

STRENGTHENING BUSINESSES

**LAKELAND CRA**  
COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

**ANNUAL REPORT**

*Lakeland, FL*  
**2023**

NURTURING NEIGHBORHOODS

# Strengthening Businesses & Nurturing Neighborhoods

Lakeland's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), formed in 1979, is entrusted with responsibility for investing in the development of target areas of the city. In Lakeland, these are the Downtown, Dixieland, and Midtown districts. Through new development opportunities and private investment, the CRA helps Lakeland thrive.

Florida Law states a CRA's charge is to *“address blight, rehabilitate and preserve the community redevelopment areas, reduce crime, create affordable housing, and preserve and enhance the tax base. Redevelopment activities within the CRA generate benefits that are ultimately shared with the entire community.”*

This report provides an inside look at the benefits the CRA is delivering to residents. You'll find highlights of projects in each district, as well as dollars invested and revenues earned. The CRA's project funding comes from Tax Increment Revenues, or increased values and taxes for developed properties.

The Lakeland CRA Board is the Lakeland City Commission, who rely on the input of an Advisory Board representing each district. CRA staff members handle the daily operations and communications of the agency.

In 2023, the agency's focus was Strengthening Businesses and Nurturing Neighborhoods. You'll see in the following pages highlights of new business development, housing initiatives, and infrastructure upgrades to support district businesses and neighborhoods in Lakeland's Downtown, Dixieland, and Midtown districts.

The CRA started its mural program with 3 locations, and now has incentivized more than 20 art installations in Dixieland, Downtown and Midtown.

The CRA has contributed over \$5 million in incentives directly to more than 100 homeowners in Midtown (down payment assistance or residential rehab).

The Lakeland CRA was established in 1979, with its first District being Downtown.

The Lakeland CRA districts comprise 11% of the City of Lakeland total size.

CRA's can have multiple districts within them. The Lakeland CRA has 3 – Downtown, Dixieland and Midtown.

## Did You Know?

# CITY COMMISSIONION

Mayor **William “Bill” Mutz**  
Commissioner **Stephanie Madden**  
Commissioner **Sam Simmons**  
Commissioner **Sara Roberts McCarley**

Commissioner **Mike Musick**  
Commissioner **Bill Read**  
Commissioner **Chad McLeod**



# CRA ADVISORY BOARD

**Terry Coney** – Chair, Midtown  
**Chrissanne Long** – Vice Chair, Downtown  
**Tyler Zimmerman** – Dixieland  
**Katy Martinez** – Downtown  
**Christine Goding** – Dixieland  
**Jason Ellis** – Downtown  
**Ronald Roberts** – Midtown  
**Lynne Simpkins** – Midtown  
**Chad McLeod** – Commissioner



Welcome Commissioner  
**Guy LaLonde Jr.**



In Memoriam:  
**Harry Bryant**,  
former advisory board member,  
Midtown

**Special Thanks to former board members who served during reporting period:**

Brandon Eady, former chair, Downtown  
Frank Lansford, Midtown  
Teresa O'Brien, At Large



# Looking Back...

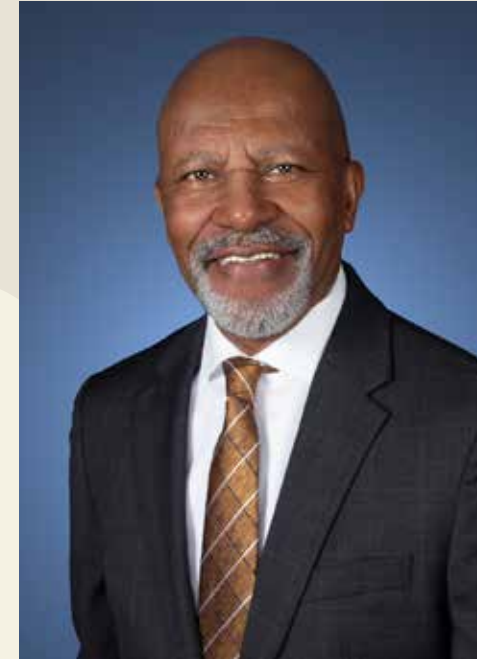
## Reflections from the past year



The Lakeland CRA fulfilled its Mission in 2023 by attaining significant project accomplishments in downtown planning, citing new area developments, launching a revolutionary software program for developers, enhancing project certainty, attracting minority investment funding, and creating a downtown west roundabout.

