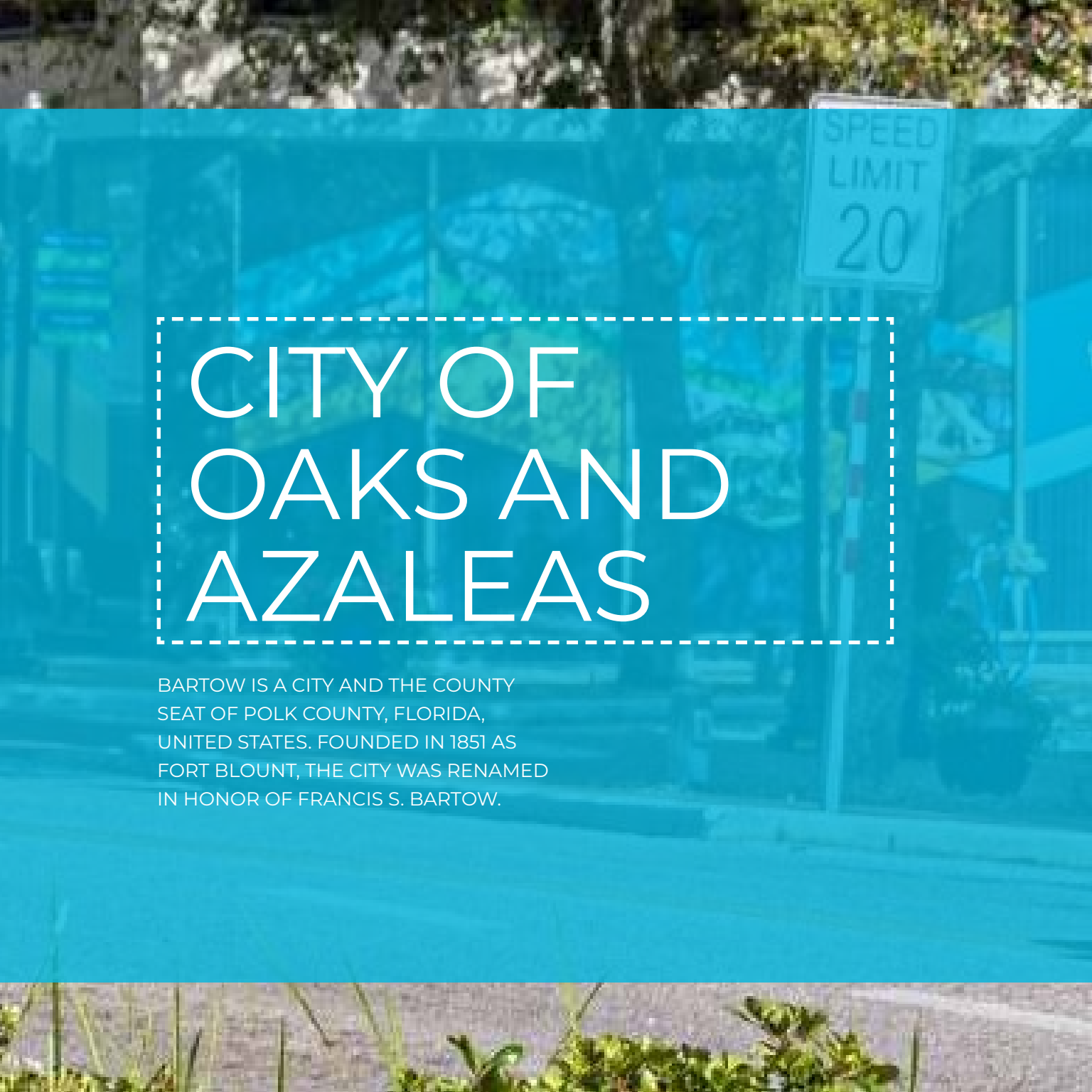




# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

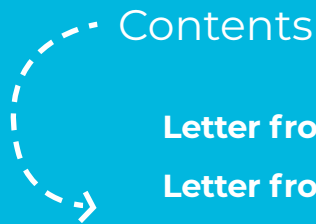
COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY



The background of the image is a photograph of a street scene. On the right side, there is a white speed limit sign with the text "SPEED LIMIT 20" in black. The sign is mounted on a metal pole. In the background, there are trees and a building. A blue semi-transparent overlay covers the middle portion of the image, where the title and descriptive text are located.

