

SASSE ST. STRATEGIC WEALTH PLAN



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Executive Summary

The Sasse Street Strategic Wealth Plan is a community-driven roadmap developed to support long-term health, economic opportunity, and neighborhood revitalization in the Sasse Street neighborhood of southeast Clarksdale, Mississippi. Located in one of the most historically disinvested areas of the Mississippi Delta, the neighborhood is defined by deep intergenerational poverty, health disparities, and racial inequity. Led by Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center (AEH) and developed with support from Thrive Integrated Strategies and a diverse stakeholder group, the plan was informed by more than 500 local residents through surveys, focus groups, and community polling.

The plan centers four top priority focus areas identified by residents:

1. Housing
2. Workforce Development & Economic Opportunity
3. Financial Literacy
4. Community Engagement & Youth Retention

Each focus area includes actionable pilot tactics designed for collaborative implementation by local partners. A central hub of activity is Sasse Park, a 9-acre green space targeted for major renovation, and the plan leverages existing initiatives such as AEH's Health + Wealth partnership with Southern Bancorp, which integrates trauma-informed financial counseling into primary care.

The plan positions AEH as a convener and backbone support, not a sole implementer. Through coordinated effort, this strategy builds the foundation for scalable, place-based investment in Clarksdale's future.

Investment Snapshot

To launch and sustain these strategies, key investment opportunities include:

- Program Coordinator: \$70K–\$90K/year
- IDA Matching Funds: \$50K
- Home Renovation Grants: \$100K–\$250K
- Youth Employment Stipends: \$25K–\$40K

- Microenterprise & Job Training: \$40K–\$60K
- Park Capital Investment: \$250K–\$500K

Together, these investments support a scalable, cross-sector model that advances economic mobility, health equity, and youth opportunity from the ground up.

Introduction

The Sasse Street Strategic Wealth Plan represents the voices of more than 500 residents from the Sasse Street neighborhood and surrounding areas in southeast Clarksdale, Miss. This neighborhood, a historically African-American community, sits at the heart of a region marked by persistent intergenerational poverty, racial inequity, and poor health outcomes. In response, this plan brings together community priorities around health, housing, financial empowerment, and youth engagement into a single community-driven framework.



Figure 1. The boundaries of the Sasse Street neighborhood in Clarksdale, Miss.

The plan was developed through the collaborative efforts of Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center (AEH), Thrive Integrated Strategies, and a stakeholder group of community leaders and organizations. Supported by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation, it reflects findings from extensive community engagement, including surveys, focus groups, and a community-wide voting process to determine the most urgent areas of need. The top four focus areas that emerged were:

1. Housing
2. Workforce Development & Economic Opportunity
3. Financial Literacy
4. Community Engagement & Youth Retention

For a detailed breakdown of the survey data and community engagement process, see Appendices A–D.

Neighborhood Context and Vision

A defining feature of the Sasse Street neighborhood is Sasse Park, a 9-acre green space that includes basketball courts, baseball fields, a small playground, and open green areas. The park is currently under-resourced but serves as a gathering point and holds great potential for revitalization. AEH and local stakeholders are leading efforts to renovate the park to address social determinants of health and increase quality of life for residents. The planned renovation will include new amenities such as a walking trail with historical markers, an amphitheater, an aquatic facility, inclusive playground equipment, fitness areas, a gazebo, picnic tables, a botanical garden, and a designated space for children with disabilities.

Simultaneously, AEH has partnered with Southern Bancorp to implement the Clarksdale Health + Wealth project, integrating financial counseling into primary care to address both medical and economic well-being. A central feature of this initiative is the development of a trauma-informed peer financial counselor training program. As this training matures, these peer counselors are expected to be deployed within the community to support the Financial Literacy focus area. This cross-sector strategy aligns health, workforce development, and financial empowerment into a replicable pilot model for addressing systemic poverty and improving economic mobility. This strategic wealth plan sits at the intersection of those efforts, advancing community-driven wealth building as a public health strategy.

Focus Areas, Goals, and Pilot Tactics

Each focus area includes specific objectives, goals, and pilot-ready tactics grounded in community input. To support implementation, AEH and the stakeholder group will convene cross-sector Focus Area Action Teams composed of local service providers, institutions, and community members. These Action Teams will collaboratively develop and execute strategies aligned with the plan, with AEH providing backbone administrative support. For example, a Housing Action Team may include representatives from city government, the local community college, nonprofit housing organizations, and local contractors or tradespeople. This document does not present a fixed timeline for implementation. Rather, it serves as a guide to action and a call for investment, with AEH and the stakeholder group acting as conveners, communicators, and coordinators, not sole implementers.

Housing Strategy

Objective A: Reduce Blight and Improve Housing Conditions near Sasse Park

Goals:

1. Renovate/repair 10 homes within a 1-mile radius of Sasse Park
2. Hold annual tenant rights workshops reaching 100+ residents

Action Team Tactics:

- Host neighborhood walk-throughs to identify the 10 most visibly blighted properties near Sasse Park.
- Pilot one home repair with volunteer support and community fundraising to model the process.
- Partner with legal services organizations to host a small workshop in a community space.
- Identify local contractors or retired tradespeople to support low-cost rehabilitation efforts.

Objective B: Increase Affordable Homeownership

Goals:

1. Launch IDA program with 10 participants
2. Secure \$250K in home repair grants for seniors/low-income residents

Action Team Tactics:

- Partner with a local bank or nonprofit to explore launching a small individual development account (IDA) savings program for homebuyers.
- Coordinate community outreach about repair grant opportunities for low-income or senior homeowners.
- Host a homeowner education night at a church or school near the park.

Workforce Development & Economic Opportunity Strategy

Objective A: Create Youth Jobs and Enterprises

Goals:

1. Seek opportunities to employ youth and host entrepreneurship bootcamps
2. Expand internships and apprenticeships in key industries

Action Team Tactics:

- Partner with the city and other organizations and individuals to recruit a small group of teens to work on a community beautification project in or around Sasse Park (dependent on park renovations).

- Partner with local entrepreneurs to host a youth micro-enterprise showcase or business plan competition.
- Identify two to three businesses willing to offer summer internships to high school students from the Sasse area.
- Work with the school system or community center to develop job-readiness workshops tailored for local teens.

Objective B: Expand Job Training Opportunities for Nontraditional Students

Goal: Assist nontraditional students in attaining certification in construction trades and healthcare jobs

Action Team Tactics:

- Partner with nonprofits, local businesses and/or higher education institutions to pilot a short construction or weatherization training linked to home repairs or park improvements.
- Work with local healthcare employers to offer a small information session on entry-level pathways into healthcare jobs.
- Explore funding for certification support for a small group of nontraditional students.

Financial Literacy Strategy

Objective A: Improve Financial Literacy for Youth and Adults

Goal: Reach youth and families with credit and budgeting basics through regular workshops

Action Team Tactics:

- Start a “bank-in-school” or other financial education class/curriculum at schools in the Clarksdale and Coahoma County school districts.
- Partner with a local bank to host a budgeting and credit workshop at a neighborhood site like a church or park facility.
- Partner with financial institutions, school or nonprofit organizations to host a family financial night where parents and children learn budgeting basics through games and activities.

"I WANT MONEY TO SAVE UP FOR COLLEGE, GET MY OWN HOUSE, MY OWN CAR, MAYBE START A SMALL BUSINESS."

-- YOUTH SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Objective B: Reduce Reliance on Predatory Financial Services

Goal: Open low-fee bank accounts and educate residents on avoiding predatory loans

Action Team Tactics:

- Identify and invite a credit union or bank to offer low-cost accounts at a community event.

- Develop a health and wealth fair community event that integrates traditional health fair activities with financial checkups and financial education.
- Offer on-site bank account sign-up and budgeting tips at existing neighborhood events.

Community Engagement & Youth Retention Strategy

Objective A: Make Sasse Park a Community Hub

Goal: Host youth-designed events and improve satisfaction with park amenities

Action Team Tactics:

- Engage local teens to co-design a small event or art project in the park (dependent on park facilities being improved).
- Advocate for amenities like Wi-Fi as part of a future park renovation.
- Coordinate with existing festivals or community events to include activities near the park.

"NOTHING POSITIVE HAPPENS HERE. IT'S BORING, NO JOBS, NO SIDEWALKS... WHY STAY?"

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Objective B: Reduce Youth Outmigration

Goal: Support youth-led businesses and increase intent to stay in Clarksdale

Action Team Tactics:

- Host a small youth business expo or “Shark Tank”-style event for young entrepreneurs.
- Partner with trusted adults to launch a mentorship matching event or panel.
- Conduct a short youth survey each year to understand what would make them stay in Clarksdale.

Evaluation Approach

Goals:

- Identify scalable models and inform replication in other Delta communities
- Track community priorities and satisfaction.
- Identify which pilots are successful or scalable.
- Use early results to attract more funding and partners.

Key Indicators:

- Number of homes repaired or identified for repair.
- Number of youth jobs or enterprises launched.
- Number of adults trained or employed.
- Number of youth events and satisfaction with the park (as renovations allow).

- Number of financial workshops and bank accounts opened.

Methods:

- Pilot project tracking and outcome mapping
- Participant surveys and focus groups.
- Workshop and event attendance logs.
- Partner feedback and informal community interviews.

Investment Opportunities

To implement and sustain the efforts outlined in this plan, the following funding and investment opportunities have been identified. Estimated ranges are provided to help guide funder planning and alignment. All amounts are preliminary and subject to refinement through partner collaboration:

- **Program Coordinator Position**
Estimated need: \$70,000–\$90,000 annually for salary, benefits, and administration.
- **Matching Funds for IDA Savings Program**
Estimated need: \$50,000 to match participant savings and support administrative costs.
- **Home Renovation and Repair Fund**
Estimated need: \$100,000–\$250,000 to cover pilot renovations and initial grantmaking.
- **Youth Employment Stipends**
Estimated need: \$25,000–\$40,000 to fund youth wages and program supports over one summer cycle.
- **Microenterprise and Job Training Seed Funds**
Estimated need: \$40,000–\$60,000 to cover competitions, training program tuition, and materials.
- **Capital Support for Sasse Park Renovation**
Estimated need: \$500,000–\$1M for phased improvements based on community priorities.

Cross-Sector Linkages and Integration

Each focus area supports and enhances the others:

- Construction and weatherization training provides a local workforce to support home renovation projects.
- Financial literacy workshops improve readiness for IDA program participation and reduce risk from predatory lending.

- Youth employment and mentorship opportunities foster connection to the community and reduce outmigration.
- Park renovations create a central hub for community events, job fairs, and youth activities.

By addressing the root causes of poverty and disinvestment through a place-based, collaborative approach, the Sasse Street Strategic Wealth Plan offers a roadmap to community renewal grounded in the values and vision of local residents.

Conclusion

This plan belongs to the Sasse Street community. AEH and the stakeholder group will champion the ideas within, convene partners, and seek resources, but success depends on collective action. The formation of Focus Area Action Teams will ensure that implementation is collaborative, locally grounded, and informed by the expertise and capacity of service providers across sectors. Whether through funding, expertise, or partnership, your contribution can help transform this vision into a lasting legacy of health, opportunity, and shared prosperity in Clarksdale.

Stakeholder Advisory Group

The following individuals contributed to the development of the Sasse Street Strategic Wealth Plan through ongoing engagement, insight, and collaboration:

- Aurelia Jones-Taylor, CEO, Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center
- Courtney Jones, Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center
- Tana Vassel, Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center
- Dr. Toya Matthews, Superintendent, Clarksdale School District
- Tyler Yarbrough, Partnership for a Healthier America
- Michelle Webster, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Josephine Rhymes, Community Advocate
- Joyce Cole, Community Advocate
- Debra Brown, Community Advocate

For More Information

For more information or to explore partnership opportunities, contact:

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Acknowledgments

This plan would not have been possible without the voices and commitment of the Sasse Street neighborhood residents who shared their experiences, hopes, and ideas through surveys, focus groups, and polling. Their vision is the foundation of this strategy.

We are deeply grateful to the stakeholder advisory group members who contributed their time, insight, and leadership throughout this process. Special thanks go to Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center for serving as the lead convener.

Additional thanks to the Walton Family Foundation for supporting this effort and believing in the power of place-based, community-led change.

Appendix A: Adult Survey Report

Appendix B: Youth Survey Report

Appendix C: Focus Group Report

Appendix D: Community Polling Results

A total of 231 adults and youth were polled and asked to vote for their top three focus areas. The focus areas received the following number of votes:

1. Workforce Development and Economic Opportunity – 163 votes
2. Housing – 158 votes
3. Community Engagement and Youth Retention – 114 votes
4. Financial Literacy – 85 votes
5. Healthcare Access – 73 votes
6. Mental Health – 73 votes
7. Sasse Park as the Hub – 54 votes
8. Systemic and Institutional Barriers – 37 votes

Glossary of Terms

Backbone Support:

An organizational role that provides administrative coordination, convening power, and accountability to multi-partner initiatives without directly delivering all services.

Focus Area Action Teams:

Collaborative working groups composed of service providers, community leaders, and residents, organized around each strategic focus area to develop and implement projects.

Health + Wealth Fair:

A community event that combines traditional health fair offerings (like screenings and cooking demos) with financial education, bank account sign-up, and small business promotion.

IDA (Individual Development Account):

A matched savings account program designed to help low-income individuals save toward the purchase of an asset such as a home, education, or small business.

Nontraditional Student:

An adult learner who may be returning to education or job training after time in the workforce, raising a family, or other life circumstances. Often used to describe students outside the traditional high school-to-college pathway.

Predatory Financial Services:

Lending practices that impose unfair, deceptive, or abusive loan terms, such as payday loans or high-interest title loans, which often trap borrowers in cycles of debt.