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Macon joins 9 other US cities in national effort to radically reimagine public spaces

Participating in Reimagining the Civic Commons offers an opportunity for Macon to develop innovative approaches to public assets as we emerge from the pandemic

May 27, 2020 (Macon, GA)— Macon has joined a national initiative to advance ambitious social, economic and environmental goals through public spaces. Reimagining the Civic Commons has invited Macon to participate as part of its efforts to bring the benefits of strategic investments in parks, libraries, trails and community centers to more cities.

Macon will join leading edge public space practitioners, policymakers, advocates and residents from around the country advancing new and innovative ways of designing, operating and measuring public spaces nationwide. The new cities joining Reimagining the Civic Commons are Lexington, Macon, Miami, Minneapolis and San José; they join five teams from Akron, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis and Philadelphia. For the next three years, these 10 cities will work to transform civic assets to connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust and create more resilient communities.

Macon leaders note the important role that public spaces have played during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that joining Reimagining the Civic Commons will help them develop strategies to rebuild social capital and foster more equitable and healthy neighborhoods.

“We are hardwired as humans to be happier with more social interaction. When we were in grammar school we instinctively sought out the playground to re-energize our spirits during our work-day,” Chris Sheridan, Chair of the Macon Bibb County Urban Development Authority said. “We can bring the experience of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail to the urban core by re-imagining our streets and sidewalks as a playground that enriches our souls. We are not isolated in our cars speeding on the same routes from home, to work, to shopping or the same group of friends. Let us re-imagine a place where we want to go just to see who we might meet.”

Macon's project will focus on expanding the Ocmulgee Trail network from just a recreation experience along the river into an equitable bike and pedestrian trail network that connects core neighborhoods to downtown. The expanded network will include downtown parks and connections to Pleasant Hill and East Macon. The team will consist of public and private partners representing the local government, philanthropy, non-profits agencies, and local businesses. Alex Morrison of the Macon-Bibb UDA and Robert Walker of the Macon-Bibb County Recreation Department have agreed to co-chair the effort.

Reimagining the Civic Commons is a collaborative effort of national foundations — including The JPB Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Kresge Foundation and William Penn Foundation — and local partners working to transform public spaces in ways that advance engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development.

“Months of quarantine has brought home to all of us just how much we need great public spaces.” said Sam Gill, Knight’s senior vice president and chief program officer. “These spaces will be key to supporting socially connected, healthy communities as we emerge from this pandemic.”

Launched in 2016, the original Reimagining the Civic Commons cities are already demonstrating the wide-ranging, beneficial impacts of innovative public space investments, design and operations:

- In Akron, a formerly neglected lake in one of the city’s hardest hit neighborhoods has become a gathering place to experience nature. Summit Lake is now a point of pride for the community, with 94 percent of visitors believe the previously isolated neighborhood now has a bright future.
- Memphis has reimagined a set of all but abandoned spaces along the Mississippi River into an active, revitalized waterfront. Following the removal of Confederate monuments, the renamed and revitalized Fourth Bluff Park and River Garden now welcome a diversity of Memphians every day. Average visitorship to River Garden has nearly doubled and visitors come from more than 40 zip codes.

To learn more about *Reimagining the Civic Commons* and explore plans for the initiative across all 10 cities, please visit: www.CivicCommons.us.

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About The JPB Foundation

The mission of The JPB Foundation is to enhance the quality of life in the United States through transformational initiatives that promote the health of our communities by creating opportunities for those in poverty, promoting pioneering medical research, and enriching and sustaining our environment. For more, visit jobfoundation.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more, visit kf.org.

About The Kresge Foundation

The Kresge Foundation was founded in 1924 to promote human progress. Today, Kresge fulfills that mission by building and strengthening pathways to opportunity for low-income people in America's cities, seeking to dismantle structural and systemic barriers to equality and justice. Using a full array of grant, loan, and other investment tools, Kresge invests more than \$160 million annually to foster economic and social change. For more information visit kresge.org

About William Penn Foundation

The William Penn Foundation, founded in 1945 by Otto and Phoebe Haas, is dedicated to improving the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region through efforts that increase educational opportunities for children from low-income families, ensure a sustainable environment, foster creativity that enhances civic life, and advance philanthropy in the Philadelphia region. The Foundation's assets exceed \$2.5 billion. For more, visit williampennfoundation.org.

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