces.



- ▶ Evaluation of current connectivity, accessibility, and usage of these areas. The evaluation process will take a deep look into current spending and financial utilization. A potential reallocation of funds for maintenance; to better understand the impact and usage of all parks and trail green spaces.

Existing Parks in Valdosta-Lowndes County



Existing Large Parks List

Freedom Park
John W. Saunders Memorial Park
McKey Park
Harry B. Anderson Tennis Center
North Lowndes Park
North Lowndes Skate Park
Scott Park
Vallotton Youth Athletic Complex
Drexel Park
Oris Blackburn Memorial Park

Existing Small Parks List

Bland Park
Chitty Park
Clyattville Park
Eastwind Park
Fellowship Park
Greer Park
Harrington Park
Hightower Park
Hyta's park
JL Lomax Park
Langdale Park
Library Park
Lovett Park
Naylor Community Park
Newbern Park
Olympic Park
Payton Park
Riley-Ledford Park
Shannon Hill Memorial Park
Smith Park
Snake Nation Park
Taylor-Cowart Park
Tom's Corner Park
Vallotton Big Field

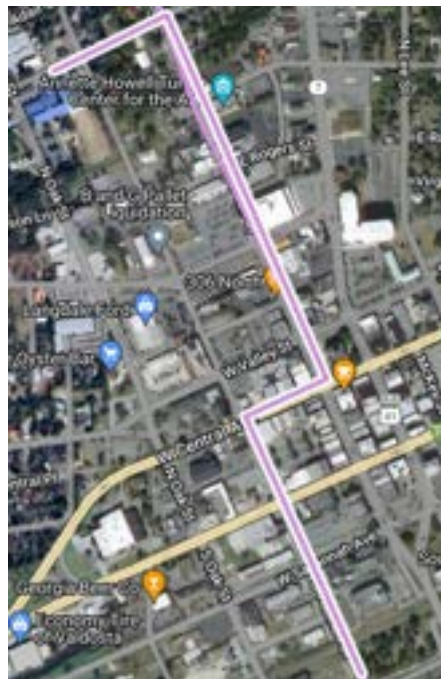
Existing City Trail

Azalea City Trail



Proposed City Trails

1. Downtown Walking Trail (From the Arts Center to Olympic Park)
2. Freedom Park Trail (from Freedom Park to Valdosta High School)
3. Langdale Park Trail
4. SGMC - VSU - Downtown Trail
5. Southside Trail (From Scott Park to Olympic Park) more on page 70



1. DOWNTOWN WALKING TRAIL



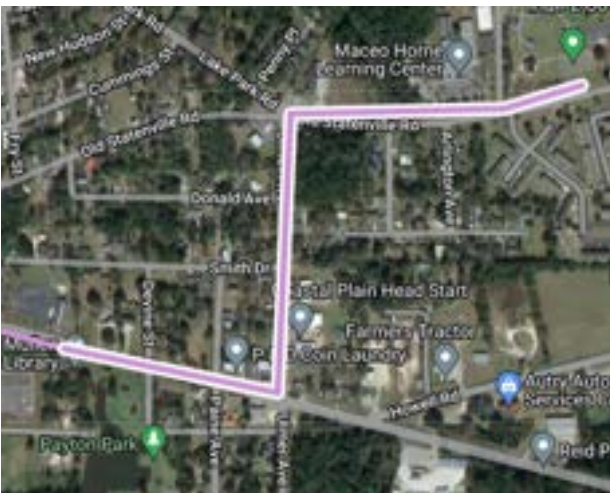
2. FREEDOM PARK TRAIL



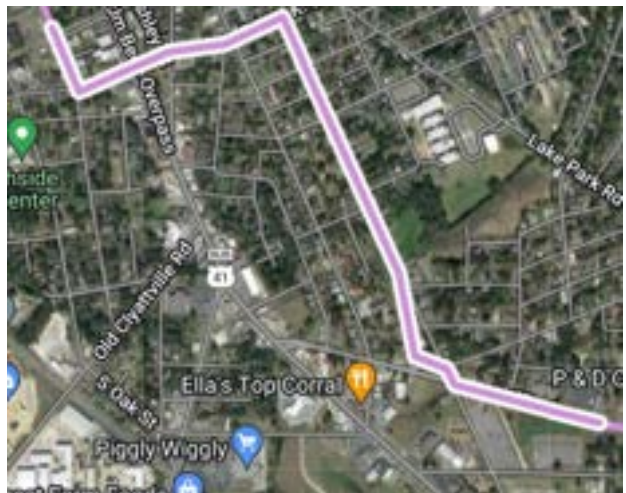
3. LANGDALE PARK TRAIL



4. SGMC - VSU -
DOWNTOWN TRAIL



5. SOUTHSIDE TRAIL (FROM SCOTT PARK TO OLYMPIC PARK)



2. Goal setting and Timelines:

- ▶ This marker is important to understand the importance of community integration. Setting goals to help community members understand and be a part of the process to integrate the parks and increase usage. Potentially having community events and information sessions geared towards transparency of the project.
- ▶ Continuing to do maintenance on the current parks and green spaces will be important to maintain consistency. Ensuring that the community facing events are diverse in nature in the historical neighborhoods, as well as the more affluent areas of the city (utilize city commissioners and council persons to discuss the narrative of a unified city.)
- ▶ Involve local residents, businesses, and stakeholders in the planning process and promote public participation through workshops, surveys, and forums. (Introduce or maintain ADA compliance)

3. Designing Green Corridors/Sustainability and Environmental Impact:

- ▶ Bringing in a sustainable urban planner for the planning and execution of the green corridors that link parks, neighborhoods, and natural areas.
- ▶ Prioritize sustainable practices in design and implementation.
- ▶ Consider the long-term ecological impact and resilience to climate change.
- ▶ Incorporating walking, cycling paths, and wildlife corridors to ensure continuity, maximizing sustainability by using existing roadways and pathways that are currently in use, possibly with more sustainable or environmentally sound materials.
- ▶ As the cohesion comes together for the local green spaces and parks incorporate the long-term vision of a state wide cohesive plan that

would integrate into the Georgia Florida Trail initiative.

- i. Partnering with Georgia/Florida(GF) Trails.

4. Maintenance and Upkeep:

- ▶ Establish a plan for the ongoing maintenance of the connected spaces. Create a career path for the direction and vision for the interconnectivity projects to continue and be sustained on a local and state level.
- ▶ Ensure the involvement of local organizations and volunteers in stewardship efforts, highlighting key local partners.

Big Idea #1: Interconnectivity between Current Ecosystems

Action Steps & Timeline

Short term goals/action items (Year 1)

- ▶ Partner with local groups to help source funding for preliminary plans
 - ▷ Community partnerships
 - ▷ Local Businesses (i.e. Chamber of Commerce,)
- ▶ Partner with the City of Valdosta for the Recreational Trails Program(RTP) Grant.
- ▶ Partnering with Georgia Florida Trails for a comprehensive plan (See Figure GF Trails, Inc.)
- ▶ Civil Engineering Plans/Layout with VLPRA.
 - ▷ Plans include connecting major parks (Freedom Park; Drexel Park; Vallotton Park; Scott Park)

Medium term goals/action items (Year 2)

- ▶ Bidding/Permitting
- ▶ Contractor selection

Long term goals/action items (Year 3 & 4)

- ▶ Breaking Ground
 - ▷ Clearing pathways
 - ▷ Integrating with current Roadways and Parks
- ▶ Installation of Infrastructure/Utilities
 - ▷ Electrical/Lighting
 - ▷ Facilities/Amenities
GF Trails, Inc; Courtesy:www.gftrails.org
- ▶ Installation of Trails and Pathways
 - ▷ Concrete/Asphalt Installation
 - ▷ Completing safety guards where necessary
 - ▷ Completion of Trails and Pathways
 - ▷ Complete sign-offs for permitting
 - ▷ Installation of Plants and Landscaping
 - ▷ Complete Maintenance Plan in coordination with Valdosta City and VLPRA

Budget

Item	Cost	Frequency
Community Engagement		
Community Events	\$35,000.00	Annually (Year 1-4)
Community Focus Groups	\$41,640.00	Annually (Year 1-4)
Promo Materials/General Supplies	\$8,000.00	Annually (Year 1-4)
Staffing		
Director of Community Engagement Salary	\$79,500.00	Annually - Ongoing
Fringe for staff	\$25,000.00	Annually - Ongoing
Preliminary Assessment		
Environmental Impact Assessment	\$50,000	One Time
Design and Planning		
Landscape Architecture and Design	\$200,000	Annually (Year 1-4)
Engineering and Technical Services	\$150,000	One Time
Permits and Regulatory Approvals	\$50,000	One Time
Construction and Development		
Materials (asphalt, gravel, signage)	\$1,200,000	One Time
Labor	\$1,000,000	One Time
Equipment Rental	\$300,000	One Time
Park Enhancements		
Playground Equipment	\$300,000	One Time
Picnic Areas and Shelters	\$500,000	One Time

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team Green

Big Idea #1: Interconnectivity between Current Ecosystems

Item	Cost	Frequency
Restrooms	\$350,000	One Time
Sports Fields Upgrades	\$250,000	Annually - Ongoing
Safety and Accessibility Improvements		
ADA Compliance Upgrades	\$200,000	Annually - Ongoing
Lighting and Security	\$150,000	Annually - Ongoing
Emergency Call Stations	\$50,000	One Time
Signage and Wayfinding	\$100,000	One Time
Maintenance		
Trails and Greenways	\$550,000	Annually - Ongoing
Park Facilities	\$800,000	Annually - Ongoing

Possible funding sources

[Recreation Trails Program](#)

- ▶ Federal program provides funding for trail construction, trail maintenance, and trail education

[Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program](#)

- ▶ Program through the National Park Service provides professional services to help achieve conservation and outdoor recreation project vision.

Potential partnerships

Partnerships and funding sources could overlap but are not always the same

Partnerships could include but are not limited to:

- ▶ VLPRA
- ▶ SGMC Health
- ▶ South Georgia Regional Commission

- ▶ Georgia Florida Trails, Inc.
- ▶ One Valdosta-Lowndes
- ▶ Valdosta State University
- ▶ The City of Valdosta
- ▶ Georgia Department of Transportation

Expected impact/Measures of success

Through this project, we aim to create sustainable spaces for both Valdosta residents and visitors of all ages. We envision parks and trails that are connected and easy to maintain while retaining their beauty without requiring substantial funds or time. Measures of success could include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Surveys (conducted in city and county schools for parents) (Qualitative Data)

- ▶ Georgia Department of Health Data for Lowndes County (Quantitative Data)
- ▶ Visitation and hotel usage (for visitors coming to enjoy the parks and trails) (Quantitative Data)
- ▶ Mobile Apps for parks and trails (QR codes along trails and throughout parks, allowing for quantitative and qualitative data collection)

Big Idea #2: Equity-driven Parks Resource Reallocation

Description

This initiative intends to revitalize current parks through a way of equity-driven resource reallocation for existing green spaces. Valdosta-Lowndes County seeks to enhance existing green spaces by incorporating sustainable and equitable features that upgrade park quality, and benefit both the community and the environment. This requires a thorough assessment of the existing parks, including their present usage rates, traffic patterns, and distribution throughout the city. Analyzing these characteristics assists in identifying the most pressing areas for development, or blight areas and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently. We will add native plants, eco-friendly features and upgrade park quality to enhance enjoyment and environmental care. In addition, this initiative will look into financing challenges and potential for sustaining and improving Valdosta-Lowndes County parks. Beyond simply sustaining quality, this project pro-

notes innovative redevelopment techniques and seeks funds to implement these enhancements while ensuring long-term sustainability and community benefit.

It was determined that in order to make existing parks as equitable as parks in more affluent areas of Valdosta-Lowndes County, targeted expenditures should be made in Valdosta's south and east parks, i.e, Scott Park, Payton Park, and Langdale Park, ensuring that they receive comparable amenities and enhancements. This involves improving existing facilities, increasing accessibility, and introducing community-specific elements to better satisfy local requirements. Furthermore, increasing funding and community involvement in these locations will contribute to the creation of inclusive, dynamic spaces that benefit all inhabitants equally.

Scope of the Initiative

The initiative's aims will be aligned with the following objectives:

► **Improve equality of existing parks:**

To make current parks in Valdosta, Georgia as equitable as parks in more affluent areas of Valdosta-Lowndes, targeted expenditures should be made in the parks located at the southern and eastern sides of the town, in addition to other blight areas; ensuring that they receive comparable amenities and enhancements. This involves improving current facilities, increasing accessibility, and introducing community-specific elements to better satisfy local requirements. Furthermore, increasing funding and community involvement in these locations will contribute to the creation of inclusive, dynamic spaces that benefit all inhabitants equally.



► **Introduction of Micro Parks & Wayfinders:**

We aim to implement new micro-parks and green spaces within existing parks in Valdosta-Lowndes County to transform underutilized areas into vibrant, community-centric spaces. These micro-parks will feature additional shaded areas, native vegetation, community gardens, dog parks, playgrounds, and splash pads, creating recreational and social hubs that enhance the local environment. Complimentary, this initiative seeks to add features such as wayfinders, which are designed to help visitors easily navigate and discover various attractions and amenities within microparks. By activating underused spaces, these micro-parks will draw traffic to commercial areas and provide more accessible green spaces closer to where community members live and work. This approach not only promotes environmental sustainability but also strengthens neighborhood connections and fosters a sense of identity within the community, making Valdosta a more livable and cohesive place.

► **Sustainability:** The program to improve green spaces and parks in Valdosta-Lowndes County includes the implementation of sustainable and innovative solutions such as solar-powered charging stations incorporated into benches and tables that provide phone charging, Wi-Fi hotspots, and temperature-controlled sitting. Furthermore, incorporating native plants and vegetation, installing solar-powered illumination in pedestrian routes, street corners, parking lots, community walking trails, and parks would make

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team Green

Big Idea #2: - Equity-driven Parks Resource Reallocation

these locations more accessible and appealing. In addition, stormwater management measures will be used throughout the city to eliminate hard surfaces and capture stormwater. This includes replacing concrete and asphalt roads with porous pavement, gravel lots, mulch walks, and natural plants to filter pollutants, minimize erosion, recharge groundwater, and reduce flooding. Permeable basketball courts and skate parks are examples of dual-purpose areas by providing recreational space and reducing flooding hazards. The effort will also look into smart stormwater systems employing real-time monitoring technologies, with VSU environmental studies students tracking data to provide hands-on learning opportunities. These sustainable, cost-effective, and multifunctional solutions seek to enhance park and trail use while improving environmental health and community resilience.

- ▶ **A cohesive maintenance plan:** for redeveloping parks and green spaces in Valdosta-Lowndes County will involve a multi-faceted approach to secure and sustain funding. The plan includes researching and applying for government grants, nonprofit and foundation grants, public-private partnerships, and community development block grants. Additionally, partnerships with local businesses, volunteer organizations, and key stakeholders such as the Lowndes County Parks and Recreation, One Valdosta-Lowndes, VSU Chamber of Commerce, Valdosta State University, and the City of Valdosta's Public



SCOTT PARK, VALDOSTA GA

Works/Storm Management Division will be essential. For more information on volunteer organizations, please refer to Keep Valdosta Beautiful programs detailed under Medium Goals in Big Idea #3. These collaborations will not only provide financial support but also offer resources and expertise to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the park redevelopment initiative. By leveraging these diverse funding sources, partnerships, and non-profits like Keep Valdosta-Lowndes Beautiful, the plan aims to create and maintain high-quality green spaces that enhance the community's well-being and environmental health.

- ▶ **Pilot Project Program:** The Equity-driven Parks Resource Reallocation initiative aims to revitalize Scott Park, Payton Park, and Vallotton Parks in Valdosta, Georgia, by addressing their underfunding and minimal resources. This pilot program will focus on equitable distribution of funds and resources to enhance its existing recreational facilities.

Action Steps & Timeline

Short term goals/action items (0-1 year)

- ▶ Conduct a comprehensive assessment of park utilization and community needs.
- ▶ Engage stakeholders through surveys and public meetings to gather feedback.
- ▶ Initiate pilot projects to implement immediate sustainable upgrades in selected parks; selected parks shall include Payton Park, Scott Park, and Vulloton park..
- ▶ Develop a preliminary funding strategy for initial redevelopment phases.



PAYTON PARK, VALDOSTA GA

Medium Term Goals/Action Items (1-3 years)

- ▶ Expand sustainable features and amenities based on pilot project outcomes.
- ▶ Begin comprehensive redevelopment of selected parks with community input.
- ▶ Secure additional funding through grants and partnerships for further park enhancements.

Long Term Goals/Action Items (3+ years)

- ▶ Complete full-scale redevelopment of all parks with sustainable design elements.
- ▶ Establish long-term maintenance protocols to ensure sustainable features endure.

Big Idea #2: - Equity-driven Parks Resource Reallocation

Budget

Item	Cost	Frequency
Basketball Court Shade	\$3,000-\$12,000 (ea.)	One Time
Playground Shade	\$9,000-\$15,000 (ea.)	One Time
Solar Powered Light Posts	\$700 (ea.)	
Demolition (Non-permeable Spaces)	\$2.00-\$6.00 (per sq. ft.)	One Time
Porous Concrete (Replacement)	\$10.00-\$30.00 (per sq. ft.)	One Time
Native Plants	\$5,000-\$10,000	Annually; Semi-Annually
Staff Maintenance (Part-Time)	\$2,000	Monthly
EnergiPlant Nano Grid	\$2,500	One Time
Total	\$37,000-\$67,000	



Possible funding sources

Grants

- ▶ [American Academy of Dermatology](#)-Shade Structure Grant Program awards grants of up to \$8,000 to public schools and non-profit organizations for installing permanent shade structures for outdoor locations that are not protected from the sun, such as playgrounds, pools, or recreation spaces.
- ▶ [Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program](#)- Grant and loan program administered by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and authorized by The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act
- ▶ [Georgia ReLeaf Grant Program](#)
 - ▶ Funding for tree painting and tree-giveaway projects
 - ▶ Maximum grant ward is \$15000
- ▶ [South Georgia Regional Commission](#)
- ▶ [Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax \(SPLOST\)](#)- A 1-cent sales tax, which the State of Georgia allows counties to collect to fund specific improvement projects.
- ▶ [Land & Water Conservation Fund Grants](#)
 - ▶ Federal program to assist with the acquisition of lands and development and renovation of outdoor recreation facilities
 - ▶ Requires a dollar-for-dollar match (minimum - \$25,000; maximum - \$500,000)
- ▶ [EnergiPlant](#) - Bench advertising can produce \$70-400 a month in revenue
- ▶ [Trees Across Georgia \(TAG\) Grant Program](#)- Financial assistance for canopy mapping, staffing, inventories, storm planning and other U&CF projects

Potential partnerships

- ▶ One Valdosta Lowndes
- ▶ [Greater Valdosta United Way](#)
- ▶ [Garden for Wildlife](#)
- ▶ [Keep America Beautiful](#)
- ▶ [Valdosta Rotary Club](#)
- ▶ VLPR

Expected impact/Measures of success

Create an environmentally safe and visually appealing space for a variety of populations to utilize for recreational and social gatherings. Building up what is already established in the community to bring more attraction and gathering to these areas.

Measure of success through reservation requests to rent facilities through VLPR following revitalization.

Survey parks throughout the year to compare traffic and facility usage.

Big Idea #3: Valdosta Eco-Adventure on the Horizon

Description

In our team's assessment of Valdosta and Lowndes County, we learned that while there are existing parks and recreation opportunities, there are very few public options for outdoor recreation in natural settings, and there is currently no public entity actively working to develop these opportunities. Research highlights the importance of local planners incorporating detailed, comprehensive planning and maintenance to address sustainable green infrastructure (Kim & Tran, 2023). Outdoor recreation opportunities enhance quality of life for people of all ages, by promoting health, wellness, and community engagement (Nazir et al, 2014; Nieuwenhuisen, 2021). The perceived quality of life of a community also factors into the community's ability to attract and retain workforce. Thus, investments in outdoor recreation and quality of place programs serve to catalyze economic development and make our communities healthier, physically, mentally, and socially (Bowen et al., 2015). This led our group to recommend the creation and implementation of a comprehensive master plan for outdoor recreation and quality of place initiatives tailored to needs of residents and visitors in Valdosta and Lowndes County.

We believe the newly formed One Valdosta Lowndes (OVL) would be the organization best suited for this task as this effort will require collaborative ef-

fort between Valdosta Lowndes County Parks and Recreation, Lowndes County, the City of Valdosta, along with other public and private entities. OVL's stated mission is "to invest in economic growth and facilitate opportunity across Lowndes County" (One Valdosta Lowndes, 2024, p. 2) and their inaugural OVL partners include: the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners, the City of Valdosta, the Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority, the Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce, Valdosta State University, Georgia Power, SGMC Health, and others, making them well-suited to be responsible for recommended endeavor.

We believe the plan should include the creation and rekindling of volunteer organizations like Keep Valdosta Beautiful, harness the resources the community has for expanded outdoor recreation, and include big ideas like new parks and trails that will provide the opportunities for outdoor recreation that Valdosta and Lowndes County lacks. We also believe that this plan will show the need for a division dedicated to outdoor recreation within the Valdosta Parks and Recreation Authority. For example, Georgia's Plan for Outdoor Recreation (SCORP 2022-2026) details key goals, connections, foundational pillars, and resolutions for maintaining and sustaining public outdoor recreation (<https://gastateparks.org/SCORP>).

Scope of the Initiative

By investing in specific quality of place initiatives and outdoor recreation activities in Valdosta, we can work to create a more attractive, healthy, sustainable, and livable community for everyone. The scope of this idea includes the following:

- ▶ **Develop a master plan through partnerships:** One Valdosta Lowndes is an incredible resource for establishing the partnerships necessary for developing this master plan. In addition, local businesses, environmental organizations, and community groups can support the planning, funding, and implementation of green infrastructure projects.
- ▶ **Create a division for outdoor recreation:** Having personnel dedicated to identifying the strengths and areas of improvement for outdoor recreation in Valdosta and Lowndes County is critical to implementation of the plan.

- ▶ **Strengthen community involvement:** A vital aspect is to foster a strong sense of community voice and ownership in creating and maintaining green spaces through public participation.
- ▶ **Support development and maintenance of River Park:** Through our conversation with local community leaders, we learned that Lowndes County owns land with access to the Withlacoochee river that has been considered for the creation of a river park, but this project has yet to be acted on. We believe this park could be an exceptional addition to the community that could provide recreation and educational opportunities (see photos below).



AERIAL VIEW OF CURRENT RIVER PARK, VALDOSTA GA



Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team Green

Big Idea #3: - Valdosta Eco-Adventure on the Horizon

With more concerted efforts, the River Park in Valdosta can pull inspirations from other successful river restoration projects. For instance the **French Broad River Park**, capitalizes on the natural beauty of Asheville, NC river front.



The river park features paved walking paths, picnic shelters, gazebos, dog park, and vast green spaces and river views, becoming a popular hub for art and cultural events.

Another example is **Eagle River Whitewater Park** in Eagle, CO, in which new green space along the riverbanks have served as an outdoor adventure and sports recreation site.

The plans for the Eagle River Whitewater Park, including parks and new green space along the riverbanks. Courtesy S20, provided in <https://archive.curbed.com/2019/5/7/18535401/river-economy-recreation-white-water-rafting-real-estate>



Action Steps & Timeline

Short term goals/action items (1 year)

Goal: Identify the goals, mission, and focus areas for the comprehensive green infrastructure plan.

Action items:

- ▶ Leverage partnerships through One Valdosta Lowndes and other community organizations to assemble a team with expertise and skills. Engaging partnerships and other stakeholders (local schools, businesses, libraries, non-profit organizations, and community members) will build the foundation for supporting green infrastructure in Valdosta and Lowndes County.
- ▶ Create a steering committee of staff and local organization members responsible for strategizing efforts to support green infrastructure and manage programming. The committee is tasked to develop the plan by the end of one year, including the following steps:
 - ▶ Conduct comprehensive inventory and assessment of existing resources and green infrastructure in Valdosta.
 - ▶ Conduct a community needs assessment to identify focus areas crucial to community members.
 - ▶ Prioritize and identify the areas that could benefit the most, considering environmental, social, and economic factors.
 - ▶ Set goals, strategies, projects, quality-of-place initiatives, and action steps, including a maintenance plan that ensures long-term viability.
 - ▶ Apply for funding sources to support the plan implementation.

Medium term goals/actions (2-3 years)

Goal: Develop personnel and engage the community in the plan implementation.

Action items:

- ▶ Designate a full-time director of to lead the outdoor division for parks and recreation, manage a calendar of events, and coordinate volunteers for green space maintenance and engagement.
- ▶ Revitalize Keep Lowndes-Valdosta Beautiful to further volunteer efforts for maintaining green space. Personnel will be responsible for creating campaigns that promote community involvement in keeping Valdosta city a beautiful, clean place and is responsible for the following:
 - ▶ Make a detailed, efficient plan for dates or periods of clean up, meeting locations for volunteers with access to restrooms, number of volunteers and best form of communication, volunteer team leaders to keep everyone focused and enthusiastic, outline and schedule of clean up plans, supplies, permits, and initiatives that aim to recruit volunteers.
 - ▶ Connect the cleaning project to what residents care about, such as having a clean, beautiful city especially after harsh weather or storms.
 - ▶ Create public awareness campaigns, such as Philadelphia's "Love your Block" program, "Adopt-a-Street/Park" programs that target certain areas and encourage community ownership, or "Trash Talk" as a lighthearted youth-centered program that educates on the impact of waste on the environment and residents quality of life.
 - ▶ Businesses can become important partners in supporting these public awareness campaigns, donating food to support volunteers during clean up days, sponsorship for cleaning supplies and equipment, spreading the word, hosting space for

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team Green

Big Idea #3: - Valdosta Eco-Adventure on the Horizon

- educational programs, and promoting the clean up days on their social media. For example, Valdosta's Green Bean Roastery is a coffee shop that can host education programs, volunteer meetings, or even storytime for kids that inspire a love for nature and the environment. Landscaping organizations can contribute their skills, while schools and VSU can provide volunteers and promote the clean up as a community service opportunity for students, staff, and faculty.
- ▶ Target outreach efforts, cultural events, and educational programs to raise awareness on the benefits of green infrastructure and encourage community participation.
 - ▶ Engage educational/agricultural programs for students and classes. Valdosta High FFA is a premier youth organization preparing students for leadership and careers in agriculture, along with college agricultural students from ABAC and VSU's environmental studies program.
 - ▶ Create a Facebook page and Instagram to maintain online presence and spread the word on green spaces improvements and projects. Social media and other communication channels can keep residents informed about projects and opportunities for engagement.

Long term goals/actions (3+ years)

Goal: Develop the River Park to become a meaningful landmark for the community.



Action items:

- ▶ Implement long-term plan for maintaining green elements including regular weeding, plant replacement, and monitoring water quality, native plants, and animal species in the river park.
- ▶ Balance functionality and aesthetic. The entrance to the park can be inviting and welcoming, keeping both native vegetation and adding paved roads and pavilions for easy access. The river trail can be better maintained to accommodate activities such as canoeing, kayaking, paddle trails, etc. The park features need to be accessible for people of all abilities and backgrounds.
- ▶ Register the river park as a local landmark, by gathering documentation that demonstrates

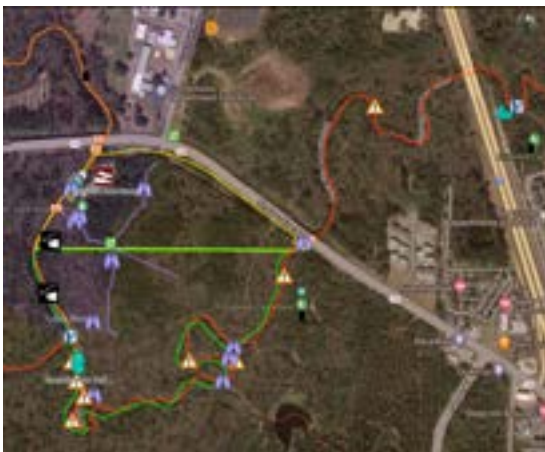
the historical, cultural, ecological, and recreational significance of Valdosta's River Park. Consult with experts, historians, and local government officials to ensure nomination documents are accurate, and complete the application process for National Register of Historic Places with the detailed research, documentation, photographs, maps, and letters of support, and follow formal steps for registration.

- ▶ Educate community members on the importance of blueways for habitat protection, restoration, recreation, community pride, public health, and ecotourism (Edmonds, 2011).

[Interactive map link](#) (provided by WWALS) along with additional maps are on the next page.



GOOGLE MAPS SHOWING WITH LACOOCHEE RIVER AS A PROMINENT NATURAL LANDMARK



WWALS MAP OF THE WITH LACOOCHEE AND LITTLE RIVER WATER TRAIL (PROVIDED BY OVL)

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team Green

Big Idea #3: - Valdosta Eco-Adventure on the Horizon

Budget

Item	Cost	Frequency
Inventory/Needs Assessment	\$100,000	One-Time
Steering Committee (refreshments, stipend of \$100/meeting)	\$10,000	Per cohort
Director of Outdoor Recreation	\$60,000	Annual
Graduate Interns (2)	\$30,000 (\$15,000 per intern)	Annual
Keep Valdosta Beautiful Funds	\$100,000	Annual
River Park Development Funds	\$500,000 River Campsite \$30,000 road, rail, and river landing construction materials \$87,000 park entrance facilities \$60,000 design and engineering \$23,000 labor costs = subtotal \$700,000	One Time
Events and Operating Costs	\$100,000	Annual
Estimated Total	\$1,100,000	

Possible funding sources

- ▶ [Keep America Beautiful Grants](#)
- ▶ [Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program](#)
- ▶ [Land & Water Conservation Fund Grants](#)
- ▶ [Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program](#)

Potential partnerships

- ▶ One Valdosta Lowndes (OVL)
- ▶ Valdosta Lowndes County Parks and Recreation (VLPRA)
- ▶ WWALS Watershed Coalition
- ▶ Suwannee Riverkeeper
- ▶ Lowndes County Board of Commissioners
- ▶ The City of Valdosta
- ▶ Explore Georgia
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes Convention Center & Tourism Authority
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes Historical Society
- ▶ Valdosta City Schools
- ▶ Lowndes County Schools
- ▶ Wiregrass Georgia Technical College
- ▶ Valdosta State University
- ▶ VSU CORE Outdoors
- ▶ Paddle Georgia
- ▶ Georgia Power
- ▶ SGMC Health
- ▶ Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- ▶ Southern Georgia Regional Commission
- ▶ Georgia DNR
- ▶ The Georgia Conservancy
- ▶ Georgia Audubon Society

Expected impact/Measures of success

The greatest impact of this initiative is being able to bring together partnerships to input their voice and join efforts in creating this comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation. This will hopefully foster a sense of community pride in the green space and environmental resources that Valdosta has to offer for residents and visitors.

