

The BEACON

SPRING/SUMMER 2026

NO. 13

LEATH BAYOU
RESTORATION

ESSENTIAL
HOUSING

COLLAGE DANCE
COLLECTIVE

\$500,000
BROWNFIELD
GRANT

PROJECT
UPDATES

**"GOD HAS
ANSWERED
MY PRAYERS
ONCE AGAIN."**

*In search for stable housing,
Valencia Black has established
residence at Place of Grace.*

PRESIDENT'S DESK



Andrew Z. Murray

The first goal of the Uptown Community Plan (which was created by and for residents and stakeholders) is: "Create fully occupied residential neighborhoods with a mix of incomes and ages, while preserving single-family homes, in which people share a sense of belonging." This 2026 issue of the Beacon puts a spotlight on what the CRA and the community are doing to make sure this goal is fully implemented.

At his State of the City speech this year, Mayor Paul Young challenged our whole city to get behind the goal of 10,000 housing units in the next four years. While Single-

Family Home Repair Director, Lisa Ivy, and her team are continuing to complete home repair after home repair in both the Uptown and Binghampton TIFs, the CRA and its partners are also tackling the rest of this goal, with construction scheduled to begin on a wide range of projects, led by Vivian Ekstrom, Director of Planning and Community Development and her team.

This range of housing options includes the newly completed Place of Grace, which Valencia Black can now call her home. Kenneth Perkins with AON Investments is bringing Veterans' Housing in the Historic Porter Leath building, a key project of the Uptown Advisory Committee. The CRA kicked off the Smokey City Market mixed use project being constructed on the former grocery store and retail sites at Jackson and Decatur by developer Ernst Vallery along with the Works, Inc.

This year we have seen Charia Jackson, Director of Neighborhood Planning and Essential Housing lead a cohort of 18 (and growing) emerging developers constructing new housing throughout the Uptown and Binghampton TIFs. Developer Andre Harris, featured in this issue, along with developers Wayne Moody, Billy Irby, and Evaniel Johnson have already kicked off their home construction projects. CRA staff like Kenny Halt and Emma Turri have worked hard, along with local contractors, to clean up lots, bayous, streets, and brownfield sites to make way for all of this new housing. This year is one of construction and it is all thanks to you, the residents, who trust us with spending your tax dollars to implement your plan for your community.



The CRA envisions residents in every neighborhood in the City of Memphis and Shelby County a healthy and safe environment, economic opportunity, affordable housing and an excellent quality of life.

850 N. Manassas St. | Gould Cottage
Memphis, TN 38107
www.cramemphis.org

Andrew Z. Murray
President

Lobelita Cole-Smith
Chief Financial Officer

Vivian Ekstrom
Director of Planning and
Community Development

Lisa Ivy
Director of Single-Family Home Rehab

Charia Jackson
Director of Neighborhood Planning
and Essential Housing

Terrance Hammons
Senior Housing Specialist

Stephanie Clark
Paralegal/Housing Specialist

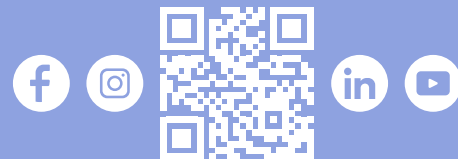
Emma Turri
Senior Project Manager

Cynthia Durham
Community Programs Coordinator

Kenny Halt
Senior Community Builder:
GIS & Data Management

Averell Mondie
Community Development Specialist

Andy Greenman
Communications Coordinator



Follow us on social media

Newsletter design and photos by Andy Greenman

CONTENTS



The CRA has teamed up with entrepreneurs to improve conditions in New Chicago. The new accelerator program began by clearing sections of Leath Bayou.

10

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

No longer searching for a stable home, Valencia Black has settled in at Place of Grace.



4 PROJECT UPDATES

Historic Porter Leath building to be transformed into veterans housing.

6 ESSENTIAL HOUSING

Andre Harris honors father-in-law as he creates new housing opportunities.

15 BROWNFIELD

A half-million dollar grant will aid remediation efforts for future housing.

17 OVER AND UNDER I-40

Community comes together to improve crossings and reconnect neighborhoods.

18 BLOCK WELLNESS

Leath Bayou springs back to life after cleanup.

20 CHANGE MAKER

Collage Dance's Elena Maverick provides lasting memories in Binghampton.