The impact does not stop there. In addition, three businesses received incentives to enhance existing properties, and some significant outreach events tightened relationships at both the corporate and citizen level. Lastly, an improved community policing strategy is now implemented underneath the beauty of midtown mini murals, and some incorporated FengShui. These crucial dollars continually provide incremental improvements in visible areas by making vital community enhancements. The CRA Team is an essential asset to our growing city.

*Mayor Bill Nutz*



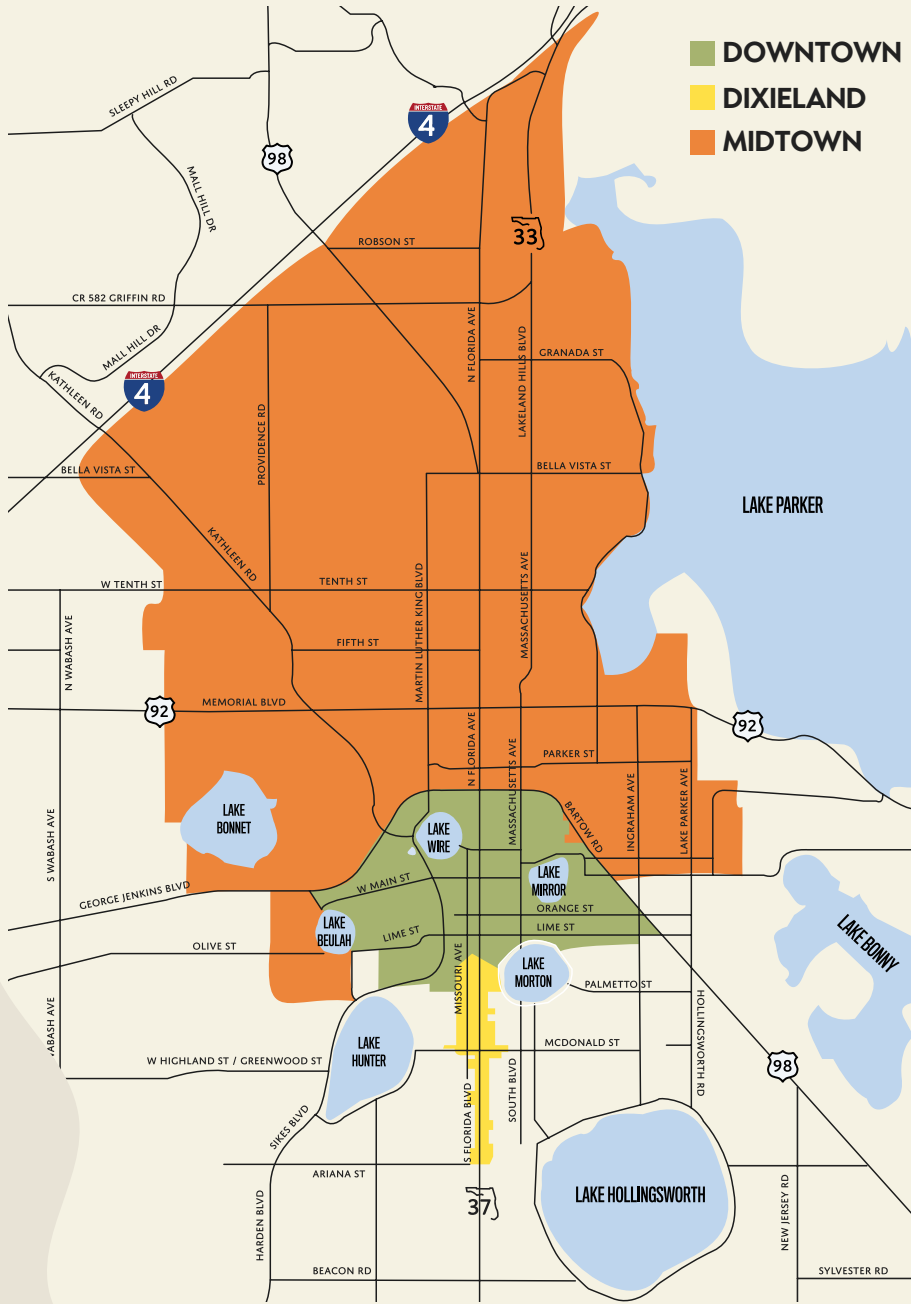
The continued development and redevelopment of all three CRA districts in Lakeland is essential to handling the current growth affecting the city.

