



BIRMINGHAM, AL

Reconnecting 4th Ave N



**A Two-Way Vision for
Reviving Legacy and
Inspiring Progress**



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01 OVERVIEW

Project Snapshot



100% Disadvantaged Community

Location: Birmingham, AL

Estimated Completion: Q2 2028

Website: birminghamal.gov/transportation/rcn

\$2,000,000 Local Match

Total Cost: \$16,540,954.33

Local Match: \$2,000,000.00

RCN Request: \$14,556,039.81*

Project Highlights



Conversion of a one-way corridor designed to move traffic quickly, into a two-way street that encourages safety, access to businesses, and a livable community.



Sustainable project design for an environmentally friendly and resilient community.



Investment in public health and local economy by reconnecting neighborhoods divided by I-65 and 4th Ave N's current one-way configuration.

Project Goals



Create a safe street for all ages and abilities that moves away from an auto-oriented design and encourages environmentally friendly multimodal transportation



Reconnect neighborhoods to improve access to jobs, nature, school, groceries, and each other.



Motivate reinvestment in a once thriving and culturally-rich area that is now a disadvantaged and low-income community.

** per SF424C form, the match and request amount vary slightly from total cost because Row 17 only allows whole number federal*

Project Scope

The 4th Ave N project is a 15-block Complete Street redesign of Birmingham's east-west main street—reconnecting a downtown commercial district divided by the construction of Interstate 65 (I-65) in the 1960s. The project encompasses the Historic 4th Avenue Business District, a once-thriving hub of black businesses and community in Birmingham.

Designed as a **true embodiment of Complete Streets principles**, this multimodal project will **revert 4th Ave N to its original two-way traffic configuration** between 24th St N and 9th St N—reviving

the access and connectivity that helped the community thrive prior to its conversion into a one-way street during the 1970s. Project design will incorporate transit, on-street parking, bicycle facilities, streetscape elements such as benches and planters, and ADA-compliant sidewalks and intersections. There is significant community desire to redesign this corridor, which is why this project has been identified as **a priority in all local plans for the last two decades**. The project design will prioritize accessibility for residents of underserved and underinvested corridor neighborhoods, and improve safety by reducing vehicle speeds and crashes. The project envisions creating a welcoming green corridor that will help

contribute to the economic resurgence of Birmingham's historic Black Main Street through place-based and equitable economic development.

CURRENT BARRIERS, HARMS, AND BURDENS POSED BY THE CORRIDOR

Situated entirely within a **Justice40 community**, the project area is marked by high rates of poverty, unemployment, diabetes, diesel particulate matter, traffic volume, and a notable lack of green spaces. If funds are awarded, the 4th Ave N project will foster a healthier community with new connections to employment opportunities, housing, healthcare, schools, grocery, places of worship and gathering, and green spaces in historically marginalized low-income communities of color. Two transportation facilities create barriers to mobility and access along the project corridor:

- **Dividing and burdening facility:** 4th Ave N is a *dividing facility* because of its alignment as a one-way street that has high traffic speeds, and is difficult to cross as a pedestrian. It is also a *burdening facility* as it contributes to air pollution and the area's designation as an urban heat island.
- » **How the 4th Ave N project addresses it:** The project would restore 4th Ave N to its original two-way configuration, and incorporate multimodal design features. The redesign will also capitalize on opportunities to increase greenery and add trees that will help decrease temperatures and air pollution along the corridor.
- **Dividing and burdening facility:** I-65 is a *dividing facility* that separates the neighborhood of Smithfield from the Historic 4th Avenue Business District. It is also a *burdening facility* due to noise and air pollution.
- » **How the 4th Ave N project addresses it:** The project would create a safer and more inviting multimodal connection on 4th Ave N under I-65. The introduction of street trees and strategic landscaping along the corridor will help mitigate air pollution from I-65.

HISTORY AND CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY MOST IMPACTED

The Historic 4th Avenue Business District, recently designated as a Main Street community by Main Street Alabama, was once the heart of Birmingham's African American business community. Locally referred to as **Black Main Street**, 4th Ave N was a bustling two-way street, humming with activity and small businesses. By the 1970s, the City **converted it into a one-way thoroughfare**, driven by an attempt to address traffic congestion and respond to white flight by moving people in cars efficiently through downtown.

As 4th Ave N evolved into a primary route for vehicles out of downtown towards the west, the eastern end of the district experienced a decline. Once vibrant, this area witnessed reduced activity, particularly as train travel waned, leading to the **demolition of the Birmingham Terminal Station** in 1969. This fundamentally altered the character of the corridor's eastern end, rendering it less active and subsequently underinvested in.

To the west, the corridor transformed into an automobile-centric area characterized by car dealerships and a lack of walkability—reinforcing the shift in the street's identity. The Smithfield neighborhood in particular serves as a case study in the adverse impacts of highway construction on black neighborhoods. Developed as a neighborhood for prominent black professionals, it is also home to Birmingham's first high school for black students. However, with the construction of I-65 and the one-way conversion of 4th Ave N, the neighborhood became isolated from downtown and ignored for investment.

Today, many historic buildings along the corridor sit vacant or lack ground-floor activity. The conversion of this historic street into a one-way corridor triggered a transformation that prioritized vehicular movement at unsafe speeds, resulting in safety issues, limited access to essential resources and job opportunities, and a decline in community investments.

02 PROJECT LOCATION

Corridor Geography

The 4th Ave N corridor runs east-to-west through the heart of downtown Birmingham within the Historic 4th Avenue Business District. The project corridor encompasses 15 blocks of 4th Ave N, from its intersection with 24th St N to the east to the intersection with 9th St N to the west – a distance of 1.368 miles. I-65 divides the project corridor between 10th and 11th Streets. This area, which includes the Fountain Heights neighborhood, was an important **cradle of the Civil Rights Movement**.

The nearby Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument includes landmarks such as the A.G. Gaston Motel (site of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "war room") and the 16th Street Baptist Church – both of which were bombed by white supremacists in 1963, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and Kelly Ingram Park, which contains numerous memorials commemorating the movement.

The Smithfield and Graymont neighborhoods are located to the west of I-65. Residents of these neighborhoods had strong ties with the Historic 4th Avenue Business District prior to

the construction of the interstate, but since then, have been quite literally cut off from accessing healthcare, public services, recreation facilities, and other important destinations in Downtown Birmingham by I-65.

