

# Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area Annual Report

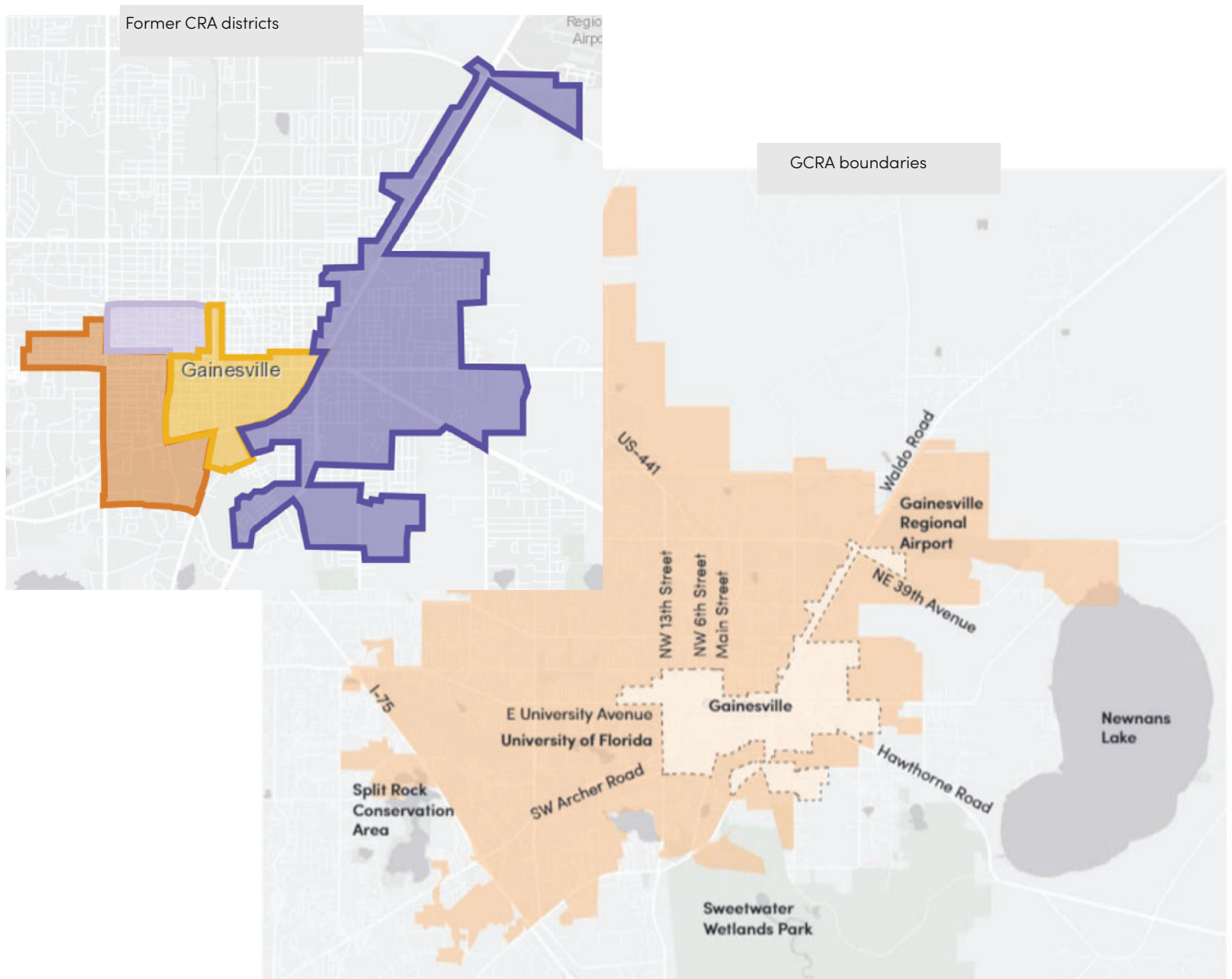
**G C R A**  
**2023**



# About the GCRA

The Gainesville Community Reinvestment Areas (GCRA) was formerly known as the Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) set forth by the City of Gainesville, by the authority of Sections 163.330-163.45, Florida Statutes. On October 1, 2019, through the adoption of Ordinance 181001 the CRA was dissolved and the GCRA was created. The GCRA reports to the Office of the City Manager, it is governed by the City Commission, and guided by a citizen advisory board. Under the new structure, the GCRA operates in a single district with a set budget for ten years.

