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City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

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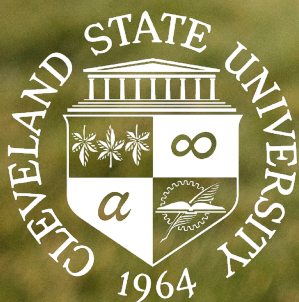
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City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

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City of East Cleveland Visioning Project



Executive Summary

Background

The city of East Cleveland, a first-ring suburb on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio, has an estimated population of 17,000. The city was once a thriving bedroom community of 40,000 with a strong manufacturing job base that, in turn, supported a vibrant civic, social, and cultural life for many years.

East Cleveland has seen steady decline over the last thirty years, the result of regional economic changes and demographic shifts. As Cleveland and the surrounding region revitalizes, East Cleveland boasts significant assets that put it in the path of opportunity and development. An excellent location, close to transportation and communication corridors, adjacency to University Circle's major employment center and institutions, and abundant affordable space for development are among its locational advantages. Mayor Brandon L. King, elected in 2017, has fortified resident engagement through the development of neighborhood groups. These groups are empowered to help direct the way limited resources are distributed across the community. He has improved relationships with the city council and the East Cleveland school district, reduced municipal debt, and established important external relationships with the state, county, and federal government that are now yielding benefits for East Cleveland.¹ This project seeks to build on this momentum by surveying a range of East Cleveland stakeholders, asking the central question, "what is the vision for East Cleveland?" now that political and administrative stakeholders are aligned and the development community is indicating keen interest in moving forward projects of scale.²

In the summer of 2019, Mayor King engaged the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University to lead a visioning project that engages citizens and stakeholders in identifying opportunities and recommendations for East Cleveland's rejuvenation.³ This document summarizes the findings of the project.

The project team thanks the Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope (NOAH) for their invaluable help in facilitating community and stakeholder outreach. We could not have gathered the rich information and insight contained in this report without their assistance.

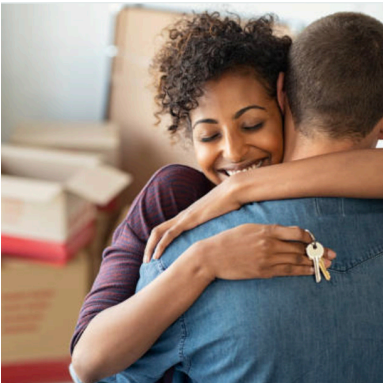


City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Vision Statement



The Levin College project team consulted with community residents and stakeholders to develop the following statements, that taken together lead to a re-imagined city of East Cleveland. The collective “we” is used in places to denote the force and clarity that residents and other stakeholders expressed their views.



- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders seek to capitalize on the strong sense of community pride and engagement that brought the city through difficult times. There is a strong reservoir of talent and community commitment that can be used for civic and community rejuvenation.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a community that is safe and free from personal and property crime. There is a strong willingness to engage in community activities that build on existing civic initiatives to help achieve a broader vision for a safe East Cleveland.
- Where others see abandonment and blight, East Cleveland residents see the opportunity to restore dwellings in need of investment, create new affordable rental housing and affordable homeownership that benefits those who have stayed the course, and generates opportunities for growing families who see the city as a viable option.



- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a city where the business community is composed of a mix of enterprises that provide competitive goods and services such as healthy food options, and high-quality consumer and retail goods. Further, new and existing businesses are supported through coordinated public/private ventures that support the city’s economic growth and increase tax revenue.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project



Vision Statement - *Continued*

- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a city where employment and training opportunities provide community members with livable wages and benefits. No single entity can generate these training opportunities, and the private sector, Cuyahoga County, and the state of Ohio are encouraged to work with East Cleveland to create meaningful opportunities for residents.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision safe and effective schools that provide our students with a high-quality education, enabling them to compete for 21st century employment opportunities, along with helping them become engaged citizens.
- East Cleveland is close to some of the best health care institutions in the world, yet our residents suffer from high rates of health disparities. East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a community where health care providers and the community collaborate to reduce health disparities as much as feasibly possible.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a “connected city” that builds on our transportation assets. Our vision sees our residents gaining transportation access to both the wider region for job opportunities, and locally to engage in community life such as travel to recreational activities, home to school to church, shopping, library, and much more.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project



Summary of Recommendations

The Levin College project team used several tools to collect information from community residents, stakeholders, and elected officials to craft the following set of recommendations that can help guide policy makers and citizens as they consider future economic development for East Cleveland.