Corridor Neighborhoods

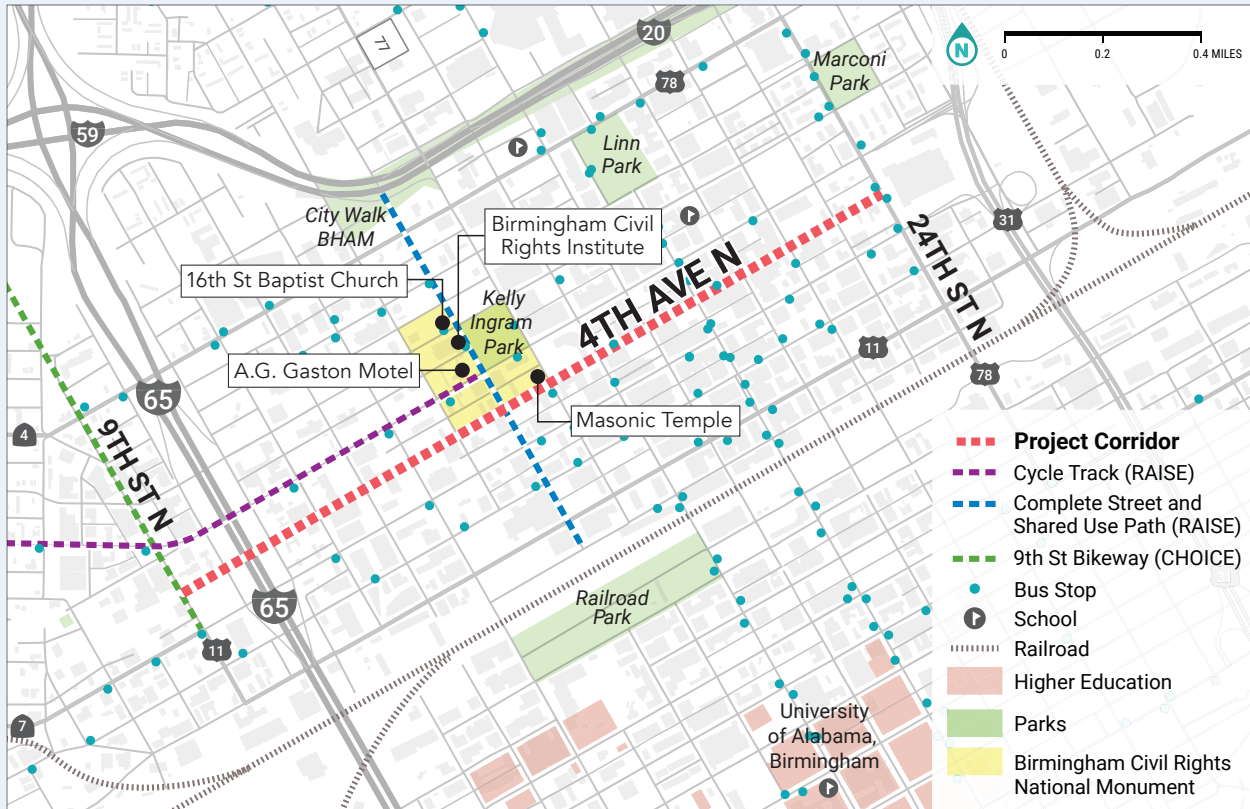
The project corridor in Birmingham, Alabama, holds significant historical importance as it was once the vibrant hub of Birmingham's Black Main Street. However, its vitality was severely impacted by two key events in its history.

First, the construction of I-65 through Downtown Birmingham in the early 1960s disrupted the district's economic activities and flow. Second, the conversion of 4th Ave N into a one-way street in the 1970s further contributed to the area's challenges, altering its dynamics and character. These factors have played a crucial role in shaping the district's present-day and provide important context for future development efforts. In the decades since these major changes, as Downtown Birmingham has begun to experience revitalization, much



Berman's Department Store (Photo credit: Courtesy of Urban Impact)

Figure 1. Map of Project Corridor



of the population of the surrounding lower-income neighborhoods has remained relatively underserved.

The project corridor is located within two census tracts (29 and 27) that have been identified as disadvantaged based on the Biden administration’s Justice40 initiative criteria. Tract 27 is in the 94th percentile (of all tracts in the U.S.) for the share of people in households where income is at or below 100% of the federal poverty level and is in the 90th percentile for unemployment. Tract 29 is in the 96th percentile for poverty. Both tracts are also considered Areas of Persistent Poverty and HUD Opportunity Zones, and Tract 27 is a Historically Disadvantaged Community.

The transformation of 4th Ave N into a two-way Complete Street will create a crucial multimodal connection between these neighborhoods — some of Birmingham’s most underserved and lacking in investment — to essential services and destinations downtown.

4th Ave N is a one-way street with three to four travel lanes for most of its length, with on-street parking spaces on one or both sides of the street east of the 17th St N intersection. There are crosswalks on most legs of each of the 15 intersections included in the project area, 14 of which are signalized. The sidewalk network within, and connecting to, the project corridor is mostly complete, with some gaps and places where the sidewalk is narrow or in disrepair. Most of the existing curb ramps in the corridor do not meet current accessibility standards.

Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority’s (BJCTA) MAX bus operates two bus stops within the corridor, one between 18th St N and 19th St N served by Route 6, and one between 20th St N and Richard Arrington Jr Blvd served by Routes 6 and 40. There are no existing bicycle facilities along the corridor, though there are some micromobility parking corrals.

03 RESPONSE TO MERIT CRITERIA

Table 1. Merit Criteria Priorities Summary

Merit Criteria	How this Project Addresses the RCN Priorities of Equity and Climate Change
Equity and Environmental Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconnect a community divided by federal and local investments: the construction of I-65 in the 1960s and the one-way conversion of 4th Ave N in the 1970s. • Reinvest in a community that was historically excluded and harmed by government policies such as redlining, racial zoning, and segregation.
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a multimodal corridor designed for people walking, rolling, biking, and taking transit. • Increase access to key community destinations including downtown city parks and green spaces, housing, small businesses, and job centers.
Facility Suitability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve public health outcomes by slowing vehicle speeds, thus reducing fatalities and injuries resulting from crashes. • Increase opportunities for physical activity and mental wellbeing by improving the built environment and creating safer places for people to walk, roll, bike, and take transit.
Community Engagement and Community-based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitably engage surrounding communities and stakeholders in project planning, development, and design to ensure the project reflects the community’s vision.
Equitable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with CHOICE grant to encourage mixed-use and range of affordable housing in the neighborhoods of Smithfield, Fountain Heights, and Central City. • Use existing programs to create opportunities for building wealth in black communities near the multimodal corridor. • Celebrate the history and culture of the Historic 4th Avenue Business District through creative placemaking, shared spaces, and pop-up markets.
Climate and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce transportation-related environmental impacts like poor air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, stormwater runoff, and extreme heat. • Encourage high-quality choices for lower-carbon travel bicycle facilities, wider and ADA accessible sidewalks, and easier transit connections. • Institute design elements and technologies that seek to mitigate climate change.
Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) participation and utilization. • Use workforce development programs to advance an inclusive wealth-building environment that benefits local black communities.

