In its earliest days, the community slightly North and East of the Mississippi River was bustling with new life and industry. A cotton-based economy previously built on slave trade was transforming in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. People from all over the world, namely Ireland, Italy and Germany, immigrated to Memphis to build lives and a strong future for their families. They worked for local companies and the area was more diverse and industrious than ever.

While it did not escape Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement unscathed, there was hope in Memphis for a promising and thriving future. This was evidenced in the camaraderie of the working class people, general safety and social freedom. Black and White people who called North Memphis home during this era recall full lives with strong homes and families. Within their racial and cultural confines, everybody belonged to everybody.

In 1983, financial loss brought about sweeping change, forcing major corporations like Firestone and International Harvester to close their doors. For residents, these companies had kept food on many tables and pumped dignity in their chests. But, over time, income was lost, and families were unable to maintain their modest lifestyles and homes. This meant more businesses failed, leaving fewer jobs and opportunities for upward mobility and economic prosperity.

White flight became inevitable and with underlying discrimination, people of color were left with no place to go. Eventually, neighbors of all races moved out and blight moved in. Fewer jobs mixed with greater needs led to crime as a means of survival. While things looked dismal, there were many who longed for restoration.
The City of Memphis Redevelopment Agency was established to be a catalyst for the restoration of communities through removing blight and providing affordable housing.

While the CRA was created in 2001, it did not become an empowered independent agency until 2017. In that year, and in 2019, City Council and County Commission designated significant resources through the Uptown TIF (Tax Increment Financing) District for community development. TIF is a tool administered by the CRA to help spur lasting development in aging or deteriorating areas. Currently, the CRA has two neighborhood-level TIF districts: Uptown and Binghampton. The neighborhood formerly known as Greenlaw / Hurt Village is now called Uptown, but the Uptown TIF refers to a much broader community. As described in the Uptown Community Plan, the TIF stretches from the Mississippi river (Mud Island, Harbor Town) through Uptown, the Pinch District, Bearwater, Scutterfield, New Chicago, and Smokey City to the interstate (see map on page 4).
The CRA uses TIF to fuel community-driven change that otherwise may not occur. TIF is essentially the increase in real property tax revenue (after the base year) within the neighborhood. This is captured in a fund and dedicated for neighborhood improvements such as housing, streets, sidewalks, parks, and much more. While some TIFs focus on commercial areas, redeveloping downtown areas, tourist attractions and even suburbs, the Uptown TIF is different. This TIF is guided by the community’s priorities, which provides the unique opportunity to partner with organizations, small businesses, and residents to engage and invest in the revitalization of the community.

The Uptown TIF expires in 2032 and the Binghampton TIF in 2048. This means that neighbors in these districts are on the clock to maximize the resources, expertise and support provided by the CRA to produce community generational wealth.

### 10 Reasons Why the Movement for Social & Economic Justice, Surviving COVID-19, and Community Redevelopment Must Co-exist in Memphis

1. One of Memphis’ most well-known historical event is the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This cemented pre-existing segregation which has subsequently led to decades of disinvestment in communities of color.
2. For 90 years, redlining has marked areas like North Memphis, South Memphis and Orange Mound. Redlining is the practice of banks denying mortgage loans to minorities in low income neighborhoods.
3. 27.8% of Memphians fall below the poverty line. That’s more than twice the national average. (1)
4. Children make up 45% of Memphis residents living in poverty. (1)
5. While Memphis remains on the U.S list for “Most Charitable Cities” its minority majority community makes up 88% of the poverty rate across the city. (3, 1)
6. This disinvestment negatively impacts not only poverty and housing, but also education, employment, access to healthy food, wellness and mortality.
7. For every 100,000 people in Shelby County, there are: (4)
   i. 73 fast food restaurants but only
   ii. 20 grocery stores
8. Black people in Shelby County are 2X’s more likely to die from heart disease, stroke and diabetes. (4)
9. As a result, minorities in Shelby County are dying from Covid-19 at disproportionate rates (Some due to pre-existing conditions to which they are systematically exposed). In Shelby County, Black people account for more than 60% of Covid-19 deaths (as of 7/17/20-). (5)
10. Our city and country are beginning to reckon with many of the systems and injustices that were built to marginalize people of color. From discriminatory land and home ownership processes and community disinvestment to disparities in health, education and police brutality, the world is crying out for change.