Tangible deliverables for the initiative include: re-funding Keep Valdosta beautiful, establishing a

steering committee, designating a director of outdoor recreation, and registering the River Park as a local landmark. In addition, an assessment of the number of outdoor activities/educational programming, city beautification and clean up programming, number of community members who volunteer and engage in green space initiatives, as well as the number of views on social media indicate the level of success in engaging the community in promoting green infrastructure and quality-of-place initiatives.

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team Green

Big Idea #3: - Valdosta Eco-Adventure on the Horizon

Acknowledgments

Team Green of the 2024 cohort of Young Gamechangers are thankful for the invaluable insights, knowledge, contributions, and guidance from the following individuals, who helped us learn about the Valdosta community and the importance of green infrastructure.

Local Leaders and Organizations

George Page | Valdosta-Lowndes Parks and Recreation

DeWayne Johnson | Georgia Coalition of Black Chambers

Mary Beth Brownlee | One Valdosta-Lowndes (OVL)

Miguel Vicente | South Georgia Regional Library

Celine Gladwin | Gladwin Vaugh Architecture

Louis Gordon | The New Georgia Project

David Cheney | G&F Trail, Inc.

Mayor Scott James Matheson | City of Valdosta



Citations

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Section 2

Valdosta Visionaries

Challenge Question:

How can the City improve its ability to support neighborhood-based, mixed-used redevelopment in the Barack Obama Boulevard, Patterson overpass, Ashley Street, and Griffin Avenue corridors?

Valdosta Visionaries

Introduction/Executive Summary

The corridors of Barack Obama Boulevard, Ashley Street, Patterson Overpass, and Griffin Avenue that make up our study area share a similar history: they were once economically vibrant areas that were home to successful businesses and boasted neighborhood pride among the primarily Black residents that made a living and created generational wealth there. The corridors also share a similar presence; as a result of political and socioeconomic changes, including desegregation, over the last 40+ years, these neighborhoods have seen a steady decline and severe disinvestment. Today, when you walk these streets, you see mainly overgrown patches of land, blighted properties, and mere remnants of the vibrant life that once existed. There is no phys-

ical or social connectivity between these corridors and the surrounding areas. Neither the infrastructure nor commercial activity exists to stimulate foot traffic or inspire a sense of communal pride.



VIEW OF JIM BECK OVERPASS FROM OLYMPIC PARK



Team Members

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This progression from vibrant to dull begs the question: What neighborhood-based investments can the City of Valdosta undertake to revive these corridors? Residents need to be connected to resources that provide a path towards food security, homeownership, education, entrepreneurship opportunities, and overall better quality of life. And most importantly, they need a voice and a sense of ownership in the redevelopment of the neighborhoods they have called home for decades. The future prosperity of the city and the well-being of the region as a whole depends on reinvestment into these underserved communities.

Our team has developed Three Big Ideas to aid the City in reviving these corridors:

- ▶ **Network of Community Resource Hubs:** Our team will develop a framework for tracking and centralizing the resources and services already provided to the community for various needs, including financial literacy, career and professional development, food security, mortgage/rental assistance, GED classes, homeownership pathways and more. We will also pinpoint multi-use spaces along these corridors where the establishment of a new resource hub would most benefit the surrounding communities and become part of an interconnected network of hubs that leverage one another's resources.
- ▶ **Southside Revitalization Plan:** Our team has created a comprehensive redevelopment plan that the City of Valdosta, as well as private partners, can use as a guide to reinvest in the Southside Historic District. By taking inventory of existing assets and service gaps along the

corridors, identifying barriers in existing zoning ordinances and opportunities for modification, and examining city-owned properties, we were able to designate high priority parcels ripe for redevelopment and mixed-use development. Overall, these plans would drive soulful redevelopment that fosters community connectivity via Big Idea #3, the Southside Spirit Trail, and provides a natural extension from Downtown Valdosta.

- ▶ **Neighborhood Connectivity and Placemaking:** The City of Valdosta has a responsibility in helping to restore a sense of "place" along the corridors of Barack Obama Boulevard, Patterson Overpass, Ashley Street, and Griffin Avenue. A crucial component of placemaking is the recognition of the history of the Southside which we recommend highlighting through a black heritage trail that we are calling the "Southside Spirit Trail." Key locations throughout the Southside will be highlighted via placards, historical markers, and mini-museums that tell the story and educate residents and visitors alike. These key locations will be connected via multi-use trail with additional opportunity to expand the placemaking efforts beyond the proposed trail path.

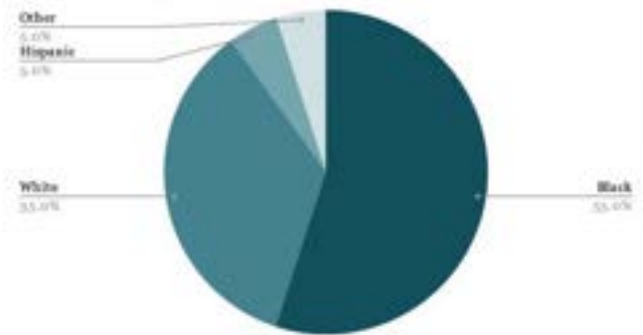
Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

General Statistics for Valdosta:

Housing Cost Burdened Households



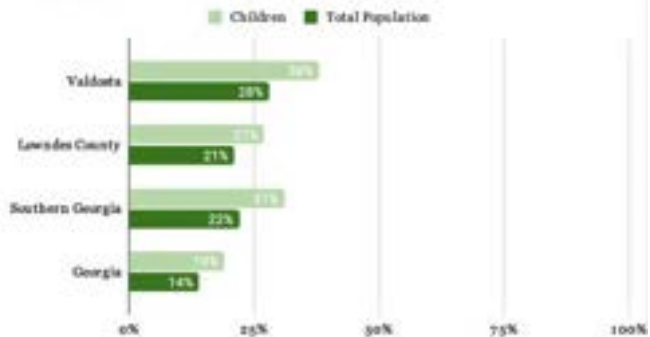
Race & Ethnicity



Household Income



Poverty Rates



GRAPHS DEPICTING DEMOGRAPHICS OF VALDOSTA IN REGARDS TO RACE, HOUSEHOLD, & POVERTY (DATA FROM: US CENSUS BUREAU - AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 2022)

Big Idea #1: Network of Community Resource Hubs

Description

To assist the City's ability to support neighborhood-based, mixed-use development in the identified corridors of Patterson Overpass, Griffin Avenue, Barack Obama Boulevard, and Ashley Street, the Valdosta Visionaries propose the establishment of community hubs. While physical infrastructure improvements such as housing developments, parks, and commercial spaces are important, the provision of comprehensive social services plays a crucial role in establishing a solid foundation for community well-being and sustainable development.

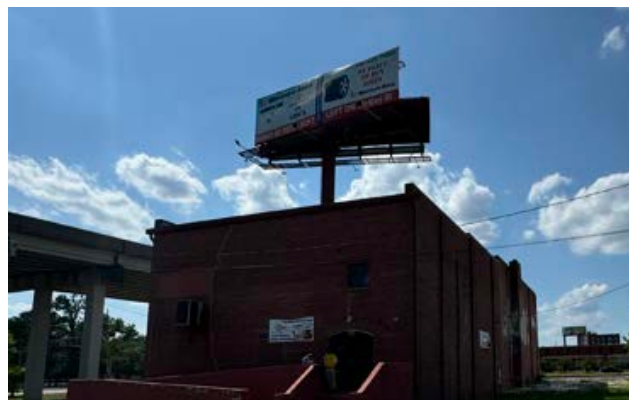
Community hubs are designed to centralize resources and services, including financial literacy, career development, food security, mortgage assistance, GED classes, entrepreneurial and small business services, and homeownership pathways.

By building a strong foundation of social support and community engagement, community hubs ensure that investments in physical infrastructure lead to long-term social and economic benefits for all residents.

There are already organizations making significant contributions to these communities, yet accessibility barriers prevent most from benefiting equally. The lack of transportation and pedestrian infrastructure in these corridors limits access to vital resources and services. By establishing satellite services via community hubs in underserved neighborhoods, organizations can bridge gaps and ensure their offerings reach a wider audience. This approach not only improves access to essential resources but also enhances community resilience



VALDOSTA VISIONARIES MEETING WITH COASTAL PLAIN AREA ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AUTHORITY WHICH OPERATES OUT OF WHAT WAS FORMERLY DASHER HIGH SCHOOL



QUALITY OF LIFE ASSOCIATION (QUOLA) BUILDING, PATTERSON OVERPASS

and cohesion by fostering local partnerships and empowering residents. Addressing these accessibility challenges is crucial for creating more equitable opportunities and strengthening the corridors well-being.

The creation of community hubs requires a strategic approach that begins with identifying accessible locations along the targeted corridors. This process includes assessing facilities and implementing pedestrian accessibility improvements. Equally important, is identifying potential partnerships with local organizations already engaged in providing essential programs and services; by creating these partnerships, there is an opportunity to extend the

same services to multiple communities hindered by a lack of public transit and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

This collaborative effort aims to enhance the accessibility of resources for all community members and foster more connected and supportive neighborhoods through the creation of “third spaces”—social environments separate from home (“first space”) and work (“second space”). Third spaces are crucial for fostering community engagement by providing a sense of belonging, accessibility to resources, and facilitating social interaction. Big Idea #3, the Southside Spirit Trail, aims to connect these hubs to the communities they are meant to serve.

Scope of the Initiative

The scope of the initiative is to establish community hubs along Patterson Overpass, Griffin Avenue, Barack Obama Boulevard, and Ashley Street to support neighborhood-based, mixed-use development. By partnering with local organizations and agencies, we aim to centralize essential services, such as financial literacy, career development, and food security programs, that help foster community integration and resiliency in the aforementioned areas.

During the research phase of this project, we were able to identify existing locations for collaboration and provide a few baseline tools to help get this program running, like a mission statement and program description, a job description for the proposed Program Manager position, and a proposed list of programs that can be offered. Additional tasks that would need to be completed include assessing facility requirements, completing infrastructure improvements to address the needs of these facilities, and closing the gaps in the transportation access.

The initial offerings of the Community Hub programs are modest, representing only the beginning of what can be achieved. Early stages focus on providing a foundational set of resources. As Community Hubs evolve, ongoing evaluation will guide the expansion of services. New services will be introduced based on emerging needs and organizational capacity. The goal is to progressively enhance the impact and reach of the Hubs over time.

Limitations of the initiative include capacity of organizations to provide additional services; many nonprofits are dealing with financial, staffing, and inflationary pressures that could affect the ability to provide. Our goal is to avoid silos and duplication of services which would overall lessen the financial burdens associated with full-scale operations. Organizations can depend on an integrated effort to address the needs of individuals and families by offering comprehensive supportive services in the four identified corridors.

Big Idea #1: Network of Community Resource Hubs

Program Description

The Community Resource Hub is a community-based initiative designed to support community members by providing services to enhance their well-being. The program is managed by a dedicated Program Manager who works in collaboration with local nonprofits to ensure a broad range of support services and opportunities to access services that are often hindered by lack of transportation and pedestrian friendly corridors. By offering a comprehensive range of resources, a community hub can effectively support and engage its community, providing valuable services that enhance overall well-being and foster a sense of belonging.

Partnering with Valdosta on Demand to integrate Community Resource Hubs into their stops is crucial for addressing the lack of pedestrian access to services in the identified corridors of the city. This collaboration is vital to the success of the plan, as it leverages an established system to meet the community's needs more effectively. By utilizing this

existing system, the city can enhance accessibility and ensure that vital resources are easily accessible to those who need them most.

Each Hub offers the same resources at the location. Through conversations with community members and organizations the top needs of the community consistently have been affordable housing, transportation, homelessness, and livable wages. To address these issues the Hubs will offer services that support economic development, education, the health of community members and the well-being of the community as a whole.

The Hubs will be operated by a Program Manager who will ensure the effective coordination and delivery of quality services at each location. They will share resources, expertise, collaborate on joint events, and offer occasional activities to the community. The Hubs will occasionally host community events to raise awareness, offer resources, and foster community togetherness.



Community Hubs Mission Statement

Our mission is to empower and enrich our community by fostering a supportive environment that promotes a welcoming and inclusive space where individuals can access essential resources and engage in meaningful activities through diverse programs and services.



IMAGE: INTEGRATED NETWORK OF COMMUNITY HUBS DIAGRAM
 (SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT)

Potential Program Locations

Barack Obama Blvd

- ▶ Lowndes/Valdosta Commission for Children & Youth, Inc. (LCCY Family Connection)
 3103 Barack Obama Blvd, Valdosta, GA 31602
- ▶ Valdosta Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority (VLPRA) Administrative Office
 1901 Barack Obama Blvd, Valdosta, GA 31602



Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #1: Network of Community Resource Hubs

Patterson Overpass

- ▶ Quality of Life Association (QUOLA)
115 E Florida Ave, Valdosta, GA 31601



- ▶ South Health District-Public Health
206 South Patterson, Valdosta, GA 31601



Ashley Street

- ▶ Lowndes Associated Ministries to People (LAMP)
714 Charlton St, Valdosta, GA 31601



- ▶ Mental Wealth Center
601 North Ashley St., Valdosta, GA 31601



Ashley Street

- ▶ South Georgia Partnership to End Homelessness (SGPEH)
601 N Lee St, Valdosta, GA



- ▶ The Salvation Army of Valdosta
320 Smithland Pl, Valdosta, GA 31601



Griffin Avenue

- ▶ Coastal Plain/Dasher School
1810 W. Hill Avenue, Valdosta, GA 31601



- ▶ McMullen Southside Library
527 Griffin Avenue, Valdosta, GA 31601



Big Idea #1: Network of Community Resource Hubs

Core Resources

The top three services offered will be Educational Workshops and Training, Tutoring and Mentoring, and Library and Learning Materials. The Hubs will also offer occasional events and activities as available throughout the year that offer resources and promote unity amongst community members. Additionally, each Hub will house a comprehensive list of community resources for the services unavailable at the sites.

Education and Training

The Hubs will offer opportunities for community members to enhance and further their education in various topics assisting with economic development, personal growth, and increased resiliency.

Potential community partnerships: Free online platforms such as FutureLearn, Coursera, Edx, and Khan Academy, South Georgia Regional Library System/PINES - Georgia Public Library Service, VSU Work-study Program, Valdosta Lowndes Retired Educators Association (VLREA), Wiregrass's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

- ▶ **Learning opportunities:** Provide online certificate programs on various topics such as digital literacy, financial management, health and wellness, and job readiness.
- ▶ **Tutoring and mentoring:** Offer tutoring for students and mentoring programs for personal and professional development.
- ▶ **Library and learning materials:** Maintain a collection of books, educational materials, and online resources for community members to access.

Job and Career Support

The Hubs will offer job training, career counseling, and employment resources, including skills training, resume-building workshops, interview preparation, and one-on-one guidance on job search strategies and development.

Potential community partnerships: Goodwill Career Center, Valdosta State University Career Services, South Georgia Regional Library System, LCCY

- ▶ **One-on-one counseling:** Personalized career advice, resume reviews, and job search strategies.
- ▶ **Career workshops:** Sessions on resume writing, cover letters, interview techniques, and job search strategies.

Technology Access

Technology labs will offer community members the opportunity to access information, enhance education, seek employment and supportive services and offer a sense of connectivity through social platforms.

Potential partners: University and public school systems, libraries, Wi-Fi carriers

- ▶ **Computer lab:** Offer access to computers and the internet for individuals who may not have their own devices.
- ▶ **Tech support:** Assist with technology-related issues, including basic troubleshooting and digital skills training.
- ▶ **Wi-Fi access:** Ensure that the Hubs have free, reliable Wi-Fi for community use

Community Information and Referral Site

Each Hub will offer an extensive collection of community resources that are currently outside of the Community Resource Hub's scope of services. This will allow for the community members needs to be met through direct or client initiated referrals.

Partnerships: Nonprofit organizations, social service agencies, food banks, Lowndes County Coordinated Entry

- ▶ **Resource Directory:** Maintain a directory of local services and resources that community members can access.
- ▶ **Referral Services:** Help individuals connect with specialized services and programs outside of the Hub's scope.

Program Manager Job Description

We are seeking a dedicated and organized Program Manager to oversee the daily operations and programs of our community hub. The Program Manager will be responsible for managing staff, planning and executing programs, maintaining the facility, and building relationships within the community. The ideal candidate for this role should have strong leadership skills, a passion for community development, and excellent communication abilities.

- ▶ **Role:** Oversee the implementation and coordination of the different hubs, manage relationships with partners, and ensure the program meets community needs.
- ▶ **Responsibilities:**
 - ▶ Develop and maintain partnerships with nonprofits and other community organizations
 - ▶ Coordinate schedules and logistics with partners
 - ▶ Monitor program effectiveness and gather feedback from community members
 - ▶ Track use of funds and metrics of success to provide to funding partners
 - ▶ Develop a comprehensive resource guide and organize community outreach and promotional activities
- ▶ Explore opportunities for expanding the program and forming new partnerships
- ▶ Effectively manage multiple priorities and projects in a fast-paced, ever-changing work environment
- ▶ Ability to use common word processing and database programs
- ▶ Manage the calendar of the four locations by organizing events and workshops that promote community engagement and learning
- ▶ Evaluate the effectiveness of services and adapt accordingly based on the needs of the community
- ▶ Ensure the center is an active part of the community in which it sits
- ▶ **Qualifications:**
 - ▶ Prior experience in community center or nonprofit management
 - ▶ Strong leadership and organizational skills
 - ▶ Experience in planning and executing community programs
 - ▶ excellent verbal and written communication skills
 - ▶ Ability to work flexible hours, including evenings and weekends

Big Idea #1: Network of Community Resource Hubs

- ▶ Bachelor's degree in social work, education, public administration or related field with 3+ years of experience
- ▶ Preferred Candidate has ties to the local community
- ▶ **Salary:** Salary is based upon candidate experience and qualifications, as well as market and business considerations.
- ▶ **Pay Range:** \$45,000 minimum to \$55,000 maximum
- ▶ **Location:** Valdosta, Georgia
- ▶ **Employment Type:** Full-time

Action Steps & Timeline

Short Term (1-3 Years)

- ▶ Research locations for Community Resource Hubs
- ▶ Research local partnerships offering core resources
- ▶ Examine logistics for accessibility
 - ▶ Establish partnership with Valdosta on Demand
 - ▶ Apply for transportation access grants
- ▶ Establish partnerships with providers that offer core resources and occasional activities
- ▶ Identify & conduct necessary improvements at the existing services

Medium Term (3-5 Years)

- ▶ Create a community Hubs calendar
 - ▶ Collaborate with partner agencies organizations to determine which Hub location will receive what services on what days
- ▶ Market resources and classes
- ▶ Meet the needs of community members via the accessibility of service

Long Term (5-10 Years)

- ▶ Monitor and evaluate progress and efficiency
- ▶ Assess the possibility to expand the resources and services provided at the Hubs
- ▶ Improved economic development
- ▶ Increased well-being of community members
- ▶ Increased community resiliency

Budget

Item	Cost
One Time Costs	
Renovations	\$100,000
Office Furnishings (office equipment, furniture, etc.)	\$50,000
Computers/Technology	\$10,000 (20 new computers - 5 at each location @ \$500 each)
Total One Time Costs	\$160,000
Annual Costs	
Program Manager	\$50,000
Unexpected Costs	\$10,000
Total Annual Costs	\$60,000
One Time Costs	
Facility Cost/Rent	\$2,000 /month (\$500 each location)
Utilities	\$1,000 /month (\$250 each location)
Office Supplies (paper, books, games, art, etc.)	\$600 /month (\$150 each location)
Total One Time Cost	\$3,600

Possible funding sources

- ▶ **Local**
 - ▶ Community Foundation of South Georgia
 - ▶ Greater Valdosta United Way
 - ▶ Re-Establishment of the Miss Black Valdosta Beauty Pageant
 - Reviving the Miss Black Valdosta beauty pageant as a community fundraiser is a great way to celebrate culture, heritage, and unity while supporting local initiatives. This approach could blend community tradition with a broader mission, helping to raise funds for repairing the Dasher School and other community hubs.
- ▶ **Federal/National**
 - ▶ Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
 - ▶ Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants Program (Environmental Protection Agency)
 - ▶ Elevance Health Foundation
 - ▶ The Brooks and Joan Fortune Foundation (BJFF)
 - ▶ The Calvin K. Kazanjian Economics Foundation
- ▶ **Private**
 - ▶ Spark Good Local Grants (Walmart)

Big Idea #1: Network of Community Resource Hubs

Potential Partnerships

- ▶ **Local**
 - ▶ Banks and Credit Union- Community Reinvestment Act
 - ▶ City of Valdosta
 - ▶ Coastal Plains
 - ▶ Georgia Military College
 - ▶ GoodWill Career Center
 - ▶ Greater Valdosta United Way
 - ▶ LAMP
 - ▶ Lowndes Coordinated Entry
 - ▶ Lowndes-Valdosta Commission for Children & Youth, Inc. (LCCY)
 - ▶ McMullen Southside Library
 - ▶ Mental Wealth Center
 - ▶ South Georgia Partnership to End Homelessness
- ▶ South Health District-Public Health
- ▶ QUOLA
- ▶ 100 Black Men
- ▶ Wiregrass Technical College
- ▶ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- ▶ Valdosta City Schools
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes County Economic Authority
- ▶ Valdosta Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority (VLPRA)
- ▶ Valdosta State University
- ▶ **State**
 - ▶ Department of Labor
- ▶ **Private**
 - ▶ Potential Industrial partners

Expected Impact/Measures of Success

- ▶ **Quantitative**
 - ▶ Number and frequency of visitors
 - ▶ Types of services being utilized by community members
 - ▶ Participation attendance and retention
 - ▶ Economic development- job placement rates, income improvement,
 - ▶ Homeownership increase %
- ▶ **Qualitative**
 - ▶ Community member satisfaction- success stories, surveys
- ▶ Community engagement- How do they feel/ perceive services?
- ▶ Development of new skills for community members (Empowerment)
- ▶ Community resiliency
- ▶ Community hubs sustainability
- ▶ Partnerships between multiple organizations

Big Idea #2: Soulful Southside Revitalization Plan

Description

While our overall goals include mixed-use developments along Barack Obama Boulevard, Ashley Street, Patterson Overpass, and Griffin Avenue, our primary focus lies within the Southside Historic Downtown, along the Patterson Overpass. This area has a rich history, with portions of the target areas being listed on the National Registry of Historical Places. The streets that lie beneath the Patterson Overpass were once home to successful Black-owned businesses and a vibrant, tight-knit community. Faced with exclusion from mainstream economic opportunities, Black communities turned inward to build their own businesses and institutions. When the Jim Beck Overpass (also known as the Patterson Overpass) was built in 1980, some of these businesses were demolished in order to make room for the overpass. Once the Overpass was complete and traffic was rerouted, the remaining businesses suffered due to the loss of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. This began a trend of overall disinvestment in the community which led to deteriorating structures and infrastructure, vacant parcels, and fewer amenities.

Key demographic and economic indicators reveal challenges in the targeted areas, but there are significant opportunities for redevelopment of the vacant and blighted properties throughout these areas, which would help improve the economic well-being of the study area, as well as the City and its community members overall. There are existing

investments and community resources that are recognized as catalysts for neighborhood revitalization efforts. The proposed redevelopment plan seeks to leverage these assets to activate and rejuvenate the identified areas to create “soulful redevelopment.” We aim to revitalize these historically Black neighborhoods in a way that honors their cultural and historical significance while promoting economic growth and community empowerment.

The downtown of the Southside Historic District consists of Census Tract 10802, which is a low-income census tract and listed within a Federal Opportunity Zone.

Existing conditions for Tract 10802 are as follows:

- ▶ **Population:** 1,703
- ▶ **Household Units:** 688
- ▶ **Avg. Poverty Rate:** 60.1%
- ▶ **Avg. Educational Attainment Rate: (High School Diploma):** 75.9%
- ▶ **Avg. Median Household Income:** \$15,825
- ▶ **Avg. Median Home Value:** \$57,000

(U.S. Census Bureau (2022). American Community Survey 5-year estimates.)

Our approach aims to address the different needs and opportunities we identified within the community and focuses on accomplishing four main objectives:



(U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (2022). AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATES.)

1. **Prioritizing** the development and preservation of affordable housing units to maintain socioeconomic diversity and prevent displacement of longtime residents;
2. **Fostering** an environment that supports local entrepreneurship by providing incentives and resources for small businesses to thrive;
3. **Expanding** the commercial core and creating visual, physical, and economic connectivity to the historic Southside neighborhood and commercial district (As highlighted in the One Valdosta-Lowndes Synergy 2030 Plan);
4. **Improving** accessibility and connectivity between Downtown Valdosta and the Historic Southside Resources via the “Southside Spirit Trail.”

We plan to do this by targeting two main land use categories: commercial and residential. The Southside Historic Downtown area consists of primarily commercially zoned properties including C-H (Highway Commercial) and C-C (Community Commercial). However, neither of these zones allow for any form of housing, aside from boarding houses, dormitories, and greek life. We also recognize that the solution to address the need for housing in this area is not to allow for residential dwelling units in these zones by-right across the City. Alternatively, we suggest the creation of the **Southside Reformation Overlay** that focuses on the revitalization of this area by allowing for single-family and multi-unit dwellings by-right above the ground floor and with a Special Exception for ground floor dwellings. This code change aims not only to maintain the historic commercial character of the district by activating the pedestrian level

with businesses, but also diversify the mix of land uses in the area which enhances the vitality, safety, and stability of the area.

For both components of our two-prong land use approach, we aim to utilize City-owned properties as catalysts for redevelopment and start with underutilized properties closer to the city center in order to re-establish the natural extension of downtown into the Historic Southside. These projects would focus on providing opportunities for mixed-use and improving neighborhood socio-demographics.

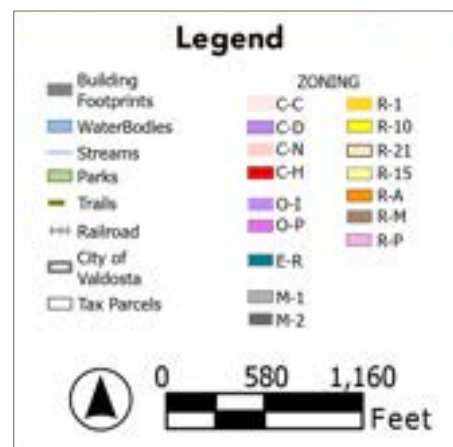
While the physical infrastructure and community improvements are invested in, the social services provided at the Community Resource Hubs will help re-establish a strong foundation and foster a supportive environment where residents are empowered to actively participate in and contribute to the ongoing improvement and sustainability of their community. Eventually, they will become the stewards of the Southside Historic District.

These new developments and existing neighborhood assets will be connected via the Southside Spirit Trail. This trail would serve as a vital link between significant cultural, historical, and community landmarks while simultaneously promoting health, community engagement, and establishing a sense of place. Informational signs can be placed along the trail to provide historical context and educate riders about important events, figures, and locations throughout the Southside Historic District.

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PROPOSED SOUTHSIDE REVITALIZATION OVERLAY



REVITALIZATION PLAN



1. Louis Lomax Linear Park

The space underneath the Patterson Overpass is an underutilized space that begs for a use. Turning the area beneath the Overpass into a park can transform this unused area into a vibrant public space that would complement the existing Olympic Park and the planned improvements for an outdoor gym, as well as the other proposed improvements in our revitalization plan and the **Southside Spirit Trail**.

► BUDGET

- Community member satisfaction- success
Land Acquisition: \$0 (Existing Public Right of Way)
- Design, Planning, & Permitting: \$20,000 - \$45,000
- Trail Construction: \$424,000 (Approx. \$1,000,000 per mile - 0.41 miles)
- Landscaping & Greenery: \$50,000 - \$75,000
- Lighting: \$30,750 (\$75,000 per mile - 0.41 miles)
- Signage & Wayfinding: \$10,000
- Amenities: \$50,000

- TOTAL COST: \$584,750 - \$634,750
- ANNUAL MAINTENANCE: \$10,000 per year

► FUNDING

- Local
 - SPLOST
 - T-SPLOST
- State
 - Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund
- Federal/National
 - Reconnecting Communities & Neighborhoods Grants
 - Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity Grants
 - Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Grants Program
- Private
 - Corporate Grants from Partners
 - ◇ Ex: Community Projects Grant from Norfolk Southern Railway

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▶ PARTNERSHIPS

- ▶ Local
 - Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks & Recreation Authority
 - Valdosta State University
 - Local Garden Clubs
- ▶ State/Regional
 - Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)
 - Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- ▶ South Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC)
- ▶ Federal/National
 - US Department of Transportation (USDOT)
 - National Parks Service
- ▶ Private
 - Corporate Grants from Partners
 - The Home Depot
 - Lowes
 - Norfolk Southern



THE ORCHARD COMMUNITY GARDEN & MARKET IN DETROIT



CONCEPTUAL RENDERING OF PROPOSED HARVEST SQUARE DEVELOPMENT

2. Harvest Square

To the east of the Olympic Park is South Patterson Street, the grass area beneath the Overpass, and two vacant parcels owned by the City of Valdosta.

With the area's proximity to Olympic Park, along with an existing but primarily unused street that curves in front of the park, we believe this would be an ideal area to have a pilot program for a food-truck designated area. In addition, since these parcels are in such close proximity to QUOLA, this would be the perfect location for a community garden that can be maintained by QUOLA and their patrons, providing them both additional food to help feed the community they

serve, as well as the opportunity to get outside, get exercise, learn new skills, and give back to the organization that assists them. Lastly, we propose an open-air pavilion that can be utilized for farmer's markets, as well as other community events.

This area just below Downtown is an ideal location to have a community food hub as it would attract visitors to the area, encourage walking to the Southside from Downtown, provide access to healthier food options and increase the community's overall quality of life.



