



What Smithfield CNI Stands For

A resident-centered transformation that connects quality housing, opportunity for all people, and a stronger, more vibrant neighborhood.



HOUSING



Mixed-Income Housing



Senior Living



Replacement Housing



Early Learning



PEOPLE



Family Support



Education



Workforce Development



Health



Economic Mobility



NEIGHBORHOOD



Complete Streets



Storefront Revival



Public Art



Safety



Connectivity



Smithfield – College Hills – Graymont

Choice Neighborhoods Initiative

The Choice Neighborhoods Program is the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) signature place-based initiative. It leverages public and private dollars to rebuild communities where public housing has aged out, while investing in the surrounding neighborhood and in the people who already live there. Below is an overview of Birmingham’s Smithfield – College Hills – Graymont Choice Neighborhood.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING • EMPOWERING PEOPLE		NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS	
WHO	WHAT	WHERE	HOW
The Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD) and the City of Birmingham are carrying out a \$50 million HUD Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant, working with Rule Enterprises and Integral, The Ascent Project, Birmingham City Schools, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, United Way, and more than forty committed partners.	Choice Neighborhoods is HUD’s signature program to rebuild neighborhoods, preserve affordable housing, and create better opportunities for residents. Birmingham’s \$50 million award anchors roughly \$225 million of housing and neighborhood investment.	The Choice Neighborhood replaces the Smithfield Court public housing site with new mixed-income housing. The neighborhood includes Smithfield, College Hills, and Graymont in west Birmingham.	A locally written Transformation Plan guides the work across three components — Housing, People, and Neighborhood — with residents involved in shaping implementation and an independent university evaluation measuring results.

What the grant is

On July 26, 2023, HUD awarded the City of Birmingham and the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD) a \$50 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant. It is the first grant of its kind awarded in Alabama. Implementation runs through 2032.

Choice Neighborhoods is unusual among federal programs because it funds three things at once and requires them to work together: replacing distressed public housing, supporting the people who live there, and improving the neighborhood around them. Most federal programs fund only one of the three.

Who leads the work

- **Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD)** — lead grantee; oversees the grant and leads the housing redevelopment.
- **City of Birmingham** — co-grantee; leads the neighborhood improvement work.
- **The Ascent Project** — leads the People work, providing family support on site at Smithfield Court.
- **Rule Enterprises and Integral** — the development partners building the new housing.
- **Birmingham City Schools** — principal education partner.
- **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)** — anchor institution and independent evaluation partner.

More than forty additional organizations — including United Way of Central Alabama, Alabama Goodwill Industries, Jefferson County Department of Health, Lawson State Community College, Birmingham Promise, Prosper, Create Birmingham, STRIVE, the YMCA, Girls Inc., and the Smithfield Branch Library — have committed services to Smithfield Court residents.

A \$50 Million Grant, Three Connected Investments

Smithfield – College Hills – Graymont Choice Neighborhoods Initiative



Combined physical investment in and around the neighborhood: approximately \$225 million

Neighborhood figures reflect the Critical Community Improvements Plan and remain subject to HUD approval.

How the \$50 million grant is deployed across the three components.

Our community vision

The vision for Smithfield, College Hills, and Graymont is a neighborhood where longtime residents stay and thrive. Not a neighborhood where investment arrives and the people who waited for it are pushed out. Every strategy in the plan is measured against that standard.

If this initiative works, residents should be able to say the following about where they live:

- I have a safe, healthy, affordable home — and I did not have to leave my community to get it.
- My children start school ready to learn and stay on track once they get there.
- I have health insurance and a regular doctor, not an emergency room.
- There is a real path from where I am now to a job that pays a living wage.
- I can walk to the store, the library, the bus stop, and the park safely, on a sidewalk that is lit.
- The businesses on our corridors are open, improving, and often owned by people from here.
- Older residents can age in place with the services they need.
- Residents help decide what happens next, and are told the truth about what is happening now.

These priorities came directly from residents. In the most recent assessment, residents asked first for physical fitness programs for adults, healthcare services, mental health services, employment services, job skills training, and youth programs and childcare. They named the neighborhood's greatest assets as its location, its schools, and its places of worship.

Housing

Smithfield Court has reached the end of its useful life. Rather than renovate in place, the plan replaces it with new housing built in phases across several sites in and near the neighborhood, so that families are not displaced all at once.