The Beacon Magazine is published twice a year by the City of Memphis and Shelby County Community Redevelopment Agency. View past magazines and subscribe to the CRA mailing list at cramemphis.org/beacon.



PORTER LEATH CAMPUS

868 N. Manassas Street

The CRA signed a redevelopment agreement with a development team in December 2025. AON Investments LLC - in partnership with P.E.A.R.L. With You, a veterans' housing/services nonprofit - plans to rehabilitate the main historic orphanage building for veterans' housing and support services. In addition, the developer plans to provide new, affordable housing options on a vacant part of the site, as well as maintain green space on the south side of the campus. AON Investments is working with their design team, as well as their financial consultants, to finalize construction and financing plans for the project in 2026.



Scan QR code to learn more and view other CRA projects.

cramemphis.org/projects



BRICK CHURCH 299 Chelsea Avenue

The site of this pre-Civil War church is being restored after decades of neglect. The CRA board approved KPS as the developer and authorized the CRA to negotiate a redevelop agreement with KPS for the Chelsea Neighborhood Center. The organization will now negotiate with KPS Development Partners and AngelStreet Memphis on a final agreement before work can formally begin.



FOOD PANTRY 1092 Manassas Street

Grace Missionary Baptist Church (GMBC) is partnering with the CRA to expand their current food pantry by rehabilitating a corner store across from Manassas High School. GMBC will expand their programming by incorporating refrigerated products and develop a full kitchen to provide hot meals. Interior demolition has been completed. This spring, the building will receive masonry repairs, a new roof, and pressure washing. Interior renovations should be complete by the end of the year.



MANASSAS MARKET 544 Jackson Avenue

The CRA is working with a local development team - JEL Developments LLC - on detailed engineering/geotechnical, architectural, and financing plans for the site. The CRA is also working with consultants on completing environmental assessment work for the site. The developer was selected in partnership with the Uptown Advisory Committee and plans to construct a mixed-use development with a grocery store which has signed a letter of intent.



SMOKEY CITY MARKET 999 Jackson Avenue

Developer Ernst Valery is creating a comprehensive plan to replace the former Gordin's Butcher Shoppe. The site will feature a mix of multi-family homes and light commercial spaces, including senior housing, a brewery, townhomes, and corner retail. Demolition of the old grocery store is set to begin in May, with construction on the townhomes and brewery immediately following.



SUNDRY STORE 989 Looney Avenue

Jones Urban Development is working to stabilize the vacant commercial structure, with plans to finish out the space for a future tenant. In addition, the developer is planning to work with a cohort of local, emerging developers to build new housing on vacant lots in the surrounding area on Looney Ave, Barrett Pl, and Lagrange Ave.



Andre Harris stands in front of the first home he constructed at 3111 Douglas Avenue.

Andre Harris Honors Father-In-Law As He Creates New Housing Opportunities

BY ANDY GREENMAN

A few days removed from the spring solstice, tree branches swayed on a windy afternoon. A crowd of 50 people gathered along the sidewalk at 915 Faxon Avenue. In the background, footings for a 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom single-family home protrude from the ground. Under-slab plumbing had been installed, awaiting concrete.

Traffic along Ayers Street came to a halt as drivers caught a glimpse. Neighbors casually strolled over to the corner lot. Mayor Paul Young, along with his entourage, stopped by to see the progress on another new home construction project in Uptown. But those in attendance came to hear from someone else. Andre Harris was the star this afternoon.

Andre is out to prove that he is ready to build affordable housing in the core of Memphis. This celebration was a long time in the

making for the founder of Nuewill Construction.

This emerging developer knows all about pressure. The former Central High School sharpshooter has been driving to the lane on the basketball court and excelling throughout his career. He graduated from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He then accepted a job with International Paper, which eventually sent him far from his Whitehaven roots to Florida, then back to Memphis.

In 2016, he and his wife, Latasha, bought a rental property and began to dip their toes into real estate. Andre was so excited to try something different in his spare time, but it didn't start smoothly.

On the first day, they hired a flooring professional. A no-show. After not returning any phone calls, Andre turned somber. He confessed to his wife, "We might have made a mistake."

But Latasha wasn't going to give up. "You should call my dad. He does everything," she replied.

With a little doubt in his mind, Andre reached out to his father-in-law, Willie Newberry. He agreed. Willie renovated the entire house and charged very little for his services.