1. Equity and Environmental Justice

RECONNECT A COMMUNITY DIVIDED BY FEDERAL AND LOCAL POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS

The City of Birmingham is in the midst of reinvesting in its neighborhoods and communities that, historically, were intentionally excluded or harmed by government policy and investment. The 4th Ave N project is one component of a larger reinvestment initiative in the city to right the wrongs of the past.

The practice of redlining severely and negatively impacted 4th Ave N neighborhoods' environmental and physical health, wealth-building capacity, and access to greenspace. As seen in the [1933 map](#) from the Engineering Department in the City of Birmingham, the City labeled the neighborhoods where the 4th Ave N project is located as “Hazardous” as noted by the red, and “Negro concentrations” as noted by the grey. In the last 50 years, in large part due to redlining and suburbanization, socioeconomic disparities have increased, and housing stock has declined.

Like many cities during this time in the United States, the City of Birmingham's [racial segregation ordinances](#) intentionally barred black people from accessing white restaurants, entertainment spaces, public transportation, and other social spaces. Local leaders recount that while these Jim Crow-era policies in part spurred the creation of the Historic 4th Avenue Business District, a place where black residents could shop, socialize, and access key destinations, the thriving commercial district was consistently marred by City investments. For example, the placement of the post office cut off 4th Ave N from the eastern side of the city in 1921. The reconfiguration of 4th Ave N from a two-way street to the one-way street in the early 1970s served people commuting into Birmingham from the suburbs. The one-way configuration significantly increased speeds on the corridor and made it difficult for people to walk and bike, use an assistive device, and take

transit. It also reduced the foot traffic on the corridor, making it a more difficult place to own and operate small businesses.

In the 1960s, as part of the expansion and construction of the Interstate Highway System, the federally funded I-65 tore through the center of Birmingham, AL. This investment [followed the boundaries](#) drawn by the City's racial zoning maps. The construction not only displaced black residents and their homes, but the construction physically divided the downtown district and created a permanent barrier that cut off access and significantly reduced the ability of people living in the surrounding areas—especially the nearby neighborhood of Smithfield—to live, work, play, and access key destinations.

“The two-way to one-way conversion in the 1970s transformed 4th Ave N from a place you wanted to be into a place where you simply moved through.”

- Project Workshop Participant

The harmful effects of the I-65 placement and the one-way configuration of 4th Ave N persists today. Using the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), Table 2 on page 8 shows the ways in which the two census tracts that overlap the project area are overburdened and underserved. The figures in bold demonstrate the areas in which the census tracts exceed the threshold of burden as designated by CEJST.

This project seeks to address the socioeconomic disparities shown above by reconnecting the Smithfield neighborhood with the Fountain Heights and Central City neighborhoods. The multimodal design will improve health by creating a built environment that fosters physical activity, social connection, and access

Figure 2. 1947 (above) and 1970 (below) aerial maps of Birmingham showing before and after the construction of Interstate 65. I-65 can be seen in the bottom photo running north to south at the western edge of the image, and illustrates how the Smithfield and Fountain Heights neighborhoods in particular were cut off from each other.



Table 2. Project Area Census Tracts: Categories of Burden

		Smithfield (Census tract: 01073002900)	Fountain Heights & Central City (Census tract: 01073002700)
	Disadvantaged	Yes	Yes
	Low income	96th percentile	87th percentile
Health	Asthma	97th percentile	77th percentile
	Diabetes	99th percentile	92nd percentile
	Heart disease	98th percentile	72nd percentile
	Low life expectancy	99th percentile	98th percentile
Housing	Historic underinvestment	Yes	Yes
	Housing cost	95th percentile	82nd percentile
	Lack of green space	81st percentile	95th percentile
Transportation	Diesel particulate matter exposure	93rd percentile	96th percentile
	Traffic proximity and volume	90th percentile	97th percentile
Workforce development	Low median income	99th percentile	96th percentile
	Poverty	96th percentile	94th percentile
	Unemployment	86th percentile	90th percentile
	High school education	30 percent	18 percent

to existing greenspace. The improvements to transit, biking, and walking infrastructure will reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, therefore reducing traffic proximity, volume, and emissions. Finally, by reconnecting a once-thriving commercial district, the home of Black Main Street in the city, the project seeks to improve connections to jobs and encourage wealth-building for people living within these neighborhoods.

No part of the construction area is located within a FEMA flood zone, and noise and air pollution impact are anticipated to be minimal compared to the long-term benefits of the project. To mitigate other anticipated construction impacts, the City will use the following approach:

- Coordinate with the Alabama Historical Commission to conduct a Section 106 review to mitigate adverse impacts to the Historic 4th Avenue Business District.

- Work with Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA) to follow their thorough mitigation plan. The plan can be found in more detail in Appendix A. BJCTA deploys a thorough mitigation plan to address negative construction impacts, particularly related to public transportation service disruptions, including:

- » Advanced planning and coordination
- » Communication and notification
- » Alternative transportation options
- » Air quality monitoring
- » Stormwater management
- » Continuous monitoring and adaptation

2. Access

CREATE A MULTIMODAL CORRIDOR DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE

Present-day 4th Ave N is not designed for people walking, rolling, biking, or using transit. The decision to convert this walkable downtown street into a one-way, three-lane arterial prioritized convenience for suburban commuters, altering the context and subsequent development of the corridor.

While the corridor has sidewalks on both sides, there are significant obstacles that limit pedestrian accessibility, especially for people who use assistive mobility devices and people with visual impairments. Specific obstacles include the planters that block the walking

path in front of the US Courthouse, and signal control boxes that block the sidewalk and curb ramps, including in front of the Carver Theatre for the Performing Arts. Numerous driveways clutter the corridor and increase the potential for turning-vehicle crashes for people walking and biking. The roadway width makes pedestrian crossing distances long and uncomfortable for slower-moving pedestrians. There are no bicycle facilities along the corridor, meaning bicyclists must either share the sidewalks with pedestrians (which is prohibited by City ordinance) or risk traveling in the 35mph roadway alongside fast-moving vehicles.