Every one of the 456 public housing apartments at Smithfield Court will be replaced with a new subsidized apartment. This is a binding commitment, not a goal. Alongside those replacement apartments, the plan adds approximately 464 additional affordable and workforce apartments, producing roughly 920 homes in total. The result is mixed-income communities rather than concentrated poverty.

Phase	Site	Replacement homes	Total homes
Phase 1	The Legacy at Graymont — senior housing with an early learning center	80	101
Phase 2	Parker High School surplus property (A)	65	151
Phase 3	Smithfield Court — west portion	48	127
Phase 4	Smithfield Court — center portion	61	153
Phase 5	Library site	79	99
Phase 6	Smithfield Court — east portion	59	149
Phase 7	Parker High School surplus property (B)	64	140
Total		456	920

What this means for residents

- **Nobody loses their housing.** Every household living at Smithfield Court when the grant was awarded keeps the right to return to the new development. Households that moved in afterward are also enrolled in services.
- **Relocation is supported, not announced.** Family Support Coordinators help each household build an individual relocation plan, including required notices, help identifying comparable housing, assistance securing utilities, help with the physical move, and support with re-occupancy for those returning.
- **Moves are timed around families.** Coordinators work to minimize disruption to children in school and to residents receiving ongoing medical care.
- **Protections are legally required.** Relocation follows the Uniform Relocation Act, Section 104(d) of the Housing and Community Development Act, and federal fair housing and disability rights law.
- **New homes cost less to run.** All units are built to energy-efficient standards, which lowers monthly utility bills.

People

The People work is delivered on site at Smithfield Court by The Ascent Project. Every household is offered a Family Support Coordinator — a single staff person who works with the whole family, not just the head of household, and who stays with that family through relocation and return. Together they build a plan covering education, health, and employment.

What is available to residents

- **Jobs and income.** Career coaching and a monthly on-site Job Seekers program; state career center services delivered on site by the Birmingham Career Center; job training and certification through Alabama Goodwill Industries, STRIVE, and Lawson State Community College; adult education and GED; financial literacy and credit repair; transportation help for the first 30 days of a new job and weekly check-ins for the first 90 days; and Section 3 hiring tied to construction on the redevelopment.
- **Health and wellness.** Help getting health insurance and a regular doctor; pediatric care, dental care, and family planning through Jefferson County Department of Health; mobile health screenings and a mobile market with fresh produce through UAB; mental health services through JBS Mental Health Authority and Exodus Counseling; and a walking club five mornings a week.
- **Early childhood, ages 0 to 5.** Help finding and enrolling in quality early learning, with partners including United Way's Success by 6, the YMCA, Mississippi Action for Progress Head Start, the Smithfield Branch Library, and Birmingham City Schools' Born Ready and Kindercamp programs. Developmental screening and referral are available through Jefferson County Department of Health.
- **School-age education.** On-site after-school tutoring in math and reading with certified Birmingham City Schools teachers; enrichment with the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; a summer camp with meals provided; STEM and coding through STREAM Innovations and the Smithfield Branch Library; Girls Inc. programming; and Birmingham Promise, which places Birmingham City Schools seniors in paid apprenticeships and provides up to four years of tuition assistance at any public college or university in Alabama.
- **Family support.** Help with budgeting, benefits and disability applications, utility and rent assistance through United Way and local partners, and referrals to services families need.

Services are available to every household at Smithfield Court, including households that moved in after the grant was awarded, and case management continues for original households who have moved off site.

What Is Being Built in the Choice Neighborhood

Schematic layout of Critical Community Improvements sites — not to scale



Facade programs apply across the area bounded by 9th Court North, 4th Street North, Center Street North, and Graymont Avenue.

Schematic layout of Critical Community Improvements sites. Locations are indicative, not to scale.

Neighborhood

The neighborhood work is led by the City of Birmingham and set out in a Critical Community Improvements Plan, which HUD has conceptually approved. Approximately \$6 million of the \$50 million grant is allocated to this work. Combined with City funds, American Rescue Plan Act funds, transportation grants administered by the Birmingham Department of Transportation, and a transit contribution from the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority, the plan totals approximately \$10.8 million.

Why this neighborhood

Smithfield was established as a place where Birmingham residents could escape cramped living conditions. For African American families in particular, it offered something rare at the time: the chance to build a community that promoted upward mobility and a sense of place. Over the decades Smithfield built schools, churches, shops, and gathering places, and developed a strong cultural identity of its own. The community played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement, and the landmarks and events of that period are still honored today.