"Without him, we may not have gotten past our first project," Andre sighed.

From that point forward, Willie and Andre were a duo. Andre never visited a potential home purchase or future renovation alone. Andre had a partner.

HOME BUILDER

Through the years, he continued the balancing act of renovating homes and playing landlord, all while maintaining his career at International Paper. Experienced in flipping homes, Andre was imagining a new challenge: building new homes. The ideas rattled around his brain for about a year, but he didn't know where to start.

Then, in 2023, while mentoring for Setting the Standard, Andre gave students a tour of a new home in the Glenview neighborhood. It took the mentor's eyes by surprise. He was stunned. The developer, Kevin McKinney, was on hand to shake hands.

"[IT] WAS AN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION AFTER WORKING FOR 20 YEARS... BUT IT ALLOWED ME TO BE ON-SITE EVERY DAY"

- ANDRE HARRIS

After the tour, Andre reached out to Kevin to share his interest in home building. Over breakfast, the two got acquainted with one another. Kevin quickly gained respect for Andre's tenacity and invited him to observe a few new homes under construction.

Throughout the summer and fall, Andre shadowed Kevin on these projects. He watched him operate, took notes of his contractors, and repeatedly visited job sites to learn the process — even if no one was around.

In late 2024, Andre purchased two lots in Orange Mound with the plan to build new homes. He reached out to his buddy Kevin and asked if he could hire him to build on one of the lots. Kevin agreed.

Two weeks after they broke ground at 3128 Douglass Avenue, Andre was laid off from International Paper. Then, at 43, Andre seemed well-positioned to move on from his 20-year career at the paper powerhouse.

"[It] was an uncomfortable situation after working for 20 years... But it allowed me to be on-site every day," Andre added.

He made a pact with Latasha that if home building didn't pan out after 12 months, it was time for Andre to find another job.

During the same year, Latasha lost her father. Willie was no



Developer Kevin McKinney was hired by Andre Harris to build a single-family home at 3128 Douglass Avenue in Orange Mound.



Pictured from the left: Priscilla Reed, United Housing; Andre Harris; Mayor Paul Young; Tammy Coleman, United Housing; Kelbert Fagan, Convergence Memphis; Andrew Murray, CRA President; Charia Jackson, Essential Housing Program Director; Trudie McClelland, United Housing; Billy Irby, West TN CDC

longer around to inspect, repair, or rehab. At this time, Andre would've been job hunting if it weren't for Willie; instead, Nuewill Construction was born as a homage to his father-in-law and friend by inverting the first few characters of his first and last name.

After finishing the first home, Andre was ready to go full-time. He felt he didn't have any other choice. With the other vacant lot, he told Kevin that he was going to do it on his own. "Go for it. That is God telling you," Kevin encouraged him.

With a Limited Residential Contractor License, Andre nervously began to build by hiring many of the contractors he'd been observing. Kevin never shied from questions and even made site visits to help. By this time, Andre knew he had to dedicate much of his time overseeing his contractors. He couldn't have a costly mistake at this juncture.

"These guys are doing a bunch of jobs. They are not just working on your site, so mistakes can happen," Andre said. "If you get too far down the road, it's going to be costly for you to go back and change or fix some stuff"

He was present as the foundation was poured, the plumbing installed, and dry-wall and insulation contractors worked. He continued taking notes and communicating.

In July of 2025, his first solo build at 3111 Douglass Avenue sold. Job complete.

LAND EXPO

After a couple of new home builds under his tool belt, Andre was looking for opportunities to grow. In February of 2025, Andre attended the inaugural Convergence Memphis Land Expo at First Baptist Broad. This is where he was introduced to the CRA's Essential Housing Program. The newly launched program was created to increase the number of housing units in Memphis, specifically, affordable units.

With a significant housing need and ample available land, who's going to build these units? Emerging developers.

Essential Housing is seeking new, motivated developers. Those who are looking to grow their business. Those who are looking to improve their neighborhood. Those who have shot three-pointers

at Morris Park. Those just like Andre Harris.

It just so happens that the founder of the newly created Nuewill Construction stumbled on the right place at the right time.

The CRA made 82 lots available in Uptown and Binghampton for home-building. The Essential Housing Program was so new it didn't even have a director. Andre and the hundreds in attendance were learning about this together. Mayor Paul Young dropped in to see first-hand if the community would support a Land Expo. Less than a year later, the Mayor announced a goal of building 10,000 homes by 2030. We believe he left inspired. So did Andre.