# CITY OF OAKS AND AZALEAS

BARTOW IS A CITY AND THE COUNTY SEAT OF POLK COUNTY, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES. FOUNDED IN 1851 AS FORT BLOUNT, THE CITY WAS RENAMED IN HONOR OF FRANCIS S. BARTOW.



|  |           |
|--|-----------|
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On behalf of the City of Bartow's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), I am pleased to provide the Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023/2024, which ended on Sept. 30, 2024.

The City of Bartow continues to enthusiastically support the work of the Community Redevelopment Agency and its vision for the revitalization and enhancement of our community.

As the City Manager, I am committed to fostering economic growth and improving the quality of life for all our residents, while honoring Bartow's history and its designation as the capital city of Polk County, one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. City leadership and our City Commission recognize the invaluable role that the CRA plays in achieving these objectives through its strategic initiatives and redevelopment projects.

The CRA's vision aligns seamlessly with the City's overarching goals for Bartow's future. By revitalizing blighted areas, promoting commercial development, and enhancing public spaces in the CRA district, which encompasses our historic downtown, the CRA will not only enhance the physical landscape of our city, but also create opportunities for economic prosperity and community engagement.

Along with our City Commission, I commend the CRA for its collaborative approach to achieving this vision. Engaging stakeholders and soliciting input from residents throughout the planning and implementation processes, ensures that the redevelopment efforts reflect the priorities of the community.

The City looks forward to partnering with the CRA in its mission to create a vibrant, sustainable, and prosperous Bartow for generations to come, while preserving the small-town charm that makes Bartow so appealing for our residents and visitors.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mike Herr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The background of the signature is a light gray rectangular box.

Mike Herr,  
City Manager of Bartow



Since joining the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) as Executive Director in July 2023, my goal has been driving balanced redevelopment and sustainable growth. By aligning our incentive programs with the CRA's Annual Budget, we established a clear two-year work plan, guiding our commercial and residential initiatives.

This past year, the CRA expanded support for our residents and businesses. We've launched programs to attract new businesses to vacant spaces and introduced a weatherization initiative, enhancing property values through exterior upgrades and ADA improvements, reinforcing our dedication to community vibrancy.

A significant achievement for the Bartow CRA has been the Bartow Now initiative, a collaboration between the CRA and city departments, funding impactful projects in FY 23/24. Key improvements underway include implementing Smart City Technologies with Wi-Fi-enabled street poles, pedestrian counters, and emergency call systems; resurfacing 2.3 miles of streets in the East End; constructing public restrooms downtown and at Over the Branch Park; and acquiring a vacuum sweeper to maintain downtown's cleanliness.

Additionally, the CRA Board approved \$430,000 in pending acquisitions to stimulate economic and residential growth, including revitalizing the Orpheum Theatre as a community hub, transforming the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge into a business incubator, and acquiring a parcel on East Washington Street for flood mitigation.

Through these projects and our Bartow Squeeze micro-transit service, we're strengthening accessibility and collaboration, ensuring a resilient Bartow for all.

