



Go Forward Pine Bluff

Project Initiative Update
March 2023

Mission:

The mission of Go Forward Pine Bluff is to increase the revenues of the city government, enabling it to provide the level of services expected by our citizens.

Values:

Go Forward Pine Bluff is guided by three main values:

1. Retain population
2. Relocate population, and
3. Attract tourism and consumers throughout the region

Goal:

The goal of Go Forward Pine Bluff is to serve as a bridge between the public and private sector that establishes the necessary working relationships to move Pine Bluff forward.

Promises Made, Promises Kept



Initiative

Projected Phase for Implementation

Update

LAND BANK (Urban Renewal Agency) COMPLETE – THE PINE BLUFF URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY CONTINUES ITS WORK

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

GFPB and the City worked together to resurrect the Urban Renewal Agency, first established as a Local Public Agency in 1962. The Urban Renewal Agency is an effective, responsible way for Pine Bluff to reduce blight, encourage business growth and generate economic progress. Five commissioners were appointed to the Agency and have been meeting since October 2017.

After public meetings held in each ward, the city council approved the PBURA's Central City Urban Renewal Plan in June 2018. The PBURA adopted the Downtown Master Vision and Plan as a guide. Work to eliminate blight and other components of the Plan is ongoing. Condemned properties in the urban renewal area are being razed with the intent of backfilling with tax producing properties. A goal of 50 structures to be demolished for 2023 has been established.

The PBURA has rehabilitated three buildings in the Four Hundred block of Main Street to entice retail and restaurant activity in the downtown area. Property has been purchased for downtown housing. The former Admiral Benbow Inn/Regency Inn is being demoed for a go-kart track and putt-putt golf. The Plaza Hotel will be demoed and replaced with Marriott Hotel. Other improvements are being made in the designated urban renewal area.

Work to expand the Sixth and Main Street Plaza will begin this year.

L. E. A. P. / Educational Alliance COMPLETE – EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE CONTINUES ITS WORK

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Leadership, Education, Accountability & Pipeline (LEAP) is a strategy to focus on attracting and retaining qualified teachers in the two Pine Bluff school districts. We will work with the schools through the Educational Alliance, who will focus on improving student success through the coordination, communication and alignment of educational resources and providing incentives to the city's public schools.

The initial meeting of the Educational Alliance was on November 28, 2017. This group is focused on developing priorities to ensure the LEAP strategy is successful.

The TEACH Pine Bluff incentive was announced on May 8, 2019. The program was developed to recruit new and retain certified teachers by offering full tuition fellowships towards obtaining a master's degree, inspiring current students through the Teacher Cadet program, or providing a grant to cover the cost of the initial National Board Certification exam. Nine Fellows were awarded a scholarship in 2019. Seven Fellows were awarded a scholarship in 2020. We currently have two Fellows pursuing their master's degree and five have graduated.

After seeing the need, we revamped the TEACH Pine Bluff program to assist teachers with passing the PRAXIS exam to become licensed. 38 teachers have been certified through this program to-date.

A Visiting Professor position was funded for nine months in the 2020-2021 school year. The incumbent made systemic improvement suggestions to the current Educator Preparatory Program (EPP) curriculum and how that content is delivered to EPP candidates. Focus was given specifically on the Praxis exam, the primary qualifying mechanism needed to receive an Arkansas Standard Teacher License.

The Walton Family Foundation has funded two grants to assist uncertified teachers and UAPB students with studying for the PRAXIS exam. Tutors, access to Study.com and 240 Tutoring, accountability check-ins are utilized to ensure participants are successful in passing the Praxis exams.

A Teaching Excellence Coordinator was hired in 2018 through a grant obtained by the Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative (ARESC), who is focused on teacher recruitment, retention, and rewards.

Employability Training IN PROCESS

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Our current workforce lacks soft skills. To make job prospects attractive to employers, we have a training curriculum that will include accountability, customer service, reliability, and other skills needed to local employers. GFPB will also work with the local manufacturing alliance to develop needed workplace skills and training needed for our local industries.

