



WELCOME TO OUR

# Spring 2025 Newsletter

## ✦ Gabbing with Gina



It is hard to believe that we are almost halfway through 2025- I think the old adage, “time flies when you’re having fun” can definitely apply for DesignAlabama over the last few months! We have definitely been busy and having fun. Over the last few months we have hosted events like our Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit, attended conferences and traveled all over the state from Wadley to Magnolia Springs and a few places in between.

**Read  
More!**



In this newsletter you will find:

An Interview with incoming Board Treasurer Jeremy Cutts, Our 19<sup>th</sup> Mayors Design Summit, and more!

Each event and trip has us finishing work in some communities while just starting work in others- but its all fun and more importantly- its all work that enhances our mission of advocating for the collaboration of the design arts and their importance in creating and enhancing place in Alabama. I am excited to see what the rest of the year brings as we continue to travel across the state, building meaningful relationships and collaborations to keep Alabama the special place it is!



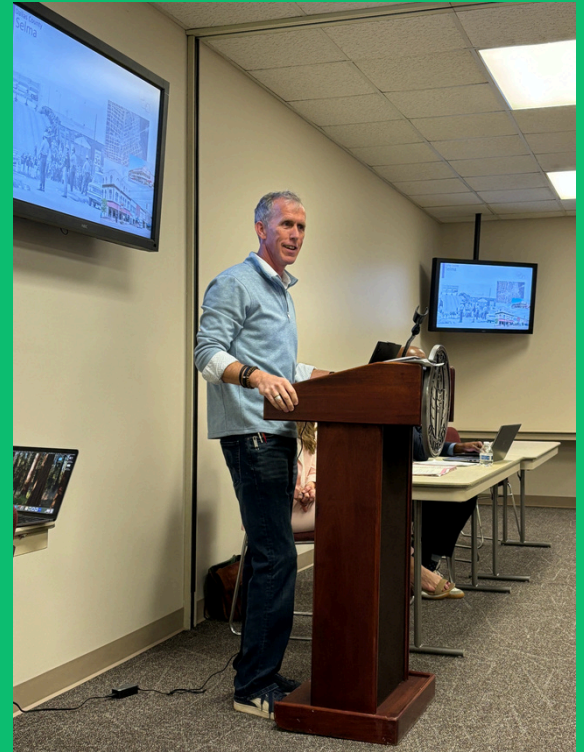
Have a project you'd like to see included in our next issue? Want to write a guest column about your personal DA experiences? Have an idea for an interesting topic we can dig into?

**We want to hear about it!**

Email [taylor@designalabama.org](mailto:taylor@designalabama.org) and tell us about it!

## Where in the state is DesignAlabama?!

- At the end of February, we traveled to Sylacauga to learn more about the EARTH program and our role in the SPARK Teacher workshop
- In April we attended and presented at the Creative Placemaking Conference in Montgomery



**Interested in  
DesignDash?**

APPLICATIONS ARE ALWAYS OPEN!  
DesignDash is a single day blitz of design interaction between community members and a group of design professionals. During this one-day event, a facilitator will lead discussions between community members and design professionals focusing on a site-specific design and planning issue.

**APPLY NOW!**

# Nine Questions with Board Member Jeremy Cutts

“WE CAN’T REALLY DESIGN FOR PEOPLE, UNLESS WE DESIGN WITH THEM.”

BY: REBECCA DOBRINSKI

For our next installment of “Nine Questions”, we spent a few e-moments with [DesignAlabama Board Member Jeremy Cutts](#). After graduating from [Auburn University](#) ('10), Jeremy started his career at [Williams Blackstock Associates](#) and is now Associate Architect with the firm. In addition to his service with DesignAlabama, Jeremy is involved the Junior Board at [Workshops Empowerment Inc.](#) as well as with [AIA Birmingham](#). In 2021 he received the Young Architect Award from [AIA Alabama](#).





Rebecca: What initially drew you to become involved with DesignAlabama? Was there a specific moment or experience that sparked your interest?

Jeremy: The Alabama Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) held a joint design charrette with DesignAlabama and others in the City of Florence in 2018. I really enjoyed the charrette, where free-flowing ideas came from every direction, at a fast pace, but all focused on a singular design issue. That energy was reminiscent of architecture school and was quite refreshing. Later that year, DesignAlabama asked if I would participate in a charrette for the City of Troy, through their program called DesignPlace. I leapt at the opportunity, and the rest is history.

RD: How does your professional background influence your work on the board, and how do you see that expertise benefiting DesignAlabama's mission?

JC: As an architect, I also have the privilege to participate in some of DesignAlabama's community programs; implementing our mission and gaining first-hand experience, which I can bring back to the board.

RD: Can you share a project or initiative led by DesignAlabama that you are particularly proud of? How did it align with your personal values and vision for urban design?

JC: I think that DesignPlace–Troy will always be special to me. It was my introductory experience which involved traveling to an unfamiliar part of the state, learning about that community's assets, people, stories, and aspirations; compiling and distilling those things into a compelling vision, which Troy has begun implementing. I developed relationships there that I still cherish to this day.



RD: What role do you think good architectural design and urban planning play in shaping equitable and sustainable communities? How does DesignAlabama help advance those goals?

JC: I believe that equitable and sustainable communities begin with the community voice. Quality design is, in part, the skill of translating the community's voice into design solutions that reflect the community's aspirational qualities, while respecting its historical contexts. The result is something that the community can take ownership of and take pride in.

DesignAlabama invites communities to participate. For example, each DesignPlace starts with a Community Come-and-Go (a listening and documenting session) an open invitation to all community members to share their thoughts, their vision, and their stories. The information captured in this session serves as the basis for the design charrette. At the conclusion of the design charrette, we present back to the community.

RD: How has your perspective on the challenges and opportunities evolved during your time on the board?

JC: Since serving with DesignAlabama, I've seen that some challenges are common in communities across our state. I've also seen a common resilience and optimism for the future; each community has unique assets which present exciting opportunities (from local to regional).

FRD: What do you believe sets DesignAlabama apart from others working in the same space, and why is its work particularly important to you?

JC: Oftentimes, the ingredients are all there, waiting for someone to put them together in a compelling way. DesignAlabama brings in design professionals to have hands-on engagement with communities. These professionals (planners, architects, landscape architects, graphic designers, and others) are trained to take the community's ingredients and put them together in a compelling way. DesignAlabama serves a unique need: bringing quality design within reach for communities that are often just beyond that reach.

RD: What role do you believe community voices should play in shaping the future of urban planning and design?

JC: Community voices are crucial. We can't really design for people, unless we design with them.

RD: What are some of the key challenges you believe cities face today in terms of urban development, and how does DesignAlabama contribute to solving those issues?

JC: DesignAlabama generally focuses on smaller cities and towns, however, these smaller cities and towns face some of the same challenges of larger urban areas (quality housing, walkability, etc.). In some ways, these smaller communities are a microcosm of larger cities and so are uniquely positioned to serve as case studies for appropriate urban development.

RD: Why is service on the DesignAlabama board meaningful to you personally, and what impact do you hope to make through your involvement, both within the organization and in the broader community?

JC: As a Black architect, who grew up in communities like some of those we serve, I represent a unique perspective and voice on our board. It is my career mission to bring quality design to communities that are often beyond its reach. DesignAlabama is a shining example of how that can be done.





## A Roadmap for Growth

### MAYOR'S DESIGN SUMMIT 2025

BY: TAYLOR PRUETT

The Montgomery-Prattville Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in Prattville, Alabama, buzzed with an air of hopeful anticipation on February 5-6, 2025, as the 19th Annual DesignAlabama Mayors Design Summit convened. Mayors from across Alabama arrived, each carrying a unique design challenge, eager for the collaborative wisdom of design professionals and their peers. The summit, generously sponsored by the Alabama League of Municipalities, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, Central Alabama Electric Cooperative, and the Walker Area Community Foundation, promised solutions and new directions for their communities.

Mayor Jeremy Pate of Cordova shared a story of resilience and reinvention. His city, still bearing the scars of devastating tornadoes that leveled its downtown in 2011, sought to recreate its character and reverse a steady population decline.

Despite the hardship, Cordova boasted impressive assets: a redeveloped mill site transformed into a park, a new \$25 million elementary school underway, and a trail plan in development. They had secured over \$15 million in grant funding for infrastructure and park projects and even operated summer and after-school programs for children. The path forward for Cordova lay in rebranding as an outdoor recreation hub, attracting visitors with its indoor baseball facility, and incentivizing downtown investment. The idea of a rails-to-trails project was also on the table, alongside the crucial need for community buy-in and follow-through.

From Harpersville, Mayor Theoangelo Perkins presented the challenge of fostering smart growth while preserving his town's rich history, dating back to 1815. Harpersville, one of Shelby County's oldest communities, had a town center plan in place and a designated "Harpersville Heritage Area" encompassing 31 historical structures, four of which were on the National Register of Historic Places. The key was crafting subdivision regulations to guide development, incorporating trails between new developments, and ensuring connectivity back to the town center.

Mayor Randy Garrison of Hartselle focused on revitalizing a historic downtown grappling with heavy train traffic, a need for a younger tax base, and recurring flooding. Hartselle had a closed hospital being converted into a library and event center, successful businesses, and an active Downtown Redevelopment Authority. The town aimed to create trails connecting parks to downtown, incentivize businesses to fill vacant buildings, and improve communication among downtown merchants. A unique challenge involved historically inaccurate awnings covering improved building facades, leading to a discussion about incentivizing their removal and adding planters with trees for shade.



Mayor Bubba Cagle of Parrish highlighted the need for basic services and community pride in his coal mining town. Despite acquiring 40 acres of uncut land and boasting community resources like a splash pad and a senior center, Parrish faced a lack of housing, insufficient building space for new businesses, and an inadequate volunteer base. Discussions revolved around using the 40 acres for a park or housing, exploring land bank options, and leveraging the city's utility board for property reactivation. A slogan contest was even suggested to boost community morale.



Finally, Mayor Zachary Bigley of Pine Level, representing the fastest-growing area in Autauga County, addressed the challenge of creating a downtown around a historic school-turned-community center and a planned city hall. The hurdles included a lack of land ownership for a town square, no zoning or codes, and expensive water costs hindering housing developments. Pine Level's next steps involved researching zoning from other communities, reworking problematic intersections, and exploring buying water from the county.



As the summit concluded, the mayors left with not only a wealth of recommendations but also a renewed sense of purpose and a clear roadmap for their communities' design and development, empowered by the collaborative spirit of the 2025 Mayors Design Summit.

The Mayors Design Summit will turn 20 in 2026, and this program has transformed DesignAlabama in more ways than we can count. We have something special in the works to commemorate this major milestone, so be on the lookout for an announcement soon!



# We are grateful for our sponsors!

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