The photosimulation in Figure 3 shows how the corridor is re-envisioned as a multimodal street. The before image can be seen in Appendix B. Bicycle facilities on both sides of the road will



Figure 3. Photosimulation of corridor improvements. 4th Ave N will be converted to a two-way street, providing for bike and pedestrian facilities and on-street parking where possible, especially in the Business District.

provide dedicated space for biking. Much of the corridor is envisioned as having protected bike lanes. Crosswalks at all intersections along the corridor will reinforce crossings, while curb extensions and landscaped islands at intersections will slow vehicle speeds and reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians. Key driveways will be closed or reconstructed to reduce conflict points between turning vehicles and people walking or biking.

IMPROVE TRANSIT ACCESS

The 4th Ave N conversion will greatly improve current transit access and lay the groundwork for a stronger transit network in the future, allowing more people in Birmingham to access daily destinations and jobs in the Historic 4th Avenue Business District. Currently, 4th Ave N has two BJCTA MAX Transit stops in the project corridor. The project will add floating bus islands at both stops, with level pedestrian crossings of the bicycle facility to make sure the stop is accessible. Crossing 4th Ave N will also be made easier with shorter crossing distances.

IMPROVE ACCESS TO CITY PARKS AND GREEN SPACES DOWNTOWN

The three parks that were part of the City's original design are within a quarter-mile of the project area, and are central to downtown Birmingham's history and cultural identity:

- **Linn Park** (formerly Central Park), in the heart of the government district.
- **Kelly Ingram Park** (formerly West Park), a historic location at the center of the civil rights struggle and the starting point for the self-guided Birmingham Civil Rights Walking Trail through downtown.
- **Marconi Park** (formerly East Park), a well-utilized neighborhood park with a ballfield and the nearby Jones Valley Teaching Farm.

In addition, two city parks on 4th Ave N - the 4th Ave History Park and Eddie Kendricks Memorial Park - are presently underutilized. The lack of safe accommodation for walking and biking makes it difficult to access these

parks and other green spaces along the Birmingham Civil Rights Heritage Trail. This multimodal corridor project will restore walking and biking access to these parks and other daily destinations in the area.

RESTORE CONNECTIVITY TO NEARBY HOUSING, SMALL BUSINESSES, AND FUTURE JOBS CENTERS

The study - *Feasibility Analysis of Converting Certain One-Way Streets to Two-Way Traffic in Birmingham's City Center* - includes 4th Ave N and concludes that the conversion to two-way would provide a basis for better access to daily destinations. Within one or two blocks of the 1.5-mile corridor are several key community destinations that will benefit from the improved connectivity of the two-way conversion. These include:

- **Freedom Manor**, a senior public housing facility on 5th Ave N whose residents often patronize businesses on 4th Ave N.
- The soon to be renovated **Masonic Temple** on 4th Ave N, a former center for Black-owned businesses, will be a place for makers and small businesses, and will feature space for retail, offices, and events.
- The **Nextec Building** on 3rd Ave N will provide a landing space for entrepreneurs who are looking to grow their businesses. This project is expected to yield over 300 jobs over the next seven years with a 65,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility.
- **Yo' Mama's**, a well-loved local restaurant, will be moving into a city-owned space on 4th Ave N. The City provided \$1.3 million in incentives to assist with the redesign of designated ground floor retail space to accommodate a restaurant.
- Several churches, including the historic **16th St Baptist Church**.
- The Birmingham Theater District, including the **Carver Theatre** and **Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame**.
- The **Auburn University Urban Studio**, the school's new campus for design studies.

3. Facility Suitability

BARRIER TO ACCESS, MOBILITY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In its current form, 4th Ave N is a barrier that actively hinders safe mobility for the community. After the construction of I-65 and 4th Ave N's conversion to a one-way street, the physical and social connectivity of the pre-existing neighborhood was fractured, with residents losing safe and comfortable access to downtown businesses and destinations. 4th Ave N is a dangerous corridor with 322 crashes since 2017.

» BARRIER SOLUTION

Converting 4th Ave N to a two-way street and creating multimodal opportunities will improve safety and health. 4th Ave N is a particularly suitable facility because unlike many of its parallel one-way streets, there are no on- or off-ramps to I-65 or US-31. This makes the street a more naturally pedestrian-friendly area, and an excellent opportunity to restore the social fabric of the community – creating new, stronger connections between residents, local businesses, and their patrons as people are able to walk and bike to their destinations.

The two-way conversion will improve public health outcomes by slowing vehicle speeds, reducing fatalities and injuries resulting from crashes. Creating safer places for people to walk and bike also provides better access to jobs, grocery stores, and healthcare facilities.

Impacts to regional goods movement are not anticipated, given that 4th Ave N does not connect to I-65 or US-31. Local goods delivery will be made simpler by the addition of a two-way facility.

ENVIRONMENTAL BURDEN

The existing one-way configuration of 4th Ave N creates a built environment that results in inefficient fuel usage, excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and poor overall air quality for communities surrounding the corridor. The Environmental Protection Agency's

Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool (EJScreen) indicates that neighborhoods adjacent to the project corridor are above the 95th percentile for exposure to diesel particulate matter and particulate matter 2.5. Exposure to vehicle emissions and a reduced pedestrian network have led to and exacerbated a number of health disparities within the surrounding communities. These neighborhoods have high rates of heart disease, diabetes, and asthma, as well as overall low life expectancy.

Its current layout with wide asphalt travel lanes and a tree canopy ranging from only 7-15%, creates a hot, unpleasant experience for walking, rolling, taking transit, or gathering in nearby green spaces. The urban heat island map in Figure 4 below shows the corridor ranging from moderate to severe heat.

» BURDEN SOLUTION

The proposed project has the potential to decrease vehicle emissions and particulate matter by reducing over-reliance on automobiles through its multimodal design. The lower design speed will also have a positive impact on emissions reduction. The proposed concept re-envisioned the wide asphalt travel lanes and minimal streetscaping into a more narrow profile with an increase in street trees. The more pleasant environment will increase opportunities for physical activity, reducing overall rates of chronic illness within the community.

Figure 4. Urban Heat Island Map



Data source: Trust for Public Land

4. Community Engagement, and Community-based Stewardship, Management, and Partnerships

FACILITATE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

If awarded funding for this project, the City will follow a **Community Participation Plan** for a robust engagement process, with set goals and measures to evaluate effectiveness. This will include working with the implementation committees from the Northside-Southside and Western areas' plans. Additionally, the City will hold focus groups to ensure the project design meaningfully addresses inequities. The City's partnership with local organizations REV Birmingham (REV) and Urban Impact will help effectively conduct outreach to hard-to-reach community members.