The City of Gainesville and Alachua County Commissions wished to create a solution that would address local issues and also insulate the CRA from future state legislative mandates. The local solution was reached through the restructuring and renaming of the agency.

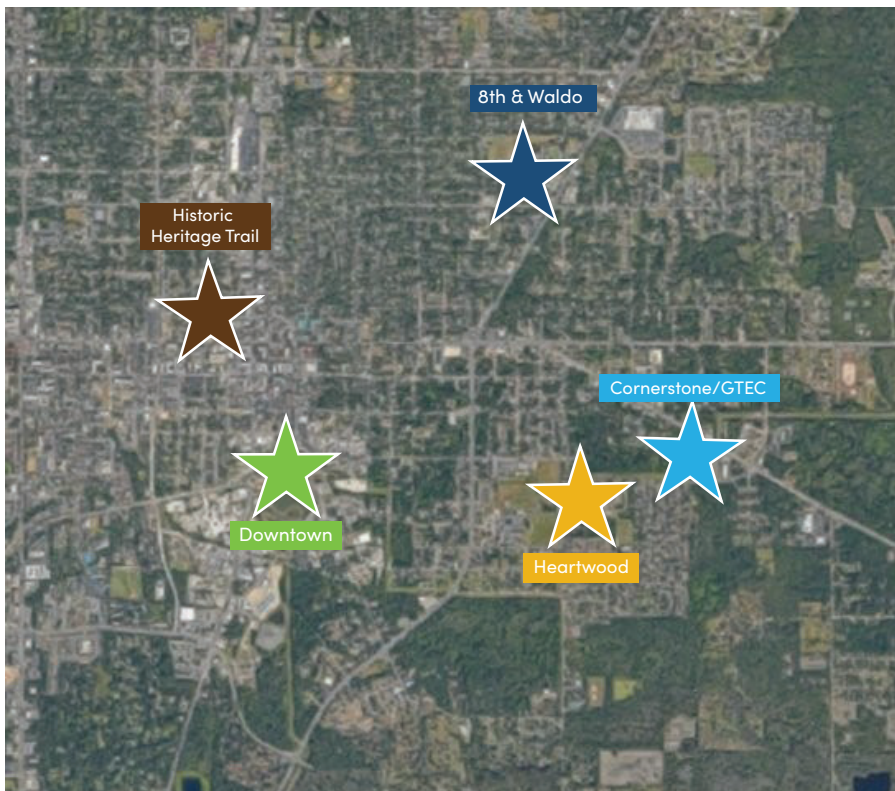


# Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area

## 2023 Annual Report

The GCRA continues with the backing of Alachua County to make strides in advancing its major projects while ensuring that its smaller projects continue to provide support to local citizens and businesses. The collaborative efforts that took root in FY22 with other departments on the GCRA's transformational capital projects has accelerated in FY23. Each of the transformational projects are listed below with their respective planned budgets through FY29, note that these are total planned funds and are not the available funds as of FY23.

### Transformational Projects



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

#### Project Budgets (FY20-29)

Cornerstone/GTEC	\$26.7 million	Heartwood Neighborhood	\$6.2 million
8th Avenue & Waldo	\$14 million		
Downtown Plan	\$12.2 million	Historic Heritage Trail	\$2.3 million