- **Establish a physical development plan that can guide future land use development**

East Cleveland should complete a land use plan as soon as possible to ensure that future development is consistent with established goals, objectives, and citizen interests.



- **Build capacity to attract and retain businesses**

East Cleveland should create an intentional plan to nurture and attract businesses of all kinds (including micro- and small- to midsize firms). A well-crafted business development strategy, along with capacity to execute, can create much-needed jobs to help East Cleveland residents support their families and build wealth.

- **Coordinate workforce development training**

East Cleveland should take advantage of job hubs in the region through enhanced collaboration with state and regional workforce and economic development agencies to coordinate workforce training for residents.



- **Enhance neighborhoods through housing preservation and blight reduction**

East Cleveland should stem housing abandonment and decline through public, private, and nonprofit partnerships that significantly reinvest in neighborhoods and communities.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project



Summary of Recommendations - *Continued*

- **Strengthen and redefine East Cleveland's image and perception**
East Cleveland should intentionally seek to improve its current image as a challenged municipality to a perception that it is a community with great potential for economic and community development.
- **Enhance parks, greenspaces, and community amenities**
East Cleveland should use its natural assets such as parks, greenspaces, and community amenities as part of a concerted effort to redefine its image and promote economic and community development.
- **East Cleveland must continue including resident voice and participation in economic and community revitalization**
East Cleveland should continue to actively create opportunities for residents to articulate their civic values and expectations and actively engage in economic and community development.
- **Expand East Cleveland's governance capacity to focus on and accomplish revitalization**
East Cleveland should use the interest and goodwill of external and internal partners to establish a discrete set of formalized ongoing partnerships focused on economic and community revitalization.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Introduction & Background

The City of East Cleveland

The city of East Cleveland is a first-ring suburb of the city of Cleveland, Ohio, located directly to the east of Cleveland's University Circle neighborhood and south of Bratenahl, which borders Lake Erie. With an estimated population of 17,109,⁴ it is ranked 21st in population among Cuyahoga County's 59 communities.⁵

At its population peak, 40,000 in 1950, East Cleveland was a bedroom community composed of working families employed at nearby manufacturing plants.⁶ A model of integration during the 1970's, the community was one of the first to have a multi-racial city council and school district leadership, with strong neighborhood and citizen participation in a wide range of recreational and cultural amenities. Since then, East Cleveland has seen significant population loss and disinvestment, similar to many first-ring suburbs across the country.⁷ Median household income was estimated at \$21,439 for 2018, the lowest among municipalities in Cuyahoga County.⁸

East Cleveland boasts multiple assets that hold great promise for the future. The city neighbors University Circle, the second-largest employment center in the region, placing it within reach of critical amenities and investment. Furthermore, East Cleveland has excellent access to I-90 and the interstate system, two major rail lines, and the regional fiber optic network.⁹ Numerous available industrial sites are supplemented by a strong long-time relationship with the Cuyahoga Land Bank, which is assisting with site assembly in key locations.