A Workforce Development Taskforce was formed and worked to develop and identify training needs and solutions. Employability training was addressed during this process. The taskforce has enhanced the corporate relationship with educational institutions to increase the number of internships offered to local students.

A summer internship pilot program was launched in 2019 with eight local employers. 15 students from UAPB were offered jobs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was suspended in 2020.

The Generator is offering classes and workshops to increase employability skills to the local workforce.

Two AmeriCorps VISTA members worked from 2021 to 2022 for one year to map digital training pathways in the area and to develop an employer stakeholder map to identify digital employment pathways.

Seven students graduated from the IT Support Specialist program offered in partnership with Generation USA and the Center for Rural Innovation. These students earned an IT Support Specialist Google Certificate and are studying for the CompTIA A+ certification. Call The Generator for current program offerings.

A grant was received by Rural LISC to provide digital case management assistance and to build digital skills through the NorthStar platform. We will continue to provide this program. Contact The Generator for enrollment information.

The Generator provided a three part program for youth summer campers in 2022 preparing them for entrepreneurship skills. More programs are being offered throughout the fall 2023 and spring 2023. A youth camp is being scheduled for 2023.

Adult programming includes Makerspace, Entrepreneurship and more. The Generator will be working with the 6th and Main Plaza entrepreneurs to ensure their success in partnership with UAPB's ERDC and the ASTBC.

Neighborhood Associations IN PROCESS

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Neighborhood Associations are formed to improve public safety, increase property value, and provide cleaner streets. We will work with existing associations and help to form new associations to accomplish this goal.

As part of the Re-Live Pine Bluff program, the Pine Bluff Homeowners' Association (PBHOA) was formed and provides a secondary loan for closing cost assistance and mortgage down payment up to 3% of the mortgage costs. Relyance Bank originates and services the loans in partnership with GFPB. Loan recipients must join the (PBHOA) and commit to living in the area for five years.

28 new homeowners have established residence through the ALICE program.

Community Planner & Grant Writer COMPLETE – THE CITY'S GRANT WRITER CONTINUES TO EXPLORE GRANT FUNDING

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CITY

Communication is key to the success of our city. We will work to encourage a marketing plan and coordinate established efforts to publicize our city and its efforts to improve relations, economic development, and our quality of life. A partnership with the Advertising and Promotion Commission is being developed.

A Grant Writer has been hired and is working to identify, write and submit grants for the city. To date, the grant writer has raised over \$5.5M. The Grant writer has been an excellent investment.

Community Gardens/Beautification IN PROCESS

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Under the leadership of Mayor Washington, a partnership with the Agricultural Extension Office was made for funding of the initial phases for a garden to be located on the grounds of the former Davis Hospital (Cherry Street & 11th Avenue). Equipment was purchased and Liberty Utilities provided water to an installed irrigation system.

During the 2019 MLK Day of Service, citizens put together many more raised beds. The Mayor's office hosted a work day and opening of the garden on March 30, 2019. Citizens can adopt a bed for planting. A pavilion, playground equipment and fence enhance the area.

Other community gardens are being developed around the city by other organizations that provide fresh fruits and vegetables as well as beautifying the area.

The Mayor's office and other groups hold community and garden cleanup days throughout the year.

Candidate's Development Institute COMPLETE

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

GFPB partnered with the Pine Bluff Chamber of Commerce to re-establish the **Candidate Development Institute**, a source of education for citizens interested in public office. This is a 6-week program, which meets once a week for 3 hours. The Institute held its first session on Sept 19, 2017 with 28 participants.

Eleven people attended a second 6-week Candidate Development Institute course that began on September 23, 2021.

In anticipation of the upcoming elections, a crash Candidate Development Institute course was held on February 3, 2022 with over 20 in attendance.

Youth Programs IN PROCESS

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Keeping our youth involved in positive experiences will keep them active and help them become good citizens. First class youth programs will be introduced and in conjunction with existing youth programs, will help form interests in areas such as sports, arts, STEM, nature, and more.