After applying for a few lots, Andre had doubts. He thought, "They'll never choose me, I'm too new. They're going to try and get these seasoned developers."

But to his surprise, it's emerging developers like Andre that the CRA had hoped to attract. Nuewill Construction was awarded 3 lots in Uptown, and Andre "was excited, but then I was nervous. Now I gotta make sure I can deliver."

ESSENTIAL HOUSING

To encourage developers, the CRA sells every buildable lot for a flat \$1,000, but then rewards them up to \$20,000 per unit. This subsidy supports home construction costs. In turn, the developer must use quality materials in accordance with MLGW's Eco-Build Program and offer affordable housing prices (rent or own). The CRA manages and guides each participant through the process.

"Programs like this are going to make it (10,000 homes) happen," Andre added. "It's ambitious. Let's go after it. I'm definitely willing to do my part to make it happen, and a lot of others are too."

After selecting the lots in Uptown, Andre is back in North Memphis, where he has many memories. This is where he visited his grandparents and cheered on the Manassas High School basketball team, which his Uncle Gerald coached to a state championship. He is grateful to see and contribute to the growth of this neighborhood at age 44.

Today, Andre holds a Full Residential and Commercial License, owns 15 rental units, and continues to add new housing units in Memphis. As he continues to hone his craft, he'd like to hire an additional project manager and expand in the near future.

"It's doable right now, but at some point it won't be. I know that I have to have more in-house help, and we'll do it." ▲

"PROGRAMS LIKE THIS ARE GOING TO MAKE IT (10,000 HOMES) HAPPEN... I'M DEFINITELY WILLING TO DO MY PART TO MAKE IT HAPPEN, AND A LOT OF OTHERS ARE TOO."

- ANDRE HARRIS

"NOW I GOTTA MAKE SURE I CAN DELIVER."

- ANDRE HARRIS



Valencia Black moved in to the newly rehabbed Place of Grace on March 19.

No longer searching for a stable home, Valencia Black has settled in at Place of Grace

An abandoned 10-unit apartment complex gets new life from CAAP

BY ANDY GREENMAN

The corner of Cedar Avenue and 7th Street in the Bickford neighborhood was an eyesore for much of the past decade. A two-story, multi-colored brick apartment complex sat abandoned. Barbed wire atop a chain-link fence surrounded the property. On the roof, a series of satellite dishes pointed to the heavens, desiring the return of Soul Train. Boarded-up windows and overgrown trees gave little hope to this former anchor of its block.

Along 7th Street, Promise Development built a pair of homes adjacent to the apartment in 2013. The following year, Uptown Manor Senior Development, a 50-unit senior living facility, opened across the street. President Jimmy Carter joined Habitat for Humanity to fill in the block with a number of single-family homes. Even as new housing options appeared, the corner lot at 1051 7th Street continued to worsen.

In December 2020, the CRA purchased the apartment complex from out-of-state investors. In an attempt to revive this corner lot, the CRA issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to find a partner. The answer was nearby.

Across the street, Cocaine Alcohol Awareness Program (CAAP) had built and managed Uptown Manor. CAAP's Executive Director, Albert Richardson, contacted the CRA with ideas to bring new life to the corner.

"The CRA was anxious to make sure something beneficial to the community took place in that area," Richardson explained. "They opened their arms and formed a true partnership."



Place of Grace located at 1051 7th Street, completed construction in late 2025.



Before the CRA acquired it, the abandoned apartment was a source of blight in Bickford.

Photo courtesy of Integra Realty Resources

“Just because I stay in a shelter doesn’t mean I have to look like it.”

- VALENCIA BLACK

The CRA donated the land and building to CAAP. On October 17, 2023, Mayor Jim Strickland and Albert Richardson buried their gold shovels in dirt to celebrate the restoration of the building. Place of Grace was born.

SEARCHING FOR HAPPINESS

As construction progressed, the neighborhood watched. Valencia Black, a financial counselor for Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, passed by nearly every day to visit her mother. She watched as bricks were laid, windows replaced, and staircases reconstructed. She didn’t have to look far because her mother, Patricia, was living right next door at Uptown Manor.

Commuting across the city to aid her mother with laundry, meal preparation, and cleaning began to take a toll on Valencia. Stress began to build as Valencia became overworked. The pressure added to the depression and anxiety she’s carried since her husband, Roosevelt Jr., died of a heart attack in 2015.