FINDLAY MARKET, CINCINNATI, OHIO



FOOD TRUCK ALLEY, ALPHARETTA, GEORGIA

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► BUDGET

- ▷ Land Acquisition: \$0 (Owned by City)
- ▷ Community Garden Costs: \$15,500 - \$73,000*
- ▷ Land Preparation & Soil Quality, Planting Areas, Irrigation, Fencing, Composting Areas, Equipment, Signage, Educational Materials, Plants/Seeds, Benches, Storage
- ▷ Open-Air Pavilion Costs: \$100-\$125 per square foot
- ▷ \$800,000 - \$1,000,000 for 80x100 Pavillion
- ▷ Food Truck Designated Area: \$0
- ▷ May need Zoning Staff to work on ordinance in house to create food truck designated areas and coordinate permitting efforts

TOTAL COST: \$815,500 - \$1,073,000

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE: \$10,000 per year

* Indicates opportunity to lower prices via partnership/in-kind donations

► FUNDING

- ▷ Local
 - PLOST, CDBG
- ▷ State
 - GMA Bricks & Mortar Program
- ▷ Federal/National
 - Farmers Market Promotion Program (USDA)

- Healthy Food Financing Initiative (USDA)
- Urban Agriculture Resilience Program - American Public Gardens Association
- ▷ Private
 - Corporate Grants

► PARTNERSHIPS

- ▷ Local
 - Local Garden Clubs
 - Second Harvest Food Bank
 - QUOLA
 - Valdosta State University
- ▷ State
 - Georgia Municipal Association (GMA)
 - South Georgia Regional Commission
 - University of Georgia Extension
- ▷ Federal/National
 - United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - The United States Botanic Garden and the American Public Gardens Association
- ▷ Private
 - South Georgia Pecan Company
 - Norfolk Southern

3. Corn's Corner/Thomas & Pierce Plaza

Across Florida Avenue from Olympic Park is a group of properties, both publicly and privately owned; there are several existing structures that are not currently in use, as well as vacant parcels of land.



This corner of West Florida Avenue and South Patterson Street can be known as **Corn's Corner**, named after Alfred Corn, an award winning poet and writer who was raised in the City of Valdosta. Additionally, we suggest the proposed plaza is named **Thomas & Pierce Plaza**, after Drewnell Thomas and Robert Pierce Jr., the first two people to desegregate Valdosta State College in 1963, both natives of the Southside, having graduated from Pinevale High School.

- ▶ 11 W. Florida Avenue - City Owned
 - Proposed Use: Non-Profit Coffee Shop
 - The City of Clarkston is home to a non-profit organization called Refuge Coffee that uses its coffee business to support community development and social causes. The goal of establishing a coffee shop at 111 W. Florida Avenue would be to create a welcoming community space that not only serves great coffee but also funds improvement projects in the Southside,

provide job opportunities, professional training, among many other things. The coffee shop can start as a coffee truck at local events while funding for a brick and mortar store is raised. The eastern facade of the building offers a great opportunity for a mural to signify the historic value of the area.



- ▶ The rest of the parcel at 111 W. Florida Avenue and the adjacent parcel (Tax Map # 0120A 176) could be used as a parking lot for the coffee shop and plaza, while the adjacent parcel that is also owned by the City would be great for a dog park. Visitors can grab a coffee and sit in the Thomas & Pierce Plaza or in the Dog Park with their K-9 friends.

- ▶ **BUDGET**
 - Land Acquisition: \$0 (Owned by City)
 - Coffee Food Truck Start-Up Costs: \$45,000 - \$60,000
 - Brick & Mortar Start-Up Costs: \$50,000 - \$300,000
 - Parking Lot: \$100,000 - \$150,000
 - Mural: \$10,000 - \$15,000 (\$20 - \$30 per Square Foot)*
 - TOTAL COST: \$255,000 - \$525,000

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- Annual Maintenance Costs: \$5,000

* Indicates opportunity to lower prices via partnership

▷ FUNDING

- Local

- ◇ SPLOST, T-SPLOST, CDBG

- State

- ◇ ACE Loans
- ◇ Vibrant Communities Grant (GCA)

- Federal/National

- ◇ Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits
- ◇ Our Town Grant Program (NEA)
- ◇ Small Business Administration
- ◇ State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)

- Private

- ◇ Corporate Grants

▷ PARTNERSHIPS

- Local

- ◇ City of Valdosta
- ◇ One Valdosta Lowndes
- ◇ Valdosta Chamber of Commerce
- ◇ Central Valdosta Development Authority
- ◇ Valdosta Downtown Development Authority

- ◇ South Georgia Black Chambers Inc.

- ◇ Local Banks - Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) Activities

- ◇ Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI)

- ◇ Valdosta Land Bank

- State

- ◇ Georgia Municipal Association (GMA)

- ◇ Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF)

- ◇ Georgia Department of Community Affairs

- ◇ Georgia Council for the Arts

- ◇ UGA Small Business Development Center

- ◇ "Color The World Bright"-UGA Student-Led Muralists

- Federal/National

- ◇ Department of Housing & Urban Development

- ◇ National Endowment for the Arts

- Private

- ◇ Norfolk Southern

- ▶ 107 W. Florida Avenue - City Owned
 - ▷ Proposed Use: Plaza
 - This vacant 0.11 acre parcel is the perfect size for a small plaza that can serve as a communal gathering spot for those to enjoy their coffee from next door or their food from the food truck designated area. This vacant land can be transformed into a vibrant plaza in Valdosta, featuring local art that reflects the Southside's history, spaces for community markets, shaded seating areas for relaxation, and pathways that connect seamlessly with the adjacent linear park. This transformation not only beautifies the area but also fosters a stronger community bond, boosts the local economy, and preserves the cultural heritage of the city.



- ▷ **BUDGET**
 - Land Acquisition: \$0 (Owned by City)
 - Site Improvements: \$75,000- \$125,000
 - ◇ (Drainage, Lighting, Hardscape, Benches, Tables, Chairs, Trashcans, Greenery, Signage & Wayfinding)
 - TOTAL COST: \$75,000- \$125,000
 - ◇ Annual Maintenance- Less than \$5,000
- ▷ **FUNDING**
 - Federal/National
 - ◇ Community Placemaking Grants (PPS)
 - ◇ Our Town Grant Program (NAE)
 - ◇ Placemaking Grant (NAR)

- Private
 - ◇ Corporate Grants
 - ◇ Community Fundraising
 - ◇ Buying a Brick, Bench, etc.

▷ **PARTNERSHIPS**

- Local
 - ◇ City of Valdosta
 - ◇ Valdosta State University
 - ◇ One Valdosta Lowndes
 - ◇ Central Valdosta Development Authority
 - ◇ Valdosta Downtown Development Authority
- State
 - ◇ Georgia Cities Foundation
 - ◇ The Georgia Economic Placemaking Collaborative
 - ◇ Georgia Power
- Federal/National
 - ◇ National Association of Realtors (NAR)
 - ◇ National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
 - ◇ Project for Public Spaces (PPS)
- Private
 - ◇ Norfolk Southern



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Big Idea #2: Soulful Southside Revitalization Plan

- ▶ 404 S. Patterson Street - Budd Commercial
 - ▷ Proposed Use: Bike Co-Op
 - ◻ To help Spirit Trail Users maintain their bikes, this small building with the roll-up warehouse door in the front could be utilized as a bike repair shop. There are several bicycle co-ops throughout the state that have DIY Bicycle Shops and provide the tools, space, parts, and guidance to empower bicyclists to repair their own bikes. Not only do these co-ops help repair bikes, they also sell bikes and accessories, provide low-cost bikes and services to their volunteers, and provide bikes to families in underserved communities.



- ▷ **BUDGET**
 - ◻ Land Acquisition: \$23,514 (Value per QPublic)
 - ◇ May be option to rent
 - ◻ Workshop Equipment & Tools: \$5,000 - \$10,000*
 - ◻ Inventory & Supplies: \$2,000 - \$10,000*
 - ◻ Programming: \$2,000 - \$8,000
 - ◻ Salary for Staff: \$25,000 - \$50,000 per person per year (depending on full/part-time status)

- ◻ TOTAL COST: \$57,514 - \$101,514
 - * Indicates opportunity to lower prices via partnership/in-kind donations



- ▷ **FUNDING**
 - ◻ Local
 - ◇ CDBG, SPLOST
 - ◇ City of Valdosta Blight Tax Funds
 - ◻ State
 - ◇ SSBCI
 - ◻ Private
 - ◇ Corporate Grants
 - ◇ Community Fundraising/Donations
- ▷ **PARTNERSHIPS**
 - ◻ Local
 - ◇ City of Valdosta
 - ◇ Valdosta State University
 - ◇ Central Valdosta Development Authority
 - ◇ Valdosta Downtown Development Authority
 - ◇ One Valdosta-Lowndes
 - ◇ Valdosta Land Bank
 - ◻ State
 - ◇ Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
 - ◻ Private
 - ◇ Norfolk Southern



4. Patterson Street Pedestrian Area

Pedestrianization involves transforming a street or area into a pedestrian-only zone. This process aims to improve pedestrian accessibility and mobility while enhancing the local environment and boosting business activity.

The stretch of South Patterson Street between Florida Avenue and MLK Drive is an ideal location to implement a pedestrian only zone as there is opportunity for high foot traffic from downtown and minimal vehicle traffic. Automatic Bollards can be installed to allow for emergency vehicle access.

BUDGET

- Land Acquisition: \$0 (Public R/W)
- Pilot Program
 - Concrete Barriers: \$6,000
 - Street Furniture: \$5,000 - \$9,000
- Permanent Closure
 - Hardscapes: \$10,000 - \$25,000
 - Landscaping & Greenery: \$5,000 - \$15,000
 - Lighting: \$3,000 - \$8,000
 - Signage & Wayfinding: \$1,000 - \$2,000
- TOTAL COST: \$19,000 - \$50,000
 - Annual Maintenance: \$10,000



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Big Idea #2: Soulful Southside Revitalization Plan

► FUNDING

- ▷ Local
 - TSPLOST
- ▷ Federal/National
 - Community Placemaking Grants (PPS)
 - Placemaking Grant (NAR)
- ▷ Private
 - Corporate Grants
 - Community Fundraising
 - ◇ Buying a Brick, Bench, etc

► PARTNERSHIPS

- ▷ Local
 - City of Valdosta

▷ State

- Georgia Department of Transportation
- South Georgia Regional Commission
- Georgia Cities Foundation
 - ◇ The Georgia Economic Placemaking Collaborative

▷ Federal/National

- Project for Public Spaces (PPS)
- National Association of Realtors (NAR)

▷ Private/Corporate

- Norfolk Southern
- Georgia Power



408 SOUTH PATTERSON STREET
(CREDIT: GOOGLE STREET VIEW)



FULLY FURNISHED 1200 SF STUDIOS
(CREDIT: APARTMENTS.COM)

5. South Patterson Studios - 408 South Patterson Street

408 South Patterson Street is a vacant commercial building owned by Budd Commercial Real Estate that was built in 1910. As

a building that is over 100 years old and seems to still be in good condition, preservation of the structure is a priority. The structure is made of two stories that are approximately 9,990 SF each.

To continue with the idea of mixed-use, repurposing of this building includes a ground-floor commercial component, along with a residential component on the second floor. Our team envisions this space becoming a business incubator space/ shared business center, but it can take many forms depending on the interest of investors and private developers, including retail, restaurants, private offices, etc.

The incubator space would have all the assets needed for business owners, students, and the like to succeed. We imagine an open floor plan with flexible desk arrangements to accommodate different working styles, private offices and meeting rooms for privacy and focused work, as well as designated common areas such as lounges, kitchens, and breakout spaces for relaxation and informal meetings.

In collaboration with the South Georgia Black Chambers Inc., programs can be developed that offer mentorship, training, and resources to startups. The space can also be used for events which offer networking opportunities to help foster a vibrant small business community. Additionally, those utilizing the workspace at South Patterson Studios would have access to the workshop space at the *CoLABorative* on

South Patterson which is directly attached to this building.

For the residential component on the second floor, we propose the conversion to efficiency apartments. The units could come in a variety of sizes, but the ultimate purpose of these apartments is to provide a small, safe, and affordable place for residents. A case study example of the efficiency type apartments we propose is the 12Hundred Studio Apartments, located in Atlanta, which is an affordable housing development established by a former Young Gamechanger, Richard Taylor.

Richard Taylor with ARRC Capital Partners partnered with Tenth Street Ventures and Alexander Goshen to develop a 40-unit apartment complex in Atlanta's Hunter Hills neighborhood. The senior loan was provided by the Atlanta Affordable Housing Fund (AAHF) while American South Fund Management (ASFM) provided equity. A previously 20 unit apartment complex was converted into 40 fully furnished 250 square foot studio apartments, all of which have attainable rents at 60 percent of Area Median Income (AMI). Additionally, 25% of units are reserved for unhoused individuals through partnerships with Open Doors and HomeFirst.



EXAMPLE OF COWORKING SPACES (CREDIT: THIS WORKSPACE & THRIVE)

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► **BUDGET**

- ▶ Land Acquisition: \$70,568 (Value per QPublic)
- ▶ Residential Cost Per Unit: \$1.4 million (35 Units - 250 sq ft. @ \$40,000/unit)
- ▶ Incubator Cost Development: \$75,000 - \$90,000
- ▶ Contingency Costs: \$150,000- \$300,000
- ▶ TOTAL COST: \$1,695,568 - \$1,860,568

► **FUNDING**

- ▶ Local
 - CDBG
 - HOME
 - SPLOST
 - City of Valdosta Blight Tax Funds
- ▶ State
 - SSBCI
 - Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund
 - Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund
- ▶ Federal/National
 - Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits
 - New Market Tax Credits
 - Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LI-HTC)

► **PARTNERSHIPS**

- ▶ Local
 - Central Valdosta Development Authority
 - City of Valdosta
 - Local Banks- Community Reinvestment Act
 - One Valdosta Lowndes

- South Georgia Black Chambers Inc.
- Valdosta Chamber of Commerce
- Valdosta Downtown Development Authority
- Valdosta Land Bank
- ▶ State
 - Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
 - Georgia Municipal Association
 - ◇ Georgia Cities Foundation
 - UGA Small Business Development Center
- ▶ Federal/National
 - Department of Housing & Urban Development



6. The CoLABorative at South Patterson

414 South Patterson Street is a commercial building that is attached to 408 South Patterson. The building was built in 1950 and is currently owned by Charlie Godfrey. This 7,552 square foot warehouse with a loading dock facing South Patterson would serve as an ideal location for a workshop and training space for skills. The roll-up garage doors provide an inspiring and practical environment for hands-on learning. Coastal Plain in partnership with Wiregrass Technical College could develop a diverse range

of training programs and workshops that align with the needs of the local community and industrial demands.

Similar projects have been completed across the state with partnerships with various technical colleges, such as South Georgia Technical College, Atlanta Technical College, and Gwinnett Technical College.



► **BUDGET**

- Land Acquisition: \$271,197 (Value per QPublic)
 - Property Renovations: \$377,600 (\$50/ square foot)
 - Workshop Equipment & Tools: \$25,000 - \$50,000*
 - Inventory & Supplies: \$15,000 - \$25,000*
 - Programming: \$20,000 - \$50,000*
 - Salary for Staff: \$25,000 - \$50,000 per person per year (depending on full/part-time status)
 - TOTAL COST: \$733,797 - \$823,797
- * Indicates opportunity to lower prices via partnership/in-kind donations

► **FUNDING**

- Local
 - CDBG
 - SPLOST
 - Blight Tax Funds

- State
 - SSBCI
 - Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund
 - Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund
- Federal/National
 - Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits
 - New Market Tax Credits

► **PARTNERSHIPS**

- Local
 - City of Valdosta
 - Coastal Plain
 - One Valdosta Lowndes
 - Wiregrass Technical College
 - Valdosta Career Center
 - Valdosta Land Bank
 - Valdosta State University
- State
 - Worksource Georgia
 - Georgia Municipal Association
 - Georgia Cities Foundation
- Federal/National
 - US Department of Labor



IMAGE: 422 SOUTH ASHLEY STREET
(CREDIT: GOOGLE STREET VIEW)

7. The Shoppes on South Ashley

416 - 422 South Ashley Street is a series of attached one-story buildings. Each of the four spaces ranges from 750 - 1200 SF which is an ideal size for a physical retail space for these new

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businesses. This provides another opportunity to partner with the South Georgia Black Chambers Inc., which already works to establish resources for Black-owned businesses.

Funneling businesses from the South Georgia Black Chambers Inc. into these startup business spaces can create a synergistic relationship that benefits both the chamber members, the small business, and the community overall.

► BUDGET

- Land Acquisition: \$91,919 (Value per QPublic)
- Property Renovations: \$434,000-\$611,000
- TOTAL COST: \$525,919 - \$702,919

► FUNDING

- Local
 - CDBG
 - SPLOST
 - Blight Tax Funds
- State
 - Ace Loans
 - Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund
 - Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund
 - State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)
- Federal/National
 - Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits
 - New Market Tax Credits
 - Historic Preservation Tax Credits

► PARTNERSHIPS

- Local
 - City of Valdosta
 - One Valdosta Lowndes
 - South Georgia Black Chambers Inc.
 - Valdosta Chamber of Commerce
 - Valdosta Land Bank
- State
 - Georgia Municipal Association
 - ◇ Georgia Cities Foundation
 - UGA Small Business Development Center
 - Georgia Department of Community Affairs



THE BLACK BOX, PORTLAND, OREGON
(CREDIT: ALICE YARDLEY)

8. 410 South Ashley Street

410 South Ashley Street is a parking lot that is owned by Saint Paul AME Church. When not in use by the church, QUOLA, which is located next door, uses it as a parking lot. We propose the same use of a parking lot, however, we suggest that the City enter a shared-use agreement with the Church. The City can use TSPLOST funds to renovate the parking lot with a new

layout, lighting, landscaping, and accessibility features. In addition, the plans can incorporate sustainable practices such as permeable pavement, rain gardens, and energy-efficient lighting. When the Church is not using it, the parking lot can be used as public parking for the Spirit Trail, the new businesses in the area, the community garden, plaza, and park.



422 SOUTH ASHLEY STREET
(CREDIT: GOOGLE STREET VIEW)

- ▶ **BUDGET**
 - ▶ Land Acquisition: \$0 (Shared Use Agreement)
 - ▶ Parking Lot: \$100,000 - \$150,000
 - ▶ TOTAL COST: \$100,000 - \$150,000
 - ▶ Annual Maintenance Costs: \$5,000 - \$10,000

- ▶ **FUNDING**
 - ▶ Local
 - SPLOST
 - TSPLOST
 - Blight Tax Funds

- ▶ **PARTNERSHIPS**
 - ▶ Local
 - City of Valdosta
 - St. Paul’s AME Church
 - ▶ State
 - Georgia Department of Transportation
 - Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank



ARTIST’S RENDITION OF THE OLD LIBERTY THEATER AND CLUB (CREDIT: JOHN CLARK MCCALL ARTWORK)

9. Black History Museum - South Ashley Street & East Florida Avenue

Two parcels on the corners of South Ashley Street & East Florida Avenue have been identified as potential locations for a Black History Museum of Valdosta/Lowndes County.

400 South Ashley Street is the former location of the Liberty Theater which holds a deep significance in the community; as a part of the Chitlin’ Circuit, the Liberty Theater and Club was the center of entertainment for the Black community in Valdosta during segregation. Nationally known Black entertainers, such as Ella Fitzgerald and B.B. King performed there. 409 South Ashley Street an existing 1 story, 3,240 SF building adjacent to a vacant city-owned parcel across the street from the Liberty Theater.

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► BUDGET

- ▷ 400 South Ashley Street
 - Land Acquisition: \$3,102 (Value per QPublic)
 - Site Development & Construction Costs: \$350,000 - \$500,000
 - Material Curation: \$0 (Potential Partnerships w/ VSU, Lowndes County Historical Society, Neighborhood Churches, Private Individual Donations)
 - TOTAL COST: \$353,102 - \$503,102
- ▷ 409 South Ashley Street & Tax Parcel 0120B 022
 - Land Acquisition:
 - ◇ 409 South Ashley - \$21,141 (Value Per Qpublic)
 - ◇ Tax Parcel 0120B 022 - \$0 (Owned by City)
 - Interior & Exterior Renovations: \$100,000 - \$150,000
 - Parking Lot Improvements: \$25,000-\$50,000
 - Asphalt Overlay, Striping, Landscaping, Lighting
 - Material Curation: \$0 (Potential Partnerships w/ VSU, Lowndes County Historical Society, Neighborhood Churches, Private Individual Donations)
 - TOTAL COST: \$146,141 - \$221,141

► FUNDING

- ▷ Local
 - SPLOST
 - T-SPLOST
- ▷ Federal/National
 - Museum Grants for African American History and Culture (IMLS)
 - African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund
- ▷ Private
 - Corporate Grants
 - Community Fundraising/Donations

► PARTNERSHIPS

- ▷ Local
 - City of Valdosta
 - Copeland African American Museum at VSU
 - Local Chapter of NAACP
 - Local Chapter of 100 Black Men
 - Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum
- ▷ State
 - Georgia Department of Community Affairs Historic Preservation Division
 - Georgia Archives
- ▷ Federal/National
 - Institute of Museum and Library Services
 - National Endowment for the Humanities
 - National Trust for Historic Preservation



10. Legacy Lofts - Southwest Corner of E MLK and S Ashley

The Southwest Corner of East Martin Luther King and South Ashley Street is made up of four parcels; two owned by the City of Valdosta and two owned by Budd Commercial Real Estate. The combined 0.77 acres of land, not including the right of way beneath and adjacent to the overpass, would serve as an ideal location for live-work units.

This development will cater to the growing demand for flexible living and working arrangements, combining residential and commercial spaces within the same property. By integrating these units, we can revitalize underutilized land and foster a vibrant, self-

sustaining neighborhood that attracts Black entrepreneurs, freelancers, and small business owners. These live-work spaces will not only provide affordable housing but also stimulate local economic growth by encouraging small-scale enterprises and fostering a sense of community. Furthermore, this initiative aligns with sustainable urban development practices, reducing the need for commuting and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents. Transforming these parcels into live-work housing will create a dynamic environment that supports both living and working, driving economic and social benefits for the entire area.

Ideally, the live work units are 2 stories with a loft space. The below floor plans are an example of how this space can be laid out. Proposed floor plans include a storefront space on the street level with a 2- car garage that can be accessed from the rear driveway, the second floor has the kitchen, dining, and living room, and the third story is the master bedroom that opens to the living room below - inspiring the name Legacy Lofts.

The units are approximately 26'x46' and contain 1,734 square feet of living space and approximately 400 square feet of commercial space, ideal for a couple or small family. These units can be scaled down to offer studio options for singular residents, or those who do not need as much space. This would also help to bring costs down and provide more units.

► BUDGET

- Land Acquisition:
 - 103 E Martin Luther King Jr Drive, 508 South Ashley Street
 - ◇ \$0 (Owned by City)

Big Idea #2: Soulful Southside Revitalization Plan



EXAMPLE FLOOR PLAN OF LIVE/WORK UNITS (SOURCE: DAHLIN GROUP ARCHITECTURE | PLANNING)

- 508 & 514 South Ashley Street
 - ◇ \$29,541(Owned by BUDD Commercial Real Estate - Value per QPublic)
 - ▷ Construction Costs: \$4,268,000-\$5,335,000 (10 units @ \$200-\$250 per SF - \$426,800 - \$533,500 per unit)
 - ▷ TOTAL COST: \$4,297,541 - \$5,364,541
 - ▶ **FUNDING**
 - ▷ Local
 - CDBG
 - HOME
 - City of Valdosta Blight Tax Funds
 - ▷ Federal/National
 - Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits
 - New Market Tax Credits
 - ▶ **PARTNERSHIPS**
 - ▷ Local
 - Central Valdosta Development Authority
 - City of Valdosta
 - Local Banks- Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) Activities
 - One Valdosta Lowndes
 - Valdosta Downtown Development Authority
 - Valdosta Land Bank
 - ▷ State
 - Georgia Department of Community Affairs
 - ▷ Federal/National
 - Department of Housing & Urban Development

Scope of the Initiative

Our project scope is to identify existing challenges within the zoning ordinance for mixed-use redevelopment within the study areas, provide recommendations on how the ordinance can be updated to allow and/or incentivize this type of development, and come up with potential projects/designs for the study areas that re-establish neighborhood vitality and connectivity.

The overall scope of the initiative is to reinvest in a community that has been historically disinvested in with soulful revitalization. The goal is to bring anti-gentrification development that truly aims to benefit the existing residents, without displacing them, while providing additional sources of money spent in the area.

Limitations of our project include both physical restrictions, as well as, social limitations. The project runs on a short timeframe which limits our ability to conduct thorough analysis, community engagement, and to develop recommendations and designs. The scope of our proposal does not address the potential of easements, utilities, and sewer and water capacity in these areas which would impact the feasibility of these projects. Additionally, we recognize that there is an overall lack of trust in the government and outsiders within the community due to historical injustices and systemic discrimination - locally, regionally, and nationally. This long standing mistrust and previously unsuccessful attempts to help the community can hinder effective communication and collaboration within the community.

Action Steps & Timeline

Short Term (1-3 Years)	Cost
Comprehensive Zoning Updates	\$25,000 - \$50,000
Comprehensive Neighborhood Inventory	\$25,000 - \$50,000
Linear Park + Phase 1 of Southside Spirit Trail	\$584,750 - \$634,750
Harvest Square Development	\$815,500 - \$1,073,000
Patterson Street Pedestrian Area Pilot Program	\$11,000 - \$15,000
TOTAL	\$1,461,250 - \$1,822,750

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #2: Soulful Southside Revitalization Plan

Action Steps & Timeline

Medium Term (3-5 Years)	Cost
Parking Lot Renovations @ 410 S Ashley Street	\$100,000 - \$150,000
Businesses at Corn's Corner	\$312,154 - \$626,514
Thomas & Pierce Plaza	\$75,000- \$125,000
The Shoppes on South Ashley	\$525,919 - \$702,919
Black History Museum- 409 S. Ashley Street	\$146,141 - \$503,102
Patterson Street Pedestrian Area Permanent Closure	\$19,000 - \$50,000
TOTAL	\$1,178,214 - \$2,157,535
Long Term (5-10 Years)	Cost
Legacy Lofts	\$4,297,541 - \$5,364,541
South Patterson Studios	\$1,695,568 - \$1,860,568
The CoLLABorative at South Patterson	\$733,797 - \$823,797
TOTAL	\$6,726,906 - \$8,048,906
Total Cost Expenditures Over 10 years	\$9,366,370 - \$12,029,191
Potential Annual Maintenance Costs for Proposed City Projects	\$40,000 - \$50,000

Estimated Costs Based on Cumming Insight's U.S. 2024 Construction Costs Per Unit & Indiana Department of Transportation's Trail Cost Calculator from 2019 including 3% increase each year for inflation

Expected impact/Measures of success

▶ Quantitative

- ▶ % Change in Property Assessments
- ▶ Total \$ Amount of property sales
- ▶ # of employment opportunities created & types of jobs
- ▶ # of new business licenses issued
- ▶ % increase in property taxes
- ▶ % increase in sales tax revenue
- ▶ # of new residential permits pulled
- ▶ # of new commercial permits pulled
- ▶ # of residential and commercial rehabilitation permits pulled
- ▶ # of Certificates of Occupancy issued
- ▶ % change in census tract population figures
- ▶ % change in Median Household Income for Census tract
- ▶ % change in Crime Rate for Census Tract
- ▶ % change in overall census tract Poverty Rate
- ▶ \$ Amount of Public Investment in parks, roads, and public spaces
- ▶ % change in building vacancy rates
- ▶ # of mixed use development projects

▶ Qualitative

- ▶ Community sentiment and perception of efforts
- ▶ Trust levels between Black community and City
- ▶ Public involvement in the planning and decision-making process
- ▶ Success in preserving or celebrating historical aspects of the community
- ▶ Quality and impact of public art installations or cultural events
- ▶ Changes in the visual appeal and overall aesthetics of the area
- ▶ Changes in social bonds and community spirit
- ▶ Improvements in the design and usability of public spaces
- ▶ Impact on local business and entrepreneurship
- ▶ Quality of life improvements
 - More housed individuals
 - Increased feelings of safety, connectivity, etc.
 - Enhanced walkability and ease of movement within the community

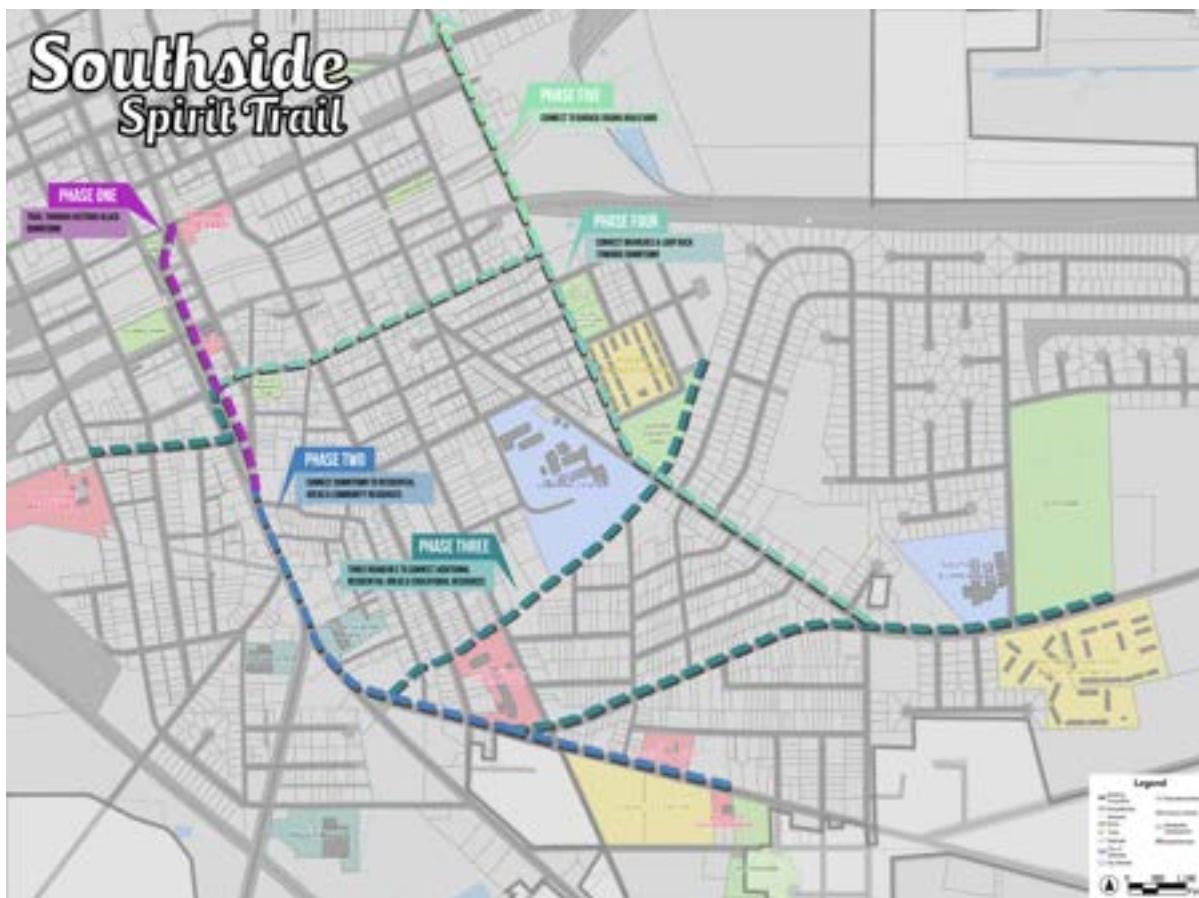
Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

Description

The City of Valdosta has a responsibility in helping restore a sense of “place” along the corridors of Barack Obama Boulevard, Patterson Overpass, Ashley Street, and Griffin Avenue. The corridors within our study area have an incredibly rich history, demonstrated in part by the [inclusion](#) of the Southside Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007. The March 2022 mini documentary [“The Southside Project”](#) sheds light

on this history through the eyes of people directly to it. As the generations who knew the southside in its heyday grow older, we are at more of a risk of losing this history if it is not properly documented.

