Columbus 2025 is a five-year strategy with the first year now in the books. I want to thank the Implementation Committee as well as the Chairs and volunteers of each Action Area for their commitment and hard work that enabled successful execution of the strategic objectives prescribed for the first year. The success experienced in 2017 positions the effort for another great year in 2018.

There is much work to be done but with the people involved, their collaboration, leadership and commitment, I have every confidence we will see another year of execution of the plan that will prove to be a major catalyst for transformation of the Greater Columbus region.

Sincerely,

Billy Blanchard
Columbus 2025 Board Chair
Partner, Jordan-Blanchard Capital

I’m very pleased with the progress that has been made in this first full year of implementation. The dedication of the core team and all the community partners has just been tremendous. With the success of each initiative and achievement of each milestone, I get more and more excited about where this region will actually be in the year 2025.

Sincerely,

Audrey Tillman
Columbus 2025 Vice Chair
Executive VP/General Counsel, Aflac

To get involved, visit Columbus2025.com/engage
For the Targeted Economic Growth (TEG) Action Area, 2017 was about identifying and understanding our opportunities as a community. In 2018, we will leverage our strengths—a collaborative, entrepreneurial business community and a can-do mindset—to grow and expand our market in key economic clusters, such as aerospace or food manufacturing.

—Jason Cuevas
Action Area Chair
Regional Director, Southwest Region, Georgia Power
2017 HIGHLIGHTS & PARTNERSHIPS

Expanding and supporting entrepreneurship requires the on-going efforts of multiple entities. Successes in this Action Area were achieved through partnerships with Columbus Makes IT, Ft. Benning, local government, businesses and academic institutions.

- Held numerous entrepreneurial scouting and recruiting events, including StartUp Weekends and a bootcamp at Troy University that helped garner over $425,000 in direct investment and seed funding for local startups
- Developed StartUp Columbus, a “first-stop shop” concept with a business accelerator program modeled from StartUp Community best practices
- Secured temporary co-working space at Columbus Makes IT with access to a fabrication laboratory (“FabLab”), with help from the River Valley Regional Commission and local government
- Mentored 47 founders and helped launch 12 startups with the help of RiverCity Foundry, Columbus Makes IT, SCORE, UGA's SBDC, the Georgia Game Developer's Association and Ga Tech’s Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC)
- Hired Columbus native, innovator, and entrepreneur, Frank Braski as our Chief Entrepreneur Officer to champion our enterprising culture with a passion for high-technology, software, cyber security, defense, robotics, medical devices and education

2018 ACTION ITEMS

Year Two Objective: Expand resources to open up entrepreneurship as a possibility for all residents

- Launch StartUpColumbusGA.com and a physical location, #WeDoAmazingStartUps!
- Engage a diverse and inclusive set of StartUps and pre-venture founders interested in producing innovation-led, high-growth potential, exportable products and services
- Work closely with Fort Benning to create opportunities for local entrepreneurs and suppliers to Grow with Benning, like the Georgia Defense Exchange (GDX)
- Activate the local investment community and establish a dedicated local investment fund, by recruiting and developing a “bullpen” of successful business people and leaders to act as startup mentors and potential investors
- Collaborate with local event promoters to include startup and entrepreneurial components at upcoming events like the Bob Wright Business Empowerment Symposium, Creative South, Way Down Film Festival, STEAMuL8!, etc.
In just one year Talented, Educated People made tremendous progress toward satisfying the recommendations of Columbus 2025. Through Success Ready, we will strive to address the educational and workforce needs of our region, increasing levels of educational preparedness and attainment while improving the overall competitiveness of the Greater Columbus workforce.

—Jacki Lowe
Action Area Chair
Retired West Region, Vice President, Georgia Power

TALENTED, EDUCATED PEOPLE

2017 HIGHLIGHTS & PARTNERSHIPS
This Action Area’s goal is to align education and workforce systems to create a talent pipeline that meets the workforce demands of the Greater Columbus region. This progress reflects significant collaboration among local educators, businesses, non-profit organizations and individual volunteers.

