

Rural Blackbelt Placemaking Action Accelerator Plan

USDA Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge

Quarter 3, 2023 Performance Narrative – Final Report

Auburn University Rural Studio developed and implemented a 2-year (24 month) pilot *Placemaking Action Accelerator Plan (PAAP)* for communities in and around Hale County, Alabama, in the heart of the Blackbelt Region. Rural Studio worked with a cross-sectorial cohort of municipal, state, and federal agencies, local community stakeholders, national subject matter experts, and non-profit organizations to develop innovative placemaking strategies and catalytic projects aimed at improving the quality of life for current and future residents of Hale County. Additionally, Rural Studio provided implementation technical assistance that served to accelerate ongoing placemaking activities in the region. In developing the PAAP, key priorities included housing, economic development, preservation and enhancement of active greenspaces, historic sites and structures, community amenities, and community-led health and wellness initiatives.

This narrative includes activities performed between October 1, 2021, and September 30, 2023.

A. Activities and Tasks Performed

The Rural Studio team has engaged in four (4) primary tasks to identify and move priority placemaking projects forward during the grant period:

- 1. Placemaking Action Planning.** During the two-year period beginning in October of 2021, we worked with community stakeholders in Greensboro, Newbern, and Uniontown. The team hosted weekly meetings with the Rural Studio faculty, staff and students, stakeholders, community members, and subject matter experts to further refine goals, objectives and expected outcomes of the overall PAAP project, as well as to identify future areas of need in each community. These meetings 1) served as a catalyst to develop six (6) actionable placemaking projects in Hale County and 2) provided the opportunity to work with and update stakeholders and community members as to the status of these projects as they moved through the ideation, design, and construction phases.

Performance Benchmarks: The team participated in One hundred and sixty-three (163) community meetings that included representation from The Newbern Library Board, Greensboro Parks & Recreation, the Hale County Commission, The Greensboro City Council, The Newbern City Council, The Blackbelt Community Foundation, the Blackbelt Wastewater Consortium, The Newbern Volunteer Fire Department, The West Alabama Boys and Girls Club Board, the Back Belt Food Project in Greensboro, Alabama Audubon, Schoolyard Roots in Tuscaloosa, Bois D’Arc Farm in Uniontown, Project Horseshoe Farm in Greensboro, University of Alabama Fellows, UAB Nursing School, The Safe House Black History Museum, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

- 2. Visioning and Input Sessions.** In addition to the meetings described above, the team hosted numerous visioning and input sessions. These review sessions included key community stakeholders and client/project leads, as well as external subject matter experts. These visioning and input sessions included small, internal design-focused meetings, larger convenings, and public celebrations of the community's work. The purpose of these meetings served to share our lessons learned and best practices with other placemaking organizations, and to work with partners to continue developing strategy, research and development to move the projects forward. Additionally, with five placemaking projects either under construction or in design development, we also continued to host internal visioning sessions, meetings, presentations, and reviews with clients and subject matter experts. These meetings occurred regularly throughout each week over the course of the grant period.

Performance Benchmarks: Visioning and Input sessions included:

- a. Halloween Review** (October 29, 2001) – a design and ideation review provided by clients, stakeholders, and subject matter experts. In Newbern, Halloween is the time to work hard and play hard. This year was no different, with a week full of pumpkins, presentations, and of course, costumes. We started the week early, with carving and displaying pumpkins at Red Barn on Tuesday evening. Friends and families from town came to join in on the fun too. After a long week of rushing to finish costumes and drawings, our students presented for Halloween Reviews on Friday October 29.
- b. Soup Roast** (December 7, 2021) – a design and ideation review provided by professional consultants and subject matter experts. Rural Studio's Fall semester culminates in the annual Soup Roast Review and Workshops, run by longtime consultants Jersey Devil's design/build legend Jim Adamson, along with Jake LaBarre from Miller Hull and J.A.S. Design Build principals Kim Clements and Joe Schneider, all in from Seattle. Together they critiqued the work of our 5th-year students with good humor and a fun spirit, despite the unpredictable West Alabama weather. This time was also used to celebrate the progress made by Fall semester 3rd-years on their project, Rosie's Home, as well as their History and Woodshop class projects. We capped off Soup Roast Review with a hot bowl of soup in the evening along with a community bonfire.
- c. Convocation** (January 12, 2022) – an internal meeting to orient incoming students to the placemaking projects.
- d. Executive Review** (March 16, 2022) – an internal review to monitor and assess progress with University and Program leadership.
- e. Farm Dinner** (March 22, 2022) – we engaged directly with our community to further develop our productive food system as a shared resource.
- f. Dedication: Project Horseshoe Farm Courtyard** (April 29, 2022) – we publicly celebrated the completion of the Project Horseshoe Farm Courtyard, which was begun prior to the RPIC

award. This program included the project dedication, a community dinner, alumni lectures, and local entertainment.

- g. Pig Roast** (April 30, 2022) we held an all-day public event in which the current placemaking projects were formally presented and discussed and community input was solicited. This event included community breakfast, lunch, and dinner along with the public presentations and discussions.
- h. Executive Review** (May 3, 2022) current placemaking projects were formally presented and discussed for advancement to the construction phase.
- i. Summer Reading Festival** (June 10 – 11, 2022), We worked with the town of Newbern and the Library Board to host the annual community “Summer Reading Festival,” which drew community members from across Hale County to participate in Placemaking Activities. Read more here: <http://ruralstudio.org/newbern-library-summer-reading-festival/>
- j. Introductory Workshops** – in mid-August the Placemaking Team welcomed a new group of twelve (12) students to begin work on year two placemaking project strategy, discovery, and development. This process consisted of the following five (5) strategy workshops:

Strategy 1: Wood Assemblies

Led by Professor of Practice Kiel Moe, subject matter expert specializing in mass timber at Auburn University School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Planning (APLA). Kiel helped us get our bearings on different types of mass timber, what it can do, and how we might use it to build a new bathhouse for the Pods, our dormitories on site at the Morrisette campus.