A crucial component of placemaking is the recognition of the history of the area. The creation of a Black heritage trail, the Southside Spirit Trail, recognizes this history in a way that can both honor



and revitalize the rich history of the Southside Historic District while simultaneously engaging the community. Key locations throughout the Southside will be highlighted via wayfinding signage, placards, historical markers, and mini-museums that tell the story and educate residents and visitors alike. These key locations will be connected via multi-use trail with additional opportunity to expand the placemaking efforts beyond the proposed trail path. The creation of the heritage trail will bring about improvements to the public infrastructure of the Southside. Together, these pieces will help create a built environment along these corridors that is **safe, navigable, inviting** and, most importantly, **responsive** to the needs of the people residing there.

The proposed trail project is divided into five phases, covering a total of 4.79 miles. Each phase focuses on enhancing pedestrian and biking infrastructure in key areas of Valdosta, particularly in historically significant and underserved communities. Overall, the project enhances connectivity, safety, and green infrastructure with a mix of protected bike lanes, widened sidewalks, street trees, along with portions of greenway trail and amenities.

- ▶ Phase One - 0.41 Miles
 - ▷ Phase One starts just South of Downtown, at the location of Team Vibe’s “The Yard” Development. It travels underneath the Jim Beck Overpass through the Historic Black Downtown. This portion of the trail is a multi-use path for biking and pedestrians that is completely separated from the road, running through the linear park.
 - Estimated Cost: \$449,000
 - ◇ Path: \$424,000 (0.41 miles @ \$1,000,000 per mile)
 - ◇ Raised Trail Crossing: \$20,000 (2 @ 10,000 each)
 - ◇ Bike Fix-It Stations: \$5,000 (2 @

- \$2,500 each)
- ◇ Other Typical Trail Improvements included in Linear Park budget

- ▶ Phase Two - 0.90 Miles
 - ▷ Phase Two begins where the Overpass connects to South Patterson and South Ashley Street. After crossing the raised bike/ped crossing, the northwest side of South Ashley Street and eventually Griffin Avenue overgoes a road diet to accommodate a protected 10-foot wide bike lane and 6-foot wide sidewalk with street trees to provide shade. Griffin Avenue is not as wide as South Ashley Street and would not be able to accommodate a 10-foot bike lane and 6-foot sidewalk. Instead, we proposed a 6-foot protected bike lane and 6-foot sidewalk with street trees.
 - Estimated Cost: \$287,000
 - ◇ Widen Road for Two-Way Bike Lane: \$162,000 (\$180,000 per mile)
 - ◇ Raised Trail Crossing: \$20,000 (2 @ 10,000 each)
 - ◇ Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons: \$100,000 (2 @ \$50,000 each)
 - ◇ Bike Fix-It Stations: \$5,000 (2 @ \$2,500 each)
 - ◇ Street Trees: \$63,600 (1 tree every 30-feet @ \$400)
- ▶ Phase Three - 1.82 Miles
 - ▷ Phase Three aims to connect the surrounding residential areas to recreational and educational resources.
 - ▷ There are three off-shoots from the main trail:
 1. A 0.27 mile portion of the trail provides access to the Southside Recreation Center down Kinchen Street via Sharrows.
 - Estimated Cost: \$3,220

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

- ◇ Sharrows: \$720 (4 @ \$180 per marking)
 - ◇ Bike Fix-It Station: \$2,500 (1 @ \$2,500 each)
 - ◇ Street Trees: N/A (Road has natural canopy)
2. A 0.61 mile greenway trail alongside Dukes Bay that provides access to the Pinevale Learning Center, Hudson Dockett Park, & Hudson Dockett Homes.
- Estimated Cost: \$771,000
 - ◇ Trail: \$756,000 (0.61 miles @ \$180,000 per mile)
 - ◇ Raised Trail Crossing: \$10,000 (1 @ 10,000 each)
 - ◇ Bike Fix-It Stations: \$5,000 (2 @ \$2,500 each)
 - ◇ Street Trees: N/A (Area along riverbank is naturally vegetated)
3. Old Statenville Road is not wide enough to accommodate a full bike lane, so we propose a sidewalk widening along the 0.94 mile stretch of road to provide access to Southeast Elementary, Scott Park, and the Brittany Park & Park Chase Apartments with street trees to provide shade.
- Estimated Cost: \$257,528
 - ◇ Sidewalk Widening: \$198,528 (0.94 miles @ \$40 per linear foot)
 - ◇ Raised Trail Crossing: \$10,000 (1 @ 10,000 each)
 - ◇ Bike Fix-It Stations: \$5,000 (2 @ \$2,500 each)
 - ◇ Street Trees: \$44,000 (1 tree every 30-feet @ \$400)
- Phase Four - 1.26 miles
- Phase Four connects the branches from Southeast Elementary to Pinevale Learning Center along Lake Park Boulevard, provides access to the Hudson Dockett Homes and community center on Fry Street, and then completes the loop back towards downtown up E Martin Luther King Drive with added sharrows.
 - Estimated Cost: \$370,012
 - ◇ Sidewalk Widening: \$266,112 (1.26 miles @ \$40 per linear foot)
 - ◇ Sharrows on MLK: \$900 (5 @ \$180 per marking)
 - ◇ Raised Trail Crossing: \$10,000 (1 @ 10,000 each)
 - ◇ Bike Fix-It Stations: \$5,000 (2 @ \$2,500 each)
 - ◇ Street Trees: \$88,000 (1 tree every 30-feet @ \$400)
- Phase Five - 0.40 miles
- Lastly, Phase Five serves to connect the trail to the planned improvements along Barack Obama Boulevard.
 - Estimated Cost: \$87,280
 - ◇ Sidewalk Widening: \$84,480 (0.40 miles @ \$40 per linear foot)
 - ◇ Street Trees: \$2,800 (1 tree every 30-feet @ \$400)

Phase	Mileage	Cost
Phase One	0.41 miles	\$449,000
Phase Two	0.90 miles	\$287,000
Phase Three	1.86 miles	\$1,031,748
Phase Four	1.26 miles	\$370,012
Phase Five	0.40 miles	\$87,280
Planning & Design Cost		\$100,000
TOTAL		\$1,550,820

Estimated Costs Based on UNC Highway Safety Research Center's report on Costs for Pedestrian and Bicyclist Infrastructure Improvements from 2013 and Indiana Department of Transportation's Trail Cost Calculator from 2019, including 3% increase each year for inflation



Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

Scope of the Initiative

This Southside Spirit trail aims to honor and revitalize the rich history of the Southside Historic District. The project will engage the community through wayfinding, placards and historical markers, connecting key locations via a multi-use trail and improving public infrastructure. The objectives of the project include documenting and highlighting the history of the Southside Historic District, fostering community involvement and education about the area's history, developing a built environment that responds to the needs of residents and visitors, and enhancing public infrastructure to create a safe, navigable, and inviting environment.

The deliverables for this project include the installation of wayfinding signage, historical markers, and placards at key locations to educate and engage the community, the development of a multi-use trail in phases to connect significant sites and improve accessibility, and public infrastructure improvements such as enhanced sidewalks, bike lanes, and street trees to create a safe and inviting environment. The primary stakeholders in this project are the City of Valdosta, community members, historical societies, and local businesses.

The project also involves addressing risks and mitigation strategies, such as ensuring accurate documentation and respectful representation of history, maintaining ongoing communication with residents and stakeholders, and promptly addressing potential construction and design issues. Further potential risks to the Southside Spirit Trail and

signage initiatives are community support, management, and consistent funding. Community buy-in is paramount to this recommendation having its intended effect of creating a sense of place. If the City does not support and derive value from these initiatives then they will not last.



A key component to the community valuing the placards and trail is ensuring that they are presentable, welcoming, and maintained. Thus, the next potential limitation is if there is not a member of City management or a dedicated team of employees providing upkeep to these spaces, then they will eventually fall into disrepair. If the City of Valdosta does not already have a dedicated team of employees who focus on upkeep of City property then we suggest enlisting local businesses to maintain the spaces and providing incentives for doing so. This could look like a lottery process where local businesses such as landscaping companies submit

their names to volunteer to upkeep the trail, community signs, and other beautification projects for one year. In exchange for their pro-bono commitment they could get a free business license from the City for the following year.

The final limitation that could impact these recommendations is consistent funding. If funding for these initiatives is reduced or cut then the quality

of these initiatives will be severely impacted. When cities and municipalities look to save money in their budgets, initiatives like these can be seen as “nice to have” but not a necessity. Thus, funding is reallocated to another line item deemed more important. This is where community buy-in plays such a crucial role. The City of Valdosta and its residents must prioritize these efforts for them to exist into the future.

Action Steps & Timeline

These action steps within each term are not suggested in a chronological order. Some can be done simultaneously or with overlapping timelines.

Short Term (1-3 Years)

- ▶ Action Item (1): **Create the position of “Cultural Liaison” within the City to spearhead neighborhood placemaking efforts, including SST development and implementation**
 - ▶ **Description:** The plan should specify the project’s guiding principles, such as accessibility, historical relevance and physical connectivity. The plan should establish a timeline for preliminary design and engineering, land acquisition, environmental studies, permitting requirements, final design, bidding process and construction. The City can contract with a consulting group such as the PATH Foundation to develop this plan (e.g. LINC Master Trail Plan and Implementation Strategy for Newnan/ Coweta County). This process should be driven by a steering or planning committee made up of City staff, local historians and other leaders present in the community. (see next action item)

- ▶ **Cost:** Additional \$10,000 per year or 20% salary increase
- ▶ **Timeframe:** Ongoing
- ▶ Action Item (2): **Develop a master trail plan and implementation strategy for the Southside Spirit Trail to include a feasibility study and public input process.**
 - ▶ **Description:** The plan should specify the project’s guiding principles, such as accessibility, historical relevance and physical connectivity. The plan should establish a timeline for preliminary design and engineering, land acquisition, environmental studies, permitting requirements, final design, bidding process and construction. The City can contract with a consulting group such as the PATH Foundation to develop this plan (e.g. [LINC Master Trail Plan and Implementation Strategy for Newnan/ Coweta County](#)). This process should be driven by a steering or planning committee made up of City staff, local historians and other leaders present in the community. (see next action item)
 - ▶ **Cost:** \$100,000
 - ▶ **Timeframe:** 6-12 months (estimate)

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

▶ Action Item (3): **Stand up a steering committee staffed by the Cultural Liaison to guide implementation of the SST master trail plan.**

▶ **Description:** The committee members should come from various backgrounds, including non-profits, church groups, small businesses and other institutions established, have history or are invested in these corridors. The City council may appoint members. This initial steering committee can exist for the development of the plan, and part of its membership can transition into an advisory board as the implementation is underway (in the medium term). It is important that the roles, responsibilities and objectives of the committee are clearly defined at the outset, and that their work is time-limited.

▶ **Cost / Frequency:** All members would choose to serve on a volunteer basis and without compensation.

▶ **Timeframe:** 6-12 months (estimate)

▶ Action Item (4): **Conduct a research assessment of existing historical sites, landmarks and neighborhoods along the trail routes.**

▶ **Description:** The City can set up a Practicum project with Valdosta State Masters students studying Public Administration and/or History to research and prepare written descriptions of identified historical sites (people, places, events). Suggested deliverables:

- A historical brochure similar to what was developed for the African American Heritage Trail in Bartow County

- Mock-ups of historical markers with descriptions to be placed along the trail.

▶ **Cost:** Potentially free

▶ **Time:** 2-3 academic semesters

▶ [https://cms2.revize.com/revize/bartowga/departments/Keep_Bartow_Beautiful/Black%20History%20Heritage%20Trail/AAHeritage-brochure_02-05-19\(3\).pdf](https://cms2.revize.com/revize/bartowga/departments/Keep_Bartow_Beautiful/Black%20History%20Heritage%20Trail/AAHeritage-brochure_02-05-19(3).pdf)

MEDIUM TERM (3-5 years)

▶ Action Item (5): **Initiate implementation of the SST master trail plan.**

▶ **Description:** This may include:

- Securing funding and resources

- ◇ Apply for grants, secure sponsorships, and partner with local businesses and organizations.

- ◇ Begin fundraising efforts through events, campaigns, and crowdfunding.

- Acquiring necessary approvals and permits

- ◇ Work with City officials to obtain the required permits and approvals for trail construction and signage.

- ◇ Ensure compliance with accessibility and environmental regulations.

- Begin pilot projects

- ◇ Implement a small-scale pilot section of the trail to test design elements and gather user feedback.

- ◇ Use the pilot project to make adjustments and demonstrate the trail's potential to stakeholders and funders.

▶ **Cost:** \$480,000 per mile

▶ **Timeframe:** TBD

- ▶ Action Item (6): **Host town hall meetings and focus groups to gather feedback and continue building public support.**
 - ▶ **Description:** Community engagement will underpin the development of the SST plan during the short term and should continue as the plan is implemented. Solicit ideas from residents through social media and other communication tools.
 - ▶ **Cost:** \$25,000 per year
 - ▶ **Timeframe:** 3-5 years

- ▶ Action Item (7): **Create a visual identity for the SST.**
 - ▶ **Description:** For the City to establish a physical and cultural presence for the trail within the community, the Southside Spirit Trail needs a visual identity, including a logo, website and other branding materials. One option is to hire a local designer to develop a full branding kit. Other options are to host another Practicum project and have students mock up a branding kit (maybe even make it a competition). The City should retain rights to all designs.
 - ▶ **Cost: Total: \$5000 (estimate)**
 - Logo: free - \$800
 - Landing page: \$600 - \$3,000
 - Brochure: \$400 (digital only)
 - Infographic: \$350 (digital only)
 - ▶ **Timeframe:** 1 academic semester

- ▶ Action Item (9): **Launch and promote the new trail.**
 - ▶ **Description:** Organize a formal launch event to unveil the Historical Trail to the public. Continue promotional efforts to attract visitors, including partnerships with tourism agencies and local media.
 - ▶ **Cost:** \$2,000
 - ▶ **Timeframe:** 1 week or 1 month long

- ▶ Action Item (10): **Establish a plan for regular maintenance and operations of the trail, including a strategy for making updates and extensions.**
 - ▶ **Description:** Monitor usage (see metrics of success below), gather feedback, and make improvements as needed to ensure the trail remains engaging and informative. It is important that the community continue to explore opportunities to expand the trail or add new thematic sections based on community interest and historical developments. The City should also develop new programs, events, and educational initiatives to keep the trail dynamic and relevant.
 - ▶ **Cost:** \$9,580 (\$2,000 per mile)
 - ▶ **Timeframe:** Ongoing

LONG TERM 5-10 Years

- ▶ Action Item (8): **Complete implementation of the SST master trail plan.**
 - ▶ **Description:** Complete constructions of the trail and installation of signage, interactive elements and amenities.
 - ▶ **Cost:** \$1,550,820
 - ▶ **Timeframe:** 5-10 years

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

Possible funding sources

- ▶ Local
 - ▷ City of Valdosta - local revenues, e.g. TSPLOST, LOST, SPLOST
 - ▷ Southern Georgia Black Chambers
- ▶ State
 - ▷ Congressionally Directed Spending (earmarks) - Senator and House offices
 - ▷ Georgia Conservancy-Community Placemaking
 - ▷ Georgia Council for the Arts
 - Project Grant
 - Vibrant Communities Grant
 - ▷ Georgia Department of Economic Affairs
 - Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Grant
 - Georgia Heritage Grant
 - ▷ Georgia Department of Natural Resources
 - ▷ Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB)
 - ▷ Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation - BRACE Grant Program
- ▶ Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program - Georgia Department of Transportation
- ▶ Federal/National
 - ▷ Federal Highway Administration
 - ▷ National Endowment for the Arts
 - Our Town
 - Challenge America
 - ▷ National Endowment for the Humanities
 - Cultural and Community Resilience Grant
 - Digital Projects for the Public
 - ▷ Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program - Department of Transportation (DOT)
 - ▷ Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)
- ▶ Private
 - ▷ Community Challenge Grant – AARP
 - ▷ Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant Program

Potential partnerships

- ▶ Local
 - ▷ City of Valdosta
 - ▷ Copeland African American Museum (housed at VSU)
 - ▷ Lowndes County Historical Society & Museum
 - ▷ One Valdosta-Lowndes
 - ▷ South Georgia Regional Commission
- ▶ Southern Georgia Black Chambers
- ▶ Valdosta City School system
- ▶ Valdosta Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority
- ▶ Valdosta State University
- ▶ 100 Black Men of Valdosta - They have started a historical signage effort already

- ▶ State
 - ▷ Georgia Archives
 - ▷ Georgia Conservancy / Georgia Economic Placemaking Collaborative
 - ▷ Georgia Department of Community Affairs - Historic Preservation Division
- ▶ Georgia Department of Transportation
- ▶ Federal/National
 - ▷ National Highway & Safety Administration
 - ▷ Department of Transportation (USDOT)
- ▶ Private
 - ▷ Community Fundraising & Donations

Expected impact/Measures of success

Expected Impact:

- ▶ Sustained community engagement that leads to:
 - ▷ **Wealth-building opportunities** for residents, and
 - ▷ **Strategic partnerships** with key stakeholders, including but not limited to: nonprofits, the business community, regional governmental entities serving greater Valdosta (e.g. One Valdosta Lowndes), and technical colleges and universities.
- ▶ Formation and solidification of community identity by erecting historical attributes (markers, placards, mini museums) that convey the community's history and produce a sense of pride and ownership.
- ▶ Safe, vibrant and attractive corridors through a process of beautification and restoration that enables mobility, creates interconnectivity and invites visitors.

Metrics of Success:

- ▶ *Quantitative*
 - ▷ Trail Usage - Number of pedestrians and cyclists using the trail daily/weekly
 - ▷ Community Engagement - Number of community events or activities held along the trail
 - ▷ Infrastructure Improvements - Reduction in pedestrian and cyclists accidents in the areas
 - ▷ Economic Impact - Increase in local business revenue due to higher foot traffic and number of new businesses that open along the trail
- ▶ Partnership Funding- Assess the amount of funding and sponsorship secured for the trail, including grants, donations, and corporate support.
- ▶ Media Coverage- Account for the number of media mentions, articles, and features about the trail in local, regional and national outlets. Track social media metrics such as likes, shares, comments and mentions related to the trail on all social media platforms used.
- ▶ Historical and Cultural Impacts- Track the number of additional historical sites or landmarks added to the trail over time. Count the number of cultural or historical events organized in collaboration with the trail
- ▶ *Qualitative*
 - ▷ Residents know where and how to access resources
 - ▷ Residents feel that change in their community is positive and they feel a sense of pride and ownership
 - ▷ Residents and visitors are able to safely navigate these corridors, whether by foot or other means of transportation
 - ▷ These corridors are integrated and interconnected with other parts of Valdosta

Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

Case Studies

“The Bottom”, City of Thomasville

Several cities in Georgia have worked to revive historically Black neighborhoods: [“The Bottom”](#) in Thomasville, GA; the [Harlem Renaissance Project](#) in Albany, GA; and the [Sweet Auburn Historic District](#) in Atlanta, GA. Interestingly, in the case of Thomasville, racial integration helped contribute to the decline of the area known as “The Bottom,” as Black residents started to frequent White-owned businesses. These examples serve as potential “case studies” for similar efforts in Valdosta, providing lessons on how the City can help these neighborhoods thrive again.

Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail

In 2010, residents of Asheville’s historically Black East End neighborhood proposed a trail to celebrate Black cultural heritage. River Front Development Group, a Black community development nonprofit founded in Asheville in 1996, committed to achieving these projects. River Front Development Group focused on co-creating and sharing narratives of often overlooked Black Ashevilleians. This trail celebrates the dignity, humanity, and agency of Black people. Community input on this project has been provided through the Asheville Black Cultural Heritage Trail Committee.



Grant Index

Funding Source	Land Acquisition	Planning	Construction	Maintenance
Transportation Alternatives (TA)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	✓	✓		✓
Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP)		✓	✓	
Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)		✓		
Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A)		✓	✓	
Reconnection Communities Pilot Program		✓		
RAISE Grants		✓	✓	
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	✓	✓		
Carbon Reduction Program (CRP)		✓		
PROTECT		✓		
Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)		✓		
Rural Surface Transportation Program	✓	✓	✓	
Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP)			✓	
Earmarks			✓	

TABLE: Summary of Federal Funding Sources and Their Eligible Activities (Source: RailstoTrails.org)

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

General

- ▶ [Bricks & Mortar Program - Georgia Municipal Association](#)
 - ▶ GMA has worked with cities in Georgia to facilitate the purchase of real estate projects for a variety of project types including City Halls, Police/Fire Stations and Public Parks, Theaters and Greenspaces among others. GMA works with bond counsel who utilize a standardized set of documents ensuring issuance cost is kept to a minimum and is able to tap its network of lenders to ensure the City is offered attractive interest rates. The program finances 100% of the hard and soft project costs.
- ▶ [Community Development Block Grant \(CDBG\) - Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#)
 - ▶ The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, managed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), provides federal funding to support community development projects aimed at improving housing, economic opportunities, and overall quality of life in low- and moderate-income communities. The program offers flexible funding to state and local governments for a range of activities, including affordable housing development, infrastructure improvements, and public services. The CDBG program focuses on projects that benefit low- and moderate-income individuals, help to revitalize distressed neighborhoods, and promote economic development and job creation.
- ▶ [Community Foundation of South Georgia](#)
 - ▶ The Community Foundation will award grants between \$1,000 and \$5,000 via the South Georgia Legacy Fund to support the ever-changing needs of the communities of South Georgia. On an annual basis, the Board of Directors of the Community Foundation accept applications from nonprofit organizations throughout our service area and make grants to deserving organizations that are improving the quality of life for the people of South Georgia. Grants are awarded to organizations whose primary office and/or services are located within CFSGA's service area that can demonstrate they have planned their projects within their general operating budget in light of overall community need or have identified opportunities to build their organization's capacity for future success and sustainability.
- ▶ [Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund \(DDRLF\)](#)
 - ▶ The purpose of the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund (DDRLF) is to assist cities, counties and development authorities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by providing below-market rate

financing to fund capital projects in core historic downtown areas and adjacent historic neighborhoods where DDRLF will spur commercial redevelopment. Applicants must demonstrate that they have a viable downtown development project and clearly identify the proposed uses of the loan proceeds. Once approved, funds may be used for such activities as: real estate acquisition, development, redevelopment, and new construction; rehabilitation of public and private infrastructure and facilities; purchase of equipment and other assets (on a limited basis).

▶ [Elevance Health Foundation](#)

▶ Elevance Health Foundation has been investing in communities for over 20 years, focusing on creating a healthier generation of Americans through its Healthy Generations program. The foundation uses social-mapping technology and public-health data to identify major health issues affecting each state. In response to COVID-19, the foundation is now focusing on addressing health inequities in four key areas: improving maternal/child health, encouraging food as medicine, reducing substance use disorder, and providing disaster relief. Over a three-year period, the foundation will invest up to \$90 million in these areas.

▶ [Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants Program](#)

▶ The Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grant program (Community Change Grants) – the subject of this NOFO – offers an unprecedented opportunity to transform disadvantaged communities across the United States into healthy, climate resilient, and thriving communities for their current and future residents. The Community Change Grants will fund community-driv-

en projects that address climate challenges and reduce pollution while strengthening communities through thoughtful implementation. The historic levels of support provided by these grants will enable communities and their partners to overcome long standing environmental challenges and implement meaningful solutions to meet community needs now and for generations to come.

- Reducing and preventing pollution;
- Building resilience to climate change and mitigating current and future climate risks;
- Enhancing meaningful involvement in government processes related to environmental and climate justice;
- Expanding access to high-quality jobs and economic opportunity through workforce development; and
- Bolstering community strength by ensuring that local residents receive the benefits of investments and have the opportunity to build on them for current and future generations.

▶ [Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits](#)

▶ Federal Opportunity Zone Tax Credits are designed to incentivize investments in economically distressed communities designated as Opportunity Zones. These incentives aim to spur economic development and job creation in underserved areas by encouraging long-term investment. Investors who put their capital into these zones can benefit from significant tax breaks, including:

1. Deferral of Capital Gains: Investors can defer taxes on capital gains if they reinvest those gains into a Qualified Opportunity Fund (QOF) within 180 days.
2. Reduction of Deferred Gains: If the investment in the QOF is held for at least 5 years,

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there is a 10% reduction in the deferred gain; if held for 7 years, the reduction increases to 15%.

3. Exclusion of Gains from QOF Investments: If the investment in the QOF is held for at least 10 years, any additional gains from the QOF investment are excluded from taxes.

▶ [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2025 AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Competition](#)

- ▶ AmeriCorps improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. AmeriCorps brings people together to tackle some of the country's most pressing challenges through national service and volunteerism. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve with organizations dedicated to the improvement of communities and those serving. AmeriCorps helps make service a cornerstone of our national culture. This funding announcement is an opportunity for communities to apply for funding to engage adults ages 55 and older in tackling the community's most pressing needs through the AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program. This is an open competition across all states and territories.

▶ [Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund](#)

- ▶ The Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF) welcomes applications from downtown development authorities (DDAs) cities in Georgia who

are requesting financial assistance for downtown capital projects. The mission of the Foundation is to assist cities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by serving as a partner and facilitator in funding capital projects. The goal of the Foundation is to promote economically sustainable projects and build partnerships in order to help ensure the long-term health and economic vitality of the community.

▶ [Greater Valdosta United Way \(GVUW\)](#)

- ▶ The GVUW funds the programs and services of 23 local nonprofits that address critical community needs. The GVUW offers micro grants to non partner nonprofits and occasionally welcomes the opportunity to learn about, and potentially support, community initiatives that fit into the focus areas of mental health training and awareness, youth afterschool programs, housing and sheltering, and basic needs.

▶ [New Markets Tax Credit \(NMTC\) - CDFI Fund](#)

- ▶ The New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program, managed by the CDFI Fund, provides tax incentives to encourage investment in low-income communities. The program offers tax credits to investors who make equity investments in Community Development Entities (CDEs), which in turn invest in businesses and real estate projects located in economically distressed areas.

- ▶ [SPLOST \(Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax\)](#)
 - ▷ A funding mechanism used by municipalities in Georgia to finance specific public projects. It is a voter-approved, 1% sales tax that funds capital outlays such as roads, bridges, parks,

and public buildings. SPLOST can only be used for specific projects listed on the ballot and is collected for a limited time, typically five or six years. The goal is to improve infrastructure and public services without increasing property taxes.

BLACK HISTORY

- ▶ [African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund - National Trust for Historic Preservation](#)
 - ▷ The African American Cultural Heritage program by the National Trust for Historic Preservation focuses on preserving and celebrating the contributions of African Americans through historic sites and cultural landmarks. The program provides support and resources for the conservation of sites significant to African American history and culture.
- ▶ [Cultural and Community Resilience Grant - National Endowment for the Humanities](#)
 - ▷ The Cultural and Community Resilience program supports community-based efforts to address the impacts of climate change and COVID-19 by safeguarding cultural resources and fostering cultural resilience through identifying, documenting, and/or collecting cultural heritage and community experiences. The program prioritizes projects from disadvantaged communities in the United States or its jurisdictions.
- ▶ [Digital Projects for the Public - National Endowment for the Humanities](#)
 - ▷ The Digital Projects for the Public program supports projects that interpret and analyze humanities content in primarily digital platforms and formats, such as websites, mobile applications and tours, interactive touch screens and kiosks, games, and virtual environments.

- ▶ [Georgia Heritage Grant](#)
 - ▷ The Program offers matching funds on a statewide competitive basis to local governments and nonprofit organizations for the preservation of Georgia Register-eligible historic properties.
- ▶ [Historic Preservation Fund \(HPF\) Grant - Georgia Department of Economic Affairs](#)
 - ▷ The HPF is the primary Federal funding source for matching grants to State and Tribal historic preservation offices and other eligible recipients to pay for such things as surveys and repair of historic resources, training, nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, and grants to local jurisdictions for their preservation priorities.
- ▶ [Museum Grants for African American History and Culture](#)
 - ▷ The Museum Grants for African American History and Culture program, managed by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), provides funding to museums and related institutions that focus on African American history and culture. The grants support a range of activities, including Enhancing and preserving collections related to African American history and culture.

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PLACEMAKING

- ▶ [BRACE Grant Program - Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation](#)
 - ▶ The purpose of the BRACE Grant Program is to reduce litter, blight, and illegal dumping on public property and encourage code enforcement efforts. Funded through the Solid Waste Trust Fund (SWTF), the grant program is designed to provide assistance to Georgia communities to help address these challenges.
- ▶ [Challenge America - National Endowment for the Arts](#)
 - ▶ Challenge America offers support primarily to small organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved groups/communities. Challenge America features an abbreviated application, a robust structure of technical assistance, and grants for a set amount of \$10,000. Grants require a cost share/match of \$10,000 consisting of cash and/or in-kind contributions. Total project costs must be at least \$20,000 or greater.
- ▶ [Community Challenge Grant – AARP](#)
 - ▶ Award \$1 million per year for innovative approaches to increasing civic engagement, public space activations, increasing transit use and active transportation, housing affordability, smart cities, etc.
- ▶ [Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant Program](#)
 - ▶ The Community Heart & Soul Seed Grant Program provides start-up funding for resident driven groups in small cities and towns looking to implement the Community Heart & Soul model. Opportunity for a \$10,000 seed grant requires a 1:1 cash match if selected for grant.
- ▶ [Community Placemaking Grants - Project for Public Spaces](#)
 - ▶ The Community Placemaking Grants program by Project for Public Spaces (PPS) supports initiatives that enhance public spaces and foster community engagement. The grants are designed to fund projects that improve the quality, accessibility, and vibrancy of public places, such as parks, plazas, and streetscapes. The program emphasizes creative and participatory approaches to placemaking, encouraging local communities to actively shape their environments. By supporting these projects, PPS aims to strengthen the social and cultural fabric of communities and promote more inclusive, welcoming, and functional public spaces.
- ▶ [In Our Backyards](#)
 - ▶ ioby (In Our Backyards) is a platform designed to support grassroots community projects through crowdfunding and local en-

agement. Individuals or groups with community improvement ideas create a project page on ioby. They set a fundraising goal and timeline, and then promote their project to raise funds from their network and beyond. ioby provides resources, tools, and support to help project leaders succeed, including fundraising advice and community-building tips. Once the project reaches its funding goal, the funds are used to carry out the initiative. They even connect groups with matching funders across the country.