Sincerely,

C. Howard Smith,  
Executive Director  
Community Redevelopment Agency, Bartow

## WHAT IS A CRA?

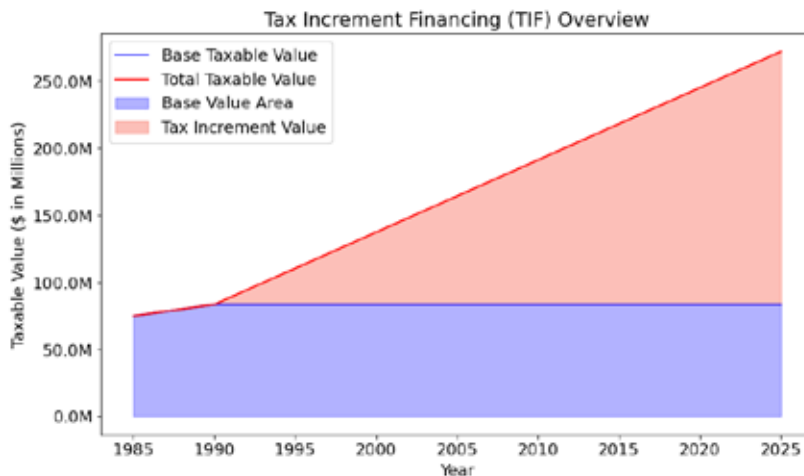
The Bartow Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is a public organization established by the City of Bartow to foster redevelopment and revitalization within designated community areas. It operates under the Florida Community Redevelopment Act of 1969 (Chapter 163, Part III, Florida Statutes), aiming to improve both the infrastructure and overall quality of life.

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CRA ARE TO:

- Conduct redevelopment activities to prevent, mitigate, or eliminate blighted conditions.
- Enhance economic vitality and the community's overall quality of life.
- Support and promote employment opportunities and entrepreneurial growth.
- Stimulate both public and private investment within designated redevelopment areas.

## HOW IS THE CRA FUNDED?

The Bartow CRA reinvests directly into the community utilizing a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) model. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) helps Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRAs) boost economic growth in targeted areas. It captures increased property tax revenues generated by rising property values after redevelopment. This additional money stays in the community, funding local improvements like roads, parks, and public facilities, which attract new businesses and residents.



As property values rise from these improvements, even more funds become available for future projects, ultimately revitalizing neighborhoods and strengthening local economies.

# ABOUT BARTOW CRA

## FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

### Base Year Taxable Value (1990):

\$83,563,055

### Current Year Taxable Value (2025):

\$271,937,186

### Tax Increment Value (2025):

\$188,374,131

**Name:** Bartow Community  
Redevelopment Agency

### Current Registered Agent's Name and title:

C. Howard Smith,  
Executive Director  
Cheryl Baksh,  
CRA Business and Community  
Engagement Coordinator

### Registered Office Address:

680 E Main Street  
Bartow, Florida 33830

### Contact:

Telephone: (863) 534-0121  
E-Mail: [chsmith@cityofbartow.net](mailto:chsmith@cityofbartow.net)  
E-Mail: [cbaksh@cityofbartow.net](mailto:cbaksh@cityofbartow.net) Web-  
site: [www.cityofbartow.net](http://www.cityofbartow.net)

**Special Purpose(s):** Community

## Redevelopment Date

**Created / Established:** April 16, 1990

### Creation Documents:

City Ordinances 1544-A, 1547-A, and  
1548-A; Resolutions 2895-R, 05-3554-R  
and 07-3630-R

**Statutory Authority:** Chapter 163, Part III,  
Florida Statutes

**Active or Inactive:** Active

**Status:** Dependent

**County:** Polk

### Local Governing Authority:

City of Bartow

**Date Created / Established:** April 16,  
1990

### Governing Body:

Local Governing Authority Appoints  
Authority to Issue

**Bonds:** Yes

**Revenue Source:** Tax Increment

### Financing Creation Method:

Local Ordinance



# BARTOW CRA BOARD



The CRA operates under the guidance of a seven-member Board of Directors, appointed by the City Commission. Board members serve four-year terms with a two-term limit, and appointments are staggered to ensure continuity.

The Board's primary responsibilities include setting policies, approving budgets, and overseeing redevelopment projects within the CRA district. They work closely with the Executive Director to implement community redevelopment activities as outlined under the Community Redevelopment Act.