The City has established the following commitments and partnerships to ensure the success of the project.

- The project reflects the City's philosophy of "Putting People First" and is a **collaboration of the City of Birmingham and two community-based non-profits, REV and Urban Impact**. These three entities worked together to develop this project and engage local stakeholders and the nearby neighborhoods of Smithfield, Fountain Heights, and Central City. Over 50 organizations have written letters of support for this project, actively support the proposed project, and are ready to collaborate and provide resources to support programming, new infrastructure, and local entrepreneurship. The project has already received [local media coverage](#) touting the community desire and project benefits. The City, REV, and Urban Impact have had one-on-one conversations with stakeholders, presented to local community organizations, and conducted specific outreach to harder-to-reach business owners who may be less interested or concerned.

"The one-way traffic system has posed several challenges to the local businesses that are the lifeblood of this community... We believe that the proposed project will have a transformative impact on 4th Ave's Historic Black Mainstreet and the surrounding community."

Reverend Arthur Price, Jr, Pastor - 16th St Baptist Church

- The City of Birmingham has committed a **\$2 million local match** to complete the Reconnecting 4th Ave N project.
- A **Community Advisory Group** will be instituted for the project to help redress transportation-related disparities and oversee development related priorities and initiatives. The City has a recent historical precedent of community-based stewardship.

REDRESS INEQUITIES THROUGH A COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH

In recent decades, the City has made a concerted effort to work in partnership with communities on planning, policy, and design. These equitable engagement efforts have resulted in community-driven plans that reaffirm commitment to the 4th Ave N project and to active transportation, broadly. For example:

- Several past planning efforts and regional collaboration efforts, including the 2022 *NW Downtown Quadrant Master Plan* and the 2020 *City Center Master Plan*, consider 4th Ave N a priority project for improving connections to nearby neighborhoods, increasing safety, and revitalizing communities.



Community street painting with Create Birmingham, Smithfield residents and local artist Lydia Walker at the intersection of Center Street and 8th Ave W in 2022 for the City's Asphalt Art Initiative.

- As part of the [Imagine Birmingham](#) planning initiative, the City of Birmingham engaged with the public to create a plan that is reflective of their community's vision for themselves. This included their needs and concerns related to active transportation in the project area. Both the *Northside-Southside Framework Plan* and the *Western Area Communities' Framework Plan* emphasized building out a connected multimodal network in the City.
- In 2018, the City worked closely with local stakeholders to develop and adopt a [Complete Streets ordinance](#). This ordinance was a culmination of a decade of community engagement and outreach, and establishes the City's commitment to safe, reliable, efficient, integrated and connected multimodal transportation network. The 4th Ave N project is one of many that will help to realize the City's Complete Streets vision.
- Most recently, residents have been actively engaged in planning efforts, including the 2023-submitted Smithfield Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant Program by the City and Housing Authority of the Birmingham District. The Smithfield neighborhood was cut off from the Downtown Civil Rights District with the construction of I-65, and was further isolated when 4th Ave N became a one-way street. The Choice program includes a bicycle facility to 4th Ave N via 9th St N – providing a direct multimodal connection to the historic neighborhood.

5. Equitable Development

COMMUNITY RESTORATION, STABILIZATION AND ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STRATEGIES

The impact of government policies like redlining, municipal projects such as the construction of I-65, and the one-way configuration of 4th Ave N have made the neighborhoods of Smithfield, Fountain Heights, and Center City difficult and sometimes undesirable locations to live in. As a result, over time there has been a decrease in population and an increase in vacant homes.

The 4th Ave N project is well-timed, as the City was recently awarded a \$50,000,000 Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant for the Smithfield Court public housing property and surrounding Smithfield, College Hill, and Graymont neighborhoods. The plan calls for the redevelopment of the 456 severely distressed public housing units that make up the 88-year-old Smithfield Court. The new Smithfield Court will include 920 new mixed-income apartments for families and seniors, including a one-for-one replacement of the original public housing units.

Building on that momentum, the City is in the process of a full zoning code overhaul. The plan is to rezone the area to Mixed-Use Downtown and Mixed-Use High – eliminating the light industrial uses and single-family detached housing. This change will result in higher-density development and will be a significant step toward anti-displacement.

Two recent multi-family (condo/loft) projects on, or adjacent to, 4th Ave N have shown strong commitment to affordable housing. The Market Lofts on Third emphasized leasing to proximate essential worker populations at UAB, St. Vincent's Hospital, Birmingham City Schools, and others. Local groups interact regularly with essential worker stakeholders to ensure awareness of this housing option to help achieve a higher occupancy rate. The Market Lofts are providing extensive affordable housing with nearly half of the units affordable to

those making 50% of the area's median family income. The 2nd project is the American Life development on 4th Avenue North that provides 137 workforce housing units.

In the late 1980s, under Mayor Richard Arrington Jr., the city implemented a unique program that allowed businesses to purchase their own properties, ensuring their continued presence in the downtown area. This innovative approach helped maintain a sense of ownership and stability in the district during a time when many were leaving for the suburbs.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING WEALTH IN BLACK COMMUNITIES NEAR THE MULTIMODAL CORRIDOR

In 2019, Mayor Randall Woodfin created the Department of Innovation and Economic Opportunity (IEO) to solely focus on the needs of small businesses. Its mission is to make Birmingham a hub for women and minority businesses through improving government policies and processes with three strategic goals: filling needs in the ecosystem, improving government operations, and finding purpose in place. IEO has created a legacy business program that seeks to support, protect, and promote legacy businesses who have contributed significantly to the fabric of the city, but may be in jeopardy of not being able to thrive amidst the city's growth. This includes many businesses in the Historic 4th Avenue Business District and along the project corridor.

Through the Building Opportunities for Lasting Development (BOLD) program, Birmingham Business Alliance is expanding the reach and impact of the legacy business program by registering qualified legacy businesses and offering both technical assistance and strategic promotions.

The local community non-profit, Urban Impact, runs BECOME, a business accelerator program

inspired by the living legacy of the Historic 4th Avenue Business District. The goal of the program is to advance a sustainable, thriving, equitable and black entrepreneurial ecosystem within the City. The program consists of a 12-week core curriculum followed by an intensive individualized technical assistance period and a one-year alumni program. To date, BECOME has supported and empowered 147 Black-owned businesses, contributing significantly to their growth and sustainability. Over the course of the grant performance period, BECOME plans to work with local leaders in the project area to assist in launching their businesses.

