



WOODLAWN
UNITED

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



DEAR FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS,

Woodlawn is a community in motion, constantly evolving and shaping a future rooted in unity and progress. It's the shared laughter echoing down 55th Place, the hands lifting each other up, and the belief that when we come together, we create something greater than ourselves. This year, we've seen the true power of community in action.

One example of that collective effort is the **Flourishing Neighborhood Index (FNI) Phase I Completion**—a crucial step in measuring community health across social, structural, and economic factors to guide future investment. This year, **3,300 parcels were surveyed**, with the **Sankofa ERG from Shipt and Protective Life assessing 1,300 parcels on Juneteenth**, demonstrating their commitment to service and community impact. This data will help shape the decisions that move Woodlawn forward, ensuring that investments align with the needs of those who call this community home.

In 2024, we were honored to host the **Purpose Built Communities National Conference**, the first since 2019, welcoming **450 place-based practitioners** committed to transforming neighborhoods. This gathering reinforced the momentum we've built and the partnerships driving real change.

That momentum is reflected in the growth of our community—the resident footprint in Kingston and Woodlawn has expanded from **5,000 to 8,000 residents**. More families are putting down roots, supported by the **Welcome Home Grant from Wells Fargo**, helping turn houses into homes.

The **Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant** is ensuring that every family and every voice has a role in shaping Woodlawn's future. With support from the **Daniel Foundation's Community Safety Grant**, we're strengthening neighborhood safety, and the **SHIPT Grocery Feasibility Grant** is bringing us closer to fresh, accessible food options.



And then there's **Woodlawn Sunday Dinner**—more than just a meal, it's a reflection of what makes this community extraordinary. When people gather, share stories, and celebrate their collective journey, they reaffirm the values that make Woodlawn strong.

Every milestone this year happened because of you. Because you showed up. Because you invested. Because you believed in what's possible.

The work continues, and so does our story. With gratitude, determination, and an unshakable belief in the power of this community, we look ahead to all that's next.

With appreciation,

Mashonda & Mike

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Strengthening Local Voices and Businesses

Woodlawn thrives when its people thrive. This year, we invested in leaders, entrepreneurs, and community spaces to create lasting impact. By creating jobs within the community, we're not only boosting economic development—we're opening doors for residents to grow, lead, and build a future right where they live.

WE Lead Fellowship – The third cohort of 18 emerging leaders completed the program, gaining skills to drive change in their communities.

Geoffrey Canada's Visit – The nationally recognized education reform advocate met with Woodlawn leaders to discuss strategies for long-term neighborhood revitalization, focusing on pathways to sustained economic mobility and community transformation.

REACH: A New Brand Experience – What began as an idea in WE Lead became a reality. Former WE Lead graduate Greg Cole and Brittany Hollis launched REACH, transforming Woodlawn Sunday Dinner into a richer, more immersive experience.

Jazz on 55th Grand Opening – A new cultural hub for the community, bringing live music, food, and vibrancy to Woodlawn.

Voltron Grand Opening – Economic development isn't just about business—it's about people. Voltron's launch is creating jobs, opportunities, and community investment in the heart of Woodlawn.



Impact Story: From WE Lead to REACH – Greg Cole's Journey



"Being part of **WE Lead** gave me the opportunity to find my voice as a leader in the city of Birmingham, which helped shape the vision for REACH. Through the program, I gained clarity on how I wanted to foster meaningful connections and create immersive experiences that bring people together. It reinforced my belief in the power of community-driven events and gave me the confidence to build a brand experience agency that not only delivers impactful moments but also strengthens the fabric of our city."

With the skills and confidence he gained, Greg Cole and Brittany Hollis co-founded REACH—a brand experience designed to bring people together in powerful, intentional ways. Through REACH, Greg has helped reimagine Woodlawn Sunday Dinner, turning it into a truly immersive community experience.

His journey exemplifies how **WE Lead nurtures bold, creative leaders** who don't just envision change but actively create it—shaping Woodlawn and Birmingham through connection, storytelling, and shared experiences.

