Residents First: Community Engagement on the Twelfth Street Corridor

Many residents along Lynchburg's Twelfth Street Corridor walk or take transit to school, work, and daily errands, yet broken sidewalks and little separation from traffic make the trip unsafe. With support from the Virginia Walkability Action Institute (VWAI), the project built momentum for Twelfth Street Redevelopment projects by re-engaging local schools to document safety conditions and gather children's and families' priorities for safe routes to school, which will shape the corridor's upcoming engineering plan. Residents also helped design a mural in the historic Diamond Hill neighborhood that celebrates the area's history, transforms an overgrown city lot, makes the walk more welcoming, and invites neighbors to care for the corridor through Adopt-A-Street.

Team:

The core team was led by Charlotte Lester, the Neighborhood Planner of the City of Lynchburg. The team included the City of Lynchburg and the Central Virginia Health District, with support from neighborhood organizations including the Diamond Hill Healthy Heart Learning Collaborative, Payne Elementary School, and Dunbar Middle School. Local artists, Jawansa Hall and Christina Davis, were integral to developing the mural concepts and installing the final art piece.

Goals and Vision:

- Engage with local schools to understand children and family's priorities for safe routes to school
- Incorporate Safe Routes to School measures in the forthcoming Twelfth Street Pedestrian Facilities Engineering Plan
- Activate underutilized space along the corridor with public art
- Encourage resident stewardship of Twelfth Street through the City's Adopt-A-Street program

The Lynchburg team and VWAI staff preparing to conduct safety observations at school pick up. Source: Horizon 54

Background:

The Twelfth Street Corridor in the City of Lynchburg, Virginia, is an arterial street in a densely populated residential area. Car ownership in the adjoining neighborhoods is low, and the poverty rate is high at 17% (U.S. Census 2026). The corridor connects residents to transit stops and a transit hub, an elementary and a middle school, and downtown and midtown. However, poor sidewalk conditions and minimal on-street separation between cars and bikes present significant safety and comfort concerns for residents. Because many residents rely on walking and transit, these conditions affect their daily access to school, work, and services.

Previous plans, including the Diamond Hill Neighborhood Plan (2024) and the Lynchburg Multimodal Plan (2025), have identified the Twelfth Street Corridor as a priority for Complete Street design improvements. The Twelfth Street Pedestrian Facilities Engineering Plan, expected to be completed by December 2026, will recommend specific safety improvements based on observations and community feedback. This VWAI project created and deployed a tool to gather feedback from children and families who regularly use the corridor for daily needs to make safe routes to school recommendations to be included in the facilities engineering plan. The project also worked to build excitement and community ownership of corridor improvements through an educational mural on a retaining wall, dubbed “Every Color Speaks”, based on resident priorities and the history of the historically Black/African American Diamond Hill Neighborhood.

On September 25, 2026, the team joined a neighborhood block party hosted by Gospel Community Church to share walkability information and continue to engage the community. The team asked what residents think about the new mural, if they think there should be more “Every Color Speaks” thematic elements on the corridor, and continued to gather data about safer pedestrian access to schools. Residents were overwhelmingly excited about the mural and in favor of more place making initiatives that further develop the theme by creating a sense of continuity and identity. These efforts keep community engaged, build evidence for various multimodal initiatives, and are implementing the ideals of the various plans put forth for this corridor.

The VWAI Lynchburg Site Visit team discussing the future mural.
Source: Horizon 54

Artists, Jawansa Hall and Christina Davis, working on the “Every Color Speaks” mural.
Source: City of Lynchburg

Outcomes and Impact:

- Partnered with City engineering and public works staff to assess conditions along the Twelfth Street Corridor to document sidewalk, street, and other safety conditions
- Recruited community volunteers to contribute local observations and perspectives
- Compiled findings into summary reports outlining existing conditions, observations, and recommendations that were shared with school representatives and City staff to inform future improvements along Twelfth Street and surrounding streets
- Collected approximately 100 responses that shaped the mural design and recruited volunteers for installation, giving residents a direct role in improving the corridor
- Co-created and installed a large-scale mural with local artists, Jawansa Hall and Christina Davis, to activate underutilized space and build community ownership along the corridor
- Attracted local media interest to help the project reach a broad audience and generate interest in the mural and corridor improvements
- Secured commitment from the City to landscape and maintain heavy brush at mural site, and working to establish an “Adopt-a-Spot” group for sustained community involvement