Urban Impact and REV collaborated on a Master Development Plan that specifies tools for equitable affordable development along the corridor — such as the Land Trust Model, Equity Partnership, 1031 Exchange, and Land “ground” Lease — and helps business owners identify opportunities for property ownership.

CELEBRATE HISTORY AND CULTURE THROUGH CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND SHARED SPACES

The Historic 4th Avenue Business District was once the main street of the African American

business community in Birmingham. In recent decades, the level of activity has reduced when compared to other areas of the city. For example, after launching the Public Space Permit program in 2020, which allowed businesses to use outdoor space, there are still no permits in place along the corridor, while other areas of downtown have several. The lack of permit applications is expected as automobile traffic along the corridor is often traveling at high speeds.

The redesign of 4th Ave N will create a more livable environment where people feel safe and comfortable biking, walking, taking transit, dining, and existing in public spaces. The City will work with local partners to activate markets and pop-ups to increase foot traffic and jumpstart 4th Ave N as a space for gathering and congregating. Finally, the City will install wayfinding to uplift and help retell the historic events of Civil Rights that occurred in the district. The wayfinding will be more than just a sign – the materials used will recognize and illustrate the historic elements of the streets.



Placemaking along other more pedestrian-friendly corridors, like the 20th St N parklet, implemented on Park(ing) Day in September 2019, has been well received.

6. Climate and Environment

REDUCE TRANSPORTATION-RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The area currently experiences notably high levels of air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, extreme heat, and a need for improved stormwater management. While greenspace exists within walking distance of 4th Ave N — including the historically significant Kelly Ingram Park — the corridor is a barrier to accessing these greenspaces.

The changes to the built environment of the corridor played an active role in the downturn that the surrounding communities (considered disadvantaged by Justice40 criteria) have experienced. Previously home to thriving neighborhoods and flourishing black businesses, 4th Ave N was the heart of the community. During the 1970s, the corridor was transformed into a one-way route designed to facilitate the swift passage of drivers through town. This approach of prioritizing uninterrupted traffic flow adversely affected local businesses by discouraging stopping, while also making it challenging to cross the corridor — exacerbating disconnect and poor access.

The conversion of 4th Ave N back to its original configuration as a two-way street will slow traffic, decrease noise and greenhouse gas emissions, and increase safety, access to transit, and greenspace. Additionally, the redesign of the corridor creates opportunities for incorporating natural elements into the built environment, like street trees to mitigate hot spot areas of extreme heat, and the use of natural and local materials.

ENCOURAGE HIGH-QUALITY CHOICES FOR LOWER-CARBON TRAVEL

4th Ave N in its current configuration of three to four lanes in one direction is inhospitable to active modes like walking and bicycling. Transit on the corridor can be difficult to access for people walking, and there are not opportunities for northbound connections.

Should the project be awarded funding, the

redesign — including bicycle facilities, wider and ADA accessible sidewalks — will directly encourage uptake of walking, rolling, bicycling, and transit. Similarly, by reducing the number of lanes, it will discourage reliance on single-occupancy cars. This modal shift will have the direct impact of reducing air pollution, stormwater runoff, and greenhouse gas emissions.

ADVANCE A CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

The City of Birmingham is a leader in climate action and sustainability in the State of Alabama. In 2012, the City set ambitious goals and policies for sustainability and green practices within the City. Since then, the City has followed through on their commitment to take action against climate change, with commitments including:

- Creating a Division of Resilience and Sustainability
- Drawing down \$1,000,000 from the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) that will quickly synthesize to a City-level climate action plan
- Adopting a Climate Action Plan, which the City is actively writing

INSTITUTE DESIGN ELEMENTS AND TECHNOLOGIES THAT SEEK TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

The right-of-way is currently asphalt from curb to curb, exacerbating the urban heat island effect and allowing harmful stormwater runoff.

In the new design, streetscape elements are incorporated that specifically target climate change and environmental impacts. These include natural elements like planters and street trees in strategic locations along the corridor as well as permeable surfaces. The amount of right-of-way dedicated to driving lanes will be reduced from three lanes in one direction to one lane in each direction.

Street trees will also be an important addition to the corridor, which lacks shade and faces extreme heat, as shown in Figure 4. Urban

Heat Island Map. Project partner Cool Green Trees has identified 4th Ave N as being within a Cool Green Opportunity area – a high priority for urban heat island intervention. They will support the project with street tree planting, thereby improving air quality, creating shade and decreasing local temperatures two to four degrees, and decreasing stormwater runoff. Tree wells to avoid sidewalk buckling will be implemented, further increasing the longevity and sustainability of the new construction.

This project improves air and water quality, minimizes stormwater runoff to important habitats, and takes actions to mitigate and avoid adverse impacts during construction.



(Photo Credit: Courtesy of Birmingham Historical Society)

7. Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity

IMPROVE DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISES (DBE) PARTICIPATION AND UTILIZATIONS

The City of Birmingham recently concluded a Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) disparity study to better understand DBE participation and utilization. The City is currently reviewing the recommendations in order to create robust, inclusive procurement programs that allow diverse vendors to engage in bidding opportunities more effectively. This will include the creation of forecasting guides, reduction in payment cycles, and improvements to vendor registration.