**Gordon Greene**  
Chairperson



**Anthony Ghent**  
Vice Chairperson



**Shana Bennett**



**Sandy Mendez**



**Jerome Corbett**

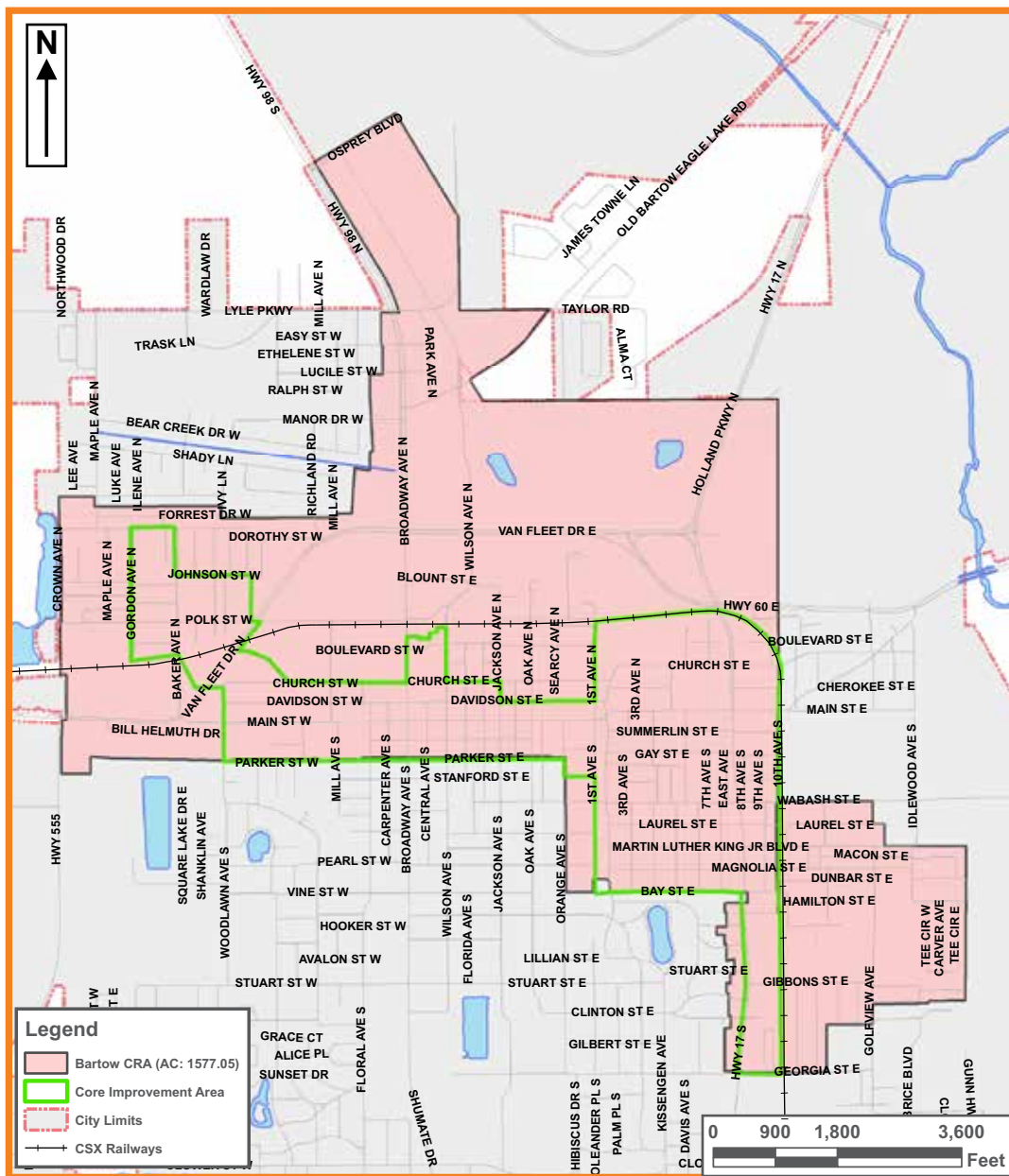


**Tom Santarlas, Ph.D**



**Cheri Kelley**





# CRA OVERVIEW

## BARTOW COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AREA FACTS

2.7

square miles

34.4

median age

4K+

population



### Area & Population

2.47 square miles

4,778 people



### Age & Income

34.4 median age (CRA)

\$37,957  
median household income



### Housing Snapshot

48.5% renter 40.9% owner-occupied

\$198,993 median home value

\$353,896 projected to reach in 5 years, +12.2% annually



### Growth & Households

33% since 2000 city grew

1,841 CRA Households



### Business & Employment

665 businesses 10,405 workers

top industry RETAIL 125 firms 1,760 workers



### Workforce & Commuting

72% white-collar

blue-collar 28%

78% commute out of CRA

# CRA BUDGET

At its June 26, 2024, meeting, the CRA Executive Board approved budget allocations supporting key initiatives under the Bartow Now Initiative, categorized as follows:

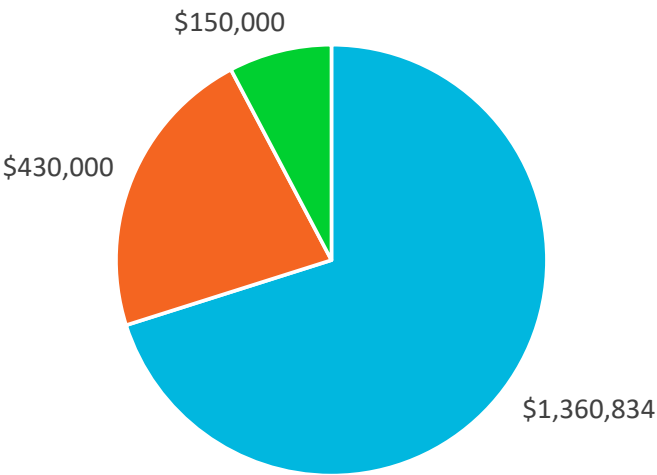
## Capital Improvement Projects

- Resurfacing city streets identified with low pavement condition ratings, a project jointly managed with Public Works.
- Constructing ADA-compliant public restrooms at Over Branch Park and downtown Bartow (Summerlin and Wilson streets), supervised by Parks and Recreation.
- Purchasing an outdoor vacuum sweeper for downtown maintenance, managed by Parks and Recreation and stored at Public Works.
- Launching the Bartow Squeeze micro-transit minibus service in August 2024, connecting downtown workers with nearby restaurants and businesses during midday hours.

## Property Acquisitions

- Acquiring the Orpheum Theatre (335 E Main Street) to develop a multipurpose community space and enhance downtown economic activity.
- Purchasing residential property at 670 3rd Avenue for future affordable or workforce housing development.
- Securing 2425 East Washington Street to initiate flood mitigation measures in the Tee Circle Community.

## CRA Project Allocations



## Program Incentives

- Expanding the Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Incentive program to include roof replacements, aiming to boost property values, eliminate blight, encourage redevelopment, and improve overall housing conditions within the CRA district.

# CRA PROGRAMS

Bartow's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) invests in five strategic areas to promote economic vitality, stronger neighborhoods, and an overall improved quality of life:



## Blight Remediation & Property Improvement

The CRA addresses rundown buildings and renovates underused sites. Key programs include the Commercial Enhance-ment Grant and the Commercial Façade Grant.



## Housing Access & Affordability

These efforts expand the supply of affordable homes and help residents maintain existing ones. Programs include Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation, the Landlord Matching Incentive, Down Payment Assistance, and the Private Investment Incentive.



## Infrastructure Improvements

The CRA enhances roads, sidewalks, and public utilities to support mobility, access, and business growth. This area includes investments in repaving, drainage, and walkability upgrades.



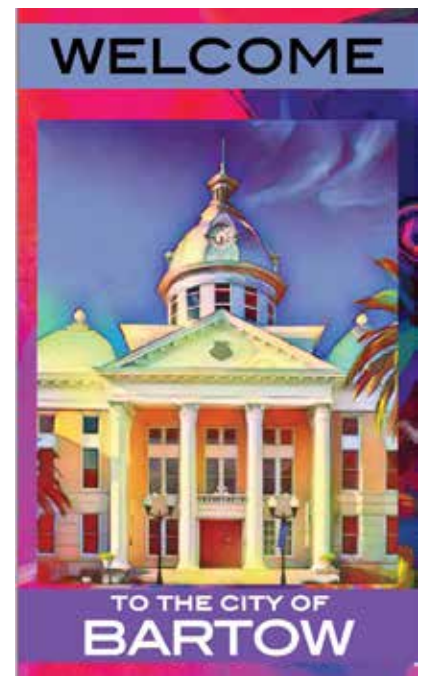
## Business District Mobility and Safety

Through transit programs and safety partnerships, the CRA helps ensure the business district is accessible, welcoming, and secure. Programs include the Bartow Squeeze shuttle and enhanced law enforcement presence.