• Established a cradle-to-career (C2C) initiative Success Ready, targeting four age groups
• Partnered with Columbus Parks and Recreation to install Free Little Libraries around the community
• Formed a community stakeholder group with South Columbus and Fox Elementary
• Realigned Partners In Education with the new Success Ready framework for more measurable outcomes
• Hosted an Industry Bus Tour with Muscogee County School District (MCSD), taking educators to local businesses to learn how to better prepare students for the workforce
• Partnered with Columbus State University and MCSD to hold a K12-Industry Conference to help teachers prepare students for college level computer science courses
• Performed a LaborShed Analysis and Workforce Assessment, allowing 21st Century Workforce to determine goals and metrics
• Partnered with Fort Benning’s Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program to host weekly Employer Connection events

2018 ACTION ITEMS

Year Two Objective: Develop homegrown talent
• Aid childcare providers to become Quality Rated for improved kindergarten readiness
• Support the creation of MCSD’s college and career academy
• Develop a cohesive approach to developing the soft skills needed by local employers

Year Two Objective: Retain our best and brightest workers
• Develop a talent retention strategy
• Host an event for private and nonprofit sectors to explore underemployment in the state

Year Two Objective: Attract talented individuals to Greater Columbus
• Create additional internship opportunities for students and educators
• Develop a Talent Coalition with representation from all major employers in the area

KEY OBJECTIVES
• Align education and workforce systems
• Develop homegrown talent through cradle-to-career partnerships, aligning education, training, business and social services
• Attract talented individuals to Greater Columbus and retain the best and brightest workers
• Increase the percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in Pre-K, public high school graduates enrolled in college, and adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher
**2017 HIGHLIGHTS & PARTNERSHIPS**

Community branding efforts developed out of feedback from focus groups, stakeholder interviews, community surveys and regional surveys, conducted to get a better understanding of current perceptions and attitudes regarding the Greater Columbus region.

- Hired marketing consultant Chandler thinks to launch a branding campaign and develop a *brand story*
- Conducted extensive research in Columbus and the surrounding area, including hundreds of interviews, focus groups, surveys and meetings
- Revealed new logo and tagline to communicate the community brand
- Published a final *Community Branding* report
- Launched the new *AmazingColumbusGa.com* website to help promote the brand within the community and beyond
- Conducted an external public relations campaign, hosting 12 travel-writer tours that resulted in $60,000+ of earned media and 250,000+ impressions
- Helped local organizations adopt new branding, including VisitColumbusGa, Development Authority and Columbus Consolidated Government
- Published *Brand Navigator* report to expand the branding efforts and create a sense of place

---

**2018 ACTION ITEMS**

- Build local advocacy and support to be led by Image By Design
- Launch social media campaign to tell “amazing stories”
- Publish and distribute Ambassador Kit to stakeholders
- Market the brand through website, brochures, social media, merchandise
- Create an internal marketing campaign
- Engage the community in branding efforts
- Revisit signage programs for creating a sense of place

---

*Branding a community is about delivering unique, authentic experiences to residents, businesses and visitors. It requires long-term commitment. The story that has unfolded for Columbus is an amazing one and will help to set the community apart from others when talking about economic development, tourism and quality of life.*

—Peter Bowden  
Action Area Chair  
President & CEO, VisitColumbusGA
The creation of vibrant and connected spaces is a significant driver of city success. The work will result in revitalized cores in our community, with healthy neighborhoods that invite investment, engage our residents and offer dignity to all of our citizens.

—Betsy Covington
Action Area Chair
President & CEO, Community Foundation

VIBRANT & CONNECTED PLACES

2017 HIGHLIGHTS & PARTNERSHIPS
This Action Area lifts up the work of a broad segment of individuals and organizations, partnering with state and local governments to bring about real change in the way we physically connect with our community and with each other.