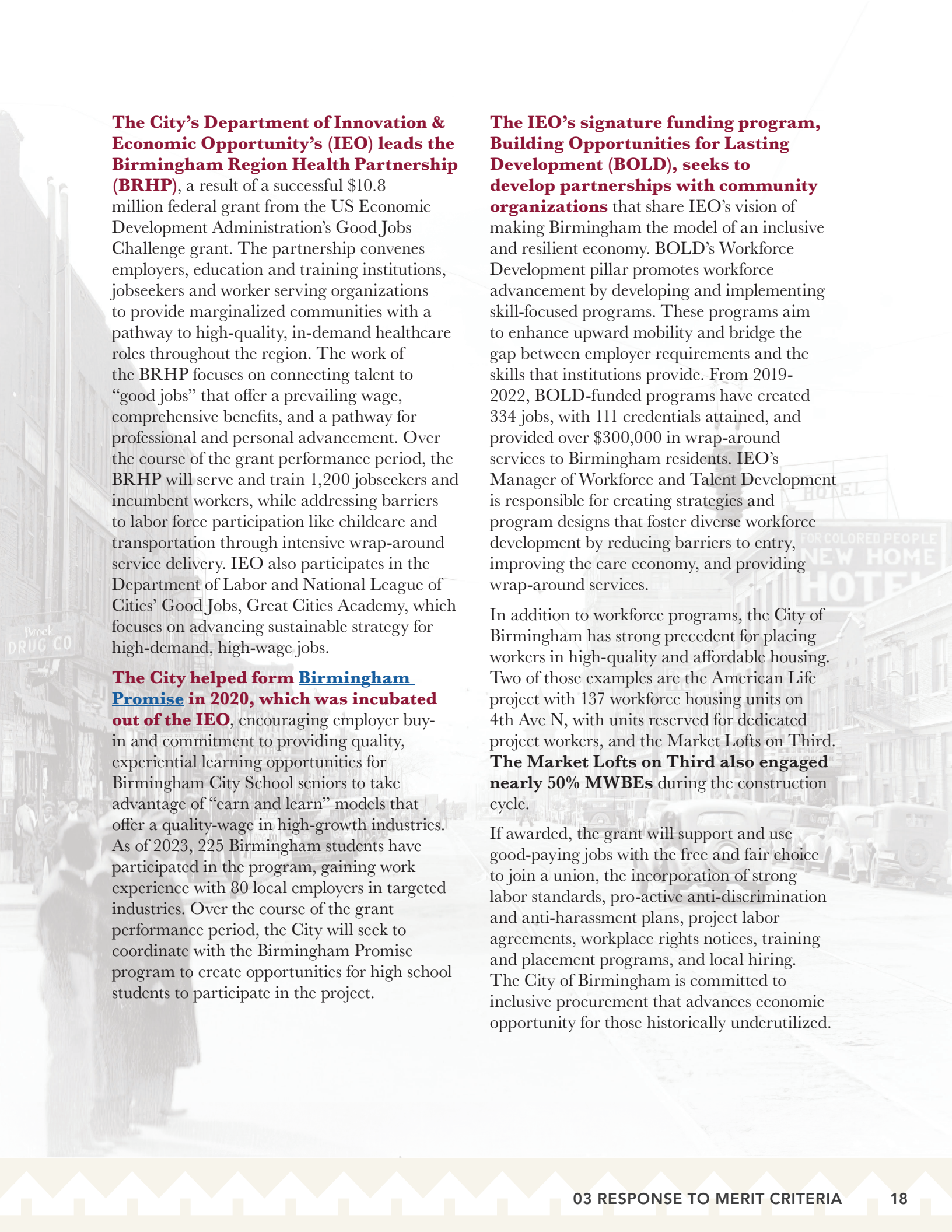
Additionally, the City partners with the Birmingham Construction Industry Authority (BCIA) to increase the utilization of Minority and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (MBE/DBE) in the City of Birmingham. BCIA is a part of the City's pre-bid process and helps ensure MBE/DBE firms are considered and hired when possible. BCIA will work with the

City during the grant performance period to help integrate MBE/DBE firms in the project.

USE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS TO ADVANCE AN INCLUSIVE WEALTHBUILDING ENVIRONMENT THAT BENEFITS LOCAL BLACK COMMUNITIES

According to [a report](#) from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the State of Alabama is experiencing a severe worker shortage. This is particularly true for the Birmingham region: 39 percent of the region's population is not participating in the labor force, limited by level of education, access to transportation and childcare, involvement with the justice system, and systemic racism ([BRHP Project Narrative](#)).

To address root issues of the labor shortage issue and ensure there are high-quality workforce development programs in place to train, support, place, and retain workers, the City is using the following three-pronged program approach:



The City’s Department of Innovation & Economic Opportunity’s (IEO) leads the Birmingham Region Health Partnership (BRHP), a result of a successful \$10.8 million federal grant from the US Economic Development Administration’s Good Jobs Challenge grant. The partnership convenes employers, education and training institutions, jobseekers and worker serving organizations to provide marginalized communities with a pathway to high-quality, in-demand healthcare roles throughout the region. The work of the BRHP focuses on connecting talent to “good jobs” that offer a prevailing wage, comprehensive benefits, and a pathway for professional and personal advancement. Over the course of the grant performance period, the BRHP will serve and train 1,200 jobseekers and incumbent workers, while addressing barriers to labor force participation like childcare and transportation through intensive wrap-around service delivery. IEO also participates in the Department of Labor and National League of Cities’ Good Jobs, Great Cities Academy, which focuses on advancing sustainable strategy for high-demand, high-wage jobs.

The City helped form Birmingham Promise in 2020, which was incubated out of the IEO, encouraging employer buy-in and commitment to providing quality, experiential learning opportunities for Birmingham City School seniors to take advantage of “earn and learn” models that offer a quality-wage in high-growth industries. As of 2023, 225 Birmingham students have participated in the program, gaining work experience with 80 local employers in targeted industries. Over the course of the grant performance period, the City will seek to coordinate with the Birmingham Promise program to create opportunities for high school students to participate in the project.

The IEO’s signature funding program, Building Opportunities for Lasting Development (BOLD), seeks to develop partnerships with community organizations that share IEO’s vision of making Birmingham the model of an inclusive and resilient economy. BOLD’s Workforce Development pillar promotes workforce advancement by developing and implementing skill-focused programs. These programs aim to enhance upward mobility and bridge the gap between employer requirements and the skills that institutions provide. From 2019-2022, BOLD-funded programs have created 334 jobs, with 111 credentials attained, and provided over \$300,000 in wrap-around services to Birmingham residents. IEO’s Manager of Workforce and Talent Development is responsible for creating strategies and program designs that foster diverse workforce development by reducing barriers to entry, improving the care economy, and providing wrap-around services.

In addition to workforce programs, the City of Birmingham has strong precedent for placing workers in high-quality and affordable housing. Two of those examples are the American Life project with 137 workforce housing units on 4th Ave N, with units reserved for dedicated project workers, and the Market Lofts on Third. **The Market Lofts on Third also engaged nearly 50% MWBEs** during the construction cycle.

If awarded, the grant will support and use good-paying jobs with the free and fair choice to join a union, the incorporation of strong labor standards, pro-active anti-discrimination and anti-harassment plans, project labor agreements, workplace rights notices, training and placement programs, and local hiring. The City of Birmingham is committed to inclusive procurement that advances economic opportunity for those historically underutilized.

04 PROJECT READINESS: ENVIRONMENTAL RISK

The City of Birmingham and its project partners have a demonstrated history of implementing significant infrastructure projects and delivering federally-funded projects. In addition, a significant amount of planning and concept development has already been completed for this project – including schematic designs and pre-engineering estimates. This project has been identified as a priority by the public and in local plans for the last 20 years.