Investing in Bright Futures

A strong community is built on education, and in Woodlawn, we're ensuring every child has the tools to succeed. Since its inception, JRELC has served over 200 children—laying the foundation for lifelong learning and brighter futures.

The Impact of Early Education

"Before my child started at **James Rushton Early Learning Center**, I worried about finding a place that would truly care for him like family while maintaining high safety and academic standards. Now, I realize I never needed to worry.

JRELC is a caring and supportive community where every child is valued and set up for success. The teachers don't just teach; they see and support each child, helping them grow academically and socially. Because of JRELC, I have complete confidence in my child's future, knowing he is receiving the best care and education possible."

– A JRELC Parent



Key Highlights

■ **i3 Academy Growth** – Enrollment reached 813 students, with 32 percent residing in the Woodlawn High School feeder pattern, reinforcing the need for high-quality education in the neighborhood.

■ **Harvard EDRedesign** – Woodlawn United was the only non-education institution selected for Harvard's Success Planning Summer Institute, a national initiative focused on personalized, relationship-based support for youth. The approach pairs each child with a Navigator who helps create a tailored plan aligned with their needs and goals. This model complements Woodlawn's wraparound services and aligns with the Purpose Built Communities framework—advancing our commitment to holistic, cradle-to-career support and neighborhood transformation.



Preserving Homes, Strengthening Roots

A home is more than just a place to live—it's where memories are made, families grow, and communities thrive. This year, we helped longtime residents stay in their homes while opening the door for new homeowners to invest in Woodlawn.

A Home with History, A Future with Hope

For 45 years, Annie Clark has called Woodlawn home. As only the second resident in her 119-year-old house, she has seen the neighborhood grow and change. A widow for 35 years, Annie worked part-time to make ends meet, but maintaining her aging home became more challenging. That's when the Critical Repair Program stepped in.

"I am so grateful to Woodlawn United for helping me get my house in order," Annie shares. "With this blessing, I don't have to worry as much. It means everything to me."

Through 27 home repair projects totaling \$602,292, Woodlawn United ensured that residents like Annie can age in place safely and continue to be part of the community they love.

Additional Housing Highlights

Cottages on Georgia Road – Secured more than \$1.6 million from the City of Birmingham, along with additional funding to support the next phase of mixed-income homeownership opportunities.

Home Sales on 49th Street – Three homes sold at \$200,000, \$210,000, and \$220,000, demonstrating growing investment in the neighborhood.

8,000

Expanded our impact by
extending our work into the
Kingston neighborhood

27

Homes repaired
enhancing housing
stability

\$602K

Invested in public
safety and community
wellness



Building a Healthier, Safer Neighborhood

- **Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant** – Partnered with HABD to secure a \$500,000 HUD grant for the Kingston-Woodlawn area's transformation.
- **Christ Health Center's 15th Anniversary** – This year, we **celebrated 15 years** of Christ Health Center's commitment to providing **accessible, high-quality healthcare** in Woodlawn. Our longstanding partnership continues to strengthen community health.
- **Flourishing Neighborhood Index (FNI) Phase I Completion** – The FNI measures community health across social, structural, and economic factors, guiding future investment. This year, **3,300 parcels** were surveyed, with the **Sankofa ERG from Shipt and Protective Life** assessing **1,300 parcels** on Juneteenth in a commitment to service and community impact.



- **Samford University - Micah Fellows Partnership** – Strengthened community asset mapping and resource accessibility.
- **Grocery Feasibility Study** – Supported by a SHIPT grant to assess the viability of a grocery store in the area.
- **Public Safety** – Strengthening neighborhood safety through initiatives supported by the Daniel Foundation's Community Safety Grant.

Woodlawn continues to grow as more families choose to move in and support local businesses—contributing to a stronger, safer, and more vibrant community.

COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Woodlawn United had the privilege of bringing people together in powerful ways this year—both through **Woodlawn Sunday Dinner** and as the host of a national conference.

A staple of Woodlawn’s culture, **Woodlawn Sunday Dinner** once again proved that breaking bread together strengthens the fabric of our community. More than **350 attendees, 20 sponsors, and 15 local vendors** gathered in the heart of Woodlawn to celebrate **connection, culture, and collaboration**.