• Connected the Fall Line Trace to the Riverwalk with the first new section of the Dragonfly Trail, partnering with Friends of the Dragonfly, local governments and others
• Made improvements to the 2nd Avenue Corridor, a major gateway to Columbus, with the state, Historic Columbus, City Village stakeholders, local volunteers and others
• Improved paths for pedestrians and cyclists from Lakebottom Park to the River through a partnership with MidTown, Inc. and local government
• Supported public transportation accessibility with new METRA routes, hours and signage system through efforts from METRA, local government and local citizens
• Broke ground on the Wynnton Streetscape Project, led by local government and Midtown, Inc. to enhance Wynnton Road and connect area neighborhoods
• Encouraged a feasibility study by the Passenger Rail Commission, demonstrating profitability of a Columbus-Atlanta railway to state and national planners

2018 ACTION ITEMS
Year Two Objective: Promote vibrant and attractive neighborhoods, corridors and activity centers
• Encourage continued improvements along the 2nd Avenue Corridor to highlight one of the “front doors” to our Uptown area
• Continue the Wynnton Streetscape Project to connect neighborhoods on both sides of the road and restore a beautiful thoroughfare in the heart of our community
• Work with the local governments to develop new metrics to measure our ability to foster healthier communities and contribute to the national discussion

Year Two Objective: Connect people and places with expanded opportunities for walking, biking and transit
• Complete the first two segments of the Dragonfly Trail
• Partner with GDOT, as part of the planned Spur 22 resurfacing, to incorporate safer pedestrian crossings with improved signalization at several Midtown intersections and to enhance pedestrian opportunities wherever possible

KEY OBJECTIVES
• Maximize the impact of the region’s greatest natural resource—the Chattahoochee River
• Promote vibrant and attractive neighborhoods, corridors and activity centers
• Connect people and places with expanded opportunities for walking, biking and transit use
• Collaborate across state lines to further promote activation of the Chattahoochee Riverfront through the region's core
COLUMBUS 2025 IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Billy Blanchard, Chair  
Partner, Jordan-Blanchard Capital

Ms. Audrey Tillman, Vice-Chair  
Executive VP & General Counsel, Aflac

Mr. Brian Anderson  
President & CEO, Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Tom Bode  
General Manager, Pratt & Whitney - Columbus Engine Center

Mr. Peter Bowden  
President & CEO, Greater Columbus Convention & Visitors Bureau

Mr. Wade Burford  
President & CEO; CB&T East Alabama at Synovus Bank

Mr. Mike Burns  
Special Assistant to the Commanding General, Fort Benning

Mr. Russ Carreker  
Partner, CS Properties

Mr. Brandon Cockrell  
Director of Plans, Analysis, and Integration; Fort Benning Garrison Command

Ms. Betsy Covington  
President & CEO, Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley

Col. Clinton Cox  
Garrison Commander, Fort Benning

Mr. Jason Cuevas  
Regional Director, Southwest Region, Georgia Power

Mr. Steve Davis  
President, Columbus Water Works

Mr. Scott Ferguson  
President & CEO, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley

Mr. Cedric Hill  
CEO & Owner, Hill-Watson-People's Funeral Service LLC

Mr. Scott Hill  
President & CEO, Columbus Regional Healthcare System

Ms. Lorette Hoover  
President, Columbus Technical College

Mr. Isaiah Hugley  
City Manager, Columbus Consolidated Government

Mr. Gaylon Jowers, Jr.  
Senior EVP & President of Issuer Solutions; TSYS

Hon. Harry Lange  
Chair, Harris County Commission

Dr. David Lewis  
Superintendent, Muscogee County School District

Hon. Eddie Lowe  
Mayor, Phenix City, AL

Ms. Jacki Lowe  
Retired, Georgia Power

Mr. Rodney Mahone  
Publisher, Ledger-Enquirer

Dr. Chris Markwood  
President, Columbus State University

Hon. Peggy Martin  
Chair, Russell County AL Commission

Ms. Marquette McKnight  
President, Media Marketing and More

Mr. Marc Olivié  
President & CEO, W.C. Bradley Company

Mr. Terry L. Reis  
Interim President & CEO, Goodwill Southern Rivers

Mr. Chuck Rossi  
President, Liberty Utilities

Mr. Heath Schondelmayer  
Market President, Columbus; Synovus

Hon. Teresa Tomlinson  
Mayor, Columbus Consolidated Government

Dr. David White  
Vice Chancellor, Troy University Phenix City Campus

Mr. Jimmy Yancey  
Retired Chairman, Synovus

COLUMBUS 2025 INVESTORS

TALENTED FOUNDERS

GROWTH PARTNERS

ENTERPRISING STEWARDS

BRAND BUILDERS

CONNECTED DIRECTORS