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) is committed to ensuring this project is added to the Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization’s 2024-2027 Transportation Improvement Program list (see Appendix C for RPCGB’s letter of commitment).

Technical Assessment

The City has the capacity and experience to deliver this project to meet federal requirements. The City will lead the administrative requirements of grant management and will conduct reviews during the design and construction submittal process. The City will also oversee the CEI process. For day-to-day management, a project manager will be assigned for all construction-related issues and a grant coordinator assigned for grant-related tracking and compliance.

As described, the City has managed multiple federal grants and large infrastructure projects in recent years. As of this writing, the City’s grant group has overseen or is overseeing over 50 federal, state, and private grants totaling over \$190 million. For example, the City is currently distributing ARPA Emergency Rental assistance I & II funds from the U.S. Department of Treasury, with nearly \$9 million distributed since April 2021. Other successful federal grants

that the City has managed, or is currently managing, include:

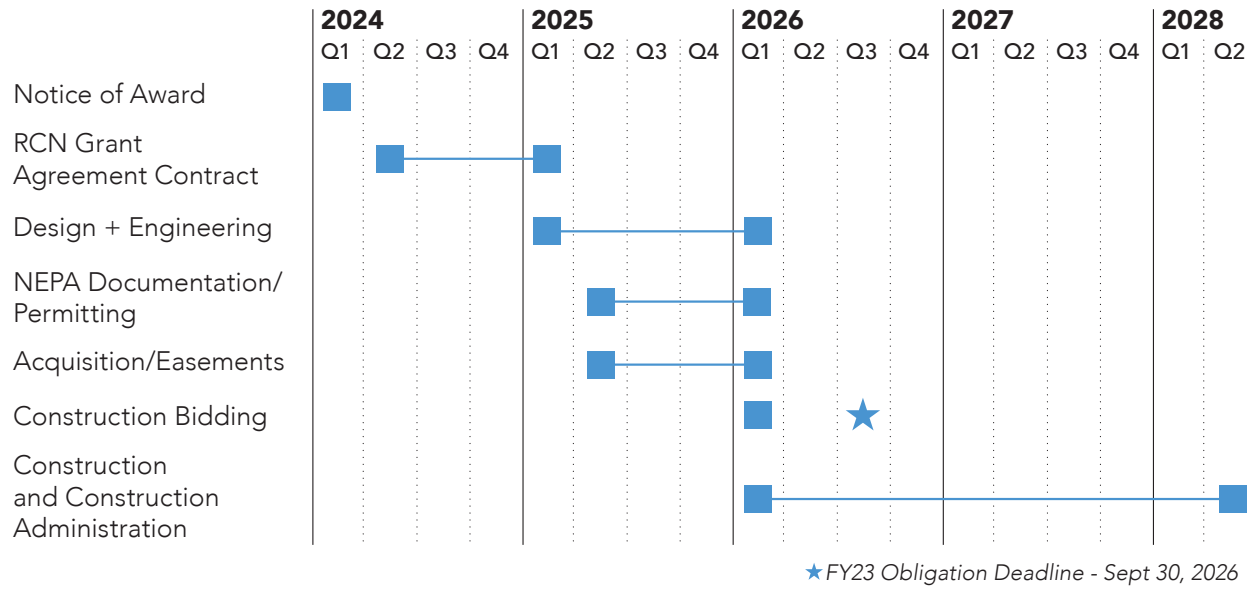
- Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (\$1 million)
- Good Jobs Challenge Grant (\$10.8 million)
- TIGER Grant for Bus Rapid Transit (\$20 million)
- RAISE Grant for the Birmingham Civil Rights Crossroads (\$21.6 million)
- Choice Neighborhood Grant (\$50 million)

When the award is provided, the City will appoint a project manager for all construction-related issues and assign a grant coordinator for grant-related tracking, along with budgetary requirements and compliance issues.

Financial Completeness Assessment

The Reconnecting 4th Ave N project is estimated to cost \$16,540,954.33. The City is providing a match of \$2,000,000.00 and this proposal requests \$14,556,039.81 in NAE grant funding to implement project improvements that would convert the corridor to a two-way street, reconnect neighborhoods along the corridor and increase equity, safety, sustainability, quality of life, and health in Birmingham. The match and request amount vary slightly from the total cost because SF424C Row 17 only allows whole number federal share percentage. More information is available in the Budget PDF. Cost estimates were developed based on a 10% design, by a regional engineering firm with extensive experience designing and overseeing roadway infrastructure projects, and reviewed by a national firm specialized in multimodal transportation. Projected construction costs were calculated based on 2028 dollars in line

Figure 5. Project Schedule



with the anticipated construction timeline. Costs for administration, full design, permitting, construction, and CEI are provided with contingency and inflation factors.

Environmental Risk

Minimal risks are anticipated with the project. See Appendix D for additional documentation on Environmental Risk.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Assuming a notice of NAE award in early 2024, the schedule projects that design and permitting would be completed in mid-2026, and construction completed in late 2028. See the schedule in Figure 5 for more specifics.

REQUIRED APPROVALS AND PERMITS

- **NEPA:** It is anticipated that the project merits a Categorical Exclusion (CE), which will be completed alongside project design. Thus, no delay associated with NEPA is expected. The vast majority of construction will be occurring within the roadway right-of-way, with limited impacts.
- **Section 106 Review:** Will be required because this a federally funded project taking place in a national historic district.
- **State Right-of-Way (ROW):** ALDOT controls 4th Ave N ROW between 11th

St N and 12th St N (AL-4). ALDOT has expressed an openness to ceding the ROW to the City.

- **Local Right-of-Way (ROW):** This project utilizes public road ROW throughout the corridor. Minor permanent and temporary construction easements of private land may be pursued along the sidewalk construction, but can feasibly be kept within the ROW if land acquisition becomes problematic on private parcels.
- **ALDOT Grading Permit:** Required for construction work within ALDOT ROW, which will occur between 11th St N and 12th St N, and under I-65.
- **National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit:** (Alabama Department of Environmental Management): Required for disturbing greater than 1-acre of earth, which is expected for the pavement removals, pavement placement, and buffer work.
- **Design Review Committee:** Required as the project is a local historic district and a commercial revitalization district. The Committee is in favor of the 10% design.
- **Local permits:** The following will be required: Barricade, Site Civil, Sidewalk/ Driveway, and Erosion Control.