

# Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

## FORT LAWN, SOUTH CAROLINA

Fort Lawn, established in the 1870's, began as a stop on the Chester and Cheraw railroad. Local investments in hydroelectric power transformed the nearby Catawba River in the early 1900's and paved the way for Springs Mill and its multimillion-dollar industry of textile manufacturing and cotton warehousing. Springs became the primary employer and source of growth until shifts in modernization and a changing national economy ended manufacturing in Fort Lawn in 2007 after 120 years of operation.

According to residents, Fort Lawn and the surrounding communities never fully recovered from the loss of the mills. A focus on revitalization became urgent.

**POPULATION:**  
Fort Lawn - 931  
29714 Zip Code -  
Approx. 3,000

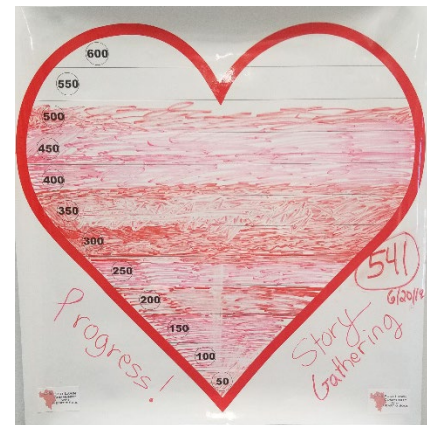
**CHALLENGE:**  
Economic  
revitalization

**FOCUS:** Access  
to opportunities to  
improve health,  
civic leadership,  
local economy

**KEY TOOL:** Fort  
Lawn Community  
Center volunteers  
and resources

### Fort Lawn “by the numbers”:

- 38 – Concerned residents with diverse backgrounds who met and collaborated to partner with the Arras Foundation on Community Heart & Soul.
- 640 – Individual interviews conducted during community engagement.
- 250 – Additional surveys to residents across the many neighborhoods in the 29714 zip code, identifying what matters most.
- Tens of thousands of dollars in grants awarded to work on action items identified by the Fort Lawn community.



### Local conditions:

On the decline for two decades, and with schools and the largest employer closing, the community faced dire feelings of apathy and limited opportunities for change. New equipment was essential for both the police and fire departments, residents needed regular access to a food pantry, and social/human services were many miles away. Cultural and educational programs were only available at the Fort Lawn Community Center (FLCC), which acted as the central gathering place for the community. Before the Heart and Soul Project was implemented in 2018, the renovation and development of the FLCC was the only community-wide occasion for decision-making based on input from residents of the area.

Despite challenges, residents remembered the things that made their home unique: access to the river, land, and open spaces; the quiet community which felt safer than surrounding towns; a low cost of living, and a strong connection to family and friends. Residents leaned into the small town love they had for one another and when Heart & Soul was introduced by the Arras Foundation in Lancaster, Fort Lawn was ready.

### Partnership:

The Arras Foundation brought the Community Heart & Soul initiative to this region of South Carolina and supported our community efforts. A vital partner to Fort Lawn's Heart and Soul initiative, the Arras Foundation contributed shared learning opportunities, a designated Heart & Soul coach, overall staff support, and funding to our project.

## Volunteer and Community Response:

Fort Lawn Heart & Soul focused on bringing residents together through story gathering, opening communication between residents with local elected leaders, and creating an economic development plan. Not the typical client in a consultation process, Fort Lawn residents inspired the development experts and became a recognized countywide leader in public engagement.

The Heart & Soul Team approached everything with a sense of dedication that helped them shift the loss of hope felt by the community. As a part of their work, the team:

- Engaged residents through phone calls, face-to-face discussions, going door to door, via social media, attending church events, speaking at town council meetings, and putting up flyers and notices at the local stores and the gas station.
- Hosted events to bring people together, including a Fall Festival, block parties, banquets, and numerous other events at the Fort Lawn Community Center and in the farthest reaches of the 29714 zip code.

As time progressed, the Team experienced incredible personal growth. Members became public speakers and initiated and led programs for safety, health, and beautification. A buzz started about the good work happening in Fort Lawn which was felt around the area.

## Heart & Soul Outcomes:

The Heart & Soul stewardship work continues to grow in strength. In addition to the Fort Lawn Economic Development and Community Action Plan, achievements include:

- An expansion of volunteers and a spirit of volunteerism within the neighborhoods in the 29714 zip code.
- Monthly Town Council reports on the Heart & Soul project and its accomplishments.
- Coordinated highway clean-ups, nature conservation/tree plantings, and beautification of Fort Lawn town signage.
- Updated EMT and Fire Station equipment, including a new fire truck, named after Bud, a beloved Heart & Soul Team member who passed away in 2021.
- Participation in the Art of Community Rural SC project, which allows artisans opportunities to utilize the arts to develop streams of income for themselves and families and improve the economic stability.
- A \$10,000 grant from AARP to improve their local park.
- A resident neighborhood watch program that is acting as a model for the surrounding counties.