This year’s event engaged **four new sponsors**, further investing in the success of Woodlawn. We’re grateful for the vendors and partners who made this special gathering possible.

Both of these events—one local, one national—reinforced the power of place and the role of community in shaping a shared future.



Vendors included:

- Bayles Catering
- Dirty Red
- Jazz on 55th
- 1918 Catering
- Naughty But Nice Kettle Corn

THANK YOU SPONSORS



PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES NATIONAL CONFERENCE

In 2024, Woodlawn United proudly hosted a vibrant **community block party** as part of the **Purpose Built Communities National Conference**. This was the **first PBC National Conference held since 2019** and welcomed **450 practitioners and funders** committed to place-based transformation. The event underscored the momentum and growth of the Purpose Built Network and highlighted Woodlawn's role in advancing neighborhood revitalization.

Attendees experienced immersive **neighborhood tours, engaged with local vendors, and enjoyed Slutty Vegan**—a business rooted in community impact. Founder Pinky Cole-Hayes joined a fireside chat during the final luncheon plenary, highlighting Slutty Vegan's growing partnership with Woodlawn United.

The conference also featured **keynote speakers** who inspired attendees with strategies for building stronger, more equitable communities:

- **Bakari Sellers**, CNN political commentator and former State Representative, spoke on place-based economic transformation.
- **Dr. Janelle Williams**, Co-founder and CEO of the Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative, shared insights on community wealth-building.
- **Pinky Cole-Hayes**, Founder of Slutty Vegan, discussed the role of entrepreneurship in revitalizing communities.



The conference also celebrated the addition of two new **Purpose Built Network Members**:

- **LIFT JAX** (Jacksonville, FL)
- **Cherry Hill Strong** (Baltimore, MD)

MEMORIAM & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In Memoriam: Barbara Merchant

The Woodlawn community lost a cherished matriarch this year with the passing of Barbara Merchant. A pillar of strength, service, and compassion, her presence was felt in every gathering, every shared meal, and every act of kindness that defined her unwavering commitment to Woodlawn.

Her legacy lives on in the connections she nurtured and the lives she touched. From her steadfast dedication to neighbors to the warmth she brought to Woodlawn Sunday Dinner, Ms. Merchant embodied the very spirit of community. As we continue our work, we do so with gratitude for her impact, ensuring that the values she upheld remain at the heart of Woodlawn's future.

