

20 Years Later: Sankofa CDC in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward Community

As the world recognized Earth Day 2025, stakeholders in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward are reflecting on community development progress geared to making the area more environmentally and economically sustainable. In the days ahead, August 29, 2025, will mark two decades since Hurricane Katrina devastated and altered the course of New Orleans' history. [Sankofa Community Development Corporation](#) (CDC) is restoring the Lower Ninth Ward, a coastal community in New Orleans, to prioritize the community above catastrophe. Sankofa CDC is strategically addressing compounding factors like flooding and environmental concerns, community preservation, economic development, and sustainability. Neighbors and stakeholders galvanizing around Sankofa CDC's resilience is an undercurrent in a resurgence in the community, which is home to about 7,500 residents compared to the 14,000 who resided there before Hurricane Katrina.



The mission of Sankofa Community Development Corporation is to build healthier communities for generations to come. Since 2008, the organization has focused our efforts on bringing flood protection, food access, and economic opportunities to the Lower Ninth Ward, valuing community voices and partnering with stakeholders and experts to repurpose blighted land into community-centered establishments. Homeowners account for 48% of the population in the Lower Ninth Ward with Less than 25 businesses are in operation on its major thoroughfares (mostly convenience stores and the median household income is \$40,960. Approximately 84% of the population are Black people.

As a member of the Deep South Center of Environmental Justice [HBCU-CBO Gulf Coast Equity Consortium Project](#), Sankofa CDC works in partnership with Xavier University of Louisiana to support the Lower Ninth community's capacity to respond to issues that affect the health and well-being of its children and families. Using a communiversity model with community-based participatory research, Sankofa CDC works with Xavier University Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities and the Physics Department in academic partnerships that respect community input. With this HBCU-CBO partnership, Sankofa CDC has increased its capacity to advocate for solutions to the challenges they face concerning environmental health, economic prosperity and social justice.

Ecological Restoration and Outdoor Education

During 2017, Sankofa CDC entered into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the City of New Orleans to develop the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail. The Wetland Park is open to the public for recreational use, aiding in the return of native wildlife, flora, and fauna. Development of 40 acres of a deteriorated natural area on Florida Ave. adjacent to the Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle that is transforming the land into a model of a restored ecosystem and natural wildlife habitat for recreation, environmental education, and flood protection.



Access to Healthy Food

The [Sankofa Fresh Start Market](#) is the Lower Ninth Ward's only green grocery store, providing 1,600 sq. ft. of access to a variety of healthy, whole foods to meet the community's nutritional needs. Sankofa CDC began its food access work in 2008 as a marketplace and farmers market, which evolved into an open-air produce stand in 2017. The Fresh Start Market opened its doors in 2024 as a permanent, 1,600 sq ft green grocery. The development of the Fresh Start Market has been driven by a collaborative, community-driven process. This initiative is focused on building health-centered infrastructure that nurtures wellness and ensures consistent access to fresh, nutritious food. Sankofa CDC began its food access work in 2008 as a marketplace and farmers market, which evolved into an open-air produce stand in 2017. As an anchor healthy food hub for the Lower Ninth Ward, the Fresh Start Market offers fresh fruits & vegetables, seafood, dried beans, and other essential food staples. It represents a vital step toward ensuring food justice and empowering the community to thrive.



Commercial Revitalization

Sankofa CDC is currently working to revitalize the St. Claude Avenue commercial corridor in the Lower Ninth Ward to support health-centered revitalization and address long-term disinvestment in the area. As a result, the organization has obtained a [Main Street America designation](#), a national initiative to revitalize historic commercial districts and strengthen economic development. Plans for a Lower Ninth Ward Main Street headquarters and resilience hub are presently being developed for community use, green economy information, and small business support.