A \$25,000 grant from State Farm's Neighborhood Assist Program was received in September 2018 for the kitchen renovation at the Merrill Community Center. The renovated kitchen will allow healthy meals to be prepared on-site as well as cooking classes for the youth and their families.

Groundbreaking for a renovated Merrill Center (now Pine Bluff Community Center) was held on February 21, 2020, and the official Ribbon Cutting was held on March 28, 2021. The Center officially opened in June, providing programming and activities for our youth. Between the State Farm Grant, other public and private contributions by and through GFPB, \$1,232,670 was invested in this project. Other funding through the City and grants were also received.

Property has been purchased on Harding Street, a blighted building (Regency Inn, formerly Admiral Benbow Inn), which is being razed now and will be replaced with a go-kart track and putt putt golf course.

The Pine Bluff Aquatics Center was completed with \$4M from the GFPB sales tax. Children and adults alike enjoy the state-of-the-art facility. In 2021, the Aquatic Center hosted the AAU swim tournament featuring 144 swimmers. This proves that the Aquatics Center can be an economic engine for Pine Bluff.

We are working with GRIP to provide positive outlets for at-risk youth. Other support for youth programs is being evaluated with one program emphasizing both sports participation and literacy.

Municipal Master Plan COMPLETE

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Requests for Qualifications were advertised and submitted for a new municipal master plan. A committee, led by Larry Reynolds of Southeast Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, reviewed the RFQs and selected Crafton Tull to prepare a new Plan. The Planning Commission also endorsed a new Plan. The city council approved the RFQ in December 2018.

A steering committee was formed to start the process of developing the Plan and community meetings were held for input and education. The Plan was finalized and submitted to the Planning Commission for approval. The City Council approved the plan on March 21, 2022. The City of Pine Bluff is responsible for implementation of the Plan.

Downtown Master Vision & Plan (U of A) COMPLETE

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

The University of Arkansas Community Design Center (ACDC), under the direction of Steve Luoni, completed the Downtown Master Vision and Plan. Mr. Luoni presented the final document to the community on December 20, 2018. The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency adopted the plan as a guide for the implementation of their Central City Urban Renewal Plan.

The Arkansas Economic Development Institute (AEDI) compiled comments of the three listening sessions held in August 2017. We were pleased to see that the recurring comments of the citizens who attended the sessions are aligned with the vision, mission, and values of GFPB. It is a validation that the work we are doing is what the residents want for Pine Bluff.

GFPB, PBURA and others are working together to implement the Plan.

The ACDC won the 2019 WAN Gold Medal award in London, beating out New York City, Toronto, and China for its design of the Re-Live Pine Bluff plan. WAN Awards are given to "...individuals and groups to show their incredible work to an international audience." www.wanawards.com

The ACDC and the Re-Live Pine Bluff plan has also won other distinguished awards.

Delta Festival COMPLETE AND CONTINUING

Phase 1: Jan 2017 – Sept 2018

Beginning as one big festival, GFPB worked in 2018 to energize some of the current festivals and quality of life events already in place. The plan is to have a schedule of events which will engage all segments of the community throughout the year.

Festivals in 2018 were:

- GFPB partnered with the Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas on their Crossroad Festival: Exploring Jefferson County's Cultural Heritage in February 2018.
- We partnered with the Pine Bluff Convention Center and M.K. Distributors to host the highly successful ForwardFEST: Beer, Batter and Blues on June 9.
- Pop Up in the Bluff, in partnership with Downtown Development, was held on September 29 and featured live music, vendors, children's games and more.
- A Homecoming Comedy Showcase was held on Friday, November 2, at the Pine Bluff Convention Center and featured four well-known comedians.
- Mistletoe Magic: Believe in Miracles was highly successful despite the weather. The Christmas Parade at 5:30 on December 6 on Main Street kicked off the weekend with 24 floats. There were bands, characters, and firetrucks in the parade as well. Saracen Landing was the site for an ice-skating rink, a 32-foot-tall snowman bounce house and a life-size snow globe. Food trucks were there throughout the weekend. Due to rain and freezing temperatures, retail vendors were not able to set up.
- The return of the King Cotton Holiday Classic was held in Pine Bluff from December 27 through 29 at the Pine Bluff Convention Center.