**8th Avenue and Waldo Road**

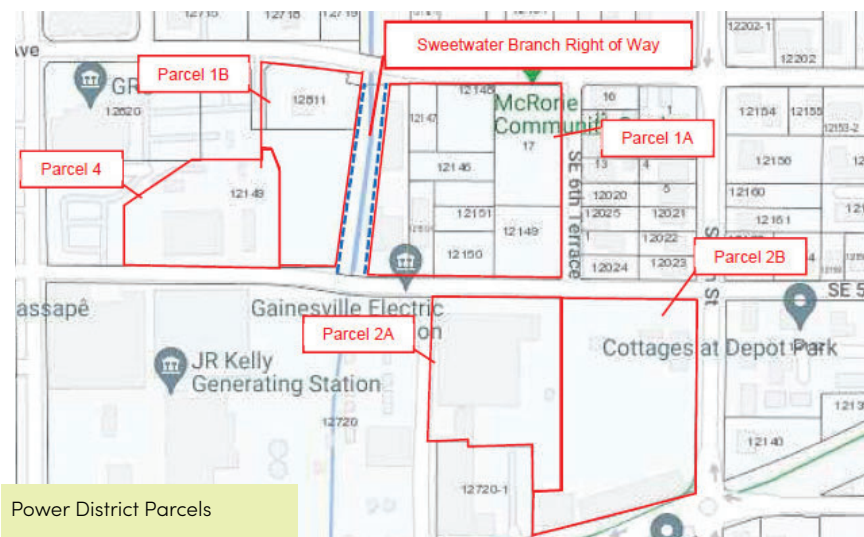
Following the approved expansion of the GCRA boundary to include the entire 36-acre NE 8th Avenue and Waldo Road site, the GCRA worked with the City’s Parks Recreation and Cultural Affairs Department to fund a feasibility and traffic study that was to examine renovations and potential changes to the site. The feasibility study was conducted by CH Johnson. As part of the study, two community engagement events were held in July, and a draft report was submitted to the City in September.



- A - Citizen’s Field
- B - Dwight H. Hunter Pool
- C - Martin Luther King Jr. Multipurpose Center
- D - Gainesville Fire Rescue Station #3
- E - Multipurpose Field
- F - Skate Park

**Power District**

Work on the **Power District** continued in coordination with GRU and culminated in June of 2023 with the City Commission directing the following: 1) Parcelize the Power District property into the proposed redevelopment parcels, 2) Update zoning and land use to reflect 2023 Power District Concept Plan, 3) Solicit request for bid for the Power District parcels, and 4) Reallocate the remaining GCRA Power District funding to the Downtown Strategic Plan implementation. The GCRA paid for Emerson Appraisal to provide an up-to-date appraisal.



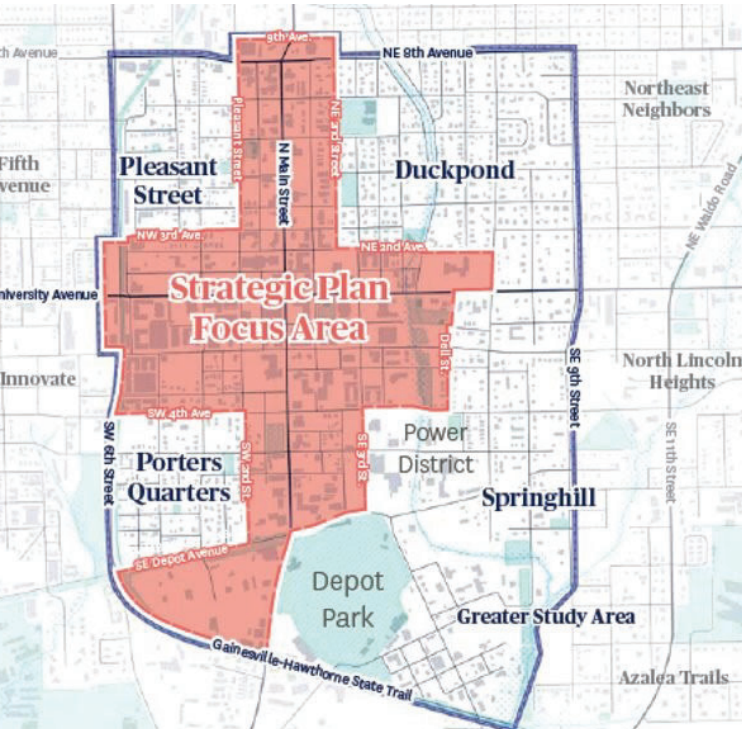
Power District Parcels

**Former Fire Station #1**

City leadership, in consultation with the GCRA, decided to list the property for sale to allow for future private activation of the property.