The neighborhood retains major assets — the Smithfield Branch Library, A.H. Parker High School, and Legion Field among them. What changed was infrastructure. The construction of Interstate 65 in the early 1970s cut a physical barrier through the area and set off a long economic decline. The City and HABD together own approximately 65 acres in the community planned for replacement housing within mixed-income and mixed-use development, which is what makes coordinated investment possible rather than piecemeal.

Connected Streets

Reverend Abraham Woods Jr. Boulevard and adjacent corridors are being rebuilt as a safer, more accessible route connecting Smithfield and Graymont to downtown Birmingham, employment centers, and essential services. Choice Neighborhoods funding pays for improvements that go beyond routine roadwork:

- Protected two-way cycle tracks, eight to ten feet wide, with raised concrete buffers.
- Pedestrian-scale solar lighting that stays on during power outages.
- New pedestrian and bicycle signals at crossings.
- Landscape buffers providing shade, public space, and stormwater capture.
- Historic brick pedestrian crossings on 8th Avenue, using brick salvaged from the Smithfield Court redevelopment — material from the original site reused in the new streetscape.

The Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority is contributing a multimodal transit hub with bicycle and scooter storage, payment kiosks, real-time arrival boards, and connections to the Birmingham Xpress bus rapid transit system, plus three solar-powered bus shelters. BJCTA will own and maintain them.

Storefront Revival Initiative

A facade improvement program for neighborhood businesses, structured as a forgivable loan so that a small business owner is not required to borrow against the future in order to improve a storefront today.

- Awards of up to \$50,000 over a five-year term, for roughly 15 businesses.
- Covers street-facing exterior work — storefront reconstruction, restoration of historic architectural features, painting, windows, doors, signage, awnings, lighting, and masonry.
- Open to property owners and to tenants, provided the owner agrees to the terms.
- Requires a minimum 20 percent match invested into the project, and the project must create or retain full-time employment.
- Target area: commercial and mixed-use properties bounded by 9th Court North on the north, 4th Street North on the east, Center Street North on the west, and Graymont Avenue on the south. Priority goes to Graymont Avenue, Center Street, and 4th Street — the neighborhood's principal gateways and business nodes.
- Applications will be submitted online and reviewed monthly by a committee.

Revive & Thrive Home Program

A home repair program for existing homeowners, so that longtime residents can stay in and maintain their homes as investment arrives.

- Grants of up to \$30,000 with no repayment obligation, for roughly 25 households.
- Covers exterior improvements visible from the street — roofing, landscaping, and exterior painting.
- Open to owner-occupied single-family homes with household income at or below 80 percent of Area Median Income.
- Target area: owner-occupied homes in Smithfield, College Hills, and Graymont bounded by 9th Court North on the north, 4th Street North on the east, Center Street North on the west, and Graymont Avenue on the south.
- All complete, eligible applications enter a randomized lottery; the first 25 selected move forward.

Homeowners needing deeper repairs such as plumbing, electrical, or heating and cooling are directed to the City's Critical Repair Program and to partners including Habitat for Humanity, HouseProud, MetroChangers, Christian Service Mission, and Strengthening Alabama Homes.

Creative placemaking

The A.H. Parker House at 522 5th Street North will be renovated into a shared community hub programmed by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Create Birmingham. It will include a gallery exhibit on Smithfield community history, a Listening Lab where visitors hear recorded stories from Smithfield community leaders, a research library, classrooms and arts programming space, a gallery and market where local artists sell their work, artist studios, and an extension of the Civil Rights Trail with a new marker honoring A.H. Parker.

A Smithfield Creative Pathway links cultural landmarks and new installations along Reverend Abraham Woods Jr. Boulevard, 8th Avenue West, and 5th Avenue North:

- A sculpture by Birmingham artist Willie Williams Jr., built from objects salvaged from historic A.H. Parker homes, with residents helping select materials and shape the concept.
- A Peacemaker Foot Soldier Memorial by folk artist Joe Minter honoring the foot soldiers of Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement.
- Two Creative Hubs — an Artisan Box where Birmingham creatives sell goods and host pop-up shops, and a Gallery Box for rotating exhibitions with work available for purchase.
- A photography mural created with photographer Dapper Lou and Smithfield residents, installed on the new Phase 1 building.
- Artist-designed wayfinding signage at culturally significant intersections, murals, and an annual art walk.

