

# PLANNING

so, we've been  
working on a  
master plan  
for hamtramck.

hammertrammic?

the city of  
hamtramck. it's  
an independent  
municipality  
completely  
surrounded by  
the city of  
detroit.

huh. like the  
hole in a donut?

not at all!



**HAMTRAMCK**

**DETROIT**

SPECIAL SECTION: NATIONAL PLANNING AWARDS

TAKING THE STING OUT OF GENTRIFICATION

NEW LONDON AFTER KELO

THE MILITARY LINES UP FOR NET ZERO

# A Game Changer

AUGUSTA, GEORGIA, IS PRIMARILY KNOWN AS THE HOME OF BOTH SOUL icon James Brown and the Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club. But it's also making its mark as a progressive city with a passion and a plan for reclaiming its most historic neighborhoods.

The Laney Walker/Bethlehem Revitalization Initiative is at the center of that new face for the city. It is working to eliminate blight, preserve African American heritage sites and historic architecture, and build 580 single- and multifamily units, a third of those targeted for seniors, students, and low-income residents. This long-term and ongoing effort to rebuild a community is one of two recipients of the HUD Secretary's Opportunity and Empowerment Award.

Even though both the Laney Walker and Bethlehem neighborhoods are listed on the National Register of Historic Districts, the once thriving community, in the heart of downtown Augusta, declined in the 1970s and '80s. By the 1990s the population dwindled, crime rose, and buildings crumbled. At the start of the project 70 percent of the area's properties were blighted.

Community leaders recognized that investments in the city's future must address inner-city quality of life, and in 2008 the Augusta-Richmond County Commission passed a resolution to revitalize the area that would be funded, in part, by a \$1 per room per night hotel fee. The fee was leveraged to create bond funding that will amount to \$38.55 million over 50 years.

"We use those funds for land planning, acquisition, and gap financing," says Chester Wheeler III, director of the Augusta-Richmond County Housing and Community Development Department, the project's master developer. "We leverage the bond financing with HUD support—HOME funds, CDBG, NSP—plus additional grant monies and private investment. You've got to be extremely creative and open to different ideas in order to make a project of this magnitude work."

The city is collaborating with more than 30 partners in all, including 24 private development partners, community housing development organizations, area colleges and universities, local churches, nonprofit entities, and a banking consortium. In addition, the city offers down payment assistance and gap financing to home buyers.

APD Urban Planning and Management, a firm with offices in Augusta, served as the project manager. Its president, Jesse Wiles, notes that the first two and half years were devoted to planning: "working with the neighborhoods to create a vision, preparing a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan, developing an overall master plan, identifying six original priority development areas, and creating design and sustainability guidelines to shape the desired type of development."

The revitalized community will consist of mixed income, mixed tenure housing options built to an evolving mix of Energy Star, LEED, or Net-Zero standards. Other sustainable efforts include drought-resis-

tant native landscaping, rainwater collection strategies, use of permeable materials, and lighting that does not contribute to visual pollution. Several bus routes already serve the neighborhood, connecting it to a major medical center and downtown, and nine pocket parks greatly expand the green space available in the area's 1,100 acres.

The early successes in priority development areas have had a halo effect, attracting other companies to help build out other sections, Wiles says. Ongoing community meetings keep neighborhood residents and stakeholders involved and engaged, says Patty McIntosh, principal of Melaver McIntosh, whose firm directs the project's outreach effort.

Initially, there was some contention surrounding the project and skepticism about its chances of succeeding, but today its transformation is undeniable. The *Harvard Student Journal of Real Estate* calls the Laney Walker/Bethlehem Revitalization Initiative a "potentially game-changing model" of how the public and private sector might work collaboratively to revitalize the American city. "I think they nailed it," Wheeler agrees. ■

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In addition to housing, the revitalization also has delivered good jobs for local workers.