The three CRA areas have projects in the works that will deal with growth, especially in the Downtown and Midtown areas. The challenge for the CRA staff is working with developers to get a blend of market rate and affordable housing. The additional need to match multi-family housing with single-family is essential.

Open lines of communication are a must to keep the public educated on the role of the CRA, and projects in development to improve, and revitalize communities. Finally, with growth there must be continued business recruitment to handle necessary services for day-to-day quality of life needs.

*Terry Coney, Advisory Board Chair*

# DISTRICT MAP



**DOWNTOWN** is the oldest district in Lakeland. Formed in 1979, the CRA's history is closely linked with the Lakeland Downtown Development Authority, established in 1977. District boundaries have expanded 4 times, and an extension of the CRA was granted in 2005.

Downtown Lakeland comprises 555 acres, with the core being a bustling center of specialty retail, dining options, and a growing arts and entertainment scene. Centered around Munn Park, the downtown redevelopment area is walkable and aesthetically pleasing because of multi-million-dollar investments in capital and streetscape improvements. With new residential growth, downtown is primed to reach its potential.

*Develop vision for land use and district design*

*Market area and recruit partners*

*Coordinate efforts of downtown groups and streamline processes*

*Improve infrastructure for parking, pedestrians and traffic*

**DIXIELAND** was established in 2001. This district is approximately 73-acres of commercial corridor, with a collection of vintage retail and boutique shops. A budding restaurant and coffeehouse scene draws creatives to connect and collaborate. Dixieland is the gateway to Downtown's arts and entertainment center.

*Redevelopment administration*

*Prevent future blight*

*Drive economic development*

*Address public facilities and services*

*Focus on strategic land use activities*

*Address housing in redevelopment area*

*Support Historic Preservation*

**MIDTOWN** was established in 2001, and with 4,463 acres, is the largest of the three CRA Districts. Spanning from the in-town bypass to Interstate-4, the area is anchored by the medical district, Joker Marchant Stadium, and the redeveloped Mass Market. This district includes 21 active and engaged registered residential neighborhoods.

*Preserve & enhance neighborhoods*

*Strengthen mixed-use activity centers*

*Identify and beautify development corridors*

*Improve open space and infrastructure*

# FINANCIALS (unaudited)

## REVENUES

| District              | Tax Increment       | Interest & Misc    | Rental Income    | Totals Per District | Percent of Total Revenues |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Downtown (all)</b> | \$3,182,040         | \$40,542           | \$0              | \$3,222,581         | 30.68%                    |
| <b>Dixieland</b>      | \$387,597           | (\$1,823)          | \$0              | \$385,775           | 3.67%                     |
| <b>Midtown</b>        | \$7,070,541         | (\$508,427)        | \$332,999        | \$6,895,113         | 65.65%                    |
|                       | <b>\$10,640,178</b> | <b>(\$469,708)</b> | <b>\$332,999</b> | <b>\$10,503,469</b> | <b>100.00%</b>            |