▶ [Knight Foundation](#)

- ▶ The Knight Foundation's Communities Program focuses on fostering informed and engaged communities, primarily in the 26 cities where the Knight brothers once owned newspapers. The foundation supports initiatives that promote civic engagement, community leadership, and equitable development. By funding local projects and organizations, the program aims to create more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient communities.

▶ [National Grassroots Organizing Program \(NGO\)](#)

- ▶ We believe those most impacted by inequity and injustice are in the best position to develop solutions. Our intent is to achieve a better future for all by providing support to community-based, grassroots organizations confronting social and environmental injustice. The National Grassroots Organizing Program (NGO) offers two-year unrestricted, general operating support grants of up to \$30,000 per year, with an average grant size of \$20,000 per year, to small (budgets under \$350,000), constituent-led grassroots organizations throughout the United States and its

territories. The organization aims to promote social and environmental justice by supporting local leadership and grassroots organizing activities of grant partners that focus on groups addressing inequity and injustice in their communities. The organization should be led by people directly impacted by the issues, have a clear plan, assess the problem, engage in outreach activities, and provide educational events.

▶ [Our Town Grants – National Endowment for the Arts](#)

- ▶ The Our Town grant program offers matching grants of \$25,000 to \$200,000 for arts and culture partnerships between government agencies and nonprofits with the goal of creatively infusing art into places.

▶ [Partners for Places - The Funders Network](#)

- ▶ Partners for Places is a grant program that funds projects improving U.S. and Canadian communities by transforming spaces and enhancing housing resilience. It supports community gardens, revitalization of neglected areas, and energy-efficient housing while fostering partnerships between local governments, communities, and funders. The program, active since 2012, emphasizes collaboration to create sustainable and equitable communities.

▶ [Patronicity “Crowdgranting” Programs](#)

- ▶ Patronicity is a platform designed to help communities fundraise for local projects and initiatives. By leveraging crowdfunding, Patronicity connects individuals with projects that need financial support, focusing on enhancing local neighborhoods and community spaces. The platform emphasizes collabora-

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ration between citizens, businesses, and local organizations to drive community-driven development and create positive local impacts.

▶ [Project Grants - Georgia Council for the Arts](#)

- ▶ Project Grants support single art projects such as an art exhibit, a theatre production, a series of workshops for children, or an artist residency. Project Grant applicants also can apply for capacity building projects, such as developing a strategic plan, creating a development plan, or providing professional development.

▶ [Placemaking Grant – National Association of Realtors](#)

- ▶ The Realtor Party's Placemaking program offers grants and resources to state and local REALTOR® associations for creating public outdoor spaces. The program includes two levels of grants: Level 1 for smaller, temporary projects up to \$3,000, and Level 2 for permanent spaces up to \$7,500. These grants help

REALTORS® enhance community engagement, foster public-private partnerships, and drive economic growth. The program also provides various toolkits and guides to assist in project planning and implementation.

▶ [Vibrant Communities Grant - Georgia Council for the Arts](#)

- ▶ The Vibrant Communities Grant (GCA) program, managed by the Georgia Council for the Arts, aims to support local arts and cultural projects that contribute to the vibrancy and sustainability of communities in Georgia. The grants are designed to enhance the cultural, economic, and social fabric of communities by funding activities and initiatives that promote artistic engagement, cultural heritage, and creative placemaking. The program encourages projects that foster community collaboration, improve local quality of life, and stimulate economic development through the arts.

HOUSING

▶ [Continuum of Care \(CoC\) Builds - HUD](#)

- ▶ The Initiative for Supportive Housing Development (INSiDE) NOFO targets efforts within Continuum of Care (CoC) geographic areas to address and reduce homelessness by adding new units of permanent supportive housing (PSH) through new construction, acquisition, or rehabilitation through one-time INSiDE awards under the CoC program. PSH is permanent housing in which supportive services are provided to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness with a disability to live independently. Additionally, no more than 20 percent of an award made under this NOFO, may also be for other eligible CoC Program activities associated with the PSH project, (e.g., supportive services, operating costs, administrative costs (Section IV.G.1 of this NOFO), and no more than 10 percent of an award may be used for project administration. The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program (24 CFR part 578) (the Rule) is designed to promote a community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; to provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, states, Indian Tribes, tribally designated housing entities (as defined in section 4 of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 (25 U.S.C. 4103) (TDHEs)), and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals, families, persons fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, and youth while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused by homelessness; to promote access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs by home-

less individuals and families; and to optimize self-sufficiency among those experiencing homelessness.

▶ [Eviction Protection Grant](#)

- ▶ The HUD Eviction Protection Grant Program provides funding to non-profit organizations and governmental entities to support eviction prevention efforts. The grants focus on offering legal assistance to low-income tenants at risk of eviction, aiming to help them stay in their homes. The program is part of HUD's broader strategy to address housing stability and prevent homelessness

▶ [Foster Youth to Independence](#)

- ▶ Former foster youth homelessness is on the rise in Valdosta, through this funding the Valdosta Housing Authority could apply to receive vouchers to house former foster youth for free, wraps around services can then be provided through YHDP

▶ [Georgia State Housing Tax Credit:](#)

- ▶ This state-level program complements the LIHTC by providing additional tax credits to developers in Georgia, further promoting affordable housing development.

▶ [Low-Income Housing Tax Credit \(LIHTC\)](#)

- ▶ This federal program, administered by the DCA, offers tax credits to developers who build or rehabilitate affordable rental housing. The credits reduce the amount of federal income tax owed by the developers, encouraging investment in affordable housing projects.

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- ▶ [Youth Homeless Demonstration Program - HUD](#)
 - ▶ HUD will select up to 25 communities to participate in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) to develop and execute a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. Develop and implement a program to prevent and end youth homelessness. Apply for project funding up to an amount between \$600,000 and \$15 million per community, based on each community's youth popula-

tion size and poverty rate, for a total demonstration amount of approximately \$60 million. The purpose of the YHDP is to implement projects that demonstrate how a comprehensive approach to serving homeless youth aged 24 and under can dramatically reduce youth homelessness. The population to be served by this demonstration program is youth experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied and pregnant or parenting youth.

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ [Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program \(ATIIP\) - USDOT](#)
 - ▶ The Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP) is a new competitive grant program created by Section 11529 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (enacted as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) to construct projects to provide safe and connected active transportation facilities in active transportation networks or active transportation spines.

ATIIP will award two types of grants: Planning and Design grants and Construction grants. Planning and Design grants are for eligible applicants to develop plans for active transportation networks and active transportation spines. Projects seeking Planning and

Design grants must have planning and design costs of at least \$100,000 to be eligible.

Construction grants are for eligible applicants to construct projects to provide safe and connected active transportation facilities in an active transportation network or active transportation spine. Projects seeking Construction grants must have total costs of at least \$15 million to be eligible

- ▶ [Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank \(GTIB\)](#)
 - ▶ The Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) is a grant and low-interest loan program administered by the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA). Since inception, GTIB has provided \$200 million in loans and

grants to highly competitive transportation projects that have enhanced mobility and driven economic development in local communities throughout Georgia.

- ▶ [Highway Safety Improvement Program \(HSIP\) - Federal Highway Administration](#)
 - ▷ The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) is a core Federal-aid program with the purpose to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads, including non-State-owned roads and roads on tribal land. The HSIP requires a data-driven, strategic approach to improving highway safety on all public roads with a focus on performance.

- ▶ [RAISE \(Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity\) - Department of Transportation \(DOT\)](#)
 - ▷ The RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) Grants program, managed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, provides funding for transportation infrastructure projects aimed at improving safety, equity, and sustainability. The program supports projects that enhance transportation systems and address various community needs, including climate resilience, economic development, and accessibility. It encourages innovative and collaborative approaches to infrastructure development and aims to benefit communities by addressing critical transportation challenges.

- ▶ [Reconnecting Communities Pilot \(RCP\) Program - Department of Transportation \(DOT\)](#)
 - ▷ The U.S. Department of Transportation's Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program aims to address the negative impacts

of transportation infrastructure that have historically divided communities. This initiative offers competitive grants to projects focused on removing, retrofitting, or mitigating highways and other barriers to improve community connectivity.

- ◻ Cultural and Community Resilience Grant Funding Types:
 - ◇ Community Planning Grants: Support studies and planning activities for projects aimed at removing or retrofitting barriers.
 - ◇ Capital Construction Grants: Fund the actual removal, retrofitting, or replacement of transportation facilities that hinder community connectivity.

- ▶ [Safe Streets and Roads for All \(SS4A\) - Department of Transportation \(DOT\)](#)
 - ▷ The Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grant program, established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, aims to enhance road safety and create vibrant communities. Funded with \$5 billion through 2026, the program provides grants to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Currently, the Department of Transportation (DOT) is accepting applications for Planning and Demonstration Grants until August 29, 2024. These grants support the development and implementation of comprehensive strategies to improve road safety and are available to local governments, transit agencies, Tribal governments, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). The program focuses on creating safer, more accessible streets, which can also boost local businesses and property values.

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- ▶ [Surface Transportation Program \(STP\) - Federal Highway Administration](#)
 - ▶ The Surface Transportation Program (STP) provides flexible funding that may be used by States and localities for projects to preserve and improve the conditions and performance on any Federal-aid highway, bridge and tunnel projects on any public road, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and transit capital projects, including intercity bus terminals.
- ▶ [Transportation Alternatives \(TA\) Program](#)
 - ▶ Georgia DOT partners with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in facilitating and providing an opportunity for local governments to pursue non-traditional transportation related activities such as pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian streetscaping projects. The Transportation

Alternatives Program improves the quality of life for citizens in communities across the state by providing local governments the means to pursue projects that might not otherwise be possible.

- ▶ [TSPLOST \(Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax\)](#) is a funding mechanism in Georgia used to finance transportation-related projects. Like SPLOST, it is a voter-approved, 1% sales tax, but it specifically targets improvements in transportation infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and transit systems. TSPLOST can be enacted on a regional or county level and is intended to address critical transportation needs without raising property taxes. The tax is usually collected for a limited period, often five years.

RECREATION

- ▶ [Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Grants Program - National Parks Service](#)
 - ▶ The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program provides matching grants to cities for park projects in underserved communities. These investments enable urban communities to create new outdoor recreation spaces, reinvigorate existing parks, and form connections between people and

the outdoors. ORLP program provides matching grants (up to 50% of total project costs) to assist communities with little to no access to outdoor recreation opportunities in urban areas. Funds can be used for the acquisition and/or development of, or to substantially renovate public parks and other outdoor recreation spaces.

BUSINESS

- ▶ [ACE Loans](#)
 - ▶ The ACE program offers financial support to small businesses through various loan and grant options. It provides resources for businesses looking to expand, innovate, or recover from economic challenges. The program focuses on delivering tailored financial solutions to meet the specific needs of small enterprises, including flexible loan terms and access to capital for growth and development. By assisting small businesses, ACE aims to foster economic development and support entrepreneurship.

- ▶ [American Express® Backing Small Businesses](#)
 - ▶ In partnership with American Express, the Backing Small Businesses grant program supports economically vulnerable and under-resourced small businesses with community reach and/or cultural significance. This year, eligible small business owners could apply for \$10,000 grants for projects that grow or improve their businesses by building community, supporting their economic viability, or bolstering meaningful change.

- ▶ [Spark Good Local Grants \(Walmart\)](#)
 - ▶ Walmart believes that strengthening local communities creates value for business as well as society. Each year, Walmart U.S. stores, Sam's Clubs and Distribution Centers award local cash grants ranging from \$250 to \$5000. These local grants are designed to address the unique needs of the communities where we operate.

- ▶ [State Small Business Credit Initiative \(SSBCI\)](#)
 - ▶ The State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI), managed by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, is a program designed to support small businesses and startups by providing state and tribal governments with funding to enhance their small business lending and investment programs. The initiative aims to increase access to capital for small businesses, promote job creation, and stimulate economic growth. States and tribes use the funds to develop or expand their small business credit programs, which may include loan guarantees, venture capital investments, and other forms of financial support. The goal is to strengthen local economies and foster entrepreneurship through improved access to financing.

- ▶ [Women's Business Center Application Readiness and Procurement Assistance - Small Business Administration](#)
 - ▶ The purpose of this Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) is to provide grant funding for organizations to establish Women's Business Centers (WBCs) to assist women entrepreneurs with application readiness for certification in the Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) and Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Small Business (EDWOSB) Programs, procurement assistance, and entrepreneurial development.

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- ▶ [Women's Business Center – Supporting Childcare Small Businesses Grant - Small Business Administration](#)
 - ▶ The purpose of this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is to invite proposals for funding from private, non-profit organizations that will provide entrepreneurial development services to women owned childcare

small businesses, as well as to women owned childcare businesses and entrepreneurs in socially and economically disadvantaged locations that are outside of the geographical areas of existing WBCs. There will be one or more awards issued in the United States and its territories.

ACCESS TO FOOD

- ▶ [Farmers Market Promotion Program \(FMPP\) - U.S. Dept. of Agriculture](#)
 - ▶ FMPP funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand direct producer-to consumer markets to help increase access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products. FMPP achieves this goal through the creation, coordination, and delivery of outreach, training, and technical assistance to domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, online sales or other direct producer-to-consumer (including direct producer-to-retail, direct producer-to-restaurant and direct producer-to-institutional marketing) market opportunities.
- ▶ [Healthy Food Financing Initiative \(HFFI\) - USDA](#)
 - ▶ HFFI provides grants, loans, and technical assistance to improve access to healthy food in underserved areas, create and preserve qual-

ity jobs, and revitalize low-income communities. HFFI supports the capacity of local and regional Healthy Food Financing Partnerships, and provides financial and technical assistance to eligible healthy food retailers and food enterprises to overcome the higher costs and initial barriers entry in areas with inequitable access.

- ▶ [Urban Agriculture Resilience Program - American Public Gardens Association](#)
 - ▶ In 2020, the United States Botanic Garden (USBG) and the American Public Gardens Association (the Association) initiated the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program. Since its inception, the program has provided financial awards to 80 urban agriculture projects nationwide, promoting public garden participation in collaborations that combine food growing and education while addressing food security challenges facing communities.

SOCIAL SERVICES

▶ [Everytown Community Safety Fund](#)

- ▶ The Everytown Community Safety Fund supports 501(c)3 organizations implementing community-based violence intervention (CVI) programs operating in cities nationwide as a core component of a comprehensive approach to reducing gun violence in America. We deliver resources to help community-based violence intervention organizations sustain and scale their essential, lifesaving work via direct investment through grants, capacity-building training, peer convenings and advocacy campaigns.

▶ [FY25 Brownfields Job Training \(JT\) Grants](#)

- ▶ The Brownfields Job Training Grant offers graduates the chance to secure environmental jobs in communities affected by brownfields versus outsourcing labor. The EPA aims to create good-paying jobs with union membership and strong labor standards. The grants cover various brownfield-related activities, including waste assessment, cleanup, remediation, and site preparation. Applicants are evaluated on their ability to secure hiring commitments from local contractors.

▶ [FY 2024 Good Jobs Challenge](#)

- ▶ EDA's mission is to lead the Federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness by preparing American regions, States, and Tribes for growth and success in the worldwide economy. Through this Fiscal Year 2024 Good Jobs Challenge Notice of Funding Opportunity

(FY 2024 Good Jobs Challenge NOFO), EDA will support regional workforce training systems in designing and implementing activities for established sectoral partnerships that place program participants in good jobs and advance industries in the federal key technology focus areas. \$25 million will be awarded through this FY24 Good Jobs Challenge NOFO. EDA anticipates awarding approximately between 5-8 grantees with awards ranging from \$1 million to \$8 million. This NOFO aims to fortify the economic and national security of the United States and advance the competitiveness of the applicant's region.

▶ [The Calvin K. Kazanjian Economics Foundation](#)

- ▶ The Calvin K. Kazanjian Economics Foundation is a non-profit private foundation that grants to support innovative economic education programs. The foundation prefers programs that collaborate with institutions with expertise in economic education, such as economic education councils, centers, universities, and colleges. Nonprofit organizations with at least five years of history can submit a letter of interest. The Foundation is open to multi-year grant funding requests and has two grant cycles with deadlines in early March and September. Current funding interests include leveraging AI, research on AI and economic education, expanding economic education programs, developing innovative curriculum, and generating more demand for economic and financial education.

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▶ [The Brooks and Joan Fortune Foundation \(BJFF\)](#)

- ▶ Primarily provides funds to support education, art, and outreach programs and projects. In general, the foundation desires to support specific activities that result in a defined outcome rather than general operating funds or fundraising campaigns. While the foundation activities have historically been located in Indiana and Florida, requests from around the country will certainly be considered. All recipients must have a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS.

Applications may be submitted between April 1 and December 31 via our Online Grants Manager.

▶ [ROSS \(Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency\) Service Coordinator Program](#)

- ▶ The Resident Opportunity and Self Sufficiency Service Coordinator (ROSS-SC) program is designed to assist residents of Public and Indian Housing make progress towards economic and housing self-sufficiency by removing the educational, professional and health barriers they face. Self-sufficiency is defined as an individual's ability to support their household by maintaining financial, housing, and personal/family stability. To achieve self-sufficiency, an individual moves along a continuum towards economic independence

and stability; such movement is facilitated by the achievement of individual educational, professional, and health-related goals. To help residents make progress towards self-sufficiency, HUD provides ROSS-SC grant funding to eligible applicants to hire a Service Coordinator who assesses the needs of Public and Indian housing residents and links them to local training and supportive services that will enable participants to move along the self-sufficiency continuum. In the case of elderly/residents with disabilities, the Service Coordinator also links them to congregate and other supportive services which enable them to age/remain in place in addition to providing other desired training and supportive services which are made available to other residents. In addition, with the ROSS-SC grant, HUD provides funding for grantees to provide direct services to further support the work of the ROSS-SC and ultimately, the goals of the ROSS program.

▶ [Wish You Well Foundation](#)

- ▶ The Wish You Well Foundation supports adult and family literacy in the United States by fostering and promoting the development and expansion of new and existing literacy and educational programs. The Foundation makes donations to programs and projects that aid in this stated mission. Most requests range from \$200 to \$10,000.

▶ [Youth Build - Department of Labor](#)

- ▶ YouthBuild is a community-based pre-apprenticeship program that provides job training and educational services for opportunity youth ages 16-24 who left school without a secondary diploma. Participants learn vocational skills in construction, as well as in other in-demand industries that include health-care, information technology, and hospitality. Participants also provide community service through the required construction or rehabilitation of affordable housing for low-income or homeless families in their own neighbor-

hoods. Participants split their time between the vocational training work site and the classroom, where they earn their high school diploma or equivalency, learn to be community leaders, and prepare for postsecondary training opportunities, including college, apprenticeships, and employment. Supportive services address barriers throughout participation and the 12-month follow-up period, and may include transportation assistance, childcare, healthcare referrals, and the provision of work attire and personal protective equipment.

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Valdosta Visionaries

Big Idea #3: Neighborhood Connectivity, Placemaking & Beautification

Acknowledgments

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- ▶ Andrew Goodwin, Director of Economic Development and City Liaison to the Jack Hadley Black History Museum, City of Thomasville
- ▶ Angela Greer, Resident Services Director, Valdosta Housing Authority
- ▶ Carla Gervin, CSBG Director, Coastal Plain
- ▶ DeWayne Johnson, President/CEO, Southern Georgia Black Chambers
- ▶ Erica Miller, Executive Director, QUOLA
- ▶ Feliciano Lewis, CEO/Director, Men4menllc
- ▶ Georgia Forward Team
- ▶ Jane Osborn, Retired Social Worker
- ▶ Kelley Saxon, Chair, Homeless Task Force
- ▶ Kelvin Pettway, ERSEA Director, Coastal Plain
- ▶ John Tyno, Weatherization Director, Coastal Plain
- ▶ Marlena Morrow, CSBG/LIHEAP Coordinator, Coastal Plain
- ▶ Mary Beth Brownlee, One Valdosta-Lowndes
- ▶ Rickita Williams, Community Services Navigator, LCCY
- ▶ Dr. Roy Copeland, Valdosta State University
- ▶ Seth Brown, Executive Director, LCCY
- ▶ SGMC Health Senior Leadership
- ▶ Valdosta Lowndes Historical Society & Museum
- ▶ Young Gamechangers Class of 2024

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Section 3

Blended Lines

Challenge Question:

How do we strengthen community togetherness among the various demographic groups within Valdosta-Lowndes County and help those suffering from lack of resources and social connection?

Blended Lines

Introduction

Valdosta, Georgia is a “City Without Limits” located in South Georgia. The city of Valdosta borders Florida and is home to the Moody Air Force Base and Valdosta State University. Valdosta is famous for its thriving sports programs and has been deemed “Title Town USA”. With lovely weather, great southern comfort food, and an atmosphere for fun, there are still some challenges to overcome. The best way to overcome any challenges within a city is for everyone to come together for common goals and the greater good of the community. With grand ideas afoot, it is our hope that this thriving community will continue to be a great place to call home. Considering these things lead to our challenge question:

How do we strengthen community togetherness among various demographic groups within Valdosta-Lowndes County and help those suffering from lack of resources and social connection?

To strengthen community togetherness, one would first have to identify those who are in the community by race and ethnicity. This is important because cultural competency or the lack of cultural competency are key factors regarding community and social connections.



Team Members

Madison Beaumarchais | Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Ga

Eric Bell | Georgia House of Representatives, Jonesboro, GA

Hope Brown | Legacy Realtors, Valdosta, Ga

Jada Carithers | Valdosta State University, Adel, Ga

Jeremy Daniel | Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Madison, GA

Abigail Harrell | Valdosta State University, Hahira, GA

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Chanel Randolph | ACE Loans, Lake Park, GA

Jason Weaver | City of Screven, Screven, Ga

Arlena Williams | Enrichment Services Program, Inc., Talbotton, Ga

According to Neilsberg Research (2024), 36.99% are White, 55.54% are Black or African American, 0.23% are American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.42% are Asian, 0.22% are Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, 1.59% are some other races, and 4.01% are multiracial. The largest ethnic minority group in Valdosta are non-Hispanic and the largest racial minority in Valdosta are White. Considering this data, it is vital to note that diversity in the Valdosta area may influence the social connection that is needed for the community to come together to thrive. When interviewing local community leaders, it was often stated that there is a divide between Valdosta and Lowndes County due to many stated reasons, but the most common reason is sports. Also, there was mention of a divide based on socio economic status, race, ethnicity, and the specific side of town families may live, sports were the most discussed area of concern. In this regard, the community has a responsibility to acknowledge the disparities, create ways to increase social connection, provide more knowledge of local community resources, and strengthen the community by coming together.

To address the above data, our team has developed these three big ideas.

- 1. A community-wide mentoring program that will benefit the children and adolescents of Valdosta-Lowndes,**
- 2. Build a multi-purpose sports center to generate revenue that could be used to provide local resources in the community, and**
- 3. A leadership retreat for community leaders and stakeholders to share and provide information to build the community.**

We feel these three big ideas will address our challenges in different ways such as provide a safe space for the youth of the community and create the sense of togetherness among the youth in the area, in hopes that it will continue into adulthood. Also, the multi-purpose center will create a hub for sporting events since the city is well known for successful sporting programs. The buildings for sporting events are currently smaller spaces; however, this space will be much larger and accommodate more events, hence, more revenue. Finally, the leadership retreat will provide a space for all stakeholders and community leaders to share the funding opportunities available, prompt elected officials to advocate for more funding to be available to the area, and encourage leaders to challenge each other to be intentional about community involvement.

Big Idea #1: Tiletown Teammates Mentorship Collective

Description

At least one in three young people will grow up without a mentor. Today's 18-to-21-year-olds report unmet mentoring needs related to depression, anxiety, and suicidality at much higher rates than previous generations. Youth who identify as BIPOC and those from lower-income levels express significantly higher rates of unmet mentoring needs. Additionally, 54% of young people who wished for a mentor were dealing with serious issues such as family problems, mental health challenges, substance abuse, or physical or sexual abuse. Youth with a mentor are 92% more likely to volunteer regularly, 75% more likely to hold leadership positions, and 22% more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging. Regular meetings with mentors make students 52% less likely to skip school and 37% less likely to skip class. Young adults with mentors are 55% more likely to be enrolled in college and maintain better attitudes toward school. Adults who had meaningful mentors report significant long-term benefits, with 74% attributing their success to their mentor, 69% finding help with educational issues, and 58% receiving mental health support.¹

Also, below are a few statistics that we discovered within the local community. Due to these statistics, the mentorship program aims to serve as positive role models and support them in their personal, social, academic, and professional endeavors.

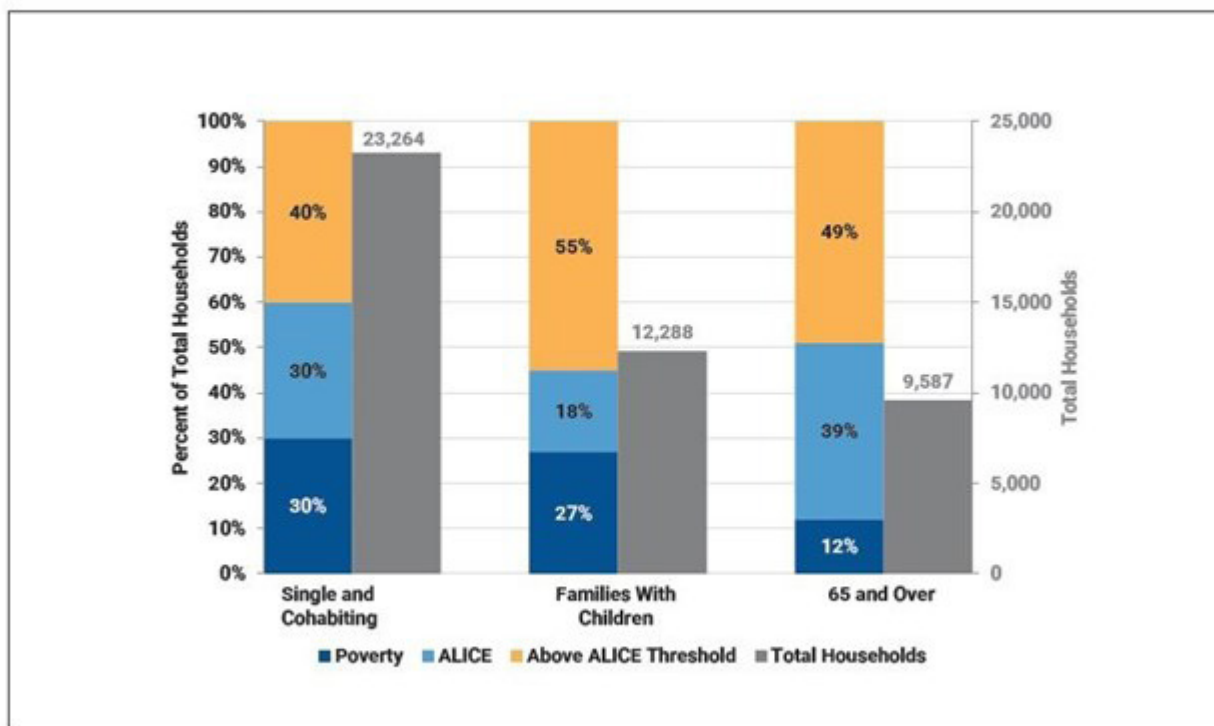
- ▶ **Valdosta City**
 - ▶ **65.5%** - 9th grade students reporting perception of negative risk with alcohol consumption
 - ▶ **55.9%** - children living in single-parent families
 - ▶ **47.7%** - families, with children, with annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold
 - ▶ **40.1%** - 3rd grade students achieving Developing Learner or above on Milestones ELA assessment
 - ▶ **23.7%** - children whose parents lack secure employment
 - ▶ **\$33,583** - median household income (\$61,224 - Georgia)
 - ▶ Population by Race/Ethnicity
 - 37.6% - White, Non-Hispanic
 - 54.6% - Black, Non-Hispanic
 - 1.4% - Asian and Pacific Islander
 - 0.1% - American Indian
 - 1.6% - Multi-racial
 - 4.5% - Hispanic
- ▶ **Lowndes County**
 - ▶ **76.4%** - 3rd grade students achieving Developing Learner or above on Milestones ELA assessment
 - ▶ **41.3%** - children living in single-parent families
 - ▶ **34.5%** - families, with children, with annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #1: Titledown Teammates Mentorship Collective

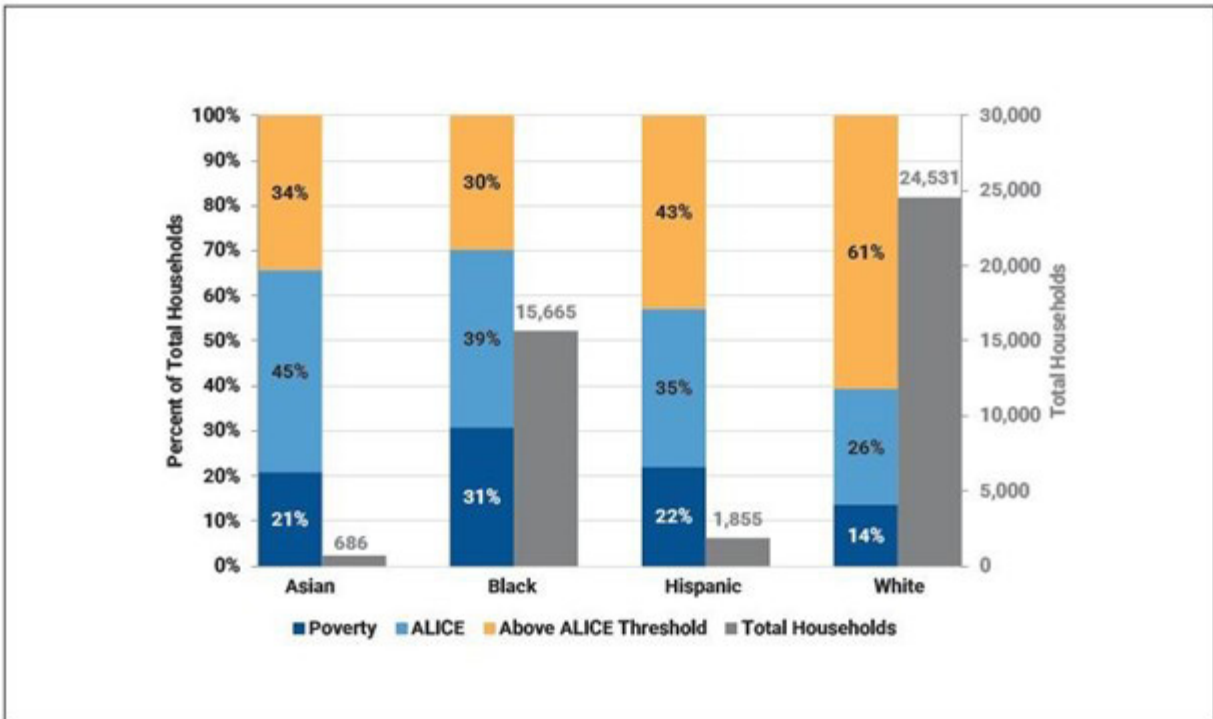
- 27.3% - children living in poverty
- 15.7% - children whose parents lack secure employment
- \$48,864 - median household income (\$62,800 - Georgia)
- Population by Race/Ethnicity
 - 53.1% - White, Non-Hispanic
 - 36.8% - Black, Non-Hispanic
 - 1.5% - Asian and Pacific Islander
 - 0.3% - American Indian
 - 2.3% - Multi-racial
 - 5.8% - Hispanic

Household Financial Status by Household Type, Lowndes County, 2021



Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021; American Community Survey, 2021

Household Financial Status by Race/Ethnicity, Lowndes County, 2021



Note: Asian, Black, and White racial categories are for one race alone. Race and Hispanic ethnicity are overlapping categories. The Asian and Black groups may include Hispanic households; the White group includes only White, non-Hispanic households. The Hispanic ethnic group may include households of any race.