2019 Festival Schedule:

- Forward Fest-Beer, Batter & Brew-Volume 2 – June 22
- Pop-Up in the Bluff – September 21
- Smoke on the Water, not held
- Homecoming Comedy Showcase – October 5
- Mistletoe Magic – December 5-8
- King Cotton Classic – December 27-29

Forward Fest was originally scheduled to be held in Regional Park at the Amphitheater. Due to record flooding, the festival was moved to Hestand Stadium's fairgrounds.

The 2020 Festival Schedule included a two-day Forward Fest. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, Forward Fest, UAPB Homecoming Show, Pop-Up in the Bluff, Mistletoe Magic, and King Cotton were cancelled.

2021 Festivals included: Forward Fest (June), Homecoming Concert (October), Mistletoe Magic (December), and King Cotton (December). Pop Up in the Bluff was postponed.

2022 Festivals include: Pop Up in the Bluff-May 7, Forward Fest-May 14, Homecoming Concert was rescheduled to August 13 to accommodate Maze feature Frankie Beverly, Mistletoe Magic-Tree Lighting on November 27 and Parade on December 1, and King Cotton-December 27-29.

2023 Festivals include: Pop Up in the Bluff, Forward Fest, Homecoming Concert, Mistletoe Magic Tree Lighting and Parade, and King Cotton.

Food Court IN PROCESS – ON HOLD

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

A permanent food court in the downtown area will provide a venue for local food trucks to gather in a safe and attractive area. Local musicians can entertain, groups can meet, and a choice of diverse foods can be accessible to downtown employees and visitors.

We are exploring sites for a food court in the downtown area.

First Responders/Bridge the Gap IN PROCESS AND CONTINUING

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

Our first responders are extremely important as they protect our assets – people, property, and community. GFPB will partner with the mayor, city council, police and fire chief to explore issues such as increased wages, training, and retention. GFPB will also explore other means available to attract and retain our first responders.

A housing loan program for first responders was announced and the first housing fair was held on December 10, 2018. The loan program will continue throughout the life of the sales tax. The Homebuyer Assistance Program was expanded in 2020. The program assists uniformed employees with down payment and/or closings costs for a home purchased or built within the city limits. Assistance for home improvement can also be obtained. Over 20 first responders have received loans amounting to over \$171,000 to date.

Although more is needed, first responders received raises and additional salary increases. After the pandemic subsides and a levelized economy is seen, the mayor and city council will consider additional salary funding.

\$50,000 was used to fund cameras for the community's safety.

An internship program was developed to employ SEARK and UAPB students who are focused on public safety as a career. One student interned with the police department in 2019. Due to the pandemic in 2020, the internship program was suspended.

The Bridge the Gap initiative is to provide a mechanism to improve relations between our first responders and the community.

Blight Removal - Commercial & Residential COMPLETE – PBURA CONTINUING ITS WORK

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency's (PBURA) Central City Urban Renewal Plan and the updated Municipal Master Plan provides mechanisms to encourage and enforce existing blight. Our city will become a cleaner, more appealing place for residents and visitors.

The PBURA began demolition in September 2018 with three houses. Equipment was purchased and employees were hired to enable the PBURA to perform demolition work in-house at a lower expense than outsourcing the work. Demolition work aggressively continues today. 50 houses are on tap to be demolished in 2023.

The PBURA purchased three buildings on Main Street to rehabilitate. Work began in July 2020 and was completed March 2021. Only the façade and exterior were rehabilitated and is ready for a retail establishment, bar, or restaurant to purchase and complete the interior. We continue to recruit prospective tenants.

Other Main Street properties have been purchased and will be rehabilitated to entice interest in downtown as well as beautify the area.

Multi-Purpose Center COMPLETE

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

GFPB pledged \$4M towards a Multi-Purpose/Aquatic Center that houses meeting rooms, classrooms, recreational areas, and a state-of-the-art aquatic center. The Center attracts out-of-town visitors to swim meets (when appropriate after the pandemic) and provides a local outlet to our citizens for additional recreational activities.