Change won’t happen overnight, but the CRA is deeply invested in making lasting change in the Uptown TIF district. **We want to hear your voice and walk alongside you to lift your vision for this community.**

Resources Cited:
1. U.S Census Bureau. 2018
4. National Disease Surveillance System
5. The Shelby County Health Department. July 17, 2020
MEET THE CORE STAFF

Rosalyn Willis
President

“Enduring constant racial slurs, picketing, and marching made me a different type of warrior, a real one, and that’s why I gave my yes to this position.”

Thirty years of experience in community development made Rosalyn Willis the perfect candidate to lead the CRA in 2018. She has been involved in Memphis development projects like: Uptown, South City, University Place and Legends Park to name a few. However, her commission by the CRA board to return home was not only due to her experience but also for her knowledge and compassion for Memphis and its people. After leading major projects all over the country and traveling the world, Willis felt that it was her calling to return home.

“Growing up in Memphis during the Civil Rights era was a challenge to say the least. I was in the group that integrated Central High School.” The average CHS graduate wears the Warrior mascot without wounds; however, this was not the case for Willis. “Enduring constant racial slurs, picketing, and marching made me a different type of warrior, a real one, and that’s why I gave my yes to this position.” Rosalyn is the daughter of A.W. Willis who founded the first integrated law firm in Memphis and worked to desegregate Memphis City Schools. “The warrior spirit allows me to hear and feel the pain of the communities we serve. I speak the language and I understand the needs. It fuels how I empower others to invest in the redevelopment of the Uptown TIF district.” Willis knew her work wasn’t in vain the day she spoke with one teary-eyed Smokey City resident who has spent years working towards the betterment of her community. The resident expressed gratitude because her voice is finally being heard and she’s experiencing the support and provision of resources that she’s advocated for over the years. For this reason Willis says, “This is sacred work.” She knows what it’s like to be mistreated and forgotten. Her hope for residents is simple, “I want them to know that they deserve better.” CRA’s goal is to equip residents with the tools to require safe homes, roads and overall living conditions in their community. “We want to make the Uptown TIF district a place where kids grow up and are proud to return as adults,” says Willis. And, it’s happening one project, one life at a time.

LISA IVY
Program Manager & Special Assistant to the President

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others.”
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Picture a soft-spoken, kind-hearted office assistant (recently promoted Program Manager) cheering on the fast and furious in down-home, fall-out drag race and you’ve got Lisa Ivy. Don’t let her quiet demeanor mislead, she will love you and stand boldly for what she believes. When Lisa heard Rosalyn Willis needed an assistant, this tech guru leaped at the opportunity to serve her own community. Lisa grew up right outside the Uptown TIF district off of Chelsea Ave. with plenty of family and friends living from Greenlaw to Smokey City. She recalls a strong sense of togetherness during her childhood, “If a neighbor was out of a job, everyone pitched in.” Lisa also leads the CRA Single Family Homes (CONT’N NEXT PAGE)
Program. If a home is not safe, warm or dry, residents can apply for up to $30,000 in funds and labor to repair a roof, firm a foundation, install HVAC and much more. Yes! You read that right! Lisa says, “You’d be amazed by the sense of neighborhood pride that can come from it.” The program recently completed Phase 1 where they renovated 30 homes. Lisa enjoys connecting families with resources to restore their homes. “I think something was lost when the older generation died, people stopped understanding the value in ownership and community and started thinking more about self than others. Sometimes you have to forget about self and build others.” After years behind the desk, Lisa is thrilled to put her feet to the pavement and run the race to bring healing to families by restoring pride in home ownership. This is valuable work and in Lisa’s words, “Everyone needs a place that they love coming home to.”