Source: ALICE Threshold, 2021; American Community Survey, 2021

Titletown Teammates Mentorship Program will provide children and youth in our community with positive adult role models and resources to foster social interaction, relationship building, and skill development, preparing them to become thriving adults who contribute positively to their community. By leveraging the winning spirit associated with the Titletown name, we aim to create a comprehensive mentorship program targeting children and youth aged 6-18. The program will ensure accessibility, engagement, and support through strategic partnerships with local city and county schools, Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce, Southern Black Chamber of Commerce, Valdosta

State University, Moody Air Force Base, and South Georgia Medical Center. Through these collaborations, we will provide a structured framework for mentorship, enabling participants to receive guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for personal growth. Our goal is to create a nurturing environment where young people can develop the skills and confidence needed to succeed in their personal and professional lives, ultimately fostering a more connected and resilient community. A mentorship collective will unite various community members and organizations to work towards the shared goal of improving the lives of local youth. By fostering collaboration among schools, businesses,

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #1: Titledown Teammates Mentorship Collective

and community groups, the program will create a sense of shared responsibility. This unified effort will strengthen community bonds and ensure that all youth receive the support they need to thrive. The program will provide resources, training, marketing, and recruitment support for current youth development programs in the community.

Based on information gathered from the Valdosta City School System Superintendent, there is a need for a collective mentorship program in the community schools. The city school system is currently working to create a position to head a mentorship program. In conjunction with this Big Idea, we hope to blend lines across the Valdosta community by

starting with the city and county schools to create one, unified mentorship program that could serve and support both school systems. Recruitment efforts for mentors will cast a wide net across the community to encourage an inclusive pool of mentors to work with the diverse student population.

This is an opportunity for community members to network and receive resources from different areas that they may not have been able to connect with previously. This program aims to connect Valdosta-Lowndes County community members across generational, socio-economic, and geographic lines and provide resources to those that may not originally have had access.

Scope of the Initiative

By creating this program, volunteers and the board of directors will support current youth development programs in the community by providing youth with positive role models in their life. Local programs such as (Boys & Girls Club, National Council of Negro Women Junior Program, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, local Sorority & Fraternity mentor groups including Delta Gems and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.'s Pearls for Girls, Kappa Psi Sigma Rhoer Club, Reach Two Inc., I Am B.E.A.U.T.I.F.U.L., 100 Black Men, Girls on the Run, and Beautiful Creations) will benefit from this program. By joining the collective, they will gain access to the online training, resources, marketing efforts, referrals from county and city schools for mentees, and referrals from local businesses for mentors, Valdosta State University, Moody Air Force Base, South Georgia

Medical Center, and other local businesses will be invited to sponsor the program through two options: providing mentors who can commit to at least one year, or hosting workshops for students enrolled in the mentor programs. Mentors will be paired with a student for one academic year, and can continue their tenure as a mentor over multiple years either with the same mentee, or with a new or additional mentee. Sponsors hosting workshops can use the sports complex detailed in a later idea to cover a variety of topics. The goals of this initiative are to increase accessibility by expanding the reach of existing mentorship programs through referral programs and enhanced marketing, enhance social interaction by facilitating opportunities for children to interact with positive adult mentors and peers, build essential life skills and confidence in youth

through structured mentorship activities, and connect families of mentees with community resources as needed. In addition to student resources, education and mentorship will be provided to parents and caregivers through take-home resources, workshops, and one-on-one conversations with other mentors. Additionally, providing exposure for men-

tees is everything. Seeing is believing. It's one thing to tell children about people, places, and things, but if they are actually able to see it then it can make a difference in their lives. By taking them out of their comfort zone, they can think about endless possibilities for their future including career choice, their aspirations, and where they want to grow.

Action Steps & Timeline

Short term goals/action items (Year 1)

Goal: Develop a robust, comprehensive mentorship program in Valdosta-Lowndes County, GA, by leveraging partnerships with the city and county schools, Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce, local mentorship programs, postsecondary education institutions, businesses, and organizations to recruit mentors and enhance support for youth aged 6-18.

Action items:

- ▶ Conduct an environmental scan to identify the current mentorship programs that exist throughout Valdosta-Lowndes County. Some examples may include: Boys & Girls Club, local Sorority & Fraternity mentor groups, I Am Beautiful, 100 Black Men, Beautiful Creations.
- ▶ Identify if these organizations would benefit by joining the collective.
- ▶ Develop a diverse board of directors, including but not limited to, members representing the city schools, county schools, small business, corporate, postsecondary education, banking, etc. This unified group can identify the key 3-5 strategic goals for the program and the name for the mentorship program.
- ▶ Identify and convene the relevant stakeholders that would be critical to partner and develop the program.
- ▶ Cultivate relationships with city and school administrators and counselors to identify children

who would benefit from having mentors in their life. The Executive Director and Board of Directors, with legal counsel, would formalize the process and standard operating procedure to ensure that the children's parent/guardian gives permission for the child to be connected with a community mentor.

- ▶ Utilize the board of directors to develop sponsorships and partnerships to support the cost of an Executive Director position to oversee the program
- ▶ Post a position for an executive director to lead the day to day tasks,
- ▶ Engage local businesses and organizations to recruit mentors. Examples: Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce, Valdosta-Lowndes Young Professionals Network, Black Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Lowndes alumni network, Valdosta State University, SGM, Moody Air Force Base, Wiregrass Technical College, Georgia Military College, etc.
- ▶ Craft the necessary risk management resources in consultation with local attorneys for each parent/guardian to sign and each mentor to sign.
- ▶ Create a database of community resources that can live on a shared drive that is given to mentors, mentees, and families/caregivers of mentees. For example, here are some of the UGA Mentor Program mentoring resources (Documents & Links (uga.edu)).

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #1: Titledown Teammates Mentorship Collective

- ▶ Resources might include services offered by the community, the school systems, and other entities that cater to young people.
 - ▶ Develop a curriculum that fits with the current mentorship programs and only adds to the information that is being provided.
 - ▶ Utilize local educators that have a vested interest in the youth within the community to develop a curriculum that matches the needs of the partnered programs and the scope of the mentors.
 - ▶ Utilize a shared drive for mentorship resources with the plans to adopt more comprehensive technology in the coming years.
 - ▶ Explore the possibility of an individual or group of individuals that would want to invest in this mentorship program via starting an endowment fund that could be held and managed by the One-Valdosta Lowndes Foundation.
 - ▶ Create an annual partnership package for companies/organizations to become annual sponsors; there could be 3-4 tiers.
- to showcase the attributes of the program to entice students and caregivers to participate.
 - ▶ Train mentors and begin year one of the program
 - ▶ Utilize local educators to assist the Executive Director in the training by providing a thorough curriculum
 - ▶ Create an assessment for all constituents (mentors, mentees, caregivers, sponsoring organizations) that will evaluate year one of the program.
 - ▶ Begin Year One of the program
 - ▶ Create a “Circle of Giving” program that individuals in the community would be inspired to invest in to support this program. It could be a naming opportunity and different giving level tiers.
 - ▶ Hire a part-time person that could assist the Executive Director with program management and stewardship activities.
 - ▶ Identify a technological mentorship platform to facilitate the mentor recruitment, mentorship connection process, and track engagement.

Medium term goals/actions (Years 2-3)

Goal: Begin training and matching mentors with mentees and develop an evaluation system that will provide qualitative and quantitative data for improvement.

Action items:

- ▶ Hire an Executive Director in year two to organize the program and make decisions
- ▶ Continue fundraising, identifying sponsors, and potential mentors
- ▶ Develop a referral system with the local schools to ensure that all students are receiving access to mentorship within the ability of the program
- ▶ Host informational sessions at the local schools

Long term goals/actions (Years 4-5)

Goal: Enhance the Mentorship program through evaluation and updates to meet the needs of the participating students

Action items:

- ▶ Continue to make updates to curriculum and programming based on current mentors' capabilities and mentees needs
- ▶ Continue to assess the program
- ▶ Consider expansion of mentor opportunities with new organizations and businesses
- ▶ Consider group mentoring on a larger scale to incorporate group dynamics (1 mentor to 5 students)

- ▶ Implement “community mentors” who undergo an additional background check, which would allow mentors to engage with mentees outside of school and in various cultural, community events.
- ▶ Create an online training program for mentors to complete annually including all necessary paperwork, curriculum updates.

Budget

Item	Cost
Year One	
Income	
Private donations	\$30,000
Corporate sponsorships	\$20,000
Expenses	
Fundraising	\$5,000
Mentoring resources	\$2,500
Recruitment	\$3,000
Balance	\$39,500
Year Two	
Income	
Private donations	\$30,000
Corporate sponsorships	\$50,000
Expenses	
Personnel	\$50,000
Office rent	\$10,000
Fundraising	\$5,000
Mentoring resources	\$2,500
Recruitment	\$3,000
Balance	\$9,500

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #1: Titletown Teammates Mentorship Collective

Item	Cost
Year 4+	
Income	
Private donations	\$30,000
Corporate sponsorships	\$50,000
Golf tournament	\$15,000
Foundations/Grants	\$25,000
Expenses	
Personnel	\$65,000
Office rent	\$10,000
Fundraising	\$5,000
Mentoring resources	\$2,500
Recruitment and recognition	\$5,000
Balance	\$32,500

Possible funding sources

State and federal grants would be a potential funding source for this project. The Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a statewide network dedicated to improving the well-being of children and families. GaFCP collaborates with various stakeholders to identify and address local needs, often providing funding opportunities for programs that support their mission. Community Impact Grants are designed to support community-based initiatives that address specific local needs, including youth development and mentorship programs. The focus is on fostering collaborative approaches to improve outcomes for children and families.

Other potential funding sources are listed below:

- ▶ Individual donors
- ▶ Business partners (Corporate and banking)
- ▶ Grants and foundations
- ▶ Golf Tournament - partnership with both community chambers
- ▶ Partnership packages providing incentives for business sponsorships such as local advertising, incentives for mentors, etc.

Potential partnerships

Potential partnerships for this program include Valdosta State University (VSU), South Georgia Medical Center (SGMC), Pepsi, Georgia Power, Moody Air Force Base, and Wiregrass. VSU can provide access to student mentors which would support their goal of providing experiential learning opportunities to all students. SGMC can offer expertise in health and wellness. Pepsi and Georgia Power can support the program through funding and by providing men-

tors from their workforce. Moody Air Force Base can contribute disciplined and community-oriented mentors, and Wiregrass can offer vocational training and support. These organizations have strong community ties and resources that align with the program's goals of mentorship, skill development, and resource accessibility. Strong partnerships with the city and county schools will be instrumental in facilitating mentee participation in the program.

Big Idea #1: Titletown Teammates Mentorship Collective

Expected impact/Measures of success

The expected impact of the mentorship program includes improved social interaction, enhanced life skills, and increased academic performance among participating youth. Measures of success will include the number of mentors and mentees matched, number of mentoring hours served, retention rates of both mentors and mentees, and the frequency of mentor-mentee interactions. Additional success indicators will include improvements

in students' academic performance, attendance, and behavior as reported by school counselors and teachers. Surveys and feedback from mentors, mentees, and their families will assess satisfaction and perceived benefits. The program will also track the utilization of community resources and participation in workshops and events, aiming for comprehensive development and positive community contributions from the mentees.

Big Idea #2: Tiletown Multipurpose Center

Description

There are several things that encompass the definition of a community. A community that is vibrant and exudes strength provides residents with an opportunity to thrive. A successfully cohesive community not only brings people together, but also creates safe and accessible spaces for everyone to enjoy. Our goal is to promote community togetherness and social interaction by offering a communal space that will provide a safe place for athletes to congregate as well as generate income that could be poured back into the community. The revenue generated from the multipurpose center will enhance our ability to offer additional resources including sponsorships for students in need who wish to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities. Furthermore, it will enable the program to provide resources such as hotel/motel vouchers for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, rental assistance for those experiencing a hardship, free financial coaching and counseling to promote financial literacy, a clothing bank, and the list goes on. In addition to the income that will be generated from the proceeds of money collected at sporting events, there will also be a space for one to host community events, mentoring servic-

es, and corporate events. When organizing sporting events, the participants/athletes can be charged fees for entry and those who are coming to spectate could also be charged fees. These events could also provide visibility for Valdosta, which should attract additional teams/participants and a larger number of spectators.



Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #2: Titledown Multipurpose Center

Scope of the Initiative

Lowndes County is recognized as “Titledown USA”, therefore, we anticipate strong engagement from constituents in the Valdosta/Lowndes area. The initiative aims to unite the city and county, fostering a shared sense of community and purpose. We recommend that there be a Title Town Multipurpose Complex committee that will determine the design of the structure, specify the intended use, agree on goals, create a timeline, outline costs and how it will be funded, and determine the roles of each committee member.

One of the goals of the multipurpose community complex is to generate income to pour back into the community, provide a safe space for mentoring services, and create an attraction that highlights Valdosta/Lowndes as a community that sticks together. This project will be for those in the community who are experiencing hardships and lack the ability to access the resources available by providing the funding to aid those individuals. Another goal of this project is to promote the community as “Title Town” by bringing more attention to the athletic programs’ success in the area. One way this community has bonded and come together is through sporting events. What better way to highlight the community than through comradery and support for the youth in a way to promote family and togetherness. To continue the message of community togetherness within Valdosta/Lowndes County, there will be a commitment that a portion of the profits go to partner with city and county initiatives that serve the underrepresented communities and local non-profit organizations.



Each committee member will have tasks to complete to foster a seamless process. Ideally, there will be committee members from various areas of expertise. There will be members who are a part of city and county government, sports and programming experts such as coaches and analysts, banking and finance experts to guide the funding aspects, community services/social workers to ensure the plan includes ways to pour back into the community, and a member of the community to provide insight as to how this will benefit the community. To ensure equal representation, the membership will be composed of individuals from both city and county government, with 50% of the members representing the City of Valdosta and 50% representing Lowndes County. These committee members will also determine who will have ownership of the space. After that is determined, the committee will govern how the multi-purpose center will operate, to include personnel.

The timeline for this project will be ten to fifteen years. To ensure progress, the committee will create individual tasks and milestones that should be completed quarterly. In addition, connecting with the city and county government will assist with obtaining all permits as well as ensuring that all codes are met will be a vital step in this process. Utilizing a committee to delegate responsibilities during this process, having a timeline and milestones to reach, and communicating clear expectations to all of those involved will help make this project a success.

Finally, establishing partnerships will increase community engagement and visibility. Partnering with a multi-purpose complex that is dedicated to travel sports presents a unique opportunity for organizations and successful companies to align with a growing, dynamic community that values athletic development, youth engagement, and community building. Here's why this partnership is advantageous:

1. Community Engagement and Brand Visibility:

Associating with a multi-purpose facility places your brand at the heart of community activities, where local families, athletes, and sports enthusiasts gather regularly. This partnership enhances your brand's visibility and demonstrates a commitment to supporting youth sports and healthy lifestyles.

2. Positive Brand Association: Travel sports are known for promoting teamwork, discipline, and excellence. By partnering with such a facility, your company can be seen as a champion of these values, reinforcing your brand's reputation for supporting personal growth, community development, and positive social impact.

3. Targeted Marketing Opportunities: The diverse audience that sports attract—from athletes and their families to coaches and sports fans—provides

a targeted marketing opportunity. Your brand can connect with a demographic that values sports, wellness, and community involvement, leading to potential customer loyalty and increased sales.

4. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Supporting youth sports through a partnership with a multi-purpose facility aligns with CSR goals by contributing to the well-being of the community, promoting youth development, and fostering an active, healthy society. This can enhance your company's CSR profile and appeal to socially conscious consumers.

5. Networking and Strategic Alliances: A multi-purpose building attracts a wide range of stakeholders, including local businesses, schools, sports organizations, and civic leaders. Partnering with such a facility opens doors for strategic alliances, networking opportunities, and potential collaborations that can further your business objectives.



POTENTIAL MULTI-PURPOSE CENTER DESIGN

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #2: Titledown Multipurpose Center

6. Long-Term Investment in Future Generations: By supporting a multi-purpose facility, your organization is investing in the future—helping to shape the next generation of leaders, athletes, and community members. This long-term investment can yield significant returns, not just in financial terms, but also in building a lasting legacy of community impact.

alliance that can significantly benefit your organization by enhancing brand visibility, fulfilling CSR goals, and creating lasting community connections. Below is an example of what is envisioned for our community. Partnering will allow the community to have a space that will benefit Valdosta-Lowndes for many years to come.

In conclusion, partnering with a multi-purpose building is not just a sponsorship; it's a strategic

Action Steps & Timeline

Short term goals/actions

- ▶ Establish the committee members and their roles
- ▶ Identify location for building
- ▶ Begin to secure funding for project

Medium term goals/actions

- ▶ Break Ground
- ▶ Obtain Permits, etc.
- ▶ Complete Construction

- ▶ Begin to hosts sporting events and community events

Long term goals/actions

- ▶ Hosts sporting events and community events
- ▶ Secure contracts with organizations, event managers, and planners
- ▶ Secure sponsorship agreements

Budget

Item	Cost
Land/Location for Multi-Purpose Center	Utilize land owned by the city/county.
Administrative and Legal Expenses	<p>\$100,000 to pay for project manager</p> <p>\$80,000 allocated to pay for evaluation of the environment/soil, permits, and other costs associated with environment analysis.</p>
Architect and Engineer Fees	\$1,000,000-This will cover mechanical and electrical design, construction documents
Site Work	\$1,000,000-any work that will include preparing the site: connection to underground utilities, tree and debris removal, soil treatment, other work that will prep the site.
Project and Building Inspection	\$100,000
Actual Facility Construction	\$10,000,000-Actual building materials, HVAC, Electrical, Plumbing, Communications/IT, Security, Fire Sprinkler System, Building Signage, Furniture, and all other general items needed.
Miscellaneous	\$7,000,000 This will be for any cost that are unexpected, additional marketing,consulting, permits, taxes, any other fees that are not previously covered.

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #2: Titledown Multipurpose Center

Possible funding sources

There are several possible funding sources. One funding source is crowdfunding. This fundraising is done by asking a large group of people to donate small amounts of money. This is a way to receive unrestricted funds that can be utilized in a variety of ways.

Another way to receive funding for this project is through grants. There are several grants that are available in the state of Georgia specifically for projects that promote community development and togetherness. Some of these grants include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants. CDBG is a federally funded block grant with a focus on areas that could benefit from resources for livable neighborhoods, fair and decent housing, and economic empowerment (www.dca.ga.gov). Valdosta is currently included in the CDBG entitlement delivery system for disbursements, therefore, with research and application, it is possible to re-

ceive funds to restore an existing structure or build a new structure. Although CDBG may not provide the entirety of funding, it could serve as a funding source. The USDA has funding opportunities for areas based on the population. With the current population of Valdosta, there is a possibility of funding in the areas of community development assistance to nonprofits and public entities, if it is utilized for the purposes of job creation or enhancement of the community. There is also a funding opportunity for facilities start-up venture costs, including but not limited to, financing fixed assets such as real estate, buildings, equipment, or working capital (www.rd.usda.gov). Taking these things into consideration, this could prove a beneficial funding source for the sports complex. Applications are accepted for this funding source until the end of July, therefore, it would have to be the year 2025 before one could apply for the funding.

Finally, the most utilized funding source is a loan.

Potential partnerships

Considering that Valdosta/Lowndes is “Title Town USA”, the most obvious partnerships would be with athletic programs in the area. Partnering with these programs will assist with development of budgets, scheduling athletic events, and creating other events that will bring the community together. Utilizing Valdosta State University’s expertise

surrounding multi-purpose center usage, collaboration with the local community, and revenue/expense experience will prove beneficial for our program. Another potential partnership could be with the Georgia Amateur Athletic Association (AAU). Partnering with this association will aid us greatly with important information regarding sporting

events, scholarship opportunities for the youth who participate in the program, and rules and regulations that must be followed.

Another beneficial partnership could be with Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority. Valdosta-Lowndes County Development Authority is known to be supportive and aggressive when structuring a deal for those attempting to develop areas within the community (www.buildlowndes.com). They provide direct financial assistance, assist with obtaining permits quickly, securing the workforce, and engineering assistance, all of which are areas needed when building and developing the multi-purpose center.



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY ATHLETIC COMPLEX

Expected impact/Measures of success

The multipurpose center is expected to foster community togetherness, support underrepresented populations, and generate income that can be re-invested into the community. Providing a safe and accessible space for various activities is a great way the multipurpose center will enhance the quality of life for residents and promote social interactions.



One way to measure success is to manage the budget for the facility. Completing monthly profit and loss statements will allow leadership to manage the amount of money that it takes to operate a facility of this magnitude while also viewing the amount of income received. The goal is to have far more income than loss so that much of the income can be utilized to fund the community.

Another way to measure success is by viewing the calendar of events hosted at the site. The goal here is to have a consistent flow of activities at the center, even if they are not big events. For example, we want to attract large crowds to increase community togetherness as well as secure a consistent stream of revenue. An important action step to accomplish the goal of increased revenue and com-

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #2: Titledown Multipurpose Center

munity togetherness is to negotiate and secure contracts. Contracts that ensure consistent usage of the center so that the center does not have periods of idle time. It is noted that a venue contract is one of the most difficult contracts to negotiate (Danzey-Bussell, A., Greenwell, C., & Shonk, D., 2020), therefore, having experienced board members to assist in this area would be beneficial.

Finally, success can be measured by the number of students and parents that benefit from playing travel sports. Generating revenue and social interaction are great benefits of the multipurpose sports complex, however, access to resources such as college scholarships is also a great benefit and outcome of the sports complex. Playing sports, in general, could promote social interaction among those in the community, but also create an avenue for students to

play sports beyond the secondary levels. For example, a student from Indiana stated, “Honestly, I love travel basketball because it fits my kind of game, and I like to meet girls from other schools,” Utterback said. “I definitely think the AAU game differs from high school basketball. With AAU it’s really exposing all of your talents” (Beas, M., 2018). This same family also disclosed that one of their daughters has seven Division 1 scholarship offers and five Division II scholarship offers. Furthering education also leads to those same students graduating from college and possibly coming back to the Valdosta/Lowndes area to pour back into the community. Instances such as the one from the family mentioned, show that the students from Valdosta/Lowndes could also benefit in this way and promote furthering education and social interaction.

Big Idea #3: Tiletown Leadership Coalition

Description

The Community Leadership Retreat aims to bring together leaders, stakeholders, and officials from various sectors within Valdosta/Lowndes to foster collaboration, reduce silos, and enhance camaraderie. The retreat will provide a platform to discuss community issues, funding opportunities, and to review gap findings from an annual community assessment conducted by an outside consulting firm. Bringing a community together involves engaging all demographics, which starts with the leaders of the community. We will encourage community togetherness at the Community Leadership Retreat

by including team building exercises so that leaders can display unity within their communities. A key feature of the retreat is a team-based fundraising competition, where the winning team will have a community project implemented in their name, promoting the spirit of “Tiletown USA.” Our work thus far has allowed us to identify the need, and hosting this retreat will hopefully allow us to get to the root of these issues and present and implement sustainable solutions that yield long-term and continual growth.

Scope of the Initiative

Participants:

- ▶ Community leaders, stakeholders, non-profit agencies, schools, city/state government officials from Lowndes/Valdosta. The individuals will be from various organizations to ensure that we capture the whole community, their perspectives, and have the maximum impact on the community

Activities:

- ▶ Discussion sessions, fundraising competition, project selection and implementation. This session will promote those key team building as-

pects that groups need to be productive. For example, trust, communication, willingness to share ideas, and overall collaboration

Goals:

- ▶ Enhance collaboration and reduce silos among community leaders.
- ▶ Address community issues based on gap findings.
- ▶ Raise funds for community projects.
- ▶ Foster a sense of community and collective responsibility.

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #3: Titledown Leadership Coalition

Action Steps & Timeline

i. Planning Phase: Encourage a collaborative funding approach where multiple entities contribute financially to each retreat, ensuring a diverse and stable funding base; Establish a multi-year rotational schedule where each entity has an opportunity to host the retreat. This ensures a fair distribution of responsibilities and benefits.

- ▶ Form a steering committee to oversee the retreat.
- ▶ Hire an external consulting firm to conduct the community assessment.
- ▶ Identify and invite key stakeholders and participants.

ii. Pre-Retreat: Create committees involving representatives from each sector to plan and organize the retreat. This promotes inclusivity and shared ownership of the event.

- ▶ Consulting firm presents gap findings.
- ▶ The steering committee formulates challenge questions based on the assessment.
- ▶ Organize logistics (venue, accommodation, materials).

iii. During the Retreat:

- ▶ Kick-off event with an overview of the goals and activities.
- ▶ Breakout sessions with mixed groups from different municipalities and leadership sectors.
- ▶ Each group develops an idea to address the community togetherness
- ▶ Voting session where groups vote on the best project (excluding their own).

iv. Post-Retreat: Each hosting entity can present its contributions to the community during the retreat, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation among participants.

- ▶ Announce the winning project for the next fiscal years.
- ▶ Organize fundraising activities within each group.
- ▶ Monitor fundraising progress and provide support.
- ▶ Implement the project with the name of the highest fundraising total group attached to it.
- ▶ Host a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the winning fundraising group.

Short-term Goals (0-6 months):

- ▶ Form the steering committee.
- ▶ Conduct the community assessment.
- ▶ Plan and organize the retreat logistics.

Medium-term Goals (6-12 months):

- ▶ Hold the retreat and select the community project.
- ▶ Begin fundraising efforts.

Long-term Goals (12-24 months):

- ▶ Complete fundraising and begin project implementation.
- ▶ Host the ribbon-cutting ceremony.
- ▶ Evaluate the impact of the project and the retreat.

Budget

Expense	Cost
Consulting Firm:	\$20,000-\$30,000
Event Planning and Logistics:	\$10,000-\$15,000 Venue: \$5,000 Accommodation: \$3,000 Materials & Supplies: \$2,000
Marketing and Communication:	\$5,000
Fundraising Support:	\$2,000
Project Implementation:	\$50,000-\$100,000 (dependent upon fundraising results)
Miscellaneous:	\$3,000
Total Estimated Budget	\$90,000 - \$150,000

Possible funding sources

To ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of our Community Leadership Retreat, we recommend implementing a rotational funding and hosting system. This approach not only distributes the financial responsibility but also enhances engagement and collaboration across various sectors. By allow-

ing different organizations to host the retreat, they can contribute in multiple meaningful ways, including providing a gathering space for attendees and committee members, as well as sharing more about their entity and its role in the community.

Potential partnerships

City Government, County Government, Valdosta State University, Moody Air Force Base, and Large Corporations (e.g., Georgia Power): These entities can offer venues, logistical support, and financial

contributions, while also gaining the opportunity to showcase their initiatives and strengthen ties with community leaders.

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Blended Lines

Big Idea #3: Titledown Leadership Coalition

Expected impact/Measures of success

The main purpose is to build a working partnership of communications throughout local government, county government, public school systems, private business owners, and so forth. We expect that this retreat will create a sense of comfort, unity, and belonging within our community as we work together

towards common goals to serve our community.

Building trust and maintaining relationships is a key part of success in this initiative which is why we will plan to meet bi-annually to create cohesiveness and unity within the cohort to ensure collaboration and address any emerging challenges.

Acknowledgments

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- ▶ **Joe Brownlee**-Region Executive, Georgia Power and **Mary Beth Brownlee**-Executive Director, One Valdosta Lowndes (scheduled together)
- ▶ **Michael Smith** – United Way President and CEO
- ▶ **Anetra Riley**-Neighborhood Development and **Demarcus Marshall**-Facilities Manager (scheduled together)
- ▶ **Commander McGraw**-Neighborhood Development Manager
- ▶ **Bill Holt**-Boys and Girls Clubs of Valdosta
- ▶ **Doyer DeLoach and Michael Anderson**-Pepsi
- ▶ **Dr. Clarissa Alderman**-Family Insight, LLC
- ▶ **Ashley Rhys**-Positive Mindset Counseling
- ▶ **Ellen Hill**-Main Street Compliance GDCA
- ▶ **Lee Henderson**-Black Cow Media
- ▶ **JaTaryia Thomas and Dr. Hill**-Mental Wealth Center, Inc.
- ▶ **Paige Dukes**-Lowndes County
- ▶ **Lisa Johnson**-Lake Park-City Clerk
- ▶ Mental Health Center of Valdosta

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Section 4

TEAM V.I.B.E.