Ground was broken in May 2018 and the grand opening was held on June 29, 2019. Pine Bluff's swim team, the Sharks, practices there and hosts swim meets. Locals utilize the facility daily.

The Aquatics Center was renamed the Pine Bluff Carl Redus Jr. Aquatics Center in July 2022 in honor of former Mayor Carl A. Redus, Jr. Water aerobics, Aqua Zumba and swimming classes are held throughout the year for all ages.

Downtown District - Cultural & Historic IN PROCESS

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

The University of Arkansas Community Design Center (ACDC), under the direction of Steve Luoni, worked with Pine Bluff Downtown Development and Bayou Rhythm & Blues and other groups to ensure we have a viable cultural and historic district to attract visitors when developing the Downtown Master Vision and Plan.

GFPB continues to meet with various groups about the cultural and historic district.

The PBURA supports our efforts with rehabilitating commercial building stock. They have also purchased property for downtown housing and is working on other projects within the downtown area.

Town Square (Pines Hotel, etc.) IN PROCESS

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

Pine Bluff Collaborative, formerly Pine Bluff Rising, is working to attract investors to renovate and repurpose the iconic Pines Hotel. They have also purchased other property in the downtown area with plans to renovate for a restaurant, blues venue, bar, and brewery.

The Community Theatre hosted a re-opening in November 2017 after a facelift. Local investors purchased the theatre in March 2020 and are developing their plans.

These additions to downtown will complement the new Pine Bluff/Jefferson County Library that opened in November 2020, as well as Southeast Arkansas Arts and Science Center's ARTSpace and ARTWORKS projects completed in 2021.

The new Pine Bluff Plaza at 6th and Main was completed and a Ribbon Cutting was held on May 1, 2019. A presentation was made to the public on April 27, 2021, to expand the square east to Texas Street. Renderings reflect the addition of a water feature, retail pods, food vendors, bar, and amphitheater. Work has begun on the expansion.

A 23-foot lighted tree was purchased in 2020 with funds from the cancelled Mistletoe Magic festival. During a trying pandemic time, an evening was dedicated to holiday music, hot chocolate, a visit from the Pine Bluff Fire Department's decorated truck and Santa, providing a nice break to our residents. Many family photographs and enjoyment of the tree throughout the Christmas season was experienced by many. The 2021 tree lighting event was a success. The 2022 tree lighting event was held at City Hall due to the Plaza being under construction with added events that afternoon to attract families.

Light poles in Phase 1 of the newly finished Streetscape area were donned with Christmas decorations that were also purchased with Mistletoe Magic funds not used in 2020 to add to the spirit of the season in downtown.

Streetscape compliments the efforts of GFPB, Pine Bluff Downtown Development, Pine Bluff/Jefferson County Library, Southeast Arkansas Arts and Science Center, not to mention the investments and efforts of other downtown investors and small businesses.

Phase 2 of Streetscape should begin in 2023 with the letting of bids by the Economic and Community Development Department.

Hub – The Generator **IN PROCESS**

Phase 2: Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

The Generator is a part of the Economic Development Pillar. It seeks to create a collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem – through programs and partnerships to drive innovation, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in Pine Bluff and Southeast Arkansas.

The Arkansas Economic Development Commission awarded \$250,000 towards an EAST lab in March 2020.

The Generator was selected to be part of a national cohort, Rural Innovation Network (RIN), and received technical assistance to prepare the EDA i6 Challenge grant. Although we were unsuccessful in securing this grant, we have received recognition with the work we are doing and have been able to apply for other grants. The Generator continues to receive technical assistance as a member of RIN. In partnership with CORI and Udacity, The Generator launched “The Future is Digital” Challenge in September 2020, digital skills upskilling programs in Digital Marketing, Front End Development and Business Analytics. In the second half of April 2021, four more upskilling programs were launched: IT Support Specialist, UX Design, Digital Marketing and Business Analytics in partnership with CORI, Generation USA and Udacity.

The Generator is participating in the Digital Navigator program which enables the team at The Generator to provide support in broadband, devices, and digital skills training to the community.