## Downtown Strategic Plan

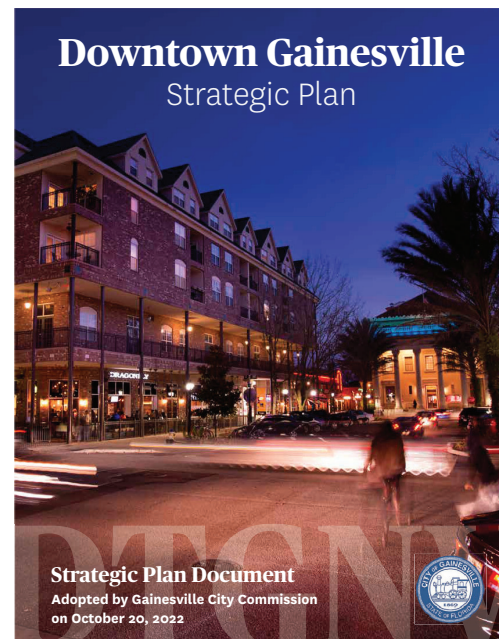
The GCRA Plan also called for creating a “Downtown Master Plan” (later renamed “Downtown Strategic Plan”). GCRA funding was used to hire MKSK who developed the plan between June 2021 and August 2022. The City Commission adopted the “Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan” (“Downtown Plan”) in October 2022. The Downtown Plan subsequently received a “Downtown Achievement Award of Excellence” in the summer of 2023 from the International Development Association for Planning, Design, and Infrastructure.



The vision of the Downtown Plan is expressed through the following goals.

- **Become a Destination** by building investments around local strengths; shaping downtown identity and creating a downtown jewel.
- **Connect the Dots** by balancing the automobile with the pedestrian; bringing streets up to city standards; activating the Sweetwater corridor and creating a greenway loop.
- **Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods** by connecting neighborhoods to downtown and establishing transition areas.
- **Increase Housing Opportunities** by addressing housing opportunities at scale; supporting affordable mixed-use housing; and facilitating market-rate housing.
- **Create a Supportive Local Business Environment** by unlocking real estate potential and increasing direct small business assistance.
- **Maintain and Enhance Downtown** by forming a place-based management organization and continuing to build capacity.

The GCRA funded the award-winning **Downtown Strategic Plan** in FY22, and FY23 saw the continuation of GCRA’s collaboration with the Department of Sustainable Development, examining different Downtown administration models. The GCRA’s efforts are focused on data gathering, community engagement, and analysis that will be used to further downtown activation efforts. City leadership held a retreat to discuss next steps and included listening sessions and a walking tour of the proposed Streatery and Sweetwater Park. One of the identified needs is a safe connection between Sweetwater Park and Depot Park. The retreat also focused on Downtown Management Organizations and focused on implementations of the initiatives in Jacksonville, Miami, Columbus, and Louisville.



### Cornerstone Phase 1

GTEC and Merieux comprise two built-out lots of the six original lots of the Cornerstone Campus. The GCRA presented to the City Commission planned renovations for the interior and exterior of GTEC, beginning with a replacement of its roof scheduled in FY24. The interior planned renovations as proposed by Walker Architects will allow GTEC to fully implement policies and procedures developed for GTEC by Greenwood Consulting. The GCRA hired a GTEC Manager in FY23 to manage GTEC and continue its development as a premier entrepreneurial incubation center. The GCRA continues to work with SF College as a partner in programming for GTEC.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Proposed Fire Station #3



Proposed RTS Transfer Station



Proposed UF Clinic

### Cornerstone Phase 2

This initiative began in fiscal year 2022 and currently encompasses the collaboration between Alachua County, the City of Gainesville, the federal Transit Authority, the Federal Department of Treasury (ARPA funds), and UF Health. In 2023, the GCRA funded the purchase of an additional property that allowed for the interconnection of the EHEDI site and the City's existing Cornerstone property, which expanded the site to approximately 35 acres. The interconnectedness will allow for the construction of the roadway that will connect Hawthorne Road to SE 8th Avenue and the Cornerstone property. The GCRA contracted with CHW, a local engineering firm, to provide site and roadway development plans. UF Health held a virtual groundbreaking for the new UF Health urgent care center being built at EHEDI. The building is being constructed with two \$2.25 million disbursements from the City of Gainesville and Alachua County of ARPA funds. Planning continues for the onsite \$4.1 million build-out of the Federal Department of Transportation grant-funded Regional Transit Services transfer station.