**VALDOSTA'S INNOVATION BENEFITS
THE ECONOMY**

Challenge Question:

Valdosta is increasingly attracting new industries to the area. With anticipated industrial recruitment success, how do we retain talent and build capacity for the needed workforce as well as support existing businesses in this growth climate?

TEAM V.I.B.E.

Introduction

Valdosta has a rich history rooted in agriculture and education. It is home to Valdosta State University, which plays a significant role in the local economy and workforce development. The community is characterized by its small-town charm combined with the amenities of a larger city. Valdosta has a diverse population with a median age of 30.3. It serves

as a regional hub for healthcare, retail, and industry. However, like many small cities, Valdosta faces challenges in retaining its workforce and fostering economic development.

It boasts a variety of cultural and recreational activities, a low cost of living, and a growing industrial sec-



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tor. Despite these advantages, Valdosta struggles with attracting and retaining young professionals and skilled workers, which is crucial for sustaining economic growth and development.

The most pressing issue Valdosta currently battles is the retention of its workforce. With a growing number of industries and businesses establishing in the area, there is a critical need to attract and retain talent to support this growth. The city's ability to maintain a vibrant economy is heavily dependent on its capacity to develop a skilled and stable workforce. Without effective strategies to keep young profes-

sionals and skilled workers in the area, Valdosta risks stagnating economic growth and failing to fully capitalize on its development potential.



Proposed Solutions

1. Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

Launching a comprehensive digital marketing campaign and developing a centralized website aims to promote living, working, and investing in Valdosta. The website will feature sections on housing, career opportunities, recreation, economic development, and community success stories. Utilizing a cohesive website combined with incorporating local influencers and ambassadors will increase visibility and attract new residents, retain graduates and engage businesses, thereby boosting the local economy while retaining and building the workforce.

By implementing these initiatives, Valdosta can address the challenges of workforce attraction and retention and economic development, ensuring sustained growth and prosperity for the community.

2. Gateway to Growth: Empowering Talent and Community

This initiative addresses critical workforce challenges in Valdosta-Lowndes County through three local talent development programs: Parent Forward, At-risk Senior Internship program and Re-entry initiatives. By empowering at-risk parents, students and justice-involved individuals with education and employ-

ment opportunities, this idea aims to strengthen the local workforce and foster community engagement.

3. The YARD Valdosta: A Mixed-Use Facility

The YARD, a mixed-use facility that combines residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, aims to attract and retain the workforce by offering unique live, work, play opportunities. The project will include affordable housing options or boutique hotel space, commercial spaces for local businesses, and small restaurant spaces for aspiring chefs and food entrepreneurs. This initiative seeks to enhance the economic vitality of the downtown of Valdosta by creating a vibrant community hub.



Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

Description

Research conducted by DCI in their Talent Wars report, shows that across all generations and industries, a better quality of life is the top lifestyle factor in any decision to relocate. A key piece of the website would be a space to share information about what makes Valdosta a great place to live, work, play, grow and glow.

Think of it as more than just a website; imagine it as a virtual hub that will serve as a resource for those currently living in Valdosta, looking to relocate or students who live in Valdosta, encouraging them to stay in the area.

To ensure the virtual hub effectively serves citizens and those considering Valdosta as their new home, a marketing campaign is essential to promote the website to individuals who may be unfamiliar with or need a reminder of all that Valdosta has to offer.

Potential funding sources to support this initiative include member businesses of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce, Southern Georgia Black Chambers, corporate sponsors such as Georgia Power, Greater Valdosta United Way, Bush Wealth Management, and GAF Roofing as well as tourism related industry including the Rainwater Conference Center, hotels, etc. Although external funding is re-

quired, the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce is envisioned to manage the website, leveraging its strong community connections to maintain accurate and valuable information.

Creating a dynamic website that highlights the city's unique qualities, combined with a strategic marketing campaign and partnerships, is key to attracting talent, boosting economic growth, and enhancing quality of life. Central to this initiative is an incentive program designed to welcome newcomers and foster community involvement. Many smaller cities have implemented similar packages to recruit talent, anticipating returns through local investment and taxes. A grassroots incentive package, focused on encouraging recent graduates, military personnel, and relocators, could include perks like free gym memberships, local dining coupons, and Chamber Young Professional Network memberships. Sponsored by One Valdosta Lowndes/Chamber, this package can be promoted through the broader community marketing strategy.

This approach positions Valdosta as a vibrant city with abundant opportunities, supported by targeted marketing, engaging events, and a user-friendly website.

Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

Scope of the Initiative

Determine a website domain that reflects Valdosta's vibrant lifestyle and offerings. Below are suggested names for the website, along with the rationale behind each:

- ▶ VivaValdosta (VivaValdosta.com)
 - ▷ Viva" means "Long Live," symbolizing a desire for residents to build lasting lives in Valdosta.
- ▶ Valdosta Vitality (ValdostaVitality.com)
 - ▷ "Vitality" signifies the capacity to live and develop, evoking a sense of aliveness.
- ▶ We are Valdosta (WeAreValdosta.com)
 - ▷ This name fosters a strong community spirit.
- ▶ Win In Valdosta (WinInValdosta.com)
 - ▷ As "Title Town," Valdosta encourages everyone to succeed and thrive by choosing to live here.
- ▶ Vibe in Valdosta (VibeInValdosta.com)
 - ▷ "Vibe" reflects the distinctive and palpable energy of the city.
- ▶ Valdosta Thrives (ValdostaThrives.com)
 - ▷ Emphasizing that Valdosta is a thriving metropolitan city with abundant opportunities for all.

The website will include five main areas – **Live. Work. Play. Grow. Glow.** These sections will serve as the foundation, with descriptive subpages added over time.



Each section will include the following:

Live

- ▶ Housing: real estate listings, affordable Housing, neighborhood guides, new housing developments
- ▶ Valdosta Fact Sheet: include school systems, healthcare, cost of living, comparison charts
- ▶ Transportation: public transit options, bike path, car services
- ▶ Safety: local police, fire departments, emergency services
- ▶ Dedicated Incentive Page: "Valdosta Welcome Package"
 - ▷ Soft incentives such as a free membership to a local gym for the first year, coupons for local

food and drink establishments, membership to the Chamber's Young Professional Network and opportunities for individuals to connect with each other as well as longtime residents through things like happy hours and other events.

Work

- ▶ Industries: major employers, industry overviews, economic trends, new businesses coming to the area, incentives for businesses and working professionals to locate here.
- ▶ Job opportunities: current openings, job boards, employment resources
- ▶ Coworking Spaces: Shared office spaces, business incubators
- ▶ Business Resources: Chambers, small business support, networking groups, entrepreneur resources

Play

- ▶ Events Calendar
 - Signature/Annual Events list (can link to other sites with event calendars)
 - Family activities: Wild Adventures, family friendly attractions
- ▶ Arts and Culture: Turner Center for the Arts, Dosta Playhouse, museums, and other art related events/activities
- ▶ Sports and Athletics
- ▶ Recreation, parks, and entertainment

Grow

- ▶ Continuing Education - Colleges, Universities, and Technical Colleges
- ▶ Professional Development Opportunities
- ▶ Leadership Development Opportunities: South Georgia Leads, Leadership Lowndes, South Georgia Women's Leadership Initiative, etc.
- ▶ Get Connected / Volunteer Opportunities / Civic Groups

- ▶ Green Initiatives: community gardens, recycling programs, environmental organizations
- ▶ Youth Programs: after-school programs, sports leagues, summer camps

Glow

- ▶ Mindfulness: mental health resources, support groups, community togetherness events
- ▶ Inspiration: Community success stories, testimonials
- ▶ Highlight health and wellness resources, medical facilities, and community well-being initiatives
- ▶ Success Stories Feature
 - Highlight testimonials from past recipients of the welcome package incentives, sharing how the program contributed to their success and growth in Valdosta.

As part of the Grow and Glow sections of the website, two programming suggestions are outlined to enhance engagement and attract talent. The Valdosta Professional and Leadership Development Program for college students focuses on retaining the talent nurtured at Valdosta State University and other regional institutions. The Valdosta Ambassador Program offers prospective residents the opportunity to connect with locals and experience the best of what Valdosta has to offer. Both programs, successfully implemented in the Greater Louisville area, have demonstrated their effectiveness in showcasing quality of life. These initiatives can be integrated with existing structures to minimize costs, with event hosting being the primary expense. Descriptions of both programs are provided below.

Valdosta Professional and Leadership Development Program for College Students

Program Overview

The Valdosta Professional and Leadership Development Program is designed to equip college students with the skills, knowledge, and networks necessary

Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

for success in their careers. The program aims to foster strong ties between students and the Valdosta community, encouraging graduates to stay and contribute to the local economy and civic life.

Program Goals

- 1. Enhance Career Readiness:** Equip students with essential skills and knowledge for the workplace.
- 2. Foster Leadership Abilities:** Develop students' leadership potential to prepare them for roles in the community and professional settings.
- 3. Promote Local Engagement:** Strengthen connections between students and Valdosta's business, civic, and cultural communities.
- 4. Encourage Retention Post-Graduation:** Highlight the benefits of living and working in Valdosta to retain talent in the city.

Target Audience

- ▶ College juniors and seniors from Valdosta State University and other nearby institutions.
- ▶ Recent graduates (within one year of graduation).

Program Structure

The program will be structured over an academic year, with monthly workshops, networking events, and mentorship opportunities. It will be divided into three phases:

- 1. Phase 1: Foundations of Professional Development (September - November)**
 - ▶ **Workshop 1: Personal Branding and Networking**
 - ▷ Topics: Resume building, LinkedIn optimization, networking strategies.

- ▶ **Workshop 2: Communication and Public Speaking**
 - ▷ Topics: Effective communication, public speaking, presentation skills.
- ▶ **Workshop 3: Business Etiquette and Professionalism**
 - ▷ Topics: Workplace etiquette, dressing for success, business communication.

- 2. Phase 2: Leadership and Community Engagement (December - February)**

- ▶ **Workshop 4: Leadership Styles and Team Dynamics**
 - ▷ Topics: Understanding leadership styles, team collaboration, conflict resolution.
- ▶ **Workshop 5: Project Management and Problem-Solving**
 - ▷ Topics: Project planning, time management, critical thinking.
- ▶ **Workshop 6: Community Engagement and Civic Responsibility**
 - ▷ Topics: Volunteering, local government, community service.

- 3. Phase 3: Career Pathways and Local Opportunities (March - May)**

- ▶ **Workshop 7: Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Valdosta**
 - ▷ Topics: Starting a business, innovation opportunities in Valdosta.
- ▶ **Workshop 8: Navigating the Job Market in Valdosta**
 - ▷ Topics: Job search strategies, local industry trends, employer expectations.

- ▶ **Workshop 9: Networking with Local Professionals**
 - ▷ Networking event with local business leaders, government officials, and community influencers.

Mentorship Program

- ▶ Pair students with local professionals for one-on-one mentorship throughout the program.
- ▶ Mentors provide guidance on career goals, leadership development, and community involvement.
- ▶ Monthly check-ins and a final evaluation of the mentorship experience.

Capstone Project

- ▶ Students will work in teams on a capstone project that addresses a real-world challenge facing the Valdosta community.
- ▶ Projects will be presented to local stakeholders, with the best project receiving funding or support for implementation.

Program Marketing and Recruitment

- ▶ **Information Sessions:** Host on-campus info sessions at the start of the academic year.
- ▶ **Social Media Campaign:** Leverage social media platforms to reach students and build awareness.
- ▶ **Collaboration with Faculty:** Partner with university faculty to integrate the program into coursework or offer extra credit for participation.

Time Frame

- ▶ Application Period: August
- ▶ Program Start: September
- ▶ Program End: May
- ▶ Capstone Presentations: Early June
- ▶ Program Evaluation and Feedback: June

Incentives for Participation

- ▶ Certificates of Completion for all participants.

- ▶ Internship Opportunities with local businesses for high-performing students.
- ▶ Networking Opportunities with local leaders.
- ▶ Scholarships for further education or professional certifications.

Long-Term Vision

- ▶ Create an alumni network to continue engaging graduates.
- ▶ Partner with local businesses to offer exclusive job placements for program participants.
- ▶ Establish a recurring annual program that evolves based on feedback and changing industry trends.

The Valdosta Professional and Leadership Development Program will serve as a cornerstone for retaining young talent in the city by providing college students with the skills, networks, and opportunities they need to build successful careers in Valdosta. Through targeted workshops, mentorship, and community engagement, the program will create a pipeline of future leaders who are committed to the growth and prosperity of Valdosta.

Valdosta Ambassador Program: A Plan for Community Engagement and Growth

Program Overview

The Valdosta Ambassador Program is designed to connect prospective residents with knowledgeable and passionate locals who can provide personalized insights about living in Valdosta. The ambassadors will serve as friendly, go-to resources for anyone interested in relocating to the city, offering guidance on neighborhoods, schools, restaurants, cultural events, and more. The program aims to foster a welcoming environment, enhance community engagement, and promote the unique lifestyle Valdosta offers.

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Program Objectives

- 1. Community Connection:** Strengthen the connection between current residents and potential new members of the community.
- 2. Resource Provision:** Provide accurate, personalized information about Valdosta's neighborhoods, amenities, and lifestyle.
- 3. Promote Valdosta:** Highlight the city's culture, events, and opportunities to encourage relocation.
- 4. Enhance Civic Pride:** Empower residents to take an active role in promoting and shaping the future and growth of Valdosta.

Roles and Responsibilities of Ambassadors

- ▶ **Neighborhood Experts:** Ambassadors will share insights on different neighborhoods, helping potential residents find the area that best suits their lifestyle.
- ▶ **Local Guides:** Provide recommendations for dining, shopping, and entertainment, showcasing the best of Valdosta's offerings.
- ▶ **Event Promoters:** Keep prospective residents informed about local events and cultural activities, emphasizing the vibrant community life.
- ▶ **Contact Points:** Serve as a first point of contact for inquiries about moving to Valdosta, offering a personal touch that enhances the relocation experience.

Ambassador Sign-Up Process

1. Application Submission:

- ▶ Interested individuals will complete an online application form available on the city's official website.

- ▶ The application will include sections on personal information, areas of expertise (e.g., knowledge of specific neighborhoods, local events), and reasons for wanting to become an ambassador.

2. Interview and Selection:

- ▶ Selected applicants will be invited for a brief interview with a program coordinator to discuss their interest in the program and assess their knowledge of the city.
- ▶ Ambassadors will be chosen based on their enthusiasm, knowledge of Valdosta, and willingness to engage with potential new residents.

3. Training and Orientation:

- ▶ Once selected, ambassadors will participate in a training session to familiarize them with the program's goals, communication strategies, and resources available to support their role.
- ▶ Training will cover key talking points about Valdosta, including its history, demographics, key attractions, and upcoming development projects.

4. Ongoing Support and Engagement:

- ▶ Ambassadors will have access to regular updates from the City/County/Development Authority, etc. about new developments, events, and other relevant information to ensure they can provide the most up-to-date advice.
- ▶ Periodic meetups and networking events will be organized to foster a sense of community among the ambassadors and provide opportunities for feedback and improvement.

Program Promotion and Outreach

- ▶ The website suggested in this document will feature a dedicated section for the Ambassador Program, including profiles of the ambassadors, their areas of expertise, and contact information.
- ▶ Social media campaigns will introduce the ambassadors and highlight their contributions, encouraging both sign-ups and engagement from the public.
- ▶ Partner with local businesses, real estate agencies, and community organizations to promote the program and encourage referrals to the ambassadors.
- ▶ Host workshops and informational sessions for residents interested in becoming ambassadors or learning more about the program.
- ▶ Collect feedback from both ambassadors and those they assist to assess the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement. Surveys and informal check-ins will be used to gauge satisfaction and gather suggestions.

The Valdosta Ambassador Program is an innovative initiative that leverages the passion and knowledge of local residents to create a more welcoming and informed community. By connecting potential new residents with friendly, knowledgeable ambassadors, Valdosta can ensure that everyone considering a move to the city feels supported and excited about becoming part of the community.

Potential Names for the Program

VivaValdosta Insiders
Valdosta Local Legends
Valdosta Champions Crew
Title Town Ambassadors
Valdosta Victory Squad

Example Websites:

Below are examples of similar websites from other communities similar to Valdosta.

- ▶ LiveInLou.com – This website is an initiative from the Greater Louisville Metro Chamber of Commerce. It is separate from their Chamber website (<https://www.liveinlou.com/>).
- ▶ ChooseTallahassee.com – This website is organized by a group of volunteers who felt that Tallahassee had so much to offer. The goal is to enhance the region's innovation and vitality by attracting and retaining a diverse population of young professionals, entrepreneurs, creative talent, retirees and students.
- ▶ <https://movingtobend.com/>
- ▶ WeAreHuntsville.com - This website is organized by a group of volunteers who are obsessed with helping people discover things about Huntsville.

Maintenance of Website:

- ▶ Suggested options to explore:
 - ▶ The initial website development company will create and compile the original content. Partner organization(s) that take ownership of the website will be responsible for editing, reviewing and maintaining website content.

Digital Presence:

- ▶ Website Development: Create a centralized website divided into following sections:
 - ▶ Live: Housing, neighborhoods, schools.
 - ▶ Work: Career opportunities, business incentives, relocation incentives
 - ▶ Play: Recreation, parks, entertainment.
 - ▶ Grow: Economic development, industrial opportunities.
 - ▶ Glow: Community success stories, testimonials.

Marketing Campaign:

- ▶ Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Content Strategy:

Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

- ▷ SEO Optimization: Ensure the website is optimized for popular search engines with relevant keywords.
- ▷ Content Creation: Regularly publish blog posts, articles, and news updates related to economic development, local business success stories, and community events.

Paid Media:

- ▶ Digital Ads:
 - ▷ Google Ads: Run targeted campaigns focusing on keywords related to relocation, investment, and career opportunities in Valdosta.
 - ▷ Social Media Ads: Utilize Facebook and Instagram to target demographics interested in relocating or investing in Valdosta. Use location-based and interest-based targeting to reach potential residents and investors.

Activations and Community Engagement:

- ▶ Farmers Market:
 - ▷ Sponsorship or Presence: Set up a booth to engage with locals and newcomers. Provide information about economic development, career opportunities, and community events.
- ▶ Educational Workshops:
 - ▷ Career Opportunities: Host sessions on job opportunities and career development.
 - ▷ Housing Market Trends: Provide insights into the local housing market.
 - ▷ Local Amenities: Showcase the benefits of living in Valdosta.

Print Media:

- ▶ Print Media:
 - ▷ Local Publications: Publish articles and advertisements in local newspapers and magazines.
 - ▷ Regional Magazines: Expand reach by featuring Valdosta in regional publications.

▶ Newsletter:

- ▷ Regular Updates: Share news on economic development, upcoming events, and community achievements. Encourage sign-ups through the website and social media.

Social Media Strategy:

- ▶ Content Calendar:
 - ▷ Regular Posts: Showcase community events, local businesses, and quality of life in Valdosta. Use a mix of photos, videos, and stories to engage the audience.
- ▶ Engagement Campaigns:
 - ▷ Contests and Polls: Encourage user participation through contests, polls, and user-generated content. Feature winners and highlight their contributions to the community.
- ▶ Involvement of Social Media Influencers
 - ▷ Identify and use the Right Influencers
 - ◇ Those who align with the community's values and have a relevant audience. Preferably Influencers who have a strong

- local presence with a focus on lifestyle, travel and/or community engagement
- ▶ Define goals and create engaging content: drive tourism, attract new residents, highlight community events/local businesses, etc

- ▶ Leverage multiple platforms to reach broader audience: TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook
- ▶ Track and measure impact: Monitor the engagement, reach and overall impact of influencer campaigns

Action Steps & Timeline

Short-Term Goals (2-4 months)

Action Items:

- ▶ Build and launch the website and brand.
- ▶ Begin SEO and content strategy.
- ▶ Start Google and social media ad campaigns.
- ▶ Plan and execute the farmers market
- ▶ Identify target talent and relevant incentives.
- ▶ Solicit local partners for in-kind donations for incentives.
- ▶ Develop marketing materials and application process for incentive packages.

Goals:

- ▶ Website Completion: Have a fully functional website live.
- ▶ Initial Traffic Generation: Drive initial traffic to the new website.
- ▶ Community Engagement: Increase local awareness through the first farmers market.
- ▶ Incentive: Solicit and package local incentives.

Metrics:

- ▶ Website Launch: Completion and live status of the website.
- ▶ SEO Performance: Number of indexed pages, keyword rankings, organic traffic.
- ▶ Ad Campaign Performance: Click-through rate (CTR), conversion rate, impressions.
- ▶ Event Attendance: Number of attendees, event feedback, new sign-ups for updates.

Medium-Term Goals (6 months - 1 year)

Action Items:

- ▶ Market incentive package on new website, through chamber, VSU, etc.
- ▶ Open incentive application.
- ▶ Begin awarding incentive packages.

Goals:

- ▶ Initial Traffic Generation: Drive initial traffic to the new website.
- ▶ Community Engagement: Increase local awareness through the first event.
- ▶ Incentives: Open application and begin awarding incentives packages.

Metrics:

- ▶ Website Launch: Completion and live status of the website.
- ▶ SEO Performance: Number of indexed pages, keyword rankings, organic traffic.
- ▶ Ad Campaign Performance: Click-through rate (CTR), conversion rate, impressions.
- ▶ Event Attendance: Number of attendees, event feedback, new sign-ups for updates.

Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

Long-Term Goals (2-4 years)

Action Items:

- ▶ Run digital ad campaigns consistently.
- ▶ Increase digital ad spend.
- ▶ Host educational workshops.
- ▶ Tracking Success of the incentive program through the website. Are people interacting and using the page to fill out a form?
- ▶ Form an ambassador team.
- ▶ Presence at the Farmers Market.
- ▶ Quarterly events for incentive recipients.
- ▶ Survey incentive recipients (1 year from award)
- ▶ Tweak incentive package (as needed) and continue awarding incentives.

Goals:

- ▶ Sustainable Economic Growth: Attract new businesses and retain talent.
- ▶ Community Development: Foster a strong sense of community and involvement.
- ▶ Revenue Generation: Generate revenue through display ads and sponsorships on the website

Metrics:

- ▶ Economic Metrics: Number of new businesses, job creation, investment levels.
- ▶ Community Metrics: Resident satisfaction, community participation rates.
- ▶ Long-term Engagement: Number of returning website visitors, long-term subscriber retention.
- ▶ Success Stories: Documented testimonials and case studies of new businesses and relocated individuals.

Budget

Item	Cost
Brand (Premium brand guide)	\$5,000

Brand Guide

- ▶ Logo, brandboard, marketing collateral.

Website (Website built 16-25 Pages)	\$7,000 - \$10,000
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- ▶ Website Advertising Services: As an example, Madden Media manages the website advertising for Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau on DiscoverAtlanta.com.

- ▶ Madden Media provides the following services:

- ◊ *Platform Management*: Management of the advertising platform(s) for serving banner and native ads on DiscoverAtlanta.com
- ◊ *Trafficking*: Trafficking and verifying creative assets (and refreshes) from ACVB sales contacts for creative processing, if necessary, and platform uploading
- ◊ *Reporting*: Monthly reporting on advertising placements with delivery at the first of the month
- ◊ <https://www.liveinlou.com> has a total of 11 pages, many of the pages link out to other resources guiding the person to a trustworthy resource.
- ◊ The new Valdosta site would need approximately 10 pages to effectively address all the categories of the Live, Work, Play, Grow, Glow.
- ◊ Example of a site that is worth \$3,000 <https://southernskiesroofing.com/> by AJC Digital, LLC

Marketing Campaigns	\$108,000 /year
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- ▶ Google Ads \$2,000 - \$5,000
 - ▶ This range depends on keywords, competition, and target audience. Start with a smaller budget and optimize campaigns for better results.
- ▶ Meta (Facebook & Instagram) \$1,000 - \$3,000
 - ▶ Based on targeting and campaign goals. Consider separate campaigns for Facebook and Instagram.
- ▶ Pinterest Ads \$500 - \$1,000
 - ▶ Target audience based on demographics and interests
- ▶ LinkedIn Ads \$500 - \$1,000
 - ▶ Ideal for targeting professionals and businesses, especially for the incentive program.

Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

Item	Cost
Farmers Markets	\$175

- ▶ 5 monthly Farmers markets from May to September

Local Incentive Package (assuming 50 households/year take advantage)	\$18,000
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- ▶ Part of the staff or intern time (chamber or OneValdosta Lowndes) - \$10,000
- ▶ Quarterly happy hour event - 4 x \$2,000 - \$8,000
- ▶ Package of local benefits (Value ~ \$1,500 - in kind donations or sponsorships)
 - ▷ First-year family membership to YMCA or gym - (~\$750 value)
 - ▷ 2 Season Passes to Wild Adventures- (~\$300 value)
 - ▷ Local restaurant/business coupons (~\$200 value)
 - ▷ 4 classes at Turner Center for the Arts (~\$140 value)
 - ▷ 2 tickets for Annual Food & Wine Classic (~\$100 value)
 - ▷ Valdosta on demand - 5 free rides - (~\$10 value)
 - ▷ Chamber of Commerce Young Professional Membership

Possible funding sources

Objective

Develop and fund a new website to highlight what Lowndes County and The City of Valdosta has to offer, fostering long-term partnerships and utilizing sponsorship ads from local businesses.

Project Oversight

▶ *City and County Contributions*

- ▶ City of Valdosta: Allocate a portion of the annual budget for tourism and economic development to support the website.
- ▶ Lowndes County: Match the City's contribution or allocate a designated amount from the county's economic development funds.

▶ *Grants and Public Funding*

- ▶ Tourism Grants: Apply for state and federal tourism grants aimed at promoting local attractions.
 - ◊ Example: Explore Georgia Marketing Grant and Co-Op
- ▶ Economic Development Funds: Leverage local and state economic development funds for community improvement projects. Lowndes County Tourism Authority: Allocate a portion of tourism promotional funds to the website development.

Potential partnerships

Local Partnerships:

- ▶ *Southern Georgia Black Chambers*: Encourage participation and potential financial contributions from member businesses.
- ▶ *Rainwater Conference Center*: Promote the center's events and facilities on the website in exchange for funding support.
- ▶ *One Valdosta-Lowndes*: Fits within the One Valdosta-Lowndes Synergy 2030 Plan.
- ▶ *Valdosta Lowndes Chamber of Commerce*: Will oversee the website's development and maintenance but is unable to fund it.

Corporate Partnerships:

- ▶ *Georgia Power*
- ▶ *Greater Valdosta United Way*
- ▶ *Bush Wealth Management*
- ▶ *GAF Roofing*

Event Sponsorships:

- ▶ Engage with local businesses to sponsor events and initiatives. Highlight their contributions in marketing material.

Big Idea #1: Connecting Valdosta: Virtual Hub and Marketing Blueprint

Expected Impact/Measures of success

Measurements for the Action Plan

- ▶ *Initial Meeting:* Meet with all key stakeholders to present the website proposal and discuss funding commitments.
- ▶ *Proposal Drafting:* Develop a detailed funding proposal, including budget estimates, sponsorship packages, and a timeline.
- ▶ *Grant Applications:* Identify and apply for relevant grants.
- ▶ *Sponsorship Campaign:* Launch a campaign to secure sponsorships from local businesses.
- ▶ *Project Launch:* Begin website development once sufficient funding is secured.
- ▶ *Ongoing Management:* Regular updates and maintenance overseen by the Valdosta Lowndes Chamber of Commerce.

Measurement of Website Optimization

- ▶ *Analytics:*
 - ▷ Track Metrics: Monitor website traffic, email open rates, social media engagement, and event attendance. Use tools like Google Analytics, email marketing platforms, and social media insights.
- ▶ *Feedback Loops:*
 - ▷ Community Feedback: Gather feedback through surveys and focus groups. Use insights to refine and optimize marketing strategies.

Measurement of Incentives

- ▶ *Applications Received vs. Incentives Awarded*
 - ▷ Compare the number of applications for incentives that have been received versus number of incentives issued. Track this statistic annually to see an increase in both fields. Demand should dictate an increase in the number of incentives, if the demand remains constant the number of incentives should also remain constant. The amount of incentives offered should never decrease.
 - ◇ Targets by the end of year one:
 - 120 applications for incentive
 - 50 incentives issued
 - 30 individuals at quarterly events
 - Participant survey (1 year later)
 - Positive feedback on incentives
 - Still living in the area
 - Feeling connected to the community
 - Intent to stay longer

Long-Term Analysis

Annual Review Meetings: Hold annual meetings with all partners to review the website's performance and discuss ongoing funding and improvements.

Continuous Sponsorship Engagement: Maintain relationships with sponsors to ensure continued support and explore new sponsorship opportunities.

Big Idea #2: Gateway to Growth: Empowering Talent and Community

Description

According to Area Development Magazine¹ corporate leaders and site selection consultants consider the availability of skilled labor and labor costs to be the top site selection factors. Over the past several years, workforce challenges have increased statewide and in Lowndes County as new company locations and expansions have continued to take place. Workforce development planning has nev-

er been so critical for supporting economic development efforts. Effective workforce development should include developing existing pools of talent in the community. This big idea provides solutions to tackle through three talent development programs: Parent Forward, an internship for at-risk senior graduates, and a re-entry training program.

Scope of the Initiative

Parent Forward Program

The Parent Forward Program aims to identify and support parents of at-risk youth who are experiencing homelessness by providing them with transformative opportunities. Our initiative seeks to empower motivated parents by offering them access to educational opportunities, and skill development programs to enhance their competitiveness in the job market, and ultimately, to grow the underutilized workforce in Valdosta and Lowndes County.

Through collaboration with social workers in the Valdosta City school district, we will actively engage parents of at-risk students with the current status of homeless. Furthermore, by establishing scholarships through local corporate partnerships and educational institutions such as Valdosta State University and Goodwill, we aim to provide tuition waivers. This is crucial as many of the participants reside below the poverty line within Title I school districts.

- ▶ Discussion with local employers (e.g. South Georgia Medical Center Health) about relevant programs at The office of Professional & Community Education (PACE) and sponsorships
- ▶ Identification of parents through Valdosta City Schools' Social worker assigned to students experiencing housing insecurity and social services resource liaison
- ▶ Short-term training through PACE in the Medical Billing/Coding Course
- ▶ Job placement with a local employer
- ▶ Evaluation and feedback

At-risk High School Senior Internship

The internship program for at-risk and/or homeless senior graduates from Valdosta City Schools, spans 8 weeks and aims to provide hands-on work experience, mentorship, and financial support totaling \$2,400 per intern.