Workshops focusing on small business issues began in August 2018 through partnerships with the U.S. Small Business Association, Communities Unlimited and the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center. Workshops continue to offer these programs and services. The Generator formed a partnership with Google and WIX Studio that allows The Generator to deploy digital skills training for youth, adults, small businesses, job seekers, and those seeking to upskill.

Programming continues for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

The Generator strives to enhance and leverage assets already in the community. We are working to partner with Southeast Arkansas College as well as other public and private entities in the city and the region. The Generator is working with UAPB’s Economic Research and Development Center Incubator to establish a MOU.

GFPB signed a Professional Service Agreement (PSA) with the City of Pine Bluff to operate the innovation hub. This PSA will provide part of the funding needed.

GFPB has been selected to join the Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) network of partner organizations. Rural LISC is a national program created by Local Initiatives Support Corporation to expand its reach to include rural communities. LISC is a community development support organization working in metropolitan areas across the country. Currently, Rural LISC partners with 87 rural community-based organizations across 44 states, helping them identify challenges and opportunities, and delivering the most appropriate support to meet local needs. Rural LISC has offered technical assistance on grants for capacity buildup. Through the partnership with Rural LISC, GFPB is now a KIVA trustee.

Makerspace classes, entrepreneurship classes, education classes, and various workshops, have been held and more are in the planning stages. Each day, more is added to the list of available offerings. A summer program for middle school and high school students was held in the 2022 summer, the 2023 program is being planned.

Baseball Tournament of Champions

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

Pine Bluff has long been known for outstanding baseball. We want to work to provide a place to showcase our local teams and attract teams from other areas, and what better way than to involve Pine Bluff’s own Torii Hunter and his friends. Our nationally known Taylor Field and Torii Hunter Field at UAPB will offer baseball fans a place to compete and attract visitors to our community.

Delta Classic – Basketball COMPLETE

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

The King Cotton Basketball Tournament, once known as the attraction for local and nationwide teams, has been revived. December 27 through 29, 2018, Pine Bluff hosted seven teams including Columbus High School (Columbus, Mississippi), Houston Math, Science and Technology Center (Houston, Texas), Landry Walker High School (New Orleans, Louisiana), Gulliver Preparatory School (Pinecrest, Florida), Park School of Buffalo (Snyder, New York), Polytechnic High School (Long Beach, California), Jacksonville High School (Jacksonville, Arkansas), and Pine Bluff High School.

2019’s tournament expanded to 11 teams. Although COVID restrictions and concerns cancelled the 2020 tournament, officials are planning a bigger and better experience for 2021.

2021’s tournament included the addition of a girls bracket with four teams, Watson Chapel, Memphis Hutchinson, Sylvan Hills, and Shreveport Huntington. 16 boys teams competed, including Arkansas teams from Pine Bluff, White Hall, Little Rock, Magnolia and North Little Rock.

2022’s tournament was held December 27-29. 16 boys teams competed, including the Pine Bluff High School Zebras and the White Hall Bulldogs. The Zebras won the tournament defeating the McEachern (Ga.) Indians 48-45.

Civil Service Commission WILL NOT PURSUE

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

GFPB and other groups will explore the possible reinstatement of the Civil Service Commission that will provide an independent body to hear complaints and make personnel decisions. Protection for police and fire personnel from undue influence by elected officials, and accountability to the Mayor by the fire and police chiefs will be discussed.

Repurposing Projects IN PROCESS

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

The updated Municipal Master Plan and the Downtown Master and Vision Plan will encourage repurposing structures that are salvageable. The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency also plays an important role with repurposing structures.

Affordable Housing IN PROCESS

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency has secured real estate in the downtown area for housing. After delays, it is anticipated construction will start in 2023.

In January 2022, we announced a partnership with two local banking institutions, Simmons Bank and Relyance Bank, to provide loans for ALICE families. ALICE is an abbreviation that describes a subset of our nation’s population: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, yet Employed. ALICE households earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but less than the basic cost of living for their particular state. ALICE households are everyday people, working two or more jobs, contributing to the economy as taxpayers. There are now 28 new homeowners thanks to the ALICE program.