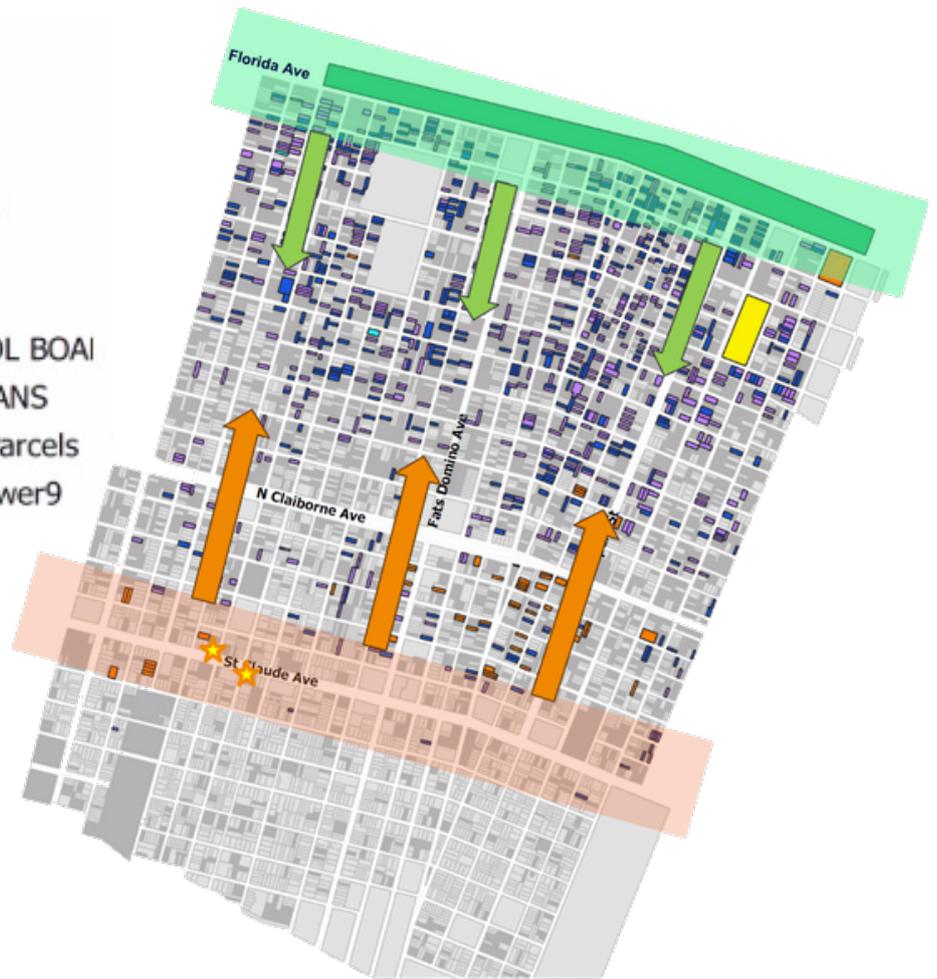


The Future for Sankofa CDC & the lower ninth ward

Sankofa is expanding on the ecological and environmental benefits of the Wetland Park through a plan for a greenways design within the northern area of the Lower Ninth Ward that connects to St Claude Ave and addresses blight, dumping, water infrastructure systems, and disinvestment in the area. The plan will include: the creation of community-based design and participation strategies; partnerships with scientific experts on a subsidence reduction; a stormwater management strategy that incorporates vacant land between Florida Avenue and N. Tonti Street in the Lower Ninth Ward; 3) and development of a strategy for land acquisition and blight restoration with the identification of publicly and privately-owned lots and 4) collaboration with the CAAB to create a community-centered multi-purpose Learning Trail to document its history and culture.

LEGEND

-  Sankofa Wetland Park
-  Adjudicated Properties
- Publicly Owned Vacant Parcels
 -  HANO
 -  NORA
 -  ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOAI
 -  THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
-  Privately Owned Vacant Parcels
-  Parcels AssessorData Lower9



The Sankofa Way: Holistic Community Development

Neighborhood Greenways & resilience studies bring the impact of the Wetland Park south, to protect the community from climate change and redress environmental justice issues.

Main Street development acts as an innovation and resilience hub that incorporates green technology and green infrastructure workforce development – which can spread north to improve our vacant lots and properties.





sankofa

Community Development Corporation

Building healthier communities for generations to come