

From Boundary to Bond
Transforming St. Charles Ave into a Harmony Spine

New Orleans, a Southern city rooted in rich Black history and culture, has long struggled with urban segregation that downplays Black narratives. In 2017, the city removed the statue of General Robert E. Lee and renamed the site Harmony Circle. While this symbolic act acknowledged a painful past, it did not resolve deep social injustice and uneven development. The Lower Garden District and Central City near Harmony Circle remain divided by race and wealth. St. Charles Avenue, with its wide traffic lanes and streetcar tracks, acts as a physical and psychological barrier between these communities.

This proposal goes beyond Harmony Circle's boundaries by transforming St. Charles Avenue from a dividing line into a unifying Harmony Spine that advances social, economic, and ecological justice.

We envision St. Charles Avenue changing from a traffic corridor into a vibrant civic spine and stormwater infrastructure. Rooted in New Orleans' tradition of using streets for collective expression—from historic strikes to Mardi Gras parades—this strategy promotes health, engagement, and equity by prioritizing walkability, transit access, and flexible programming. It invites artists and activists to express themselves in designated spaces, while encouraging property owners to create more welcoming street-level facades. The approach offers a replicable model for median-lined streets citywide.

At St Charles Avenue's core, Harmony Circle becomes an active gathering point. Inspired by the ring shout—a spiritual, communal African American dance—the design forms interlocking circles for cultural and community use. A "Ring Shout Dance Shed" anchors the space as a landmark for daily life and remembrance. Recycled monument materials become urban furniture and retaining walls, shaping a post-monument landscape that reflects history while activating daily use.

By extending design beyond the circle and along the avenue, the Harmony Spine becomes a space that unites rather than separates, and empowers rather than isolates.



PROGRAM CALENDAR ON ST CHARLES AVE