Although she has maintained a 12-year career at Le Bonheur, Valencia has been unable to find a long-term residence. She spent a year at the Hospitality Hub in Orange Mound, followed by a stint with her sister. On June 11, 2025, she signed a lease with the Salvation Army Women’s Shelter, where she lived in a shared space with three others. She inspired many with her charming appearance, shiny jewelry, and delightful scent.

“Just because I stay in a shelter doesn’t mean I have to look like it,” she insisted.

Throughout the moving around, Valencia says her colleagues were unaware of her housing situation. Her dedication to helping others and maintaining a professional appearance disguised her personal challenges.



Outside supermarkets, Valencia Black enjoyed ringing the bell and meeting shoppers while raising money for the Salvation Army Women’s Shelter in November 2025.



CAAP Executive Director receives support at the Place of Grace ribbon cutting

Valencia was spending upwards of \$200 on Uber rides to and from work on the weekends alone. The loss of her husband still weighed heavily, and last year, she suffered a mild stroke.

“As the years go by, I think it will get better, but it doesn’t go anywhere,” she grumbled, referring to her depression. “Even though all this is going on, I still keep moving.”

With months left on her lease at the Women’s Shelter, Valencia was again searching for a place to live. A low credit score didn’t help. She couldn’t afford units that required a deposit equal to three times the monthly rent. That’s when she inquired about the building across the street from her mom. She applied and put her faith in the Lord.

THE LUCK OF THE PART-IRISH

Valencia and her husband, Roosevelt, who was part Irish, celebrated St. Patrick’s Day each year. Each year, he would circle the spring holiday on the calendar and decorate their home, treating it as his own Christmas. Since his passing, those memories have brought sadness to Valencia. But this March 17th was different.

The phone rang. An employee from CAAP was on the other end and said ‘Come get your keys. Give us your deposit, and you’re in.’

“It was a chill that had gone through me. Wow, God has answered my prayers once again,” she beamed.

Two days later, Valencia received her keys and became one of the first tenants in the renovated complex.

A few weeks later, we got our first look inside her apartment. Books were stacked on the living room floor, the top few by her favorite author, Joyce Meyer. She’s been sleeping on an inflatable bed until she finds a mattress. A shiny stainless-steel fridge completes the kitchen. Soon, she hopes to arrange the books to make room for a sectional couch and a plush rug. A couch to spread out on and watch scary movies.

“I am going to make this apartment fabulous. I want to make it a home,” she gushed.

“It was a chill that had gone through me. Wow, God has answered my prayers once again.”

- VALENCIA BLACK

Valencia no longer needs to commute across town to assist her mother. With more time, she plans to focus on her health and well-being. Her daughter and two grandchildren are eager to visit, and her mother now lives just steps away. Although there is still much to do, at 58, Valencia feels a renewed sense of hope.

“I love it, the space I have here. I’m at peace.”



CAAP Executive Director Albert Richards, middle, leads the way during the ribbon cutting on December 19, 2025.

PLACE OF GRACE

Following a ribbon-cutting on December 19, 2025, the 10-unit Place of Grace filled to capacity. The 600 sq. ft. units are available to seniors 55+ with incomes below 60% of AMI. The addition of an elevator has made every unit ADA accessible. Coin-free laundry is available on the main floor. CAAP also provides transportation for health and social services events, such as dental appointments and doctor visits.

Albert states that the title Place of Grace is something that “was welcoming, that had a purpose to give an opportunity to individuals who traditionally wouldn’t have one. The ability to live in affordable, long-term housing that is different from what you’d find in the city for that particular population. And we were able to accomplish that with the help of those funders.”

Partnerships with the Memphis Housing Authority, the CRA, and Housing and Community Development helped this project reach completion.

This rehabilitation is a milestone for residents of Bearwater. Seniors can exercise along the Washington Park loop, catch live music at the Grind City Amp, and someday cycle all the way to Shelby Farms via a future Chelsea Greenline connection. Albert is thrilled at the trajectory of North Memphis.

“It’s been amazing growth. We still have a lot to do, but it’s amazing when you look at 10 years ago.” ▲

“It’s been amazing growth. We still have a lot to do, but it’s amazing when you look at 10 years ago.”

