

A TALE OF TWO (OR THREE) NEIGHBORHOODS

This is a tale of two neighborhoods that grew in different ways for different reasons around the downtown area of the prominent southern city of Augusta, Georgia. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s, all three areas were impacted by a set of common threads, and today are experiencing similar threats while united in a desire for change.

The Laney Walker neighborhood evolved well into the 1900s as an integrated, multi-cultural working-class community driven by development of the Georgia Railroad and Augusta Canal. In the early 20th century, Jim Crow laws imposed segregation block by block and Laney Walker became the main black neighborhood in the city. The area thrived despite segregation with numerous black-owned businesses, churches, and schools until the wave of suburban migration swept the country and disinvestment followed.

On the very edge of Laney Walker is Allen Homes, where the Augusta Housing Authority built 150 residential units in 1961. The site is disconnected from the surrounding street network and isolated by rail lines, a highway, high voltage power lines, and industrial uses, making it difficult for residents to access neighborhood amenities or feel part of the surrounding community.

Harrisburg flourished along the Savannah River in the 1800s as a mill village centered around the Sibley and King mills. When the mills began to decline in the 1930s the area remained largely residential. It also suffered from suburban flight in the 50s, followed by urban renewal efforts in the 70s that left large open swaths of vacant space. And in the 80s, the John C. Calhoun Expressway sliced the neighborhood in half, bringing further decline.