**Former RTS Site Redevelopment**

The City received an unsolicited proposal for redevelopment of the site by the Knot Climbing gym. The City instructed staff to post a solicitation for redevelopment of the site with an appraisal and due diligence to be conducted. An Invitation to Negotiate was issued on July 18, 2023, and closed on August 11, 2023, with the sole respondents being the Florida Music Hall of Fame and the Knot Climbing Gym. An evaluation committee comprised of the City Manager’s office, GCRA staff, and the Department of Transportation evaluated the responses and provided to City leadership a recommendation to select the Knot Climbing



Proposed Knot Climbing Gym development

**Public Space & Streetscape**

The GCRA continued to support efforts to revitalize and promote safety through improvements along public spaces and streetscapes. Along **East University Avenue** and **SE Hawthorne Road** the GCRA contracted to replace street banners with the local company Kevin Jeffers providing them and hanging them. The GCRA also continued work in revitalizing the Eastside Gateway where **East University Avenue** and **SE Hawthorne Road** split. The City used \$1.4 million in GCRA funds to provide a match for the **University Avenue** corridor improvements to improve pedestrian safety.



SE Hawthorne Road street banners

The GCRA, through its **Community Enhancements Programs**, continued to assist residents within its boundaries with its Heirs Property Assistance program, Home Energy and Water Efficiency Initiative, My Neighborhood grant program, Neighborhood Grant program, Business Improvement Grant program, Community Partnership program, and Model Block and Attainable Housing Initiatives. The GCRA, throughout the year, reviews its Programs and, this year, brought to the City Commission for approval improvements for the Heirs Property Assistance, My Neighborhood Grant, and Neighborhood Paint programs. All three of the programs included a new component that detailed metrics for measuring the success of the programs.



### **Model Block and Attainable Housing Initiatives**

The City of Gainesville has owned the lot at 414 NW 5th Avenue, in Pleasant Street, and the lot at 405 SW 5th Avenue in the Porters Quarters neighborhood. In 2021 and 2022, GCRA staff developed a framework for the potential development of the property, called the Building Blocks Plan, through a series of community engagement events, interviews, and surveys. The Building Blocks plan was presented to the Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area (GCRA) Advisory Board at its February 21, 2023 meeting. The board directed staff to seek more input from both the Pleasant Street and Porters Quarters communities and to develop a more concrete plan.

Community voices predominantly expressed a desire for single-family homes, in harmony with the neighborhood's character, catering to both past and current residents. To address housing shortages and prevent gentrification, the GCRA enlisted DAG Architects for a two-phase approach (Design and Construction Documents), focusing on 1-2 unit developments on approximately 1/3-acre lots in both neighborhoods. DAG's evaluation will consider setback requirements, site features, and community feedback, with the GCRA budget influencing the scale. Drawing inspiration from the Model Block Infill Project, the initiative aims to seamlessly integrate residential units, enhancing natural, historical, and economic characteristics while respecting the neighborhood's unique context.



The **Heartwood** neighborhood is a 34-unit subdivision located on 15 acres at 1717 SE 8th Avenue and is on the former Kennedy Homes site. The mixed income neighborhood is comprised of eleven affordable Dreams to Reality residences with the rest being Showcase lots sold to the buyer to contract with one of two builders and Market Rate where the City builds the home and sells it.



Heartwood aerial taken by private citizen July 2023

Heartwood continues to be the premier city-led housing development project, welcoming new and returning residents to Gainesville home ownership. In October 2022, Heartwood hosted a construction and beam signing event attended by residents of the community, and City and County leadership. Heartwood had fifteen homes completed with residents moving in (nine homes were Dreams to Reality, five were Showcase homes, and one was a GCRA-funded market Rate home). The City Commission directed that eleven homes in the neighborhood be designated as Dreams to Reality homes. Up to \$70,000 was made available to Dreams to Reality homeowners from GCRA and Housing and Development programs to assist in making the homes more affordable without sacrificing their quality. Future residents can also purchase Showcase home lots where they can decide which of eleven home blueprints they wish to construct and contract with one of two approved builders to build them. The GCRA-funded market rate homes are built two at a time on open lots within Heartwood and then are listed for sale to home buyers. The market rate model was undertaken to make it easier for home buyers to purchase the homes with a regular mortgage.