- ALBERT RICHARDSON



The site at 165 Chelsea Avenue has housed a variety of businesses, such as an auto repair shop, a gas station, and a laundromat.

\$500,000 TDEC Grant will aid remediation efforts at former commercial corner

BY CRA STAFF

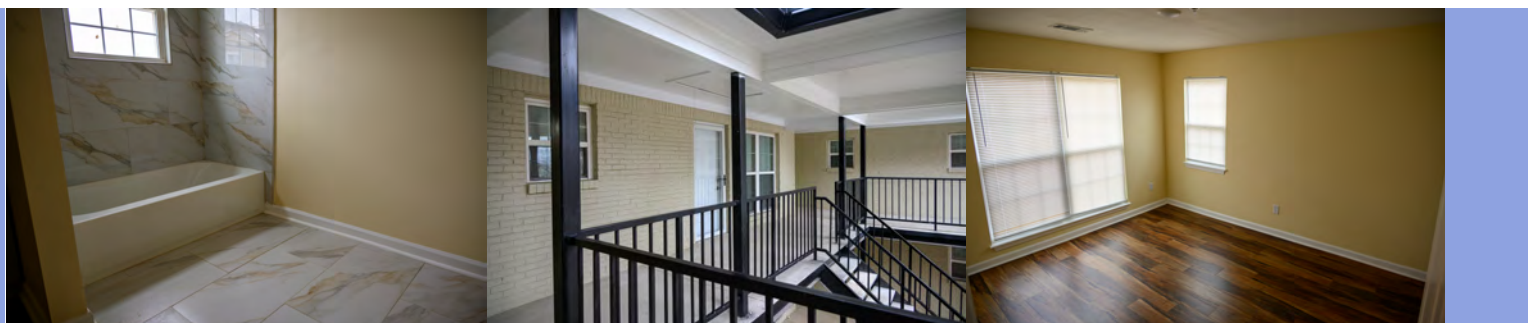
CRA was recently awarded \$500,000 from the Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation (TDEC) through the Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grant (BRAG) program to aid remediation efforts at a key site in Uptown. At the corner of 2nd & Chelsea, plans for a multi-family residential development are hindered

by contamination from petroleum and cleaning solvents likely leftover from past businesses like an auto repair shop and gas station.

In the coming months, CRA will release procurement requests for a qualified environmental consultant and remediation contractor to remove the contaminated

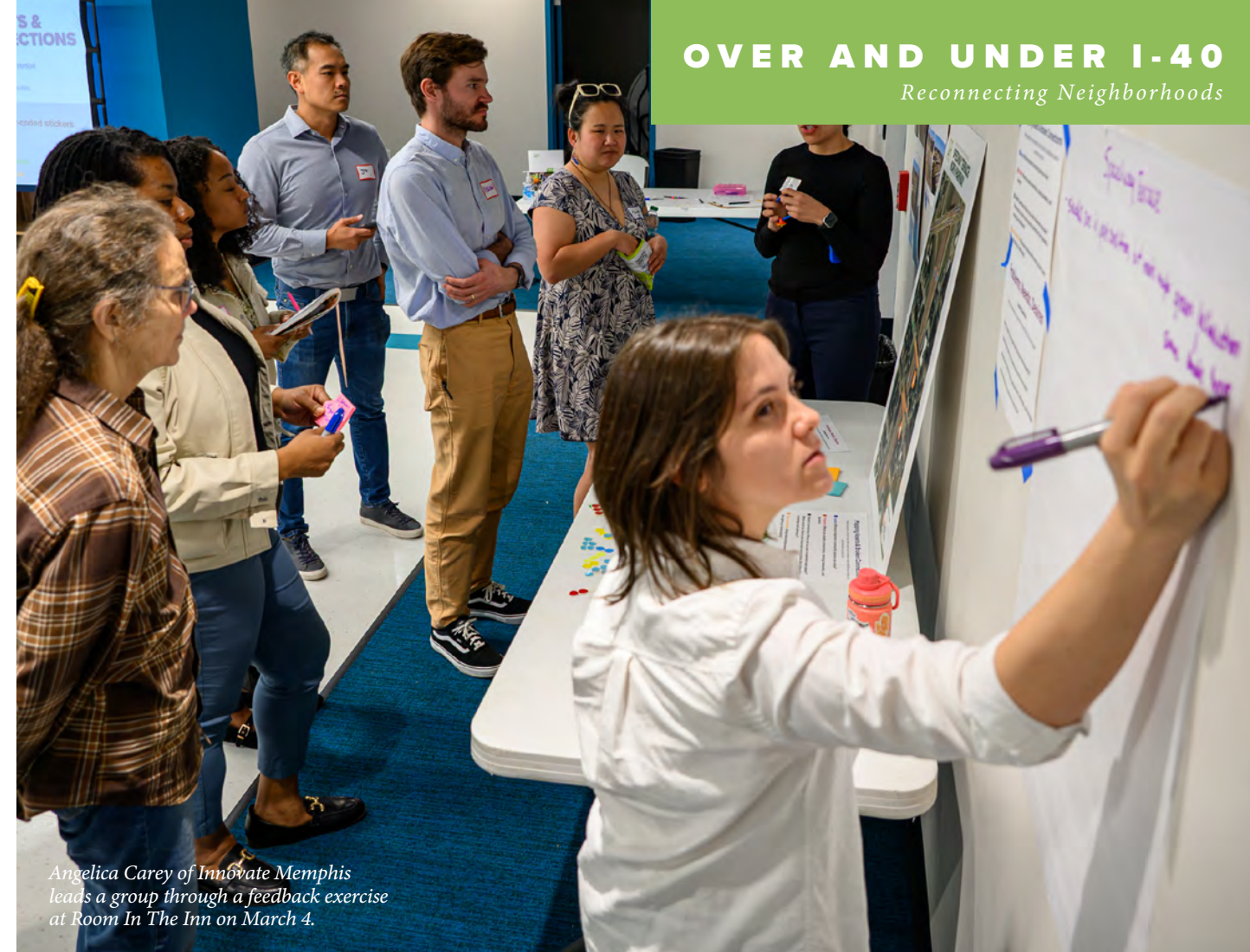
soil from 165 Chelsea. CRA Brownfield Project Manager Emma Turri shared her optimism about how the project is moving forward.