## Placemaking & Civic Partnerships

Through grants and art installations, the CRA showcases Bartow's heritage and encourages gathering places. Programs include the Placemaking & Resident Engagement Grant and the CRA Banner Project.



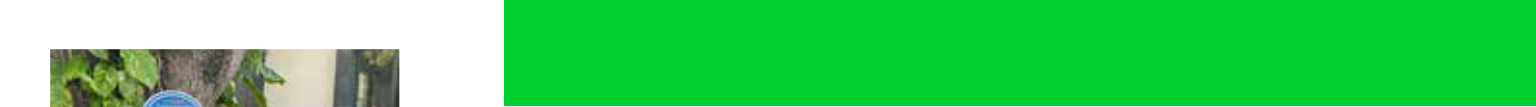
# BLIGHT REMEDIATION & PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT



The Blight Remediation & Property Improvement focus addresses neglected properties to renew neighborhoods. In 2024, the CRA invested \$67,915 through the Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation program, funding essential repairs for local homeowners. Projects included exterior renovations, window and door replacements, roofing upgrades, and structural improvements. By fixing homes proactively, the CRA prevents further decay, improves neighborhood appeal, and boosts local home values. The Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation initiative offers homeowners financial help, covering repairs that maintain property standards and neighborhood charm. Homeowners receive funding assistance to ensure their homes are safe, stable, and in good repair, protecting community character and fostering private investment. The CRA continues to seek opportunities to intervene early, addressing potential blight before it worsens.

## \$67,915 INVESTED





to add quality homes to the community. Down Payment Assistance provides essential funding to eligible buyers, easing upfront housing costs and promoting wider homeownership within Bartow's neighborhoods. New construction incentives further strengthen local housing stock by encouraging investment in residential growth, meeting diverse community needs. Through these efforts, the CRA increases access to stable, affordable housing and builds thriving communities aligned with local standards and HUD guidelines

## HOUSING ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

The CRA's Housing Access & Affordability efforts expand homeownership and stimulate new housing construction across Bartow. In 2024, the CRA awarded \$30,000 in Down Payment Assistance to two homebuyers, significantly reducing financial barriers for first-time homeowners. Additionally, three incentives supported new housing developments, encouraging private builders and developers