Heartwood Beam Signing Ceremony



Sold Home in Heartwood

### Heirs Property Assistance Program

The purpose of this program is to improve neighborhood stability by growing individual wealth and access to property ownership by assisting in the clearing of property titles for the heirs. The program has been updated this fiscal year to assist with estate planning and financial assistance for overdue residential property tax bills after successfully probating the property through the program. Assisted 7 recipients in resolving Heirs' ownership claims out of 8 applications for the fiscal year.

### Home Energy and Water Efficiency initiative

The purpose of this program is to encourage safe, well-designed, high-quality housing to support the existing housing stock that provides housing options for long-term homeowners and renters. The program accomplishes this by partnering with the Community Weatherization Coalition to perform home energy tune-ups for renters and homeowners within the GCRA boundary.

Assisted 66 residents with weatherization efforts to lower their utility bills.



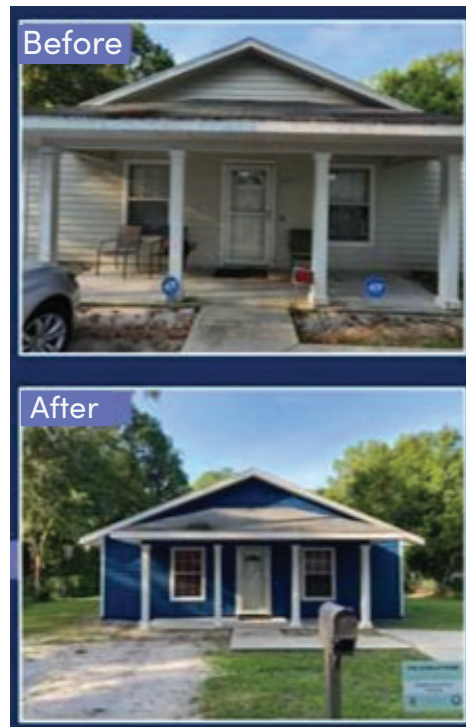
### My Neighborhood Grant Program

The purpose of the program is to encourage strong community connections by incentivizing long-term homeownership within neighborhoods. This program provides for community members who lived in Cedar Grove II, Greater Duval, Fifth Avenue, North Lincoln Heights, Pleasant Street, Porters, Springhill, Sugarhill, and just added in FY23 Heartwood (formerly Kennedy Homes) for at least three years prior to 2011. The program has been updated to offer up to \$35,000 towards the purchase of a vacant developable lot or a residential home in an eligible neighborhood. New home purchases within the Fifth Avenue or Pleasant Street neighborhoods qualify for up to \$50,000 of assistance.

### Neighborhood Paint Program

The purpose of the Neighborhood Paint program is to improve the exterior of homes within eligible neighborhoods located within the GCRA boundary by repainting them at no cost to income eligible residents. The program was modified in FY23 due to the increase in costs associated with painting homes. The homeowner agrees to not alter the finished project for a period of five years. The GCRA will have the ability to require a pro-rated amount of the painting funds repaid to the GCRA if the homeowner performs a non-approved alteration or fails to maintain the work done.

The GCRA painted 45 homes in FY23 out of 53 requests. Of these requests, 22 were approved applications from FY22, and 23 were approved applications from FY23 (7 lived outside of the required area, and one applicant's home was rejected due to concern pressure washing the home would damage it).