## EXPENSES

| Expenditures Type                  | Downtown           | Dixieland       | Midtown            | Total All Districts | % of Total Funds Spent |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Operating                          | \$33,409           | \$13,671        | \$542,383          | \$589,464           | 11.54%                 |
| Debt Services                      | \$400,000          | \$0             | \$0                | \$400,000           | 7.83%                  |
| Economic Development               | \$1,951,860        | \$2,148         | \$716,849          | \$2,670,857         | 52.29%                 |
| Community Improvement              | \$56,053           | \$7,134         | \$446,388          | \$509,575           | 9.98%                  |
| Corridor Enhancements              | \$128,526          | \$15,335        | \$188,706          | \$332,567           | 6.51%                  |
| Property Acquisition & Management  | \$2,044            | \$0             | \$254,379          | \$256,422           | 5.02%                  |
| Affordable Housing                 | \$0                | \$0             | \$325,376          | \$325,376           | 6.37%                  |
| Neighborhood Investments           | \$0                | \$0             | \$23,334           | \$23,334            | 0.46%                  |
|                                    | <b>\$2,571,892</b> | <b>\$38,288</b> | <b>\$2,497,415</b> | <b>\$5,107,596</b>  | <b>100%</b>            |
| % of Total Increment Revenues Used | 81%                | 10%             | 35%                |                     |                        |



### DOWNTOWN

Base Year Value (2005)  
**\$69,900,088**  
 Assessed Value as of Oct. 2023  
**\$400,430,296**

### DIXIELAND

Base Year Value (2001)  
**\$22,142,832**  
 Assessed Value as of Oct. 2023  
**\$57,809,540**

### MIDTOWN

Base Year Value (2001)  
**\$313,768,148**  
 Assessed Value as of Oct. 2023  
**\$1,000,772,491**

## INCENTIVES & PROJECTS

| CRA Incentives and Project Data              | No. of Projects | Funded              | %           |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| <b>Economic Development</b>                  | 45              | \$2,578,842.76      | 64%         |
| <b>Community Improvement</b>                 | 14              | \$509,574.92        | 13%         |
| <b>Corridor Enhancements</b>                 | 11              | \$332,567.12        | 8%          |
| <b>Property Acquisition &amp; Management</b> | 3               | \$256,422.20        | 6%          |
| <b>Affordable Housing</b>                    | 3               | \$325,376.02        | 8%          |
| <b>Neighborhood Investments</b>              | 11              | \$23,334.40         | 1%          |
|  | <b>87</b>       | <b>\$10,503,469</b> | <b>100%</b> |



CRA-FUNDED

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVES

## HOMEOWNER INCENTIVES

| Expenditures Type       | # of Projects | Amount Awarded |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Down Payment Assistance | 10            | \$118,010      |
| Owner Occupied Rehab    | 4             | \$165,238      |
|                         | 14            | \$283,248      |

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING LAND BANK

| Expenditures Type   | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|------|------|
| Total Properties Made Available for Infill Land Bank Affordable Housing Program | 51   | 57   |
| CRA Properties Included   | 14   | 23   |
| Infill Land Bank Properties Sold (ALL)  | 5    | 10   |
| CRA Properties Closed   | 5    | 9    |
| Infill Land Bank Properties Under Construction (ALL)                            | 5    | 5    |
| Infill Land Bank Properties Under Construction (CRA)                            | 4    | 1    |

# FEATURED PROJECTS

## MAJOR MOVES

*Downtown West Action Plan*

*E. Main/Rose Street Right-of-Way Improvements Planning*

*Catalyst Lakeland Launched*

*Prospera/BBIC Partnership*

*Lake Beulah Roundabout Construction*

## INCENTIVE PROJECTS

*Kitty Cat Lounge*

*Quick Print Art Infusion*

*Skate World*

## OUTREACH

*BizBash*

*National Night Out Community Events*

## OTHER

*Community Policing Strategies*

*Tenant Property Upgrades & Efficiencies*

*Feng Shui*

*Midtown Mini Murals*



# DOWNTOWN WEST

Lakeland's Community Redevelopment Agency is breathing new life into an area that has been plagued by blight for decades. The Downtown West plan will lead to partnerships with developers to build new homes, apartments and businesses. Another goal is to guide development of infrastructure connecting the area to downtown with improved transit, sidewalks and bike paths. **The Downtown West Action Plan prioritizes 3 major moves:**