“We’re excited to move forward, start cleaning up this site, and partner with Nickson Development to bring new housing to the Uptown Neighborhood.” ▲





Nature has taken over a former truck terminal at 854 Heiskell Place.



Angelica Carey of Innovate Memphis leads a group through a feedback exercise at Room In The Inn on March 4.

200 Potential Brownfield Sites Identified by the CRA

BY EMMA TURRI

As a member of the Memphis Brownfield Coalition, the CRA has been working diligently over the last couple of years to identify and perform environmental assessments on key sites in the Urban Core of Memphis. These assessments alleviate some of the uncertainty around redevelopment potential and inform re-use strategies for sites that are often vacant and blighted. With assistance from resident liaisons and community stakeholders, the CRA has identified over 200 potential brownfield parcels and prioritized over 20 of those

based on redevelopment potential. Utilizing grant funding from the US EPA, CRA's pool of environmental consultants have performed 14 Phase 1 ESAs in the last two years. By the end of the grant period in 2027, CRA plans to have performed Phase 2 ESA sampling on another 6 sites to inform design and engineering plans for a variety of projects, many focused on affordable housing.

The next Advisory Council meeting will take place at 1300 Jackson Ave. on June 16th, 2026 at 1:00 PM. The public is welcome to join. ▲

PHASE 1 ENVIRONMENTAL SITE ASSESSMENTS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED AT 14 SITES

- 0 Vance Ave
- 165 Chelsea Ave
- 179 Keel Ave
- 274 E Tillman St
- 544 Jackson Ave
- 560 E. Trigg
- 659 N Manassas St
- 677 N Fifth St
- 854 Heiskell Pl
- 901 Chelsea Ave
- 981 Peach Ave
- 1344 Jackson Ave
- 1727 Lamar Ave
- 2799 Harvard Ave

DOWNLOAD REPORTS AT
CRAMEMPHIS.ORG/BROWNFIELD



WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

Tell us how to improve crossings
Over And Under I-40 by
completing a survey at
bit.ly/4cDzyqb.