Create Birmingham serves as lead administrative partner for day-to-day operations. Birmingham Creatives for Impact leads cultural programming. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute provides curatorial guidance. The City's Department of Public Works maintains the public infrastructure. A Smithfield Cultural Assets Council meets quarterly to coordinate.

Neighborhood safety

Community-based violence intervention operates in Smithfield through the Free Da Streetz Birmingham program, providing street outreach, mediation, and community response. This work is not funded through the Critical Community Improvements Plan, but it advances the same objective: physical investment and community safety have to move together.

Residents have consistently asked for a neighborhood grocery store. A grocery store appears on the Critical Community Improvements map as part of a longer-term Social Innovation Center concept, alongside a technology center, a relocated library, and a clinic. It is not one of the three funded activities and no funding is currently committed to it.

The facade programs are not open for applications yet. Program guidelines, award amounts, and eligibility are being finalized. Watch for announcements through the monthly newsletter, community meetings, and the community broadcast system.

How to get involved

Choice Neighborhoods requires residents to help shape the work, and in this initiative that requirement is operational, not ceremonial.

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- **Monthly community meetings** at Smithfield Court, where residents receive updates across all three components and meet partner organizations directly.
 - **Monthly newsletters** hand-delivered to every household, plus a voice, text, and email broadcast system for timely notice of events, services, and deadlines.
 - **Weekly door knocking** by Family Support Coordinators, so that engagement does not depend on residents having the time, transportation, or trust to come to a meeting.
 - **Resident Advisory Council** meeting monthly, plus standing task forces covering Housing, People, and Neighborhood.
 - **Community Advisory Board** — a seven-member board representing both public housing residents and neighborhood homeowners, meeting monthly with the evaluation team.
 - **Resident-led research.** Eight residents of HABD communities have been trained as Community Research Assistants and are conducting recruitment and data collection for the evaluation.
 - **Businesses and community organizations** participate through partner agreements, community meetings, and the business evaluation study.

Where things stand

Completed

- \$50 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant awarded July 26, 2023 — the first in Alabama.
- On-site family support fully operational with a staffed Family Support Coordinator team.
- More than \$15 million in partner service commitments documented.
- Phase 1 environmental clearance, HUD approvals, and City construction permits obtained; tax credit and bond extension secured.
- Phase 2 environmental cleanup plan approved by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.
- HUD conceptual approval of the Critical Community Improvements Plan.
- Transit commitment secured from the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority.
- Feasibility study and building assessment completed for the A.H. Parker House; artists commissioned for the sculpture, memorial, and mural.
- Independent UAB evaluation established, with a Community Advisory Board seated and resident research assistants trained.

Underway

- Phase 1 financing and closing, followed by construction start.
- Phase 2 tax credit application under review.
- Final approval conditions for each Critical Community Improvements activity.
- Storefront Revival and Revive & Thrive program guidelines being finalized ahead of launch.
- Connected Streets construction and engineering documents.
- Community violence intervention outreach in Smithfield.
- UAB evaluation enrollment, including business owner focus groups.

Planned

- Construction and lease-up of Phase 1, followed by Phases 2 through 7 through 2031.
- Launch of the storefront and home repair programs once approvals are final.
- Connected Streets construction.
- Relocation and return of Smithfield Court households to new homes.
- Renovation of the A.H. Parker House and installation of the Creative Pathway.
- Relocation of the Smithfield Branch Library into a future Social Innovation Center.

Why the evaluation matters

A \$50 million public investment should be able to answer a straightforward question: did this actually make life better for the people who live and work here? Required federal reporting counts units, enrollments, and services delivered. It does not measure whether residents are healthier, whether the neighborhood feels safer, whether homeowners gained or lost, or whether local businesses benefited.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is conducting an independent evaluation, led by the Heersink School of Medicine together with the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. It draws on funding from the National Institutes of Health and UAB's own resources, so most of the research cost is not paid from the grant.

The evaluation looks at health, safety, walkability, and social connection among residents; how neighborhood change affects property values and homeowners, including families holding heirs' property; how neighborhood conditions affect local businesses and which programs actually help them; and whether the results were worth the cost.

Participation is voluntary and confidential, findings are reported in aggregate, and no individual participant or business is identified. Participation is the only way the record reflects what residents and business owners actually experienced. A separate briefing with full detail on the study is available for anyone considering taking part.

Contact

Melanie Bimbo, Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Director, Housing Authority of the Birmingham District, 150 8th Avenue North, Birmingham, Alabama 35204. Email mbimbo@habd.net.

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