**1** Improving connectivity for everyone, everywhere by widening sidewalks, adding trails and connecting neighborhoods.

**2** Prioritizing neighborhood beautification like sidewalks, streetlights, and street trees. The plan leaves no communities behind!

**3** Identifying residential options where it makes sense: near community services, transit, and amenities. This targeted infill could include "missing middle" housing like duplexes and townhomes, and an Arts Gateway that mixes residential types compatible with light industrial uses.



## The Study Area

The Action Plan's study area is west of Florida Avenue, south of Memorial Drive, north of Lime Street, and east of Lake Beulah Drive.

## Neighborhoods within the study area include:

North Lake Wire, Crescent Heights, Westgate Central, Lake Beulah and Downtown West.

**The community process kicked off in Fall 2022 and will culminate in Spring 2024.**

[lakelandcra.net/cra-feature-downtownwest](http://lakelandcra.net/cra-feature-downtownwest)

# East Main Street/Rose Street Right-of-Way Improvements Planning

**Visioning for the redevelopment of the East Main Subdistrict of Midtown focuses around Rose Street, realized in partnership with local architect Jon Kirk of Straughn Trout Architects, and the Hype Group. The area is to be branded "LoMa" or Lakeland's local maker village.**

Rose Street is a direct gateway to downtown and is primed for redevelopment. The first phase of the East Main District redevelopment focuses on the small area from East Oleander Street south to East Main Street, and from Ingraham Ave. west to Lake Mirror.

The concept zeroes in on creating an entryway to the East Rose Street area for pedestrians and bicyclists. In doing so, it will change the look and feel of the area with extended sidewalks, new lighting, and public art in a cohesive streetscaping that reimagines a predominantly industrial area.







## Catalyst Lakeland Launched

Lakeland's Catalyst 2.0 is the first version of 3D digital platform that allows user interaction in a web-based application. It's a useful tool to view Lakeland from three perspectives: satellite, aerial and building/street level. The program is a planning tool but primarily markets current and future projects, as well as gives developers an initial, up to date tour of Lakeland.

Catalyst 2.0 identifies locations for investment within Lakeland's three CRA Districts, showing available sites, recently completed projects, projects under construction, or design and vision plans. It also allows users the ability to review property and/or project information.

[catalystlakeland.com](http://catalystlakeland.com)

## PROSPERA/BBIC Partnership

Lakeland's commitment to inclusive economic opportunity is stronger than ever. Partnerships with Black Business Investment Corporation (BBIC) and Prospera ensure that all small businesses and entrepreneurs - both established or aspiring - will have access to no cost, individualized support critical to their success.

[prosperausa.org](http://prosperausa.org) | [tampabaybbic.com](http://tampabaybbic.com)





# Lake Beulah Roundabout Construction

The Lake Beulah (aka Five Points) Roundabout construction project began in October 2023. The intersection at West Main Street, West Lemon Street and Sloan Avenue is being converted to a single lane roundabout. The \$2.2 million project funded by the City of Lakeland and Lakeland CRA will take approximately nine months to complete.

The project is designed to increase intersection capacity and eliminate congestion. Once completed, the roundabout will reduce intersection delays, improve safety, and serve as a gateway feature to the “Downtown West” area.



# Kitty Cat Lounge

In July 2022, Cindy Skop asked the CRA to help with her dream of renovating 946 E Orange St into the Kitty Cat Lounge. She wanted a space where people can have coffee and visit adoptable cats. The café is separated from the cat area, for those who only want some locally brewed coffee.