Feedback Needed to Make Over And Under I-40 Safer

BY EMMA TURRI

In March, CRA and Innovate Memphis held two community feedback sessions to start forming the basis for a plan to improve intersections crossing Over And Under I-40 in North Memphis. The Reconnecting Communities grant awarded to CRA by the US DOT in 2024 seeks to create a plan and designs that prioritize enhancements to interstate underpasses like Vollintine Ave and pedestrian bridges like the walkway at Keel Ave. The community workshops brought forth several recommendations such as

repairing sidewalks, creating public art, and adding wayfinding signage. Incorporating this feedback, the CRA will engage a team of designers and engineers to draft conceptual drawings and finalize construction documents. The goal is to apply for additional funding in the future to implement realistic improvements that help reconnect residents and businesses in several North Memphis neighborhoods including New Chicago, Smokey City, Klondike, North Parkway-Forest, and the Medical District. ▲



A member of Express Water Works & Lawncare clears litter and vegetation from Leath Bayou on April 1, 2026.

Leath Bayou springs back to life after cleanup

BY KENNY HALT

Following work by the City of Memphis to clear portions of the Leath Bayou near Manassas High School, lifelong North Memphian "Big" Tony Henderson shared childhood stories of regularly traversing the Leath Bayou (most of which is underground) as a shortcut to Washington Park.

When CRA contractor Express Water Works & Lawncare began clearing above-ground sections of a New Chicago bayou, we were pretty sure it wasn't going to come with any similar, terrifying stories of children navigating underground drainage tunnels to cut a few minutes off their walk to the park. That seemed like something Big Tony was exclusively doing in the 1970s. Plus, this bayou's tunnels appear much shorter. Nope, didn't matter. A lifelong New Chicago resident named William was more than happy to tell us that when he was a kid, he'd travel over two miles underground in this bayou to get to the Memphis Zoo back in the day.

DISCLAIMER: For anyone considering making such a journey, the CRA's official stance is that those tunnels don't take you anywhere and that there are man-eating monsters down there.

While we do not encourage using bayous for travel, Tony and William's stories are important. Not only are those stories part of their communities' history, but they also illustrate this particular water drainage and bayou system is far more complex and extensive than you would

ever imagine.

As Express valiantly made their way through the brush that had enveloped the bayou running through 1077 and 1083 Chicago Ave., they uncovered everything you could imagine — coolers, car parts, tires, food, cans, CDs, tree trunks, and the front door to a house. The reality is that while some of this debris was dumped directly into this section of the bayou, much of it likely traveled here after being dumped upstream in the drainage system.

Express has done more than just beautify this section of the bayou. It opened up an increasingly clogged portion of critical infrastructure. We don't want to think about what the downpours this spring could've done to our neighbors' homes if it weren't for their hard work.

Express owners Zachary & Yvetta Bright are far from done. They are one of three landscapers selected as the first cohort of the CRA's newly launched Lot Maintenance Accelerator Program. The accelerator transforms non-buildable CRA properties into vibrant community spaces. It provides community-focused, locally owned small businesses with a canvas to create a "living portfolio" that showcases the full breadth of their skill set to potential clients. Clearing the bayou is the first step in this program, and it's Bright's mission to turn Bayou intersecting properties on Chicago Avenue into something you may have never previously imagined.

Keep your eyes peeled for updates on this



At Collage Dance Collective in Binghamton, Elena has built strong friendships and enjoys watching dancers grow. She also serves on the Binghamton TIF Advisory Committee.

Elena Maverick

Operations Director, Collage Dance

Explain your relationship to Binghamton

Since 2021, I have had the privilege of working at the Collage Dance Center, located in the Binghamton community on the corner of Tillman and Sam Cooper. By partnering with local organizations, hosting community events, and engaging in neighborhood initiatives, Collage Dance is deeply integrated into the fabric of Binghamton, serving not just as a location, but as an active partner in the community's ecosystem.

What do you enjoy most about this neighborhood?

What I enjoy most about the Binghamton neighborhood is that it truly embodies the idea of loving thy neighbor. The residents are deeply compassionate and look out for one another in countless ways.

What CRA work interests you the most?

The CRA work that interests me the most is the Single Family Home Rehabilitation program. This program administers funds to homeowners for residential repairs and renovations to keep homes safe, warm, and dry. This program is right in line with the supportive and helping nature of the Binghamton residents and community. By supporting critical repairs, this initiative perfectly aligns with the community-focused and resilient spirit of Binghamton residents, fostering long-term stability and neighborhood pride.

How do you see Binghamton in 10 years?

I see a 10-year future for Binghamton that balances progress with pride. By combining intentional, resident-driven development with partners who are truly committed to being part of this community. Ensuring that Binghamton thrives while keeping its soul.