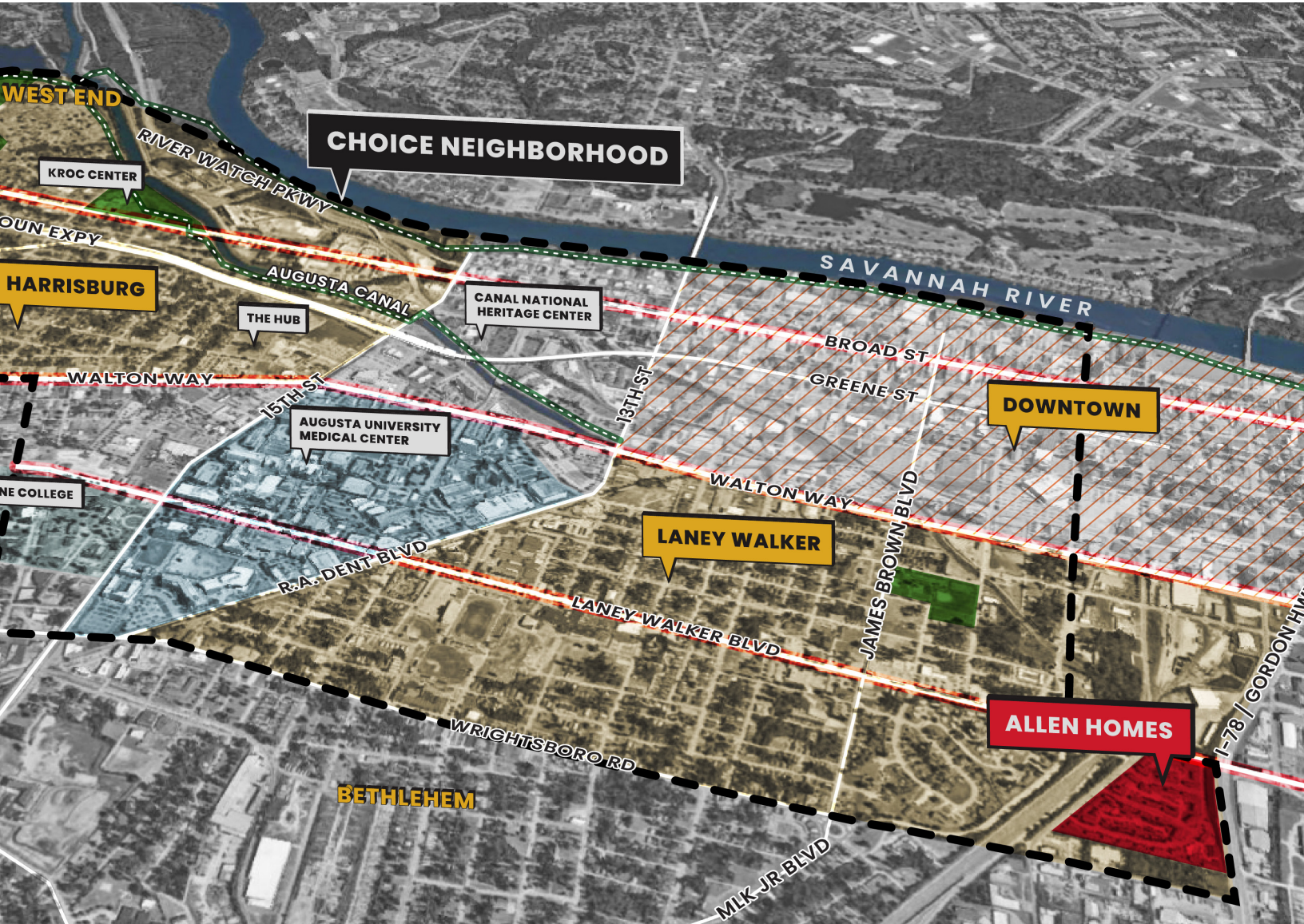


FIGURE 1 | Neighborhood Birds Eye

Both of these historic neighborhoods are wrapped along the edge of downtown where the walkable, pedestrian-scaled streets of the outer neighborhoods merge into a more visible, dense grid. Downtown is centered around Broad Street, which is lined with a variety of stately buildings, hotels, and theaters that hint at a more lively and prosperous time when the city was a winter destination for wealthy northerners attracted the climate and natural beauty of the region, and its golf courses and polo grounds. Despite the one week each year, the city welcomes tourists from

around the world to the Augusta National for the famed Masters Golf Championship, downtown also bears the impact of changing settlement patterns, the influence of the automobile, and decades of disinvestment.

These three historic districts comprise the Laney Walker-Harrisburg Choice Neighborhood and all three are ready to turn the page on this stubbornly enduring tale.



About the Neighborhood

Conditions in the Choice Neighborhood today reflect both struggle & promise.

Decades of disinvestment have left sweeping pockets of blight and vacancy. In 2000, the population was approximately 12,000 and by 2021, it declined to 9,396. Very modest growth of less than one percent is anticipated through 2026.

Augusta is a minority majority city, where approximately 58.4% of residents are black, and 34.3% are white. In contrast, 68.9% of Choice Neighborhood residents are black and 25.4% are white, while 98% of Allen Homes residents are black with less than 1% white.

The median household income in the city (\$44,715) is twice that for residents of the Choice Neighborhood (\$20,633) and four times that for Allen Homes households (\$9,528). Low incomes are directly linked to employment. Based on the Choice Neighborhood survey, only 38% of neighborhood residents are employed full time

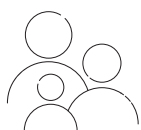
versus only 27% of Allen Homes residents.

Where the vacancy rate in the city is high at 12.3%, it is double in the Choice Neighborhood at 23.3%. Also in sharp contrast is the Choice Neighborhood's homeownership rate of only 16.6% compared to the citywide rate of 44%.

The homeownership rate is low in part because of rising housing costs. In the Choice Neighborhood, the median cost of homes (\$78,606) are 3.8 times higher than the median income. This disparity is even starker when viewed by race. For black residents in the Choice Neighborhood, the cost of homes is 9.5 times higher than the median income vs. 3.4 times higher for white residents.

These conditions are compounded further across the neighborhood and particularly for Allen Homes residents by a high proportion of single mothers, low rates of literacy, and concerns about safety, threatening the neighborhood's ability to stabilize itself and residents ability to live healthy, productive, self-sustaining lives.

Demographics at a glance



There is a very high percentage of children at Allen Homes, where the **MEDIAN AGE IS 14.**

- City median age of 35
- Choice Neighborhood median age is 40.

Augusta is a minority majority city, where most residents identify as Black:

58% of City of Augusta

69% of Choice Neighborhood

98% of Allen Homes



Median Income:

\$44,715

City of Augusta

\$20,933

Choice Neighborhood

\$9,528

Allen Homes



Homeownership Rates:

44% of City of Augusta

17% of Choice Neighborhood

GET UP Augusta

Nurturing the Seeds

Although these numbers paint a concerning picture, there are a lot of positive elements to build on.

The city has a strong and diverse economy with many employers anchored in and around the Choice Neighborhood. This includes a thriving military presence and growing nucleus of national cyber security. Healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and government administration round out the economy, offering a vast array of employment opportunities.

In addition, national trends continue to indicate a desire for more urban living with access to a range of amenities including restaurants, arts, culture, and outdoor recreation. Cities of all sizes will continue to fight for talent as they race to provide these amenities. Downtown Augusta has an advantage with a walkable “main street infrastructure” in place that will continue to flourish as it attracts more businesses, residents, and investments.

In the last two decades, the city has made significant efforts to reimagine the downtown and the historic neighborhoods of Laney Walker and Harrisburg. Redevelopment areas and

opportunity zones span the Choice Neighborhood, providing additional incentives. The Department of Housing and Community Development, the Augusta Housing Authority as well as smaller community development organizations have also completed several projects in pockets across the neighborhood. In fact, the Laney-Walker Bethlehem Revitalization Initiative was awarded the American Planning Association’s National Planning Excellence Award: HUD Secretary’s Opportunity & Empowerment Award in 2013.