### Community Partnership Grant Program

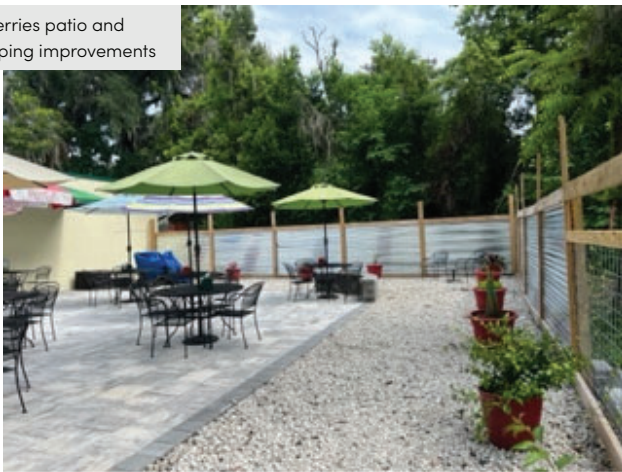
The purpose of the program is to assist local community organizations by providing grant funds to support arts and cultural initiatives, cultural celebration, racial healing/justice, recovery and resiliency, neighborhood improvements, and encourage economic development. The events must be free and open to the public.

The program approved grants to six community organizations in FY23, totaling \$20,000 out of nine organizations that expressed interest in the program. The events approved were the Fifth Avenue Arts and Cultural Festival, East Gainesville Backyard BBQ, Hippodrome’s 50th anniversary, the Flying Pig Parade, the Pride Community Center of North Central Florida, and Sarah’s Sweetwater Greenway Gathering.



Flying Pig Parade Community Partnership Grant recipient

Sweetberries patio and landscaping improvements



Sublime Taco renovation on Waldo Raod

Three businesses participated in the **Business Improvement Grant Program** in FY23.

GCRA Investment	<b>\$68,000</b>
Public Investment	<b>\$149,000</b>
Total Investment	<b>\$217,000</b>

### Business Improvement Grant Program

The purpose of the Business Improvement Grant program is to encourage private investment in making significant improvements to building exteriors. The improvements are to return public benefits such as enhanced corridor aesthetics, improved pedestrian comfort, and public safety. The program is a 50 percent matching grant program that pays recipients after all approved work is complete and after review and confirmation that their vendors were paid. Additionally, a five-year easement is placed on the property where the GCRA, must approve any changes to the improvements or the recipient is required to pay back a pro-rated amount. The GCRA updated the program in FY23 to allow tenants of City-owned properties to apply for the program.

Sixteen entities expressed interest in FY23, with three companies completing applications that were approved under the program. The three applicants were DA Joyce Builders, Sweetberries, and Sublime Taco.

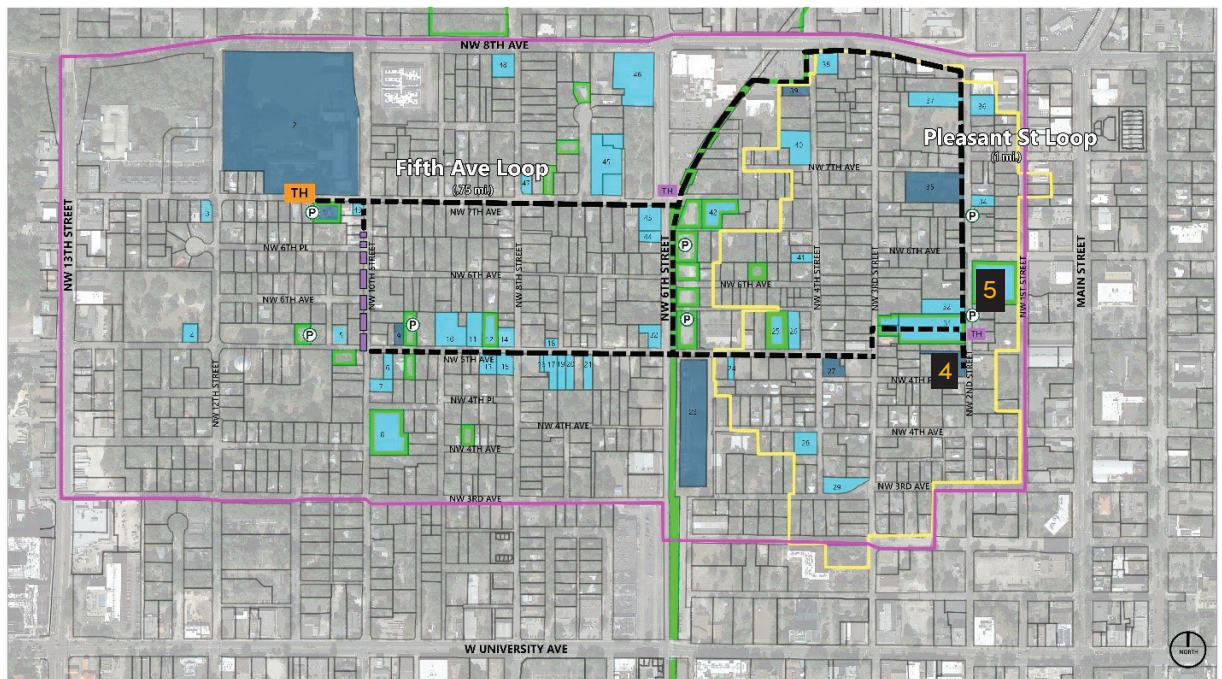
**Historic Heritage Trail - Fifth Avenue / Pleasant Street**