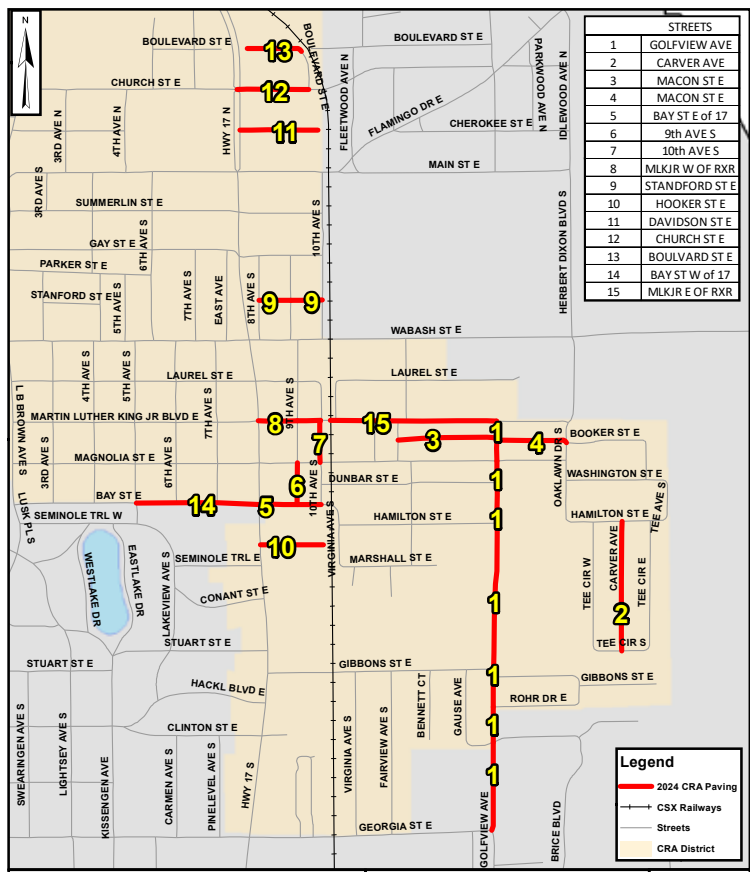


# INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

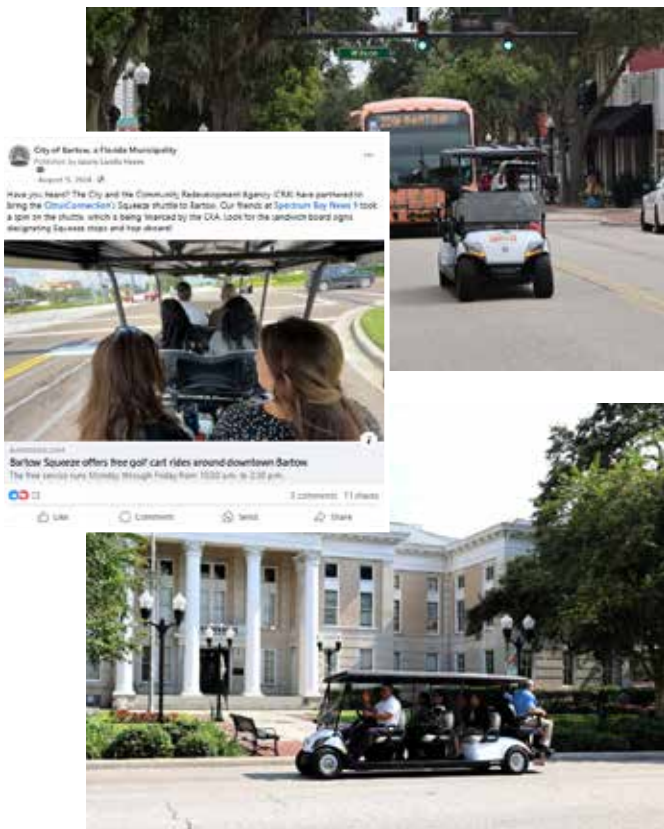
The CRA's infrastructure investments are pivotal to Bartow's long-term success, ensuring that roads, sidewalks, and essential utilities meet community needs. In 2024, the agency allocated \$500,000 to repave 15 streets in the CRA district, emphasizing safer travel for

drivers and pedestrians alike. These upgrades also addressed drainage concerns, helping reduce pooling water that can damage roadways and create hazards. By improving surface conditions and crosswalks, the CRA encourages more consistent foot traffic near local businesses and public facilities.

In 2024, the CRA invested a total of \$1,360,834 in Public Infrastructure Enhancement Projects, significantly upgrading community amenities and improving residents' quality of life. This investment included \$500,000 dedicated to repaving 15 streets, enhancing vehicle and pedestrian safety and facilitating easier access to local businesses. Additionally, the CRA funded the construction of two new public restroom facilities totaling \$712,000—one at Over the Branch Park and another in Downtown Bartow—addressing essential needs in these frequently visited locations. Finally, the CRA also acquired an outdoor vacuum sweeper for \$85,000 to maintain cleanliness and attractiveness in the downtown area.







## BUSINESS DISTRICT MOBILITY AND SAFETY

A thriving downtown hinges on both efficient transportation and effective crime prevention, so the CRA integrates mobility and safety efforts within the business district.

The Bartow Squeeze shuttle, introduced in late August 2024, is central to this strategy: it delivered over 1,100 rides in just a few months, connecting residents and visitors to shopping, dining, and cultural sites. By reducing parking headaches and encouraging foot traffic, the shuttle boosts local commerce and helps Bartow remain an appealing destination. Long-term plans may include expanding the service to more routes and hours, further increasing accessibility and convenience.