The CRA was happy to be a partner and was able to assist with infrastructure items such as a sprinkler system, a new fire alarm system, grease trap and backflow preventer.







## Quickprint Art Infusion

The spring of 2023 was an exciting time. Cynthia Terry, owner of the Dixieland Quick Prints building, asked the CRA to commission artists Beth Warmath and Ahmad Taylor to create two murals as part of Dixieland's Art Infusion Program. Cyndi's building sits on two separate parcels, so the CRA approved the north and south walls for murals.

Cyndi specifically wanted to capture things she remembered from Dixieland as a child and enjoys now.

The two artists came up with these fantastic murals and have been enjoyed by many.



## Skate World

In November 2022, Chanel Bellotto requested the CRA incentivize the remodel of Skate World, 911 N Lake Parker Ave.

Skate World had been purchased by Chanel's grandfather in 1973. Four years later, Chanel's father purchased the business and ran it successfully for 30 years. In 2007, when her father unexpectedly passed away, she inherited the business. She has worked extremely hard to create a safe, clean, family friendly environment. She has made improvements over the years, such as new skates, new carpet, constantly painting, new cafe tables, and new equipment in the quick serve area, along with installation of a new skating surface.

Chanel asked the CRA to help with an expansion, so they could offer an area for birthday groups to celebrate, new ADA compliant bathrooms, and a game room area.





## BizBash

CRA staff attended the “Lakeland Biz Bash” organized by BRIDGE Local, CORE Networking Group, and the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce.

The event provided a networking opportunity for Lakeland entrepreneurs, small business owners, and organizations to share and gather important information.



## Advisory Board Retreat



## National Night Out Community Events

National Night Out is an annual community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie.

With 15 neighborhood events and block parties throughout the CRA districts, the community celebrated their vibrant neighborhoods and shared common goals in continuing to make Lakeland a great place to live and thrive.





# Community Policing Strategies

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, community policing is *“a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.”*

In 2022, the CRA entered a partnership with the Lakeland Police Department to expand their “Community Policing Innovation” program from two to four sworn officers. Beginning in FY 23, this increased efforts to address neighborhood-specific concerns within the three CRA districts.

Since its expansion, our four CRA officers have consistently engaged the residential and business communities within our districts, responding to concerns, including criminal trespassing, illegal dumping, prostitution, street level drug activity, and nuisance abatement cases. They have provided recommendations to better secure businesses and prevent crime through environmental design. Staff and advisory board members have participated in ride-a-longs that yielded first-hand accounts on the level of response to calls, as well as the proactive approach taken to develop solutions and build trust among community members.

As a part of the Neighborhood Liaison Unit, the CRA officers have coordinated extensively with community organizations, city departments, and staff to prioritize Dixieland, Downtown, and Midtown’s quality of life, from both a public safety and community relations standpoint.



*Officer Edwin Sanchez*

*Officer Nicholas Buttrey*

*Officer Michael Hammersla*

*Officer Cody Vaughn*

# Tenant Property Upgrades & Efficiencies

The Lakeland CRA currently leases commercial property to 8 tenants in the Midtown District. Successful property management requires great communication with your tenants. Listening to their needs and being consistent and efficient with upgrades and repairs is crucial.

CRA staff works hand in hand with tenants to keep the properties up to code and to assist with their business needs. Through the City of Lakeland Facilities Department, we can keep the businesses secure, clean and well maintained, as well as provide necessary safety inspections.

**Over the last year we have coordinated the following projects:**

- *Provided a compactor for 3 tenants to share, alleviating illegal dumping and rummaging.*
- *Coordinated a 2nd walk-in freezer to accommodate Dou Bakehouse's customers.*
- *Replaced broken audio equipment at Crystal's World of Dance.*
- *Provided a larger gate for Dou Bakehouse to make loading of delivery vehicles easier and more efficient.*
- *Replaced worn and rusty stairs for Market Loft Apts.*
- *Upgraded security for several tenants.*
- *Resurfaced a parking lot.*
- *Installed The Well's hanging art display.*
- *Repaired damaged fencing at the Urban Farm.*

# Tenants

Crystal's World of Dance  
The Yard on Mass  
Haus 820/The Collective  
ART/ifact Studios Inc.