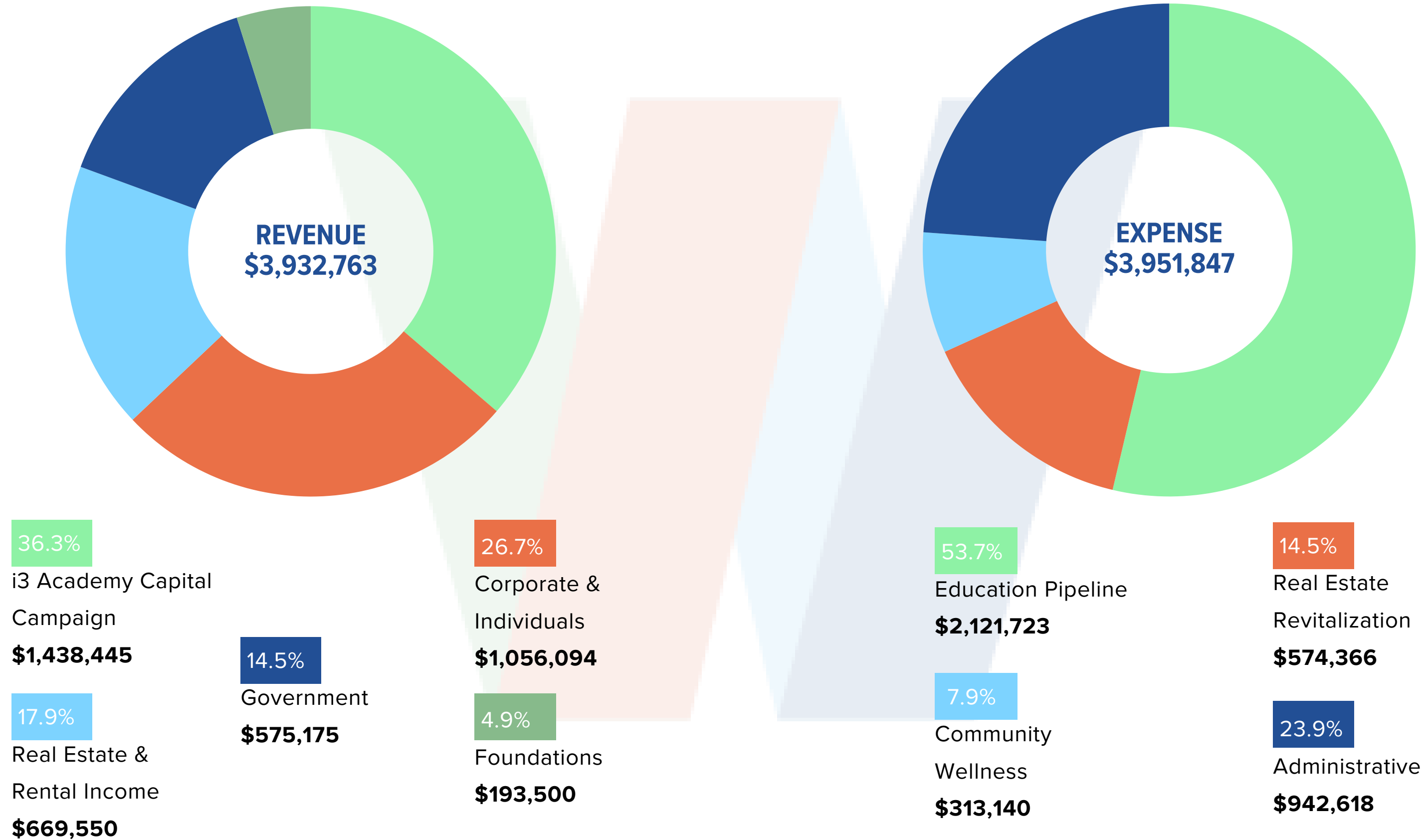


Board Member Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest appreciation to **Marquita Davis** and **Steve Spencer** for their leadership, vision, and dedication to Woodlawn United. As they concluded their board service in 2024, we honor the many ways their contributions have shaped our initiatives, strengthened our programs, and deepened our impact. Their guidance has been instrumental in building a stronger, more connected community, and their legacy will continue to influence our work for years to come.



COMMUNITY & FINANCIAL IMPACT



CONTRIBUTORS

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Looking Ahead: Strengthening Woodlawn's Future

As we step into 2025, Woodlawn United remains committed to deepening our impact. Our focus will be on expanding economic opportunities, increasing affordable housing, and strengthening educational initiatives that empower the next generation. New partnerships, strategic investments, and community-driven solutions will guide us as we continue to build a thriving, inclusive neighborhood.

Key Initiatives on the Horizon:

- **Expanding Small Business Support** – Investing in local entrepreneurs and business owners.
- **Affordable Housing Developments** – Advancing projects like Cottages on Georgia Road and increasing homeownership opportunities.
- **Community Wellness Growth** – Strengthening healthcare access, expanding social services, enhancing public safety through community-driven initiatives and strategic partnerships, and exploring options to bring a grocery store to the community through a current feasibility study.
- **Woodlawn Community Stories** – Launching a campaign to elevate the voices and experiences of residents.
- **Deepening Our Investment in Kingston** – Through the Choice Neighborhood Planning process, we're expanding resident engagement, driving equitable development, and fostering long-term community growth.



HOMEcoming: A CELEBRATION OF COMMUNITY

Woodlawn is a community defined by the strength of its people, the vibrancy of local businesses, and the spirit of collaboration that fuels its future. As we reflect on this year's achievements, we recognize the people who make Woodlawn special.

Whether you are a long-time resident, a new partner, or a supporter from afar, we invite you to be part of the journey ahead. Let's continue building a community where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

Join us. Invest in the future of Woodlawn.



THE POWER OF COMMUNITY



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