The Heritage Trail will celebrate the people, places, and events to the historic African American Fifth Avenue and Pleasant Street communities.

The project is a signature component of the GCRA's 10-Year Reinvestment Plan. The trail travels through neighborhoods that are symbolic in Gainesville of civil rights struggles and is uniquely its own while being reflective of other similar communities in the Southeast. It is envisioned as a system of physical markers and locations that identify significant people, achievements, history, and cultural knowledge within key historic African American neighborhoods. The purpose of the project is to provide trail visitors with information about the area, leading to heightened awareness and appreciation of the history of these communities.

The GCRA put out an Invitation to Negotiate in FY23, and Community Planning Collaborative was selected by the evaluation committee and approved by the City Commission on September 21, 2023. The GCRA also worked with the City's Public Works department to cost estimate bringing the trail infrastructure up to ADA compliance.

**COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENTS  
& HOUSING**



- 1 - Old Lincoln High School
- 2 - A. Quinn Jones Museum
- 3 - Old Greather Bethel Church
- 4 - Friendship Baptist Church
- 5 - Rosa B. Williams Center

# 2023 Financials\*

<b>BALANCE SHEET</b>	<b>Eastside</b>	<b>Fifth Avenue Pleasant Street</b>	<b>Downtown</b>	<b>College Park University Heights</b>	<b>GCRA Fund</b>
Total Assets	\$55,883	\$211,655	\$2,048,737	\$4,197,545	\$20,714,280
Total Liabilities	\$1,250	\$14,389	\$18,257	\$1,000	\$246,692
Total Fund Balance	\$54,633	\$197,265	\$2,030,480	\$4,196,545	\$20,467,588
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$55,883</b>	<b>\$211,655</b>	<b>\$2,048,737</b>	<b>\$4,197,545</b>	<b>\$20,714,280</b>

\*The figures on this page are the unaudited financials. The audited financials will be posted at [www.gainesvillecra.com](http://www.gainesvillecra.com) once they are available.

## Special Thanks

### FY 2023 GCRA Advisory Board

Jason Mitchell (Chair)  
 Joakim "Jay" Nordqvist (Vice Chair)  
 Davonda Brown  
 Evelyn Foxx  
 Heather Kates  
 Joakim "Jay" Nordqvist  
 Jacob Ihde  
 Kali Blount  
 Sarah Erikson

### FY 2023 Gainesville City Commission

Harvey Ward, Mayor  
 Desmon Duncan-Walker, Mayor-Pro Tempore, District I  
 Commissioner  
 Ed Book, District II Commissioner  
 Casey Willits, District III Commissioner  
 Bryan Eastman, District IV Commissioner,  
 Cynthia Chestnut, At-Large Commissioner  
 Reina Saco, At-Large Commissioner

### Alachua Board of County Commissioners

Anna Prizzia, Chair, District 1 Commissioner  
 Marihelen Wheeler, Vice Chair, District 2 Commissioner  
 Mary Alford, Vice-Chair, District 3 Commissioner  
 Ken Cornell, Chair, District 4 Commissioner  
 Charles "Chuck" Chestnut, IV, District 5 Commissioner

### GCRA Leadership

Cynthia W. Curry, City Manager  
 Philip R. Mann, Interim GCRA Director

**Prepared For**



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