Dou Bakehouse  
Neighbors of Lakeland  
Urban Farm  
The Well





# Feng Shui

The bronze sculpture “Feng Shui,” by Polish sculptor Jerzy Kedziora, was first installed in Munn Park in 2015.

It was taken down in 2019 when damage to the sculpture became evident. After storing the sculpture for 5 years, the Parks & Recreation Department teamed up with the Lakeland CRA to ensure its conservation, with the help of RLA Conservation of Arts and Architecture in Miami. Feng Shui was returned to Munn Park in November 2023. Funding support included \$10,000 from the Lakeland CRA Art infusion program and proceeds from the city’s annual Spring Obsession and Art show.



# Midtown Mini Murals

In early 2023, the Lakeland CRA and Talbot House Ministries teamed up to launch The Midtown Mini Mural Project, a collaborative art infusion project. Phase I was completed in September 2023 and included 9 panels on the perimeter wall of Talbot House, at the corner of N. Tennessee Avenue and E Parker Street. Artists included Kent McAllister, Sam Butler Jr., Ven Martin and Lesly “Jesse” Clark.

The theme focused on African American artists providing messages of hope and diversity. Phase I of the Midtown Mini Mural project cost \$7,000. Phase II of the project is underway with a call to artists and will include 10 panels fronting E. Parker Street. The theme of hope, diversity and inclusion will continue. We anticipate Phase II murals will be completed by early summer 2024. The CRA has allocated \$9,500 for Phase II of the project.

Creating colorful, vibrant, public art that inspires hope, diversity and inclusion not only provides a fresh coat of paint, but it also brings new life and color to the Midtown district. Much like the Dixieland Art Infusion program, the CRA is on a mission to create visual interest through public art and engagement with the art community. We are grateful for the partnership with Talbot House and hopeful that the murals build on the pillars of hope and inclusion that the Ministry provides to all it serves.





# Looking Ahead...

## Strengthening Places

The CRA will work with multiple stakeholders to improve our districts, harnessing the skills, experiences, and resources of those in the private and public sectors to strengthen the places we serve through creative incentives and advocacy.

## Strategic Infill Development

The CRA will focus on building within unused and underutilized lands consistent with existing development patterns, typically in urban areas. Infill development is critical to accommodating growth and redesigning our cities to be environmentally and socially sustainable.

## CRA Redevelopment Plan Updates

The CRA will update district redevelopment plans to address current conditions, progress made, and an outlook of priorities for the coming year. The CRA is responsible for developing and implementing these plans to address the unique needs of our targeted districts, including the overall goals and the specific types of projects identified for each district.

## Downtown West Implementation

The CRA will lead advocacy with multiple stakeholders to continue bringing attention and investment to the neighborhoods within this study area. The Action Plan for Downtown West will guide specific projects and policy implementation.



# CITY OF LAKELAND STAFF

**Shawn Sherrouse** City Manager

**Brian Rewis** Director of Community & Economic Development

**Emily Colon** Deputy City Manager

**Jason Willey** Assistant Director of Economic Development

**Rob Hernandez** Assistant City Manager

**Teresa Maio** Assistant Director of Community Development

# LAKELAND CRA STAFF



**Valerie Ferrell**  
CRA Manager



**Carlos Turner**  
Office Assistant



**Shelley Guiseppi**  
Project Manager



**Sandra Fairall**  
Project Coordinator



**Jonathan Rodriguez**  
Project Manager



**Karen Thompson**  
Project Manager



# LAKELAND CRA

COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

join us

## CRA ADVISORY BOARD

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month @ 3<sup>pm</sup> | City Commission Conference Room

## CITY COMMISSION

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays @ 9<sup>am</sup> | City Commission Chambers, City Hall

photo credit

Tom Hagerty Photography

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