If you or someone you know in the Uptown TIF district is in need of securing a safe, warm or dry home environment, please visit cramemphis.org to start the Single Family Home Program application today. Lisa is ready to roll with you to the finish line.

Andrew Murray
Director of Planning and Community Development

“Ideally, we want people talking about areas in the neighborhood possessively, my garden, my park, my church, my school. That’s what we are working towards.”

Some are raised on milk, corn and peas, but Andrew Murray was born into a soulful, Motown and Stax loving family. So it was an honor when he had the opportunity to move to Memphis, the home of soul music to serve this community. He made his way to the CRA from the gateway of the West, St. Louis. While there Murray managed planning projects and community organized in the distressed area of East St. Louis.

It was that work that sparked his heart for revitalization. The solution for blighted areas is often to destroy and start from scratch, but Andrew is inspired by Isaiah 61 and seeks to rebuild ancient ruins. “I know that renewal, the act of sustaining an existing life is much more complex than taking life away. It can be emotionally, physically, and mentally draining, but it’s worth it, because the people are worth it.” As the Director of Planning and Community Development Andrew ensures that community voices are heard by creating and executing plans. The Uptown and Binghampton TIF districts each have an advisory board composed of residents and community partners. Andrew also leads the Lot Reimagined Program. This initiative invites residents and developers to propose a use for an open lot in the district. Some vacant lots are too small to build a home or business, so people like Bobby and Derravia Rich (pictured) have come up with unique ways to use land.

They are growing an urban garden and social gathering space called Black Seeds. The possibilities are endless! Andrew encourages ideas like this. In his words, “they cultivate a sense of community, denoting ownership. Ideally, we want people talking about areas in the neighborhood possessively, my garden, my park, my church, my school. That’s what we are working towards.”

If Andrew is not busy developing the next community plan, you can definitely find him talking with friends or jamming to a tune.

If you are interested in proposing your great idea for land use, visit cramemphis.org to see a list of available lots and submit your proposal! To reach Andrew, email andrew.murray@memphistn.gov.

Bobby and Derravia Rich standing on the site of their urban farm, Black Seeds.
The Beacon

Kimani Shotwell
Senior Community Builder

“We have a vision for the generation to come. We want to leave such a foundation that North Memphis is never forgotten again.”

When lifetime athlete Kimani Shotwell left the mountainous horizons of Alaska and Canada to return home, he had no clue that his heart for youth development would lead him back to the North Memphis community that raised him. After years as a basketball coach and mentor, Kimani shared, “in my desire to build strong and productive young men and women I realized that it takes a community to raise a child.” But, how can a community raise a child without the resources to maintain it? Imagine a block dismantled by a storm or prolonged disinvestment, natural, yet dangerous cracks in sidewalks, overgrown and abandon parks, insect and animal infestations that discourage neighbors from beautifying their yards with colorful flowers and thriving gardens. Can you see it? A disheveled community disrupts not only a child’s stability and sense of home, but also that of adults. That’s why Kimani is committed to educating residents about available resources, employing indigenous and/ or small business owners like Glen Lloyd of Techfix and Ruby Ramirez of Hawks Tree Service. In addition to this, a partnership with Neighborhood Christian Center allows CRA to employ people from the community to complete the wide range of needs. Teams are finishing about 10 residential projects a week and 5 commercial properties each month. Kimani is grateful for the dual and far reaching impacts, “We serve a large elderly population and I’ve been enriched by their wisdom, likewise, our efforts give them hope that the community they once knew can be restored.” The Uptown TIF expires in 11 years. That means that the funds that make this type of work possible will no longer exist. However by that time, the CRA aims to have worked themselves out of jobs, equipping residents to carry the torch of future economic development and ultimately building generational wealth for the community. Kimani says, “We have a vision for the generation to come. We want to leave such a foundation that North Memphis is never forgotten again.”

If you or someone you know has organic overgrowth and/ or tree service needs in the Uptown TIF district, please reach out to Kimani at kimani.shotwell@memphistn.gov.