¹ 38th Annual Corporate Survey: Are Unrealized Predictions of an Economic Slump Leading Small to Mid-Size Companies to Put Off Expansion Plans? - Area Development

Big Idea #2: Gateway to Growth: Empowering Talent and Community

Participants are matched with local companies based on their interests and skills, supported by mentors from organizations like the Boys and Girls Club who offer guidance on professional development and financial literacy. Funded through government grants, corporate sponsorships, and community donations, the program fosters career readiness through workshops, check-ins, and a final showcase to highlight achievements and enhance employability skills.

▶ *Intern Placement*

- ▶ Interns are matched with local companies based on their interests and skills.
- ▶ Each intern receives \$2,400 for the 8-week period, paid directly to the company to cover their wages. Internships are part-time work (28 hours per week).

▶ *Mentor Selection*

- ▶ A mentor is hired from an organization like the Boys and Girls Club for a 12-week period.
- ▶ Role of the Mentor:
 - ◇ Provide guidance and support to interns throughout their internship.
 - ◇ Assist with resume building, job applications, and interview preparation.
 - ◇ Offer advice on financial literacy, such as opening bank accounts and managing personal finances.
 - ◇ Serve as a role model and advocate for interns' professional development.
 - ◇ Continue to work with students upon the completion of their internship to determine their next career steps.

▶ *Program Activities*

- ▶ Orientation: Introduction to the program, expectations, and goals.
- ▶ Soft skills training provided by Goodwill prior to internship.
- ▶ Skill Building Workshops: Sessions on workplace skills, professional etiquette, and career development from local employers.
- ▶ Internship Period: Hands-on work experience at local companies.
- ▶ Weekly Check-Ins: Meetings with mentor to discuss progress and challenges.

▶ *Final Showcase and Evaluation*

- ▶ Presentation: Interns present their experiences and achievements to mentors, program coordinators, and company representatives.
- ▶ Feedback and Reflection: Assess interns' growth and solicit feedback for program improvement.

Internship Success Story

Run as a pilot in Summer 2024, YOUTHrive summer internship program offered by Columbus 2025 serves as an example program that the at-risk high school senior internship can be modeled after. "This program offers businesses access to a pool of qualified and eager young talent, while recent graduates get a head start on their careers through hands-on experience."²

Re-entry Training

Second-chance workforce strategies not only help meet the labor demands of new industries but also provide meaningful opportunities for individuals seeking to reenter the workforce, ultimately strengthening the local economy and enhancing social cohesion. We propose forging partnerships between local employers, educational institutions, and correctional, transitional, and recovery facilities to offer tailored reentry programs and skills training for justice-involved individuals. By utilizing the justice-involved demographic Valdosta and Lowndes can effectively retain talent, build workforce capacity, and support existing businesses, ensuring sustainable economic growth and community development.

Recidivism by the numbers: Recidivism places a heavy burden on taxpayers. The cost to incarcerate one person for a year in Georgia is \$21,000 – more than twice the amount the state spends toward educating one student for a year, (<https://foropportunity.org/>). This means that every cohort of released prisoners that recidivates amounts to \$130 million annually, given the 30 percent recidivism rate and the 20,000 offenders released each year. Further, state expenditures on incarceration reached \$1.1 billion in fiscal year 2010 – more than twice the amount spent in 1990, which was \$492 million. For the amount taxpayers have spent on the prison system in recent years, the outcomes have been unacceptable.³ Offenders who participate in correctional education programs are 43% less likely to return to prison within three years of release. Prison Education Programs- Save \$4-5 in three-year reincarceration costs for every \$1 invested.

Success Stories: North Georgia Technical College⁴, in partnership with the Georgia Department of Corrections, has successfully facilitated several cohorts of American Welding Society (AWS) training. Since 2016, approximately 100 participants have completed the course and received an industry certification. Graduates who earn their national industry certification, are hired full-time with full benefits by local industry partners. With a median pay for these positions being \$20 an hour, participants are provided a financial foundation for success as well.

“This partnership has been a win-win,” said Mary Overholt, Kubota Manufacturing of America’s senior human resources manager. “We developed an opportunity to add to our highly skilled workforce and provide a high-paying job with full benefits to the residents. Katie Hardy was released and hired full-time as a welder with Kubota Manufacturing USA in 2022. She has been promoted, not once but twice since becoming part of the Kubota team. She is currently a team lead and is responsible for onboard training in her production area” (Mary Overholt).



² YOUTHrive by Columbus 2025 Summer Internship Program Year One End of Program Report

³ Lois Davis, Ph.D. and Robert Bozick, Ph.D. are the lead authors of the RAND report “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults” which can be found at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html

⁴ Davis and Bozick also are the evaluators for the Vera Institute of Justice’s Pathways from Prison to Post-Secondary Education project.

⁵ Reference: Columbus Technical College Mobile Construction Lab

Big Idea #2: Gateway to Growth: Empowering Talent and Community

Local Possibilities: Announced July 2024, Wiregrass Georgia Technical College was awarded a \$1 million grant from the Lowes Foundation. Wiregrass will build a 53-foot mobile construction trailer and hire an instructor to provide educational training in a variety of residential and commercial trades to graduating high school seniors, adult learners, and individuals enrolled in Georgia Department of Corrections education programs. The 53-foot trailer will remove transportation barriers for hundreds of students and host an “industry ready” program to help combat the construction workforce shortage in rural south Georgia.⁵

Training Format: The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) offers Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs to help adults develop the skills and credentials they need for in-demand careers:

- ▶ Concurrently - combine adult education and literacy with workforce training and preparation for a specific occupation.
- ▶ Contextually - help adults who may lack basic, occupational, or workplace skills.

▶ Short-term - designed to help participants quickly gain industry-recognized training and secure a livable wage. Some programs can be completed in less than a year and may include job placement assistance.

▶ Topics Covered Include:

- ◇ Related Technical Instruction ie: Welding, Construction, Manufacturing.
- ◇ Teamwork/ Work Habits.
- ◇ Self-management/ Time Management.
- ◇ Communication Skills (Oral & Written).
- ◇ Attendance/ Punctuality.
- ◇ Productivity.
- ◇ Organization/ Responsibility skills.
- ◇ Appearance/ Professional Image.
- ◇ Resumes.

Action Steps & Timeline

Parent Forward

- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 1
 - ▷ program selection and funding discussion
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 2
 - ▷ identification of parents
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 3
 - ▷ start of short term training program through The Office of Professional and Community Education (PACE)
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 4
 - ▷ completion of training program
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 1
 - ▷ additional soft skill training/ interview prep
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 2
 - ▷ connection with local employers
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 3
 - ▷ job placement
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 4
 - ▷ evaluation and feedback

At-risk Senior Internship

- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 1
 - ▷ curriculum and partnership development
 - ▷ fundraising
 - ▷ identify intern placement options (business partners)
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 2
 - ▷ intern selection
 - ▷ mentor recruitment
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 3
 - ▷ Intern placement
 - ▷ Program (orientation, soft-skills training)
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 4
 - ▷ Internship period with weekly check-ins
 - ▷ Final showcase

- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 2
 - ▷ Feedback and reflection

Re-entry

- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 1
 - ▷ identify relevant training programs at Wiregrass
 - ▷ funding discussion with Goodwill
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 2
 - ▷ identify Lowndes County inmates for training
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 3
 - ▷ first cohort of skills training
- ▶ Year 1 Quarter 4
 - ▷ skills training continued
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 1
 - ▷ employability/life skills and interview prep with Goodwill
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 2
 - ▷ job interviews (as inmates transition out)
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 3
 - ▷ job placement
- ▶ Year 2 Quarter 4
 - ▷ participant and employer follow up

Big Idea #2: Gateway to Growth: Empowering Talent and Community

Budget

Item	Cost
Parent Forward (assuming 10 in pilot)	\$42,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Tuition sponsorship for The Office of Professional and Community Education (PACE) program - Medical billing (\$2,000-\$4,000/student)▶ Program Administration: Cover costs related to program coordination, materials, and workshops. - VSU Student Worker with PACE (\$11/hr x ~160 hrs/semester) \$2,000	
At-risk Senior Internship (assuming 10 in pilot)	\$37,600
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Intern Stipends: Allocate funds for the \$2,400 stipend per intern for 8 weeks.▶ Mentor Compensation: Budget for the mentor’s salary and expenses for the 10-week period. Approximately \$10,000 - \$12,000.▶ Student transportation (160 ValdostaOnDemand rides per student): \$1,600	
Re-entry (assuming 25 in pilot)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Skills training for inmates through Wiregrass - covered through the sources such as: the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), HOPE Career Grant, and Second Chance Pell Grant▶ Employability Skills training through WireGrass Technical College and Goodwill	

Possible Funding Sources

Parent Forward

- ▶ Corporate sponsorship
- ▶ Tuition Waivers from Valdosta State University
- ▶ “Pepsi Parent Potential - Scholarship”

At-risk Senior Internship

- ▶ Corporate Sponsorship: Partner with local businesses and corporations to sponsor internships or provide financial support.
- ▶ Community Foundations: Approach

philanthropic organizations and community foundations for grants and donations.

- ▶ Individual Donations: Launch a crowdfunding campaign or accept individual donations from community members and supporters.

Re-entry

- ▶ Goodwill
- ▶ Worksource Southern Georgia via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- ▶ Second Chance Pell Grants

Potential Partnerships

Parent Forward

- ▶ Valdosta City Schools
- ▶ South Georgia Medical Center Heath (SGMC)
- ▶ Valdosta State University - The Office of Professional and Community Education (PACE)

At-risk Senior Internship

- ▶ Goodwill
- ▶ Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Local businesses

College for current Lowndes County Jail and Valdosta Transitional Center.

- ▶ Goodwill provides additional employability skills for transitioning inmates
- ▶ Connections to local employers willing to hire justice-involved individuals through Goodwill Career Center
- ▶ Job Placement
- ▶ Participant and employer follow-up and feedback

Re-entry

- ▶ Skills training through Wiregrass Technical

Expected Impact/Measures of Success

Parents Forward Program Pilot

- ▶ Number of parents in the first cohort
- ▶ Receive training through The Office of Professional and Community Education (PACE)
- ▶ Job placement at South Georgia Medical Center Health (SGMC)
- ▶ Retained more than 12 months

- ▶ Job placement rate 85% Target
- ▶ Retention rate 70% Target

Re-entry Program Pilot

- ▶ Number of participants 6-25

At-risk High School Senior Internship Pilot

- ▶ Number of program graduates (~10)
- ▶ Graduate survey
 - Positive feedback
 - Skills learned
- ▶ Full-time job offers

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility

Description

Mixed-use developments are critical in the sustainability of a downtown area because they bring together a variety of functions and uses; residential, commercial, and recreational. Mixed-use developments can also lead to increased foot traffic, diversified revenue streams, and the opportunity to maximize on valuable downtown real estate. When considering methods to boost the economic health of the downtown area, a mixed-use development was considered by Team V.I.B.E. Mixed-use facilities, when developed with the community and the workforce in mind, can be a breeding ground for growth and economic vitality. With this in mind, The YARD must serve three primary purposes, the attraction of a new workforce, the retention of the existing workforce, and the development of both workforces.

Early in the planning stages, it was decided that this development must provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs, of all ages, with both a brick-and-mortar facility and an open-air market. Both of these designated spaces will allow businesses and individuals to harness their skills and grow as part of the workforce. The YARD will provide vendors, crafters, artisans, growers, gardeners, and bakers alike a dedicated permanent space to sell their products and services daily. The available spaces would be competitively priced, to encourage fledgling businesses to grow their clientele and their market with the

hope of establishing permanent roots in Valdosta. While downtown can be a multifaceted destination with a number of offerings for a variety of visitors, one of the most common reasons that consumers visit a downtown area is the available dining. Many downtowns are known for their diverse culinary offerings and often house a variety of eateries, cafes, and restaurants⁶. Thus, The YARD⁷ could also serve as a restaurant incubator. Catering to aspiring chefs and food enthusiasts, The YARD would create an environment of shared kitchen spaces, business resources, and invaluable experiences for those wanting to test concepts, menu items, and grow in the industry. Additionally, the commercial development piece should provide space for anchor tenants such as small-scale local grocers or co-ops, boutiques, and or office space . This solution provides an answer to the attraction and workforce development elements.

The YARD intends to include either a boutique hotel or multi-family residential space. The opportunity to provide a boutique hotel opens the door to provide a unique space to host meetings and conventions, conveniently located adjacent to the Valdosta Career Center which houses large meeting spaces. Additionally, the boutique hotel is situated only one block away from the newly renovated Unity Park Amphitheatre. If the developer were to pursue the mul-

⁶ The photo in figure 1 is of Krog Street Market in Atlanta, Georgia. The district is dedicated to curating a unique dining and shopping experience that attracts younger crowds. This can serve as a unique attraction that is aimed at retaining a new and young workforce.

⁷ The adjacent photos are of the Chattahoochee Food Works.

ti-family residential option, the development could work to address the missing middle by providing a unique living opportunity for individuals and families that are not seeking the traditional single-family detached home and may otherwise leave Valdosta for opportunities similar to The YARD that are available in other cities. Additionally, the multi-family residential aspect could provide downtown residential living that is a mix of fee-simple and rental will provide a revenue stream for the development outside of typical commercial leases. This solution provides an answer to the attraction and retention elements.

Further, future redevelopment and revisioning of the overall area should include focusing on the development of workforce housing units on adjacent

blocks and the repurposing of the Valdosta Career Center. Several parcels along East Savannah Avenue, South Lee Street, Wooding Lane, South Troup Street, Holiday Street, South Forrest Street, and East Crane Avenue would be ideal for redevelopment as an extension of The YARD. These lots could be redeveloped to host a mixture of single-family detached and multi-family residential priced appropriately to be considered workforce housing. Building on to the workforce development aspect the City of Valdosta could seek to repurpose the existing Valdosta Career Center to house additional workforce development programs proposed by the Young Gamechangers as well as the Georgia Department of Labor. Both elements can be viewed as a continuation and expansion of The YARD.



Young Gamechangers–S. Ashley St. and E. Savannah Ave. Redevelopment

SITE PLAN



NOTES:

- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps reveal the historic location of a rail siding bisecting the site. The former siding alignment could be commemorated with colored paving materials running through the site.
- Open flexible space in the plaza allows multiple uses.
- Streetscape amenities like street trees and ADA ramps along S. Ashley St. and E. Savannah Ave. make the area more pedestrian friendly.
- ADA access at the S. Ashley St. warehouse is achieved via rear platform.



OF LABOR

0' 20' 40'



NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION
 Conceptual use only

This drawing was prepared as a conceptual design solution. The University of Georgia shall not be responsible for any problems which arise from the use of this drawing as a working drawing for construction purposes.

Carl Vinson
 Institute of Government
 UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



SOUTH ASHLEY STREET &
 EAST SAVANNAH AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT

Job address:

Client:
 YOUNG GAMECHANGERS

Job Number:

Designed by: CF

Drawn by: CF

Date: AUGUST 12, 2024

Revision:

PAGE 1 OF 3

Valdosta/Lowndes County 2024: Team V.I.B.E.

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility



SALE \$185,000 | Commercial Sale

211 213 South Ashley St, Valdosta, GA 31601

Building: 6,390 sq. ft.

Land: 0.15 Acres

Courtesy Of Godwin Real Estate & Investment Group

[MORE INFORMATION](#)

[CONTACT](#)



SALE \$150,000 | Commercial Sale

203 East Savannah Avenue, Valdosta, GA 31601

Building: 8,968 sq. ft.

Land: 0.58 Acres

Courtesy Of Godwin Real Estate & Investment Group

[MORE INFORMATION](#)

[CONTACT](#)

MLS LISTINGS

Scope of the Initiative

Commercial Property Redevelopment

Seven storefronts located along East Savannah Avenue, South Ashley Street, and South Lee Street have been identified as ideal sites for a potential redevelopment in a mixed-use complex dubbed The YARD. The redevelopment should occur in three phases with the primary commercial spaces being developed in Phases I and II, the open air market simultaneously with Phases I and II, and the boutique hotel or residential space in Phase III.¹⁰



Commercial Space Leasing

The commercial units should house a restaurant incubator that provides commercial kitchen spaces, business resources, and invaluable experiences for those wanting to test concepts, menu items, and grow in the restaurant industry. Additionally, the commercial development piece should provide space for anchor tenants such as small-scale local grocers or co-ops, coffee shops, bakeries, boutiques/retailers, and or office space¹¹. The current average rent in the City of Valdosta, according to Main Street Manager Kim Hughes, is between \$14 and \$27 per square foot of space rented. It is recommended that leases for space in The YARD be at a cheaper, more competitive rate than the rest of the downtown market. Given the amount of space it is believed that a lower more affordable rate will generate traction for tenants and still return a profit on the development year over year.



Open Air Market Leasing

The open-air market for The YARD should be designed in a way that promotes equitable access to commercial space and an environment that encourages growth for entrepreneurs. The space should be inviting and welcoming to businesses and patrons alike with design qualities that hone in on the values, traditions, and natural beauty that make Valdosta unique. The space should also ensure comfort in

¹⁰ The three photos below exhibit the current condition of the properties along South Ashley Street and East Savannah Street. The building along East Savannah Street is currently being demolished.

¹¹ The adjacent photograph is of the Bottling Department Food Hall in San Antonio, Texas.

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility

the summer and winter months to prevent lulls in foot traffic on hot or cold days. Ideally, reservable space in the open market area should be open to entrepreneurs at a reasonable rate with temporary licensing and shortened leases offered.



Example

Lovejoy, Georgia¹²: Lovejoy has an open-air market located conveniently in their downtown. This urban outdoor market space welcomes vendors of a variety of products and services. The market has hours of operations from sunup to sundown with options for extended hours on a case by case basis. The rate to rent space is only \$10 per day.

The open-air market should also offer space to food truck vendors as this appears to be a quickly grow-

ing market and a way to harness and grow new fledgling businesses in this market.

Example

Turin, Georgia¹³: In Turin, Georgia a dedicated space for food truck vendors opened in May 2023. The space is known as the Fabulous Food Trailer Park, it features several food trucks, entertainment such as live music and games. The space even livestreams the East Coweta High School football games on Friday nights.

The goal of the open-air market is multifaceted. Primarily, it is to encourage businesses to find their clientele, market themselves, and pay a cheaper rate; this in turn should help to encourage these businesses to stay in Valdosta and continue to grow. Indirectly, this provision also provides a unique social space where people can congregate, network, and grow. It should be noted that the open-air market aspect should not be viewed as the income driver for the development, hence the necessity for anchor tenants in the brick and mortar facilities¹⁴.

Boutique Hotel with Meeting Space or Multi-Family Residential¹⁵

Placing a boutique hotel efficiently utilizes limited land by optimizing the vertical integration of functions within a single structure. This effort maximizes the use of existing infrastructure and fosters a compact urban layout that is both sustainable and practical. Furthermore, taking this approach can at-

¹² <https://www.cityoflovejoy.com/873/Open-Air-Mart>

¹³ <https://www.wintersmedia.net/food-truck-parks-a-moveable-feast-both-in-turin-and-newnan/> - The attached link is an article published by Winters Media and Authored by Katie Anderson.

¹⁴ The picture adjacent to the text is of the Marietta Square Market in Marietta, Georgia.

¹⁵ The image is of the Hotel Indigo in Savannah, Georgia; it is an example of a boutique hotel. <https://www.ihg.com/hotelindigo/hotels/us/en/savannah/savid/hoteldetail>

tract and retain young professionals to the vibrancy of the mixed-use development by providing a space to stay for a longer expanse of time. The hotel development would be conveniently located just a block away from the new Unity Park Amphitheatre as well as being located adjacent to the Valdosta Career Center which has larger meeting spaces available. This opens some opportunities to host larger conferences in the heart of downtown Valdosta. Alternatively, the developer could also utilize the

space for the development of multi-family housing. Multi-family housing developments open the opportunity to provide

Security and Safety

Because mixed-use developments tend to be active throughout the day and nights, the presence of residents and commercial activities help deter crime, thus creating a safer environment.

Action Steps & Timeline

Short term goals/action items

1. Vision Setting and Community Input Meetings

Open community meetings allow the public and stakeholders an opportunity to provide comments and feedback regarding the proposed redevelopment. This is a crucial element, as it will aid in the design process by providing more insight as to what the community sees best fit for certain aspects of the redevelopment.

2. Request for Qualifications for architectural and engineering services

Through a Request for Qualifications, the developer should seek qualified architectural and engineering design services to produce renderings and a design of the facility. These firms should have experience in historic preservation. The design should be kept consistent with the original building footprint and produce a seemingly identical facade.

3. Detailed Design and Development¹⁶

The developer should ensure that the designs produced by the contracted architecture and engineering firms are consistent with the historic preservation standards and zoning regulations.

4. Historic Preservation of the Properties along South Ashley, East Savannah Avenue and South Lee Street

The structures at 211-213 South Ashley Street, 201-203 East Savannah Avenue, and 200 South Lee Street will be subject to historic preservation due to the age of the building.

5. Second Round of Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The developer should utilize a second set of community and stakeholder feedback sessions on the proposed design of the redevelopment. Pertinent feedback should be incorporated in the design where it is possible.

6. Planning and Zoning Approvals

Full plans should be submitted to the City of Valdosta Planning, Zoning, and Engineering Departments for the plan review and comment period. In this period concerns or required modifications should be made. Additionally, any and all variances should be applied for to ensure no delays to the development timeline.

7. Secure Financing

The developer should explore funding options

¹⁶ The above photo is another example of what could be renovated/constructed at the selected site. This photo particularly exhibits a sample floor plan.

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility

such as grants, loans, and tax incentives for historic preservation initiatives. It should be noted that federal and state grants are not immediate in return and can cause significant delays, these sources should be considered early in the development stage.

Medium-term goals/action items

8. Request for Proposals for General Contractors

The developer should release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for general contractors. The authority should evaluate the bids and select the contractor(s) for the redevelopment project. The contractor(s) selected should have expertise in craftsmanship to meet the historic standards.

9. Finalize Contracts

The developer should negotiate and sign contracts with the developer and ensure all legal and insurance requirements are met.

10. Site Preparation and Permitting¹⁷

The developer should ensure the contractor obtains all necessary building permits, demolition permits, and environmental reviews. At this stage, the contractor will begin to prepare the site for construction, including any remaining demolition.

11. Construction Phase I : Commercial Building Re-Construction and Restoration

The contractor will now begin Construction Phase I of the redevelopment, which is the

reconstruction and restoration of the historic buildings subject to redevelopment and the construction of the new infill building

12. Construction Phase II: Open Air Market¹⁸

In Construction Phase II, the contractor will complete the critical open-air market element. This will begin near the end of Phase I, with construction being completed at the same time in month 25.

13. Inspection and Certification of Commercial Buildings and Open Air Market

The final inspections and occupancy certificates will be obtained for the commercial buildings and open air market.

14. Marketing and Leasing

Begin marketing and leasing commercial spaces in Phases I and II.

15. Grand Opening Preparation

Plan and organize a grand opening event and engage with the community and media to promote the new facility.

16. Grand Opening

Officially open Phases I and II of the mixed-use facility to the public. Continue to manage and lease remaining spaces.

¹⁷ The image beside this section is an example of the site work process, this image is stock and not of the current site.

¹⁸ The adjacent image is an example of the inspection and certification process of the construction and renovation phases.

Long-term goals/action items

17. Construction Phase III: Boutique Hotel or Residential Complex

Upon completion of Phases I and II, the contractor will begin the boutique hotel or residential complex development.

18. Inspection and Certification of Building

Conduct final inspections to ensure the building

meets all regulatory standards and obtain occupancy certificates.

19. Marketing, Selling and Leasing

If the boutique hotel option is constructed, begin marketing the hotel and meeting spaces to potential users. If the residential option is constructed begin selling the fee-simple units and/or leasing the residential units and commercial spaces.



INFILL BUILDING RENDERING¹⁹



RECONSTRUCTION OF EAST SAVANNAH AVENUE²⁰

¹⁹ Infill building rendering provided by Carmine Fischetti of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

²⁰ Rendering of the East Savannah Avenue building created and produced by Céline Gladwin at Gladwin Vaughn Architecture.

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility

20. Grand Opening Preparation

Plan and organize a grand opening event for Phase III. Engage with the community and media to promote the new facility.

21. Grand Opening

Officially open the Phase III facility to the public. Continue to manage and lease remaining spaces.

22. Repurposing of the Valdosta Career Center to House New Programs

The City of Valdosta should seek to repurpose the Valdosta Career Center to house programs proposed by the Young Gamechangers as well

as many other pertinent workforce development programs. These programs keep in line with the facility's current use but seek to further develop the existing workforce.

23. Complete Neighborhood Revisioning

The entirety of the neighborhood on the blocks adjacent to The YARD could be revisioned to be a community hub that has an entertainment district, workforce and affordable housing, a workforce development center, and other community resource centers. The City should make this a neighborhood revitalization priority.

Budget

Item	Cost	Frequency
Land Acquisition	\$ 630,000	One Time, 3 Parcels
Site Work Costs <i>Site Prep/Earthwork/Improvements (45,000 Ft2)</i>	\$ 60,000	One Time - Prep Entire Site
Historic Commercial Building Re-Construction <i>Office, Retail, and Restaurant Space (10,000 Ft2)</i>	\$ 2,620,000 <i>(262 p/Ft²)</i>	Phase 1 - Commercial
Historic Commercial Building Renovation and Restoration <i>Renovation of Existing Space (6000 Ft2)</i>	\$ 1,200,000 <i>(200 p/Ft²)</i>	Phase 1 - Commercial
Infill Building to Connect Historic Structures <i>Office, Retail, and Restaurant Space (7,600 Ft2)</i>	\$ 1,991,200 <i>(262 p/Ft²)</i>	Phase 1 - Commercial
Open Air Market Construction <i>Pervious Concrete/Pavers (\$ 12 p/Ft2 @ 7000 Ft2), Shade Structure</i>	\$ 105,000	Phases 2 - Commercial

Item	Cost	Frequency
Boutique Hotel or Multi-Family Residential 3 Floors, 48,000 Ft ² total, 34 Hotel or Residential Units @ 1000 Ft ² , 11,200 Ft ² Underdeck Parking	\$ 9,600,000 (262 p/Ft ²)	Phase 3 - Commercial with Residential
Fees Permitting, Impact Fees, Architectural, Engineering, Etc	\$ 32,555 (City) \$ 407,760 (A + E)	Consider Waiving Permitting and Impact Fees,
Construction Contingency	\$ 1,664,651.50	10% of Total
Total	\$ 18,311,166.50	All Phases and Fees

Possible Funding Sources

American Rescue Plan Act Funds - For infrastructure improvements, walkability, reconnection of a disadvantaged community to downtown, workforce development, etc. Must act before December 31, 2024 to set obligations towards a project. Expenses must be made by December 31, 2026, infrastructure projects must be completed by September 30, 2026.

Historic Building in a Commercial Historic District - Tax Credits and Incentives - property and work must be eligible - National Parks Service - 20% of expenses are eligible

Georgia State Historic Preservation - 25% of expenses are eligible - Georgia Cities Foundation provides opportunities for loans. These are for revitalization and enhancing downtown districts. Lower interest rates than local lenders. You can borrow up to 200,000.

Georgia Cities Foundation - Revolving Loan Fund Used for revitalization efforts in downtown. Maximum loan amount is 250,000. Lower interest rate. Can borrow up to 40% of the total project. 50% must come from local lenders and 10% from private investment.

Community Development Redevelopment Loans - Non-Entitlement Communities. The Federal Government distributes it to states and then from there it is distributed to local communities. The focus is for slum or blighted areas. These are non-competitive, revolving loans. The maximum amount is \$1,000,000.00. The City would negotiate terms and interest rates. Must be approved by DCA.

Community Development Block Grant - For infrastructure improvements.

Potential Partnerships

- ▶ City of Valdosta
- ▶ Central Valdosta Development Authority
- ▶ Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ One Valdosta-Lowndes
- ▶ Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority
- ▶ Private Equity

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility

Expected Impact/Measures of Success

Quantitative

Financial Performance: The goal of this multi-use development is to attract and retain businesses and talent. We are hoping the influx of new businesses and talent will drive innovation and economic growth. Moreover, this will aid in the creation of new jobs that range from construction workers, and project managers, to hospitality, and retail. In addition, the total amount of money received from both businesses and residential leases will help us determine the return on investment (ROI). ROIs in real estate can vary widely depending on the market and type of property. A common target is around 8-15% annual ROI, but it can be higher in certain markets. Venture capital investments typically aim for higher returns due to higher risk, often targeting 20% or more annually. A “good” ROI is context-dependent, varying based on the type of investment, risk profile, and market conditions. Similarly, choosing the right benchmarks will involve selecting metrics that accurately reflect the risk and return characteristics of The YARD. The characteristics listed below will provide the best benchmarks to determine the financial performance of The YARD.

1. Determination of Initial Investment

This includes the purchase of the property, legal fees, design fees, renovation and improvement costs, as well as other upfront costs.

The current estimation is approximately \$18,311,166.50.

2. Calculate the Annual Net Operating Income (NOI)

This is representative of the income generated by the property after subtracting the operating expenses.

NOI is the equivalent of gross rental income less operating expenses.

3. Accounting for Financing

Though not required for determining NOI, it will also be beneficial to consider any loan payments when determining cash-on-cash return.

4. Determine the Property(ies) Annual Appreciation

This step is not always included in the calculation of ROI, but a property's appreciation in value can affect the overall return.

5. Calculating ROI

$$ROI = \left(\frac{NOI + Appreciation - Annual Costs}{Initial Investment} \right) \times 100$$

6. Additional Optional Metrics

► *Property Value Appreciation:* By attracting more people to The YARD on a regular basis, we aim to boost spending at local retail and service businesses. This increase in economic activity is expected to raise the property values of both residential and commercial properties in the area.

► *Sustainability:* This state-of-the-art development will make efficient use of land and preserve green spaces and will be able to evolve to meet the needs of the present.

Qualitative

Resident/Business Satisfaction: We anticipate that the amenities provided by this multi-use development will enable residents to experience a higher standard of living generally because of its comfort, convenience, and safety. There should be a sense of community and belonging among the residents. Additionally, an increase in customer traffic should

yield a return on investment for organizations. Owners of businesses in the area should have faith in the area's business growth and viability.

Integration: The YARD intends to improve the area's historic identity and blend in with the local way of life.

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Captain Jason Clifton, *Lowndes County Jail*

Susan E Bailey, *Administrative Coordinator of PACE program Valdosta State University*

Big Idea #3: The YARD Valdosta, A Mixed-Use Facility

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