Another very recent addition is the HUB for Community Innovation, which sits at the heart of the Choice Neighborhood. The HUB brings together several innovative non-profits committed to providing access to critical resources such as nutritious food, healthcare, and literacy, necessary for families to thrive.

The challenge for this Choice Neighborhood planning process will be to connect all of these dots, and create a critical mass of visible reinvestment to build the momentum necessary to alter people’s perceptions that the tide is at last changing.

Creating a Shared Vision

With generous funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Development (HUD) through the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI), Augusta has the potential to do just that. The City of Augusta and the Augusta Housing Authority received a two-year planning grant to develop a neighborhood plan to improve the quality of life for residents of Allen Homes and the surrounding neighborhood.

This place-based initiative focuses on three core goals:

Housing

Improving distressed public housing, in this case Allen Homes, with high-quality mixed-income housing that is well-managed and supports the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

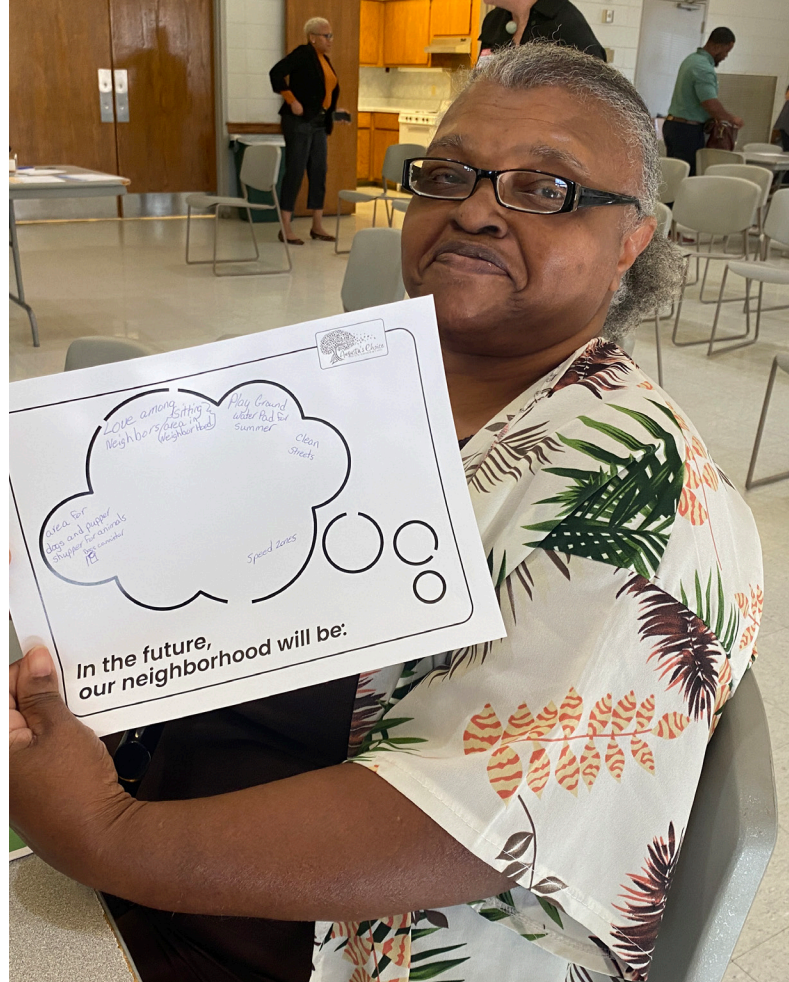
People

Enhancing the quality of life for residents with regard to employment and income, health, and children's education.

Neighborhood

Improving conditions through public and private reinvestment regarding safety, economic development and commercial activity, connectivity and mobility, and parks and open space.

Through the lens of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, the planning team will work with the community to continue the work that has been started.



The planning process is striving to give voice to all stakeholders by inviting everyone to the table to create a shared vision. A survey of 66% of Allen Homes residents and over 400 Choice Neighborhood residents shows just how aligned their aspirations are.

It is hoped that this transparent, consensus-based process can help to break down some of the deep-seated racial divides and long-standing biases against those in poverty.

Building a Neighborhood of Choice

An overarching goal is to benefit the folks who have tried to weather the decades-old storm by remaining in the neighborhood so that they will not be priced out by anticipated investments and rising housing prices and will have the opportunity to enjoy the transformation.

This plan strives to create a Neighborhood of Choice. Where people of all walks of life can comfortably choose to live, work, and play here.