April Simmons
Director of Vision and Project Management

“It’s a big job and at the end of the day, we don’t just want to do this for the community, we want to do it with them.”

April joined the CRA family this year, but she is no stranger to community development. For the past 10 years, her urban planning and project management experience has taken her throughout Memphis, working on projects like the Crosstown Concourse and the Harahan Bridge project, providing a pedestrian and bike path from Downtown Memphis to West Memphis, AR. But admittedly, she’s always longed for more, “The longstanding goal of my work has been to make Memphis better.” This South Memphis native with two degrees from University of Tennessee- Knoxville dreamed of a job that married her passion for people and community with her education. April says that she’s found that in CRA, “I was a consultant for the CRA’s current community plan before taking this position. It’s been great to tell people in a neighborhood meeting, ‘I’ve got your back’ and have the ability, confidence and resources to actually follow through with that statement.” Overall, April’s role is to ensure that all projects move forward. More specifically, she’s working on commercial infrastructure like sewers and restoring alleys and roads in the TIF district. “We want people to want to remain in or move into this area,” April says, “it’s a big job and at the end of the day, we don’t just want to do this for the community, we want to do it with them.” April also manages the Uptown Advisory Committee. This committee gives residents the opportunity to provide feedback on the implementation of the community plan.

If you live in the Uptown TIF district, feel free to reach out to April at april.simmons@memphistn.gov to learn more about the Uptown advisory committee. After all, CRA is here for you.
This past December, CRA hosted a Vision Night to share community plans with residents, partners and friends. If you missed it, here’s a recap of CRA’s central programs.

The **Single Family Homes** program ensures residents occupy a safe, warm and dry space. Approximately 30 homes have been completed.

The **Lots Reimagined** program allows individuals with the passion, plans, and long-term commitment to invest in the revitalization of a vacant lot or lots.

The **Block Wellness** program (also known as Lights, Camera Action) is CRA’s street by street and block by block approach to addressing infrastructure repairs, organic overgrowth, safety additions, vacant lots and abandoned/ unused structures.

**Partnerships:** CRA has several partnerships with organizations to support and propel the completion of community plans including: Habitat for Humanity, Elmington Capital, Whole Child Strategies, Oasis of Hope, Promise Development, Memphis Medical District Collaborative (MMDC) and The City of Memphis to name a few. In addition to this, CRA is participating in several other major infrastructure projects.

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**Meet the Editor**

**Marketing & Communications Director, Erin Cole**

“In all of the world, there is not a group of people like Memphians. At our best we are painfully honest and wildly courageous with astonishing perseverance.”

Erin is the newest member of the CRA team. She is a writer, performer, host and event producer. A Memphis native, Cole grew to appreciate the beauty in her city through experiencing the culture and people in other places. She says, “In all of the world, there is not a group of people like Memphians. At our best we are painfully honest and wildly courageous with astonishing perseverance.” Cole gained a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and a Minor in Theatre from the University of Missouri- Columbia. Her work to activate civic spaces and transform communities in Memphis through the arts connected her with CRA. “The arts are a gold mine in connecting an individual's heart to a movement.” Cole says she enjoys seeing people “come alive” to a new way of thinking and living. She’s excited about telling resident’s stories in a way that invites others to engage and invest in the longevity of their community. “It’s easy to see everything that’s wrong in a neighborhood, but in my short time with CRA, I’ve met at least a dozen community builders who are pouring out their lives for this district.” Cole believes there are hundreds of stories to tell. “I look forward to archiving what’s being done so that future generations understand the sacrifices cemented in the grounds they walk.”

If CRA accomplishes its objectives over the next 30 years, the Uptown and Binghampton TIF districts could become models for similar communities around the country. Like CRA President Rosalyn Willils said, “This is sacred work,” and the impact will never be adequately quantified. But, in these newsletters, Cole plans to give readers a glimpse into the lives of those who have embodied the change they want to see.

To share a story about a neighbor who is making a difference in the Uptown TIF district, please email Erin at memphisandshelbycra@gmail.com.