Simmons Bank has lowered their qualifying credit rating on two loan products. Relyance Bank will originate and service loans in partnership with GFPB to provide a secondary loan for closing cost and mortgage loan down payment assistance. Those receiving the closing costs and down payment assistance will be required to join the Pine Bluff Homeowners’ Association.

Those homeowners who live in a targeted area can receive assistance with new construction/rehabilitation costs under the Neighborhood Enhancement Act.

Walking, Bridge, Jogging & Biking Trails **IN PROCESS**

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

Statistics prove that walkability is key to satisfaction among residents. GFPB will work to connect our existing walking trails, provide biking trails and other outdoor facilities. A way to connect Saracen Landing to downtown is being explored, which will connect downtown to the trail around Lake Saracen and the pavilion.

A Trails Committee was formed and has been exploring options for trails in and around Pine Bluff/Jefferson County.

Pine Bluff was one of ten communities to receive a Trail Accelerator grant from the International Mountain Bicycling Association. The \$20,000 grant will examine the best opportunities for trails, both shared-use and bike-optimized in Jefferson County.

Incentive Programs **IN PROCESS**

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

GFPB will work with local financial institutions, Pine Bluff Downtown Development, and city government to create an incentive relocation program to attract restaurants, young professionals, and commercial vendors to the renovated downtown district.

We are working to reinstitute a small business loan program and exploring other programs. The Pine Bluff Urban Renewal Agency purchased three buildings on Main Street that have been rehabilitated to attract businesses. Other buildings have also been purchased with plans to rehabilitate.

Regional Park & Saracen Landing **IN PROCESS**

Phase 3: Oct 2019 – Sept 2020

Saracen Landing has the infrastructure to support better amenities that will meet the demands for increasing the quality of life and activities for families and youth.

Regional Park’s softball complex fields were reworked using FEMA funds from the June 2019 flooding. Other improvements to the concession stand, fencing, seating, and other amenities have been completed.

In addition to Go Forward Pine Bluff, other organizations are working to improve Pine Bluff:

- The Saracen Casino opened its Annex in October 2019. The Casino complex for gambling and restaurants opened Phase 1 in October 2020, the hotel and entertainment facilities were scheduled to open in December 2020, but those plans have been delayed.
- The Arts and Science Center for Southeast Arkansas opened a renovated ARTSpace and ARTWorks on Main Street in 2021.
- The Pine Bluff/Jefferson County Library new downtown location has opened and the remodeling of Watson Chapel and Alzheimer branches completed.
- SEARK opened Seabrook to the community for intramural and youth sports. They have hired their first athletic director with their competitive sports program to be launched in the fall of 2023.
- UAPB partnered with the Bowen School of Law.
- UAPB and SEARK partnered to offer an “A to B” program (associate to bachelor’s degree program).
- GTL plant development progresses.
- Jefferson Regional begins demolition work.
- Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District received a grant to build a new headquarters facility.
- CARTI Cancer Center has built a new location in Pine Bluff.
- Arkansas Children’s Hospital has established a new clinic and is partnering with Jefferson Regional.
- Jefferson County Health Department, Coroner’s Office, and Veterans Service Office each builds a new site.
- Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System opens a new clinic.
- Jefferson Regional has opened the Jones-Dunklin Cancer Center.
- A military clothing company, a disabled workforce employer, begins operations at the Pine Bluff Arsenal.
- Good Day Farm Arkansas locates in Pine Bluff.
- Streetscape Phase 1 complete, Phase 2 is to begin in 2023.

GFPB and other entities continue to work to stimulate economic growth, improve our educational system, and provide an attractive quality of life. We are working FOR you and BECAUSE of you. **Promises Made, Promises Kept.**

To download the full plan, go to our website www.goforwardpinebluff.org. Check the website often to keep updated on the happenings of GFPB. Also, “Like” us on Facebook and email us if you have any questions and/or suggestions. We would love to hear from you.

If you would like to receive text message updates and news from us, please text “pinebluff” to 1-866-431-1022.

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