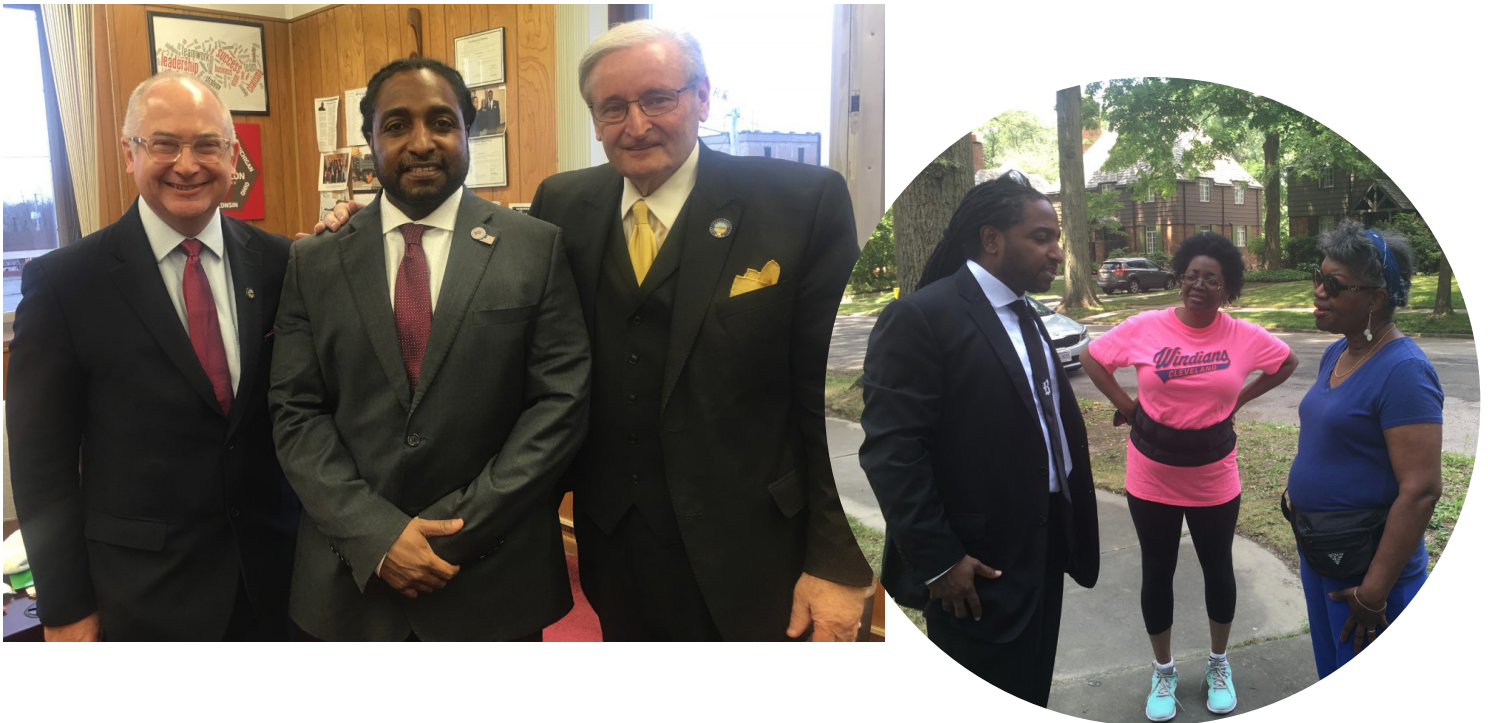
City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

The City of East Cleveland - Continued

Input from recent surveys and public meetings associated with this visioning project indicate a strong sense of community and history, and interest in continuing to strengthen the community's economy and opportunity for residents and businesses. Simultaneously, maintaining autonomy and self-determination is a priority.¹⁰

As University Circle continues to grow, expanding eastward along the Euclid corridor, the pressure for development and investment in East Cleveland is steadily increasing. In the past year, real estate developers have expressed interest in several key sites. It is very important that the city put in place strategies to facilitate development and economic revitalization. One of the key elements for any revitalization strategy is a vision of the city's future, as defined by the citizens.

In recent years, the city has strengthened its social and political capital. Mayor Brandon L. King, elected in 2017, in partnership with the Northeast Ohio Alliance For Hope (NOAH), the local community development corporation for the city of East Cleveