

# Conclusion

## The Shoals is at a moment of great opportunity, one that will require cross-community cooperation to capitalize on.

In regional cooperation efforts throughout the country, the essential driver is the business community. Elected leaders come and go, but ultimately, it is businesses, concerned with the economic vitality of the region, that provide the consistent leadership and resource base that allow communities to reach higher. However, private businesses need public partners to support and drive change. Public universities often play a major role, lending institutional support, leadership, and technical advice. Civic groups and foundations can also form that cross-community bridge and non-governmental support to drive toward goals.

**The Shoals has a spirit of courage, creativity, and openness to innovation that will serve it well at this moment.**

The Shoals has pulled together at critical points in the past and has already built a model for regional cooperation that's present nowhere else in the state.

### PARCA recommends that The Shoals:

- 1 | Protect and build upon the cooperation established through The Shoals Economic Development Authority and the two-county Shoals Economic Development Fund by expanding the definition of "economic development" to embrace the investments in workforce development and quality of life.
- 2 | Build on The Shoals success in K-12 education and maximize its investment in higher education.
- 3 | Make regional investments in cultivating and promoting The Shoals' unique assets.

- 4 | Improve cooperation between existing governments, and streamline government with the aim of providing coordinated, efficient, and cost-efficient government.

More specifically:

### 1 | Regional Investments

Clarify and expand the purposes for which The Shoals Economic Development Fund can be spent and leave the decision-making on its allocation to the locally representative body charged with its administration.

- Ensure there is an adequate site development and incentive pool to meet current obligations and capitalize on emerging opportunities.
- Authorize investment in training and education that will produce an unmatched workforce.
- Authorize investment in regionally important quality of life enhancements that build on The Shoals' unique attributes.

### 2 | Workforce

Create a cradle-to-career collaborative that ensures every child in The Shoals has access to the highest quality education and training.

- Ensure that Shoals Scholar Dollars is sustainable and is supportive of maximum student opportunity aligned with regional needs.
- Tighten the alignment of the offerings at Northwest-Shoals with the needs of local employers with an eye toward the advancing technology.

- Support the ambitions of the University of North Alabama’s entry into Division I and plans to grow enrollment. Recognize the need to increase bachelor’s degree educational attainment in The Shoals and UNA’s role in producing those graduates.

### 3 | Quality of Life/Place

Continue and amplify efforts to promote and enhance The Shoals’ unique cultural and natural assets.

- Merge the revenue streams of Lauderdale and Colbert county tourism efforts to eliminate inter-regional competition. Develop a coordinated, complementary, and cooperative promotion effort.
- Inventory the needs for civic spaces and performance venues needed to host musical and cultural events.
- Identify a regional planning and investment plan to improve and connect parks trails and greenways to take advantage of the Tennessee River and other natural attractions. Form a public-private partnership to advance this goal.

### 4 | Governmental Cooperation

Streamline government, increase cooperation, and consider consolidation of duplicative services.

- Form a Mayors’ Council with regular agenda-driven meetings aimed at addressing issues of joint concern and exploring collaborative projects. Consider the adoption of anti-poaching agreements to prevent self-defeating, inter-local competition.

- Consider a joint planning initiative so that municipal comprehensive plans are aligned and complementary. Connections and way-finding between cities should be improved.
- Identify a regional planning and investment plan to improve and connect parks trails and greenways to take advantage of the Tennessee River and other natural attractions. Form a public-private partnership to advance this goal.
- Examine the consolidation of utilities, services, and even municipalities.
  - a. Tuscumbia and Sheffield should jointly form three separate study groups to examine the potential benefits and obstacles to increased cooperation or consolidation.
    1. Utilities
    2. Municipal Departments
    3. School Systems
  - b. Explore the inclusion of Florence and Muscle Shoals in service-sharing and utility provision discussions.
  - c. Consider the adoption of a city manager form of government for Florence and other municipalities in The Shoals.