

THE MILL DISTRICT

COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

Community leaders in Columbus, Georgia, created a non-profit organization called the Mill District established as a 501 (c)(3) to implement the Purpose Built Communities model in four historic neighborhoods. The Purpose Built Communities model focuses on three pillars: quality mixed-income housing, education, and community wellness to support holistic and sustainable neighborhood revitalization. The neighborhoods of City Village, North Highland, Bibb Village and Anderson Village housed generations of working-class families, employed in the area's textile mills. After the mills closed, these neighborhoods experienced significant public and private disinvestment.

The city of Columbus received a \$300,000 Brownfield Assessment Grant and hoped that environmental assessments at these blighted properties could catalyze redevelopment in the Mill District area. Despite some limited local investment, the area did not see longer-term interest from outside developers. According to Justin Krieg of Historic Columbus and administrator of The Mill District,

“In hindsight, the delay in developer interest was a good thing. It gave us time to figure out what development we wanted based on the needs of the neighborhoods.”

The Mill District brought together local leaders from community organizations and foundations, city and county government, property owners and private businesses to connect and amplify investments in mixed-income housing, education and community wellness. The Mill District built long-term partnerships with public entities, such as the Muscogee County School District, with whom it signed a formal MOU. Through this MOU, the Mill District leveraged \$1.5 million to fund four additional staff members at an underperforming school, including a social worker, parent-involvement specialist, instructional coach and assistant principal.

The Mill District also partnered with community health clinics such as MercyMed to provide healthcare services at neighborhood-serving schools so that local students had greater capacity to learn and thrive. The success of these partnerships has helped pave the way for even more investment on and around brownfield sites. In 2020, a \$34 million dollar construction project broke ground that would serve as a new medical school campus for Mercer University in Columbus, Georgia, bringing nearly 240 students and 60 supportive faculty to the city.

Adjacent to the Mercer project, the historic City Mills buildings are under renovation to become a hotel, yoga studio and restaurant. Just north of that site is the location for a newly reconstructed mixed-income multifamily housing development that was successful

Photo Caption: A community mural in City Village (Source: EPA).

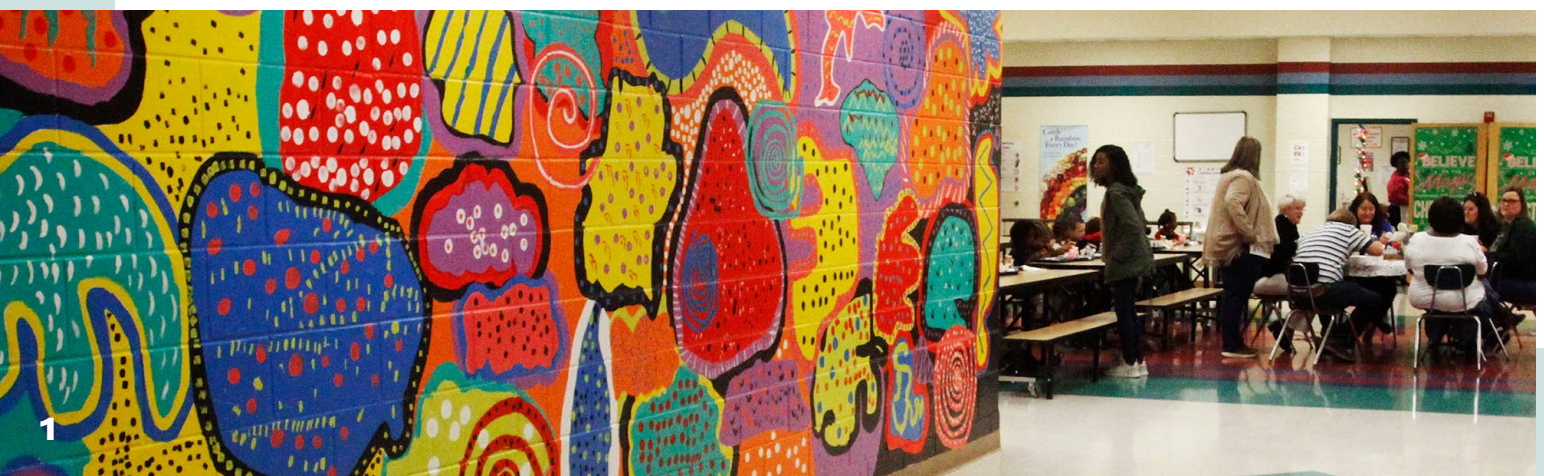




Photo Caption: A teacher tutoring a student at a school in City Village (Source: EPA).

in securing low income housing tax credits to assist in leveraging the project. Another site received grant funds to assist with environmental assessments.

The Mill District connected with NeighborWorks Columbus, an existing non-profit housing developer to secure funding for quality affordable housing. NeighborWorks received nearly \$80,000 from the Historic Columbus Foundation's Revolving Redevelopment Fund to rehabilitate a historic home in the North Highland neighborhood. NeighborWorks plans to renovate/construct nearly 22 homes in the neighborhood. Many of these properties received assessment grants as well.

Focusing on schools, housing, and health care has been a conscious choice to invest in the people of the neighborhood in addition to the place. To evaluate its impact, the Mill District tracks key economic and educational outcomes, including changes in poverty rates, crime, building permits and school performance.

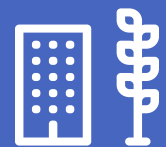
Through early community engagement and structured partnership-building, the Mill District was able to address multiple challenges simultaneously to advance the neighborhood goals of housing, education and community wellness.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE MILL DISTRICT: purposebuiltcommunities.org/our-network/columbus-ga-the-mill-district

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES: Purpose Built Communities website purposebuiltcommunities.org

Purpose Built Communities' white paper "Poverty and Place: A Review of the Science and Research that have Impacted Our Work" purposebuiltcommunities.org/poverty-and-place-a-review-of-the-science-and-research-that-have-impacted-our-work

COMMUNITY MODEL: PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES



The [Purpose Built Communities](https://purposebuiltcommunities.org) model seeks to disrupt the root causes of poverty by focusing on neighborhood-scale investments in mixed-income housing, a continuum of education services and community wellness to advance racial equity in health and economic mobility. A local non-profit organization leads implementation by building partnerships from all sectors, aligning residents with resource partners and coordinating across efforts.