On the safety side, the CRA works closely with law enforcement to fund additional patrols, equipment upgrades, and neighborhood watch programs, placing officers where they can make the greatest impact on potential trouble spots. Early indicators show a decline in property damage and theft in areas with a robust police presence and watchful community involvement. This coordinated effort strengthens bonds among officers, residents, and business owners, fostering a culture in which everyone looks out for one another. By uniting reliable transit solutions with vigilant policing, the CRA advances a vibrant, family-friendly district where shoppers feel secure, businesses prosper, and community pride flourishes. As the CRA continues to refine these programs, Bartow's core remains on track for sustainable growth.



## PLACEMAKING & CIVIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Placemaking & Civic Partnerships category breathes new life into Bartow's public spaces and showcases the city's cultural roots. In 2024, the CRA's Placemaking & Resident Engagement Grant supported the Banner Project, celebrating influential African Americans who shaped Bartow's story. These banners adorned Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Polk Street, and L.B. Brown Avenue, visually linking residents to Bartow's rich history and honoring local figures prominently

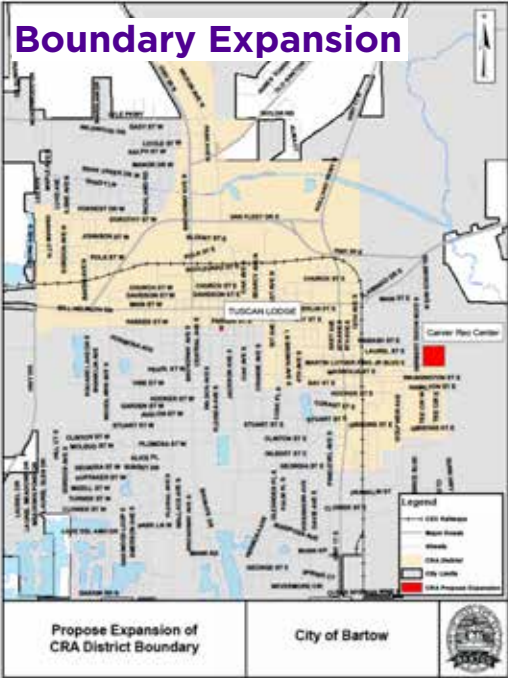
featured in the photographs above. Separately, the "One Nation, Many Stories" initiative, in partnership with the Polk County History Center, deepened community ties through storytelling and historical exploration. Events and activities under this program energized public spaces and encouraged resident interaction, as highlighted in the image below. Though no new murals appeared in 2024, additional artistic projects are planned to boost foot traffic and local pride. By connecting art, history, and civic involvement, Bartow's revitalized public areas attract new investment and inspire greater community engagement. These visible upgrades and cooperative efforts drive economic growth, bringing businesses and residents into alignment with the CRA's vision of a lively and unified city.





# LOOKING AHEAD

## Boundary Expansion



## Tuscan Masonic Lodge



## East-End Vision 970 East Main Street



# CRA FINANCIALS

**BASE YEAR TAXABLE VALUE (1990): \$83,563,055**  
**CURRENT YEAR TAXABLE VALUE (2025): \$271,937,186**  
**TAX INCREMENT VALUE (2025): \$188,374,131**

| Description  | FY 2023-2024       |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Estimated Revenues</b>                            |                    |
| City   | \$1,136,546        |
| County   | \$1,242,884        |
| Total TIF  | \$2,379,430        |
| Allocation of Unassigned Fund Balance                | \$1,629,926        |
| Accumulated Balance                                  | \$4,009,356        |
| <b>Fund Balances</b>                                 |                    |
| Cash   | \$500,000          |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUES &amp; BALANCES</b>                 | <b>\$4,509,356</b> |
|  |                    |
| <b>Expenditures</b>                                  |                    |
| Obligations  | \$266,736          |
| Contractual Services                                 | \$704,602          |
| Grants and Incentive Programs                        | \$3,060,885        |
| Operations   | \$457,215          |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>                            | <b>\$4,489,438</b> |
|  |                    |
| Budgeted Fund Balance, End of Year<br>(September 30) | \$19,918           |



Bartow Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)  
C. Howard Smith, Executive Director · 680 E Main Street, Bartow, FL 33830