Strategy 2: Landscape

Two more APLA faculty, Assistant Professor Emily Knox and Associate Professor David Hill, joined us from Auburn, to dive into all things landscape architecture. They pushed us to think differently about what a “building” is and asked us to consider the broader site, with dirt and vegetation as space makers.

Strategy 3: Code and Life Safety

Next, we were put to the test by Cheryl Noel and Ravi Ricker, who visited from Chicago, Illinois, to help us specifically with this year’s house project. The house will only be 18 feet square, so we dug into the building code to understand what stairs can do for such a small house. Cheryl and Ravi asked us to mark out full-scale mock-ups of some of our best plan ideas, and afterwards we explored each one to see what the spaces might feel like.

Strategy 4: Design

Architect John Forney came from Birmingham, AL, to turn all preconceptions on their heads. He worked with us to really break apart the bathhouse project and think about how it may be situated across the Morrisette campus. John also challenged us to flip our 18’ x 18’ houses upside-down and see what switching the first- and second-floor program might do.

Strategy 5: Detail Strategy

Our final visitors came all the way from Seattle, Washington. Kim Clements, Joe Schneider, and Jake LaBarre got into the details with us, drawing and sketching rapid-fire to round out our workshops. They helped us start to imagine what our projects might look like and how much space they'll really take up by mocking up heights and imagining the vertical spaces.

- k. **Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank** (October 12, 2022) – the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta held a community roundtable event in Hale County. Focused on Economic Resiliency, and featuring community leaders and stakeholders from Hale County, these sessions were organized and hosted by Rural Studio. The discussion focused on learn more about local economic drivers & challenges of the region, especially considering recent tornadoes and the pandemic, and provided a diversity of on-the-ground perspectives on economic opportunities and challenges in the heart of the Black Belt. In the afternoon, Rural Studio hosted the group for lunch, which was attended by over 75 participants. During lunch, speakers shared challenges relative to food insecurity and access to clean water in the region and illuminated the work in which Rural Studio and our partners are engaged to address these important issues. Lunch ended with a brief presentation by two Rural Studio student teams that began to “set the table” for the afternoon round table that would focus on Rural Housing Resiliency, followed by a tour of recently completed housing projects in a local family settlement.



Held in the Newbern Library, the afternoon session illuminated 5 key barriers to addressing the issue of housing access and affordability in the Black Belt:

1. Rural communities don't always benefit from Federal Resources

2. Heirs' property often prevents individuals from being productive with the land they already own
3. Many Black Belt towns don't have the infrastructure to attract industry and provide living wages
4. The construction workforce is estimated to shrink significantly in the next decade, and rural communities will likely feel the most impact
5. Substandard housing and the risk of poor health outcomes in rural areas is directly linked

Participants included representatives from: Rural Studio, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, USDA Rural Development (Alabama & Federal), Housing Assistance Council, Regions Bank, Alabama Wastewater Consortium, Alabama House of Representatives, Alabama Housing Finance Authority, HOPE Credit Union, Chipola Area Habitat for Humanity, Alabama Power, CHOICE, HUD, Alabama Senate, Project Horseshoe Farm, Hale County Chamber of Commerce, and Reuters.

- I. **Black Belt Food Initiative: Food for Thought (October 21 – 22, 2022)** – this two-day celebration was a collaborative effort of Black Belt Food Project, the Newbern Library and Auburn University's Rural Studio program. The goal of the event was to provide a better understanding of shared cultural heritage through food.

On Friday at the Newbern Library, author and historian Emily Blejwas led a presentation of her book *The Story of Alabama in Fourteen Foods*, followed by a light tasting featuring recipes from the book. *The Story of Alabama in Fourteen Foods* explores well-known Alabama food traditions to reveal histories of the state in a new way. The book is part history, part travelogue, and part cookbook. Emily Blejwas uses representative foods, dishes, and beverages, as a lens for exploring the diverse cultures and historical traditions of Alabama. Drawing on historical research and interviews with home cooks, chefs, and community members cooking at local gatherings and for holidays, in her talk Blejwas detailed the myths, legends, and truths underlying Alabama's beloved foodways.

On Saturday, we hosted tours of the Rural Studio Farm led by our farm manager Eric Ball and provided cooking demonstrations in Rural Studio's Great Hall. The Hale County Public Library organized a seed swap, where community members were encouraged to bring some seeds to share and trade. The event highlighted regional farmers, producers, chefs, organizations and educators that are working to create a stronger, more diverse community through food during the Black Belt Food Initiative's food expo. We hosted demonstrations and information covering a range of topics, from food distribution services to educational programming opportunities.

The event culminated with open conversation over a West and North African inspired lunch created by chef [Halima Salazar of Gimbias Kitchen](#) (Oxford, MS) and [chef Sarah Cole of Abadir's](#) (Greensboro, AL). The meal was inspired by in-season produce picked fresh from the Rural Studio Farm. This was a free event open and accessible to everyone in the community.

- m. Community Pumpkin Carve and Halloween Project Review** (October 28, 2022) – We had familiar faces return this year, including Marlon Blackwell from Marlon Blackwell Architects; Emilie Taylor Welty, Director of Architecture at Tulane University and Design-Build Manager of the Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design; Emily Neustrom from Material Institute; and the Front Porch Initiative’s Rusty Smith, Betsy Farrell Garcia, and Mackenzie Stagg. We also hosted visitors who came a long way to see the work: Kent Hicks from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Kelly Gregory all the way from San Francisco. And of course, everyone was in costume!
- n. Soup Roast** (December 6 – 8, 2022) – a design and ideation review provided by professional consultants and subject matter experts.
- o. Pig Roast Year-End Community Celebration** (April 28 – 29, 2023) Rural Studio held our annual community celebration and presentation in which all projects under way were presented to the community for discussion. The event included Alumni lectures, Initiative updates from the Farm, Wastewater Consortium, and Front Porch Initiative, Class updates from faculty, presentations at the Morrisette Campus for projects in the design phase, and onsite for those under construction, a convocation for graduating students, and community meals for all of those in attendance. All members of the community were invited, as well as interested parties from outside Newbern. During the 2023 Pig Roast celebration, the population of Newbern tripled in size.
- p. Fannie Mae Executive Retreat** (May 15 – 17, 2023) Rural Studio Hosted a cohort of 15 executives from Fannie Mae in Hale County, Alabama. This group represented leadership from several business units, including their Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Duty to Serve (DTS), Sustainable Communities, and Disaster Response and Rebuild teams. The goal of this visit was to investigate and understand how Fannie Mae might better support community placemaking opportunities (with a particular focus on rural and other overburdened/hard-to-serve markets through their various regulated responsibilities.
- q. HAC/USDA Placemaking Summit** (May 22 – 24, 2023) Rural Studio hosted the Housing Assistance Council (HAC) and the cohort of ten placemaking organizations HAC supported through their own USDA RPIC grant. Through this convening on the ground in Hale County and virtual sessions, AURS assisted HAC in offering planning support, technical assistance, and training to encourage placemaking activities in rural communities in seven (7) additional southeastern states. In total, the ten communities receive 15 months of capacity building support, and peer-to-peer connections. The goal of the summit was to provide best practices through Rural Studio case study projects, and to emphasize placemaking as a tool for economic development and community cohesion. Participating organizations included:
- Covenant Faith Outreach Ministries, Tupelo, MS
 - Helping One Another, Inc., Sardis, MS
 - Paxico and Beyond Community and Economic Development, Paxico, KS
 - Mountain T.O.P., Altamont, TN
 - Men and Women United for Youth & Families, Delco, NC
 - United Communities Assistance Network (UCAN!), Supply, NC

- City of Hinton, Hinton, WV
- Philippi Grand Theater Project (Woodlands supported), Philippi, WV
- Seminole Arts Council, Inc., Seminole, OK
- Prek-12 and Beyond, Tallulah, LA

After the gathering at Rural Studio, HAC’s cohort communities continued planning and carrying out their local placemaking challenges into 2024. As the RPIC cycle concludes, HAC case studies featuring these Cohort communities will contribute to the national dialogue surrounding rural placemaking and design broadband expertise and resources tailored to local needs throughout the RPIC program.

- r. **Weekly Visioning Sessions** – These included input from external subject matter experts in the areas of design, architecture, landscape architecture, structural engineering, environmental engineering, social scientists, housing policy researchers, housing developers, building contractors, homelessness advocates, wastewater engineers, life safety specialists, building code reviewers, food security advocates, housing finance experts, and population health scientists. Over the course of the grant, these subject matter experts included:

Nicole Abercrombie, Cameron Acheson, David Baker, Andrew Berman, Marlon Blackwell, Will Bryan, Joe Burns, Emefa Butler, Peter Christiansen, Kim Clements, Sarah Cole, Salmaan Craig, Michael Crane, Lisa Cohen, Sekou Cook, Roy Decker, Roberto DeLeon, John Dorsey, Nicole Dugat, Anne Marie Duvall, Hank Eisenberg, Julie Eizenberg, Joe Farruggia, Meg Ford, Olivia Fuller, Elizabeth Farrell Garcia, Johanna Gilligan, Chris Hamm, Frank Harmon, Barbara Harper, Brad Hart, Chris Herbert, David Hill, David Hinson, Katherine Hogan, Walter Hood, Ellie Hough, Anderson Inge, Emily Knox, Frank Koenig, Jake Labarre, Pete Landon, Eddie Lattimer, Jovita Lewis, Amanda Loper, Christian Ayala Lopez, Justin Miller, Kiel Moe, Mary Moore, John Morris, Mike Newman, Cheryl Noel, Thomas Patterson, Scott Peacock, Jennifer Pindyck, Bess Renjilian, Ricker, Maggie Rosenthal, Adele Schirmer, Joe Schneider, Anne Smith, Mackenzie Stagg, Jamie-Lee Steenkamp, James Stockard, Paul Stoller, Billie Tsien, Katrina Van Valkenburgh, Dan Wheeler, Julie Rivkin Wheeler, Nick Wickersham, and Bill Zahner.

3. **Ideation, Design, and Construction of Placemaking Projects.** In consultation with community stakeholders and national subject matter experts, the student-led teams advanced placemaking concepts through the process of design ideation and development, including the development of drawings, models, presentations, prototypes, and mockups. During the course of this grant, two placemaking projects were completed and four others are well into construction.

Performance Benchmarks: C.H.O.I.C.E. House and Patriece’s Home were completed in the summer of 2023. Rosie’s Home, and the 18x18 House are on schedule to be complete late spring of 2024. The Rural Studio Bath House will be complete fall 2024. Additionally, the Rural Studio Farm received expanded programming through support of the grant.

See “B. Project Descriptions” for more information.

4. Produce Online Communication Platform. Each placemaking project team maintained an online journaling platform used to communicate publicly the ongoing planning and design of each project. See “Project Descriptions” for web links to each project journal.

Performance Benchmarks: Project status was updated bi-weekly and at key developmental milestones of each project.

B. Project Descriptions

Six placemaking projects received support during the course of this grant through the various stages of exploration, ideation, design, and construction with the explicit goal of increasing economic security, public health and wellness, and creating more resilient communities in and around Hale County. With community and stakeholder input, these projects were selected as they best fit key priorities articulated in the PAAP application including housing, economic development, community-led health and wellness initiatives, and the preservation and enhancement of active greenspaces, historic sites, and structures.

1. C.H.O.I.C.E. House Emergency Shelter is a project designed to address the need for rapid rehousing solutions in both rural Alabama as well as the United States as a whole. To do this, the student team worked with [C.H.O.I.C.E.](#), a resource-based organization headquartered out of Uniontown, Alabama. Since 2009, Executive Director Emefa Butler and her team have worked to “bridge the gap between availability and accessibility” in Uniontown and across Perry County. Programs across six focus areas work together to create a holistic approach to community improvement. The student team worked with C.H.O.I.C.E. to support their rapid re-housing initiatives by designing and building an emergency shelter for two client families to stay for up to 30 days. Prefabrication, durability, and accessibility drove the design, given the varied demographics and high turnover of clients. While the student team built the shelter to accommodate two families at a time, the goal of this partnership with C.H.O.I.C.E. is to set an emergency shelter precedent that is replicable for many different situations and opportunities. Dedication and Ribbon cutting for this completed project took place on August 26, 2023. Online project journal: aub.ie/choicehouse

2. Patriece’s Home design is focused on providing more space for varying and multi-generational families in a small footprint. Often in rural areas, like Hale County, one family will live in the same home for many generations. This design offers opportunities and challenges for the home to adapt as the number of occupants and their relationships change. Although the home is designed to be adaptable, the goal for future users is to be able to modify the space without significant alterations or additions to the interior rooms or outdoor spaces. In this design, the interior of the home expands upward rather than outward, decreasing the overall cost per square footage. Because homes are such an important asset to a rural homeowner, this project seeks to optimize how the home can be used as generations of residents and their circumstances change. The dedication and Ribbon cutting for this completed project took place on August 26, 2023. Online project Journal: aub.ie/patriece

3. Rosie's Home builds upon Rural Studio's ongoing post-frame construction research in which first a roof is constructed on site and then the home is constructed underneath. This approach allows a team to work on site more quickly in a sheltered and controlled environment. This version of a post-frame home is a multi-phased project. Students in the 2021 Fall semester analyzed both the client's site as well as previous 20K Homes to determine the size, form, and location of the initial roof structure for Rosie's Home. Local contractors then erected the chosen roof assembly. The Spring 2022 semester students designed the interior and exterior spaces below the roof. In the 2022 Fall Semester, the student team explored material assemblies and details that contribute directly to the overall healthfulness of the home. Post-frame structures are common, affordable, and of the vernacular in West Alabama. Once complete, homeowners can more easily make subsequent additions under the big roof. Alternative, more healthful building envelope materials have been identified and are currently being used in the construction of Rosie's Home. For example, instead of utilizing traditional fiberglass batt insulation that is inexpensive but carries with it a fairly significant carbon production footprint and associated negative health impacts, the student researchers elected to utilize three alternative insulation strategies instead of the typical fiberglass batt for Rosie's Home. Sheep's wool (Havelock), Hempwool, and mineral wool (Rockwool) have been installed in three locations within the enclosure and will be monitored for performance comparison. Each product is installed the same way as fiberglass batt insulation but have improved performance values. Other healthful strategies for Rosie's home include custom hardwood cabinetry, low VOC paints, non-toxic flooring, increased access to daylight, air filtration, and outside air. Completion, dedication, and ribbon-cutting are scheduled for April 27, 2024. Online project journal: aub.ie/rosieblog

4. 18x18 House

The 18x18 House aims to fulfill the need for a small, adaptable, multistory house in both urban and rural settings. The 18x18 House can provide extra space for a growing family or to maintain the kinship network in situations where space may not exist for additions or new construction. The dimensions and name—18' x 18'—come from the size of two parking spaces, as some cities are negotiating with developers to swap out parking spaces in exchange for housing units that are affordable. This footprint also can be a convenient size for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). ADUs can be built on single-family properties to create more density and housing opportunity in urban neighborhoods. In rural areas, such a small house can be built on family properties that may not have usable space for a larger home. Rural properties often have obstacles such as standing ground water, septic fields, power lines, or abandoned homes that can drastically reduce the buildable footprint. Groundbreaking for this project took place in August, 2023 and the project is scheduled to be complete mid-summer of 2024.

Online project journal: aub.ie/18x18houseblog

5. Rural Studio Bathhouse

This year, Morrisette Campus's housing pods will gain a new bathhouse, while the Studio continues to research the potential of mass timber as both a construction material and a more sustainable and appropriate local way to build. The student research team has been challenged to build a functional, dignified, and beautiful bathroom facility out of wood, while dealing with the associated need for the management of water, humidity, and ventilation. The facility will offer showers, toilets, and laundry space for an expected 16-person cohort of future students. The Rural Studio Bathhouse research team also explored the possibility of a cooking space for students to

use while living in the pods, connecting student and community life even more closely to the Rural Studio Farm. The project broke ground in July 2023, and is scheduled to be substantially complete fall 2024.

Online project journal: aub.ie/rsbathhouseblog

6. Rural Studio Farm

The Farm is a year-round functioning produce farm, located on the Rural Studio campus in Newbern, AL. It produces over 6,000 pounds of food per year and feeds the Rural Studio community multiple nutritious meals each week.

Thus far, ten student design projects have developed the Farm into a sustainable, small-scale farming model with a passive solar greenhouse, rows of garden beds, and irrigation and water reclamation systems. In addition, these student projects provide a fully functioning commercial kitchen, dining spaces, and storage. By growing, harvesting, preparing, and eating food produced on site, the Studio makes better use of its land while simultaneously testing the local food sourcing system necessary to support more sustainable rural living.

Food production on the Farm has become an important cultural element of Rural Studio, with every student assisting in the daily growth and harvesting processes. Students learn to be critical consumers and begin to understand the social, cultural, and environmental implications of sustainable agriculture. Moreover, the Farm draws attention to the impact of West Alabama's historic plantation culture. Known as the Black Belt, the rich soil of this region once supported extensive cotton fields before poor farming practices stripped the soil of its nutritious properties. Now, the depleted land contributes to the challenges of this rural food desert.

Online Project Journal: aub.ie/farmblog

C.H.O.I.C.E. House | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio

PROJECT TYPE

Community, Residential

LOCATION

Uniontown, AL

PROJECT STATUS

Completed August 2023

TEAM

5th-Year Students: AC Priest, Davis Benfer, Hailey Osborne, Yi Xuan (Raymond) Teo

Faculty: Andrew Freear, Steve Long, John Marusich

BLOG

aub.ie/choicehouse



C.H.O.I.C.E. House under construction

Durability, dignity, and accessibility drive the design.

C.H.O.I.C.E. House: Emergency Shelter is a project designed to address the need for rapid rehousing solutions in rural contexts. To do this, the 5th-year student team worked with Choosing to Help Others In Our Community Excel (C.H.O.I.C.E.), a resource-based organization headquartered in Uniontown, Alabama. Since 2009, Executive Director Emefa Butler and her team have worked to “bridge the gap between availability and accessibility” of both social and economic resources in Uniontown and across Perry County. Programs across six focus areas work together to create a holistic approach to community improvement.

The 5th-year student team worked with C.H.O.I.C.E. to support their rapid re-housing initiatives by designing and building emergency shelter for between two and six clients to stay for up to 30 days. Durability, dignity, and accessibility drive the design, given the varied demographics and high turnover of clients. While the student team built two shelter units, the ultimate goal of this partnership with C.H.O.I.C.E. is to set an emergency shelter precedent that is replicable for many different situations and opportunities.

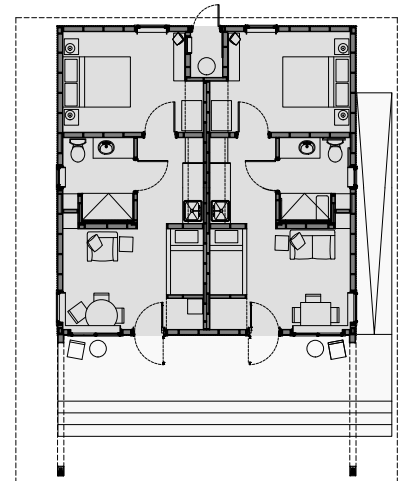
C.H.O.I.C.E. House | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



Unit interior with living room on the left and daybed nook on the right; the bedroom can be seen down the hall



The team with client, Executive Director Emefa Butler



Floor Plan

Patricee's Home | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio

PROJECT TYPE

Residential

LOCATION

Greensboro, AL

PROJECT STATUS

Complete

TEAM

5th-Year Students: Adam Davis, Daniel Burton, Laurel Holloway, Lauren Lovell

Faculty: Andrew Freear, Steve Long, John Marusich

BLOG

aub.ie/patricee



Patricee's Home celebrated its ribbon cutting in August 2023

A two-story home that can adapt as its occupancy changes

Patricee's Home design focuses on providing more space for varying and multi-generational families in a small footprint. Often, in rural areas like Hale County, one family will live in the same home for many generations. This offers opportunities and challenges for the home to adapt as the number of occupants and their relationships change. In response, this home is designed to be adaptable; the goal is to be able to modify the space without significant alterations or additions to the interior rooms. In Patricee's Home, the interior of the home expands upward rather than outward, decreasing the overall cost per square footage.

This project also explores the option of separating the home into two independent and separate units. Part of the ground floor can be closed off to create a separate one-bedroom apartment that can be utilized as a second residence or for a potential second source of income. Because homes are such an important asset to a rural homeowner, this project seeks to optimize how the home can be used as generations of residents and their circumstances change.

Patricee's Home | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



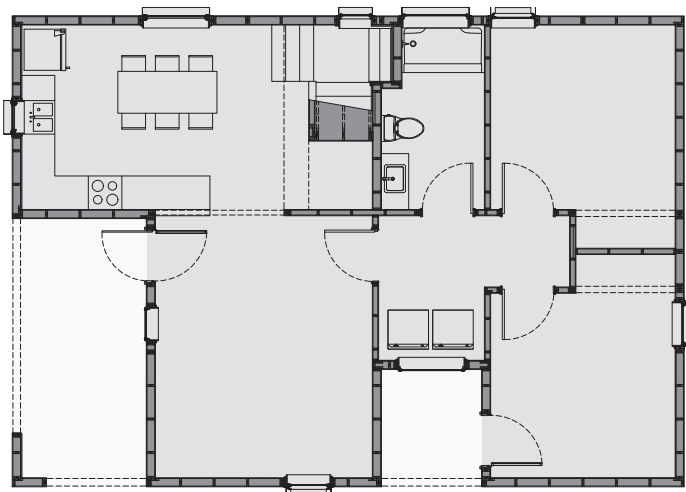
View from the kitchen to the stair, with utility closet below



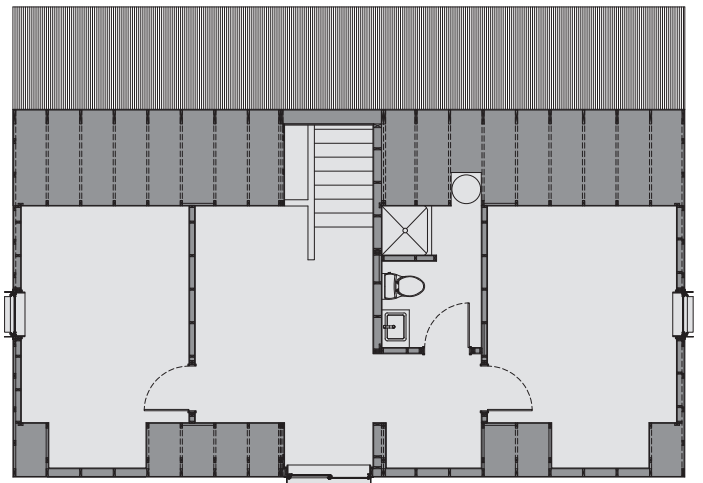
The stair is clad in wood for durability



Homeowner Patricee with her children; her previous home is in the background



Ground Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

Rosie's Home | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio

PROJECT TYPE

Residential

LOCATION

Newbern, AL

PROJECT STATUS

Estimated completion early 2024

TEAM

3rd-Year Students: Laura Forrest, Peter Harpring, Anna Leach, Grant Schurman, Jon Hunt Ficken, Julia Whitt, Sarah Recht, Will Robinson, Alex Tate, Amanda Kaase, Ellis Smith, Eric Miles, Gabriel Brown, Jenna Webb, John Ratley, Paxtyn Whitney, Rachel

Klein, Tricia Smith, Finn Downes, Lucas Henderson, Canon McConnell, Jungting Song, Trenton Williams, Bailey Kennedy, Caitlin Ranheim, Casey Dillard, Cayden Davis, Emma Avery, Emma Johnson, Elizabeth Helms, Hanna Wieland, Jack Felder, Kati

Warner, Kylie Kendall, Luke Bradberry, McAllister Tucker, Shannon Brennan, Tanner Wallace

Faculty: Emily McGlohn, Chelsea Elcott, Judith Seaman

BLOG

<http://aub.ie/rosieblog>



Rosie's home takes shape; her current trailer home can be seen in the background

Post-frame structures are common, affordable, and of the vernacular in West Alabama.

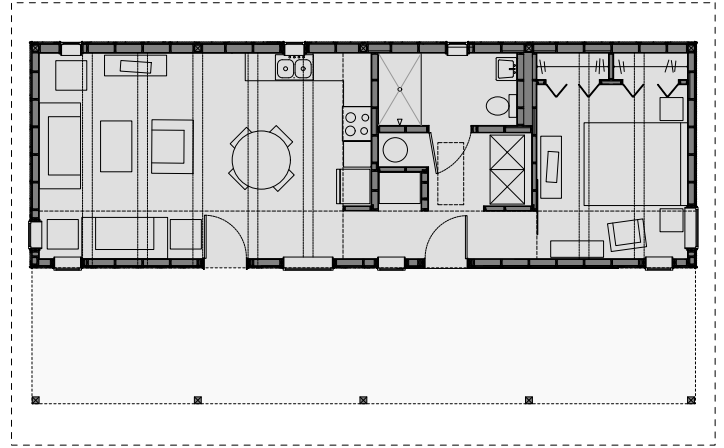
Rosie's Home builds upon Rural Studio's ongoing post-frame construction research in which first a roof is constructed on site and then the home is constructed underneath. This approach allows a team to work on site more quickly in a sheltered environment. This version of a post-frame home is a multi-phased project. Students in the 2021 Fall semester analyzed both the client's site as well as previous Rural Studio homes to determine the size, form, and location of the initial roof structure for Rosie's Home. Local contractors then erected the chosen roof assembly. The 2022 Spring semester

students designed the interior and exterior spaces below the roof. In the 2022 Fall semester, the student team explored alternative insulation strategies and details that will contribute directly to the overall healthfulness of the home. Students in the Spring 2023 semester investigated exterior cladding options that indicate and suggest locations for future additions into the large porch. The fall 2023 students explored ideas focused on health and housing affordability relative to interior finishes and equipment. It is estimated that the home will be completed in early 2024.

Rosie's Home | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



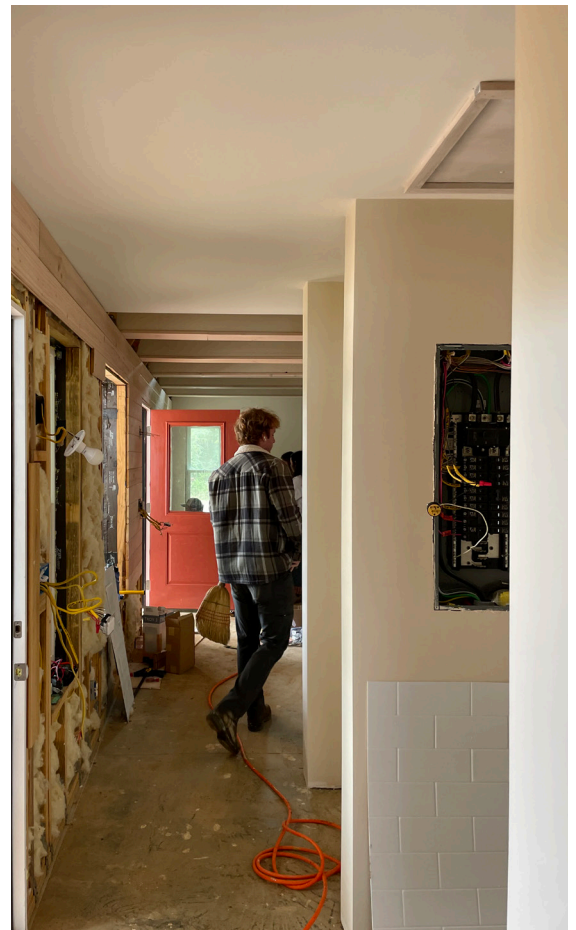
Some interior walls feature wood cladding on the wall and ceiling



Floor Plan



Interior finishes are being installed in the home



18x18 House | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio

PROJECT TYPE

Residential

LOCATION

Newbern, AL

PROJECT STATUS

Estimated completion Fall 2024

TEAM

5th-Year Students: Jake Buell,
Julie DiDeo, Meagan Mitchell,
& Naomi Tony-Alabi

Faculty: Andrew Freear, Rusty Smith,
Mackenzie Stagg,

Elizabeth Farrell Garcia, Jennifer
Pindyck, Steve Long, John Marusich

BLOG

aub.ie/18x18houseblog



18x18 house under construction

A small-footprint house that addresses limited buildable space for accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and housing that is affordable

The 18x18 House aims to fulfill the need for a small, adaptable, multistory house in both urban and rural settings. The dimensions and name—18' x 18'—comes from the size of two parking spaces, as some cities are negotiating with developers to lessen parking requirements in exchange for inclusion of additional affordable housing units. This footprint also allows the design to function as an accessory dwelling unit (ADU). ADUs can be built on single-family properties to create more density and housing opportunity in urban neighborhoods.

In rural areas, such a small house can be built on family properties that may not have buildable space for a larger home. Rural properties often have obstacles such as standing ground water, septic

fields, power lines, or abandoned homes that can drastically reduce the buildable footprint. The 18x18 House can provide extra space for a growing family or to maintain the kinship network in situations where space may not exist for additions or new construction.

Without such a house available, rural homeowners are increasingly turning to prefabricated, mass-produced utility sheds to meet their housing needs. Readily available for purchase from building supply retailers under long-term, “rent-to-own,” and “buy-now-pay-later” options, these sheds are designed for the storage of tools, yard implements, and other types of equipment, but are in no-way responsive to the needs and requirements of human habitation.

18x18 House | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



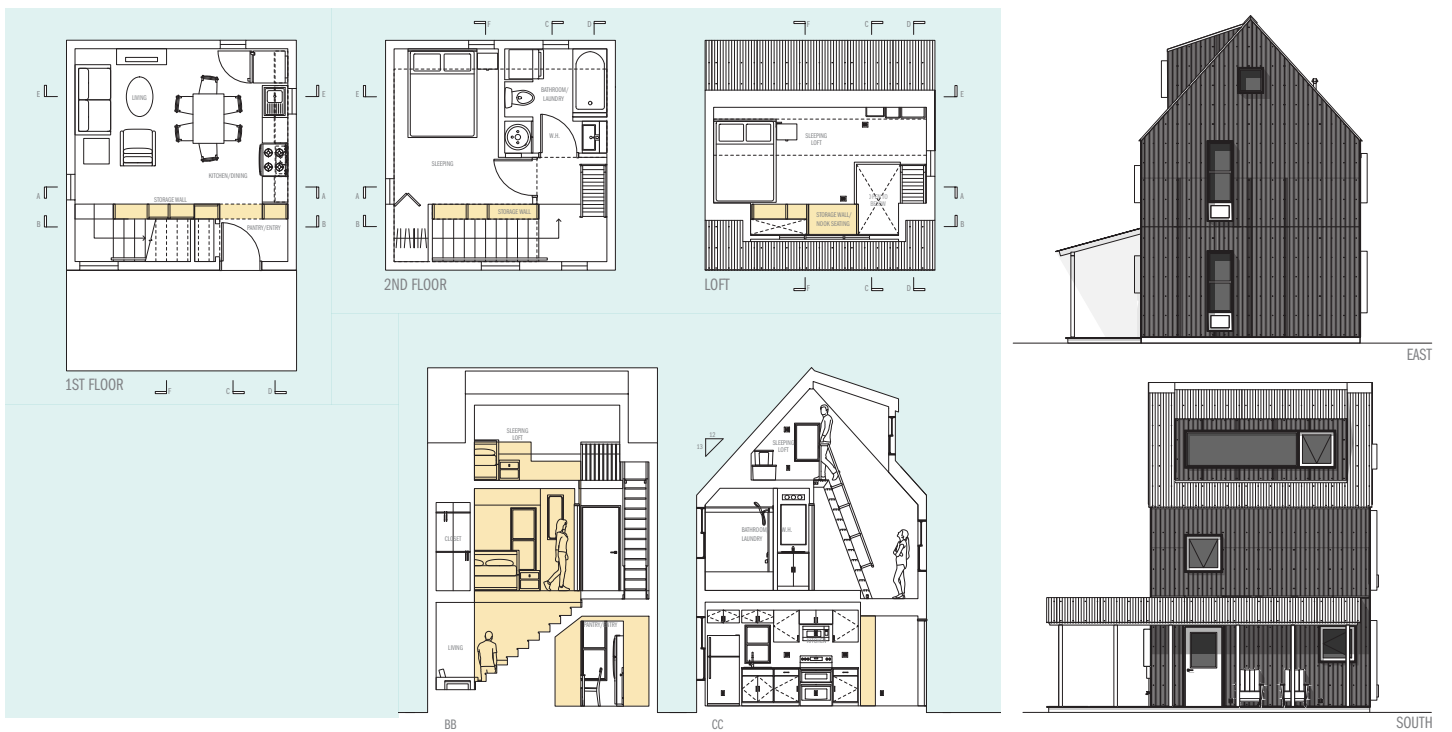
The competition



5th-year team for the 18x18 House project



Framing the house



Plans and Elevations

**RURAL
STUDIO**

8448 AL Highway 61
Newbern, AL 36765

ruralstudio.org
supportruralstudio.org

Rural Studio Bathhouse

Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio

PROJECT TYPE

Campus

LOCATION

Newbern, AL

PROJECT STATUS

Estimated completion fall 2023

TEAM

5th-Year Students: Ambar Ashraf,
Ashley Wilson, Carla Slabber,
& Logan Lee
Faculty: Andrew Freear, Steve Long,
& John Marusich

BLOG

aub.ie/rsbathhouseblog



Students presenting to Roberto DeLeon

A shared bathhouse (and more) that tackles how to make mass timber work well in a warm, damp environment

This year, Morrisette Campus's housing pods will gain a new bathhouse, while the Studio continues to research the potential of mass timber as both a construction material and a more sustainable and appropriate local way to build. Working, once again, directly with Kiel Moe, the 5th-years have been challenged to build a functional, dignified, and beautiful bathroom facility out of wood, while dealing with the associated need for the management of water, humidity, and ventilation.

The facility will offer showers, toilets, and laundry space for an expected 16-person cohort of 3rd-year students. The Rural Studio Bathhouse may also explore the possibility of a cooking space for students to use while living in the pods, connecting 3rd-year life even more closely to Rural Studio Farm.

Rural Studio Bathhouse

Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



Students in consultant Katherine Hogan's workshop



Workshop and lecture by consultant Kiel Moe



Presenting latest concepts to reviewers



5th-year team for the Rural Studio Bathhouse

Rural Studio Bathhouse

Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



Students in consultant Pete Landon's workshop



Working with engineering consultant Joe Burns



Construction mock-up on the site

Rural Studio Farm | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio

PROJECT TYPE

Campus

LOCATION

Newbern, AL

PROJECT STATUS

Ongoing

TEAM

Hundreds of students for more than a decade have contributed to the Rural Studio Farm work.

BLOG

aub.ie/farmlblog



Photo by Timothy Hursley

Rural Studio Farm Solar Greenhouse

Everyone's efforts are celebrated by eating the harvested food together.

The Farm is a year-round functioning produce farm, located on the Rural Studio campus in Newbern, AL. It produces over 6,000 pounds of food per year and feeds the Rural Studio community multiple nutritious meals each week.

Thus far, ten student design projects have developed the Farm into a sustainable, small-scale farming model with a passive solar greenhouse, rows of garden beds, and irrigation and water reclamation systems. In addition, these student projects provide a fully functioning commercial kitchen, dining spaces, and storage. By growing, harvesting, preparing, and eating food produced on site, the Studio makes better use of its land while simultaneously testing the local food sourcing system necessary to support more sustainable rural living.

Food production on the Farm has become an important cultural element of Rural Studio, with every student assisting in the daily growth and harvesting processes. Students learn to be critical consumers and begin to understand the social, cultural, and environmental implications of sustainable agriculture.

Moreover, the Farm draws attention to the impact of West Alabama's historic plantation culture. Known as the Black Belt, the rich soil of this region once supported extensive cotton fields before poor farming practices stripped the soil of its nutritious properties. Now, the depleted land contributes to the challenges of this rural food desert.

Rural Studio Farm | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



Photo by Timothy Hursley

Students working on the Rural Studio Farm



Harvesting carrots on the Rural Studio Farm



Planting seeds in the Greenhouse



Preparing to transplant baby plants outside to new beds

Rural Studio Farm | Designed and Constructed by Auburn University Rural Studio



Photo by Timothy Hursley

Rural Studio's chef Catherine Tabb, preparing a meal for students, staff, and faculty



Harvesting garlic for the kitchen



Photo by Timothy Hursley

Celebrating our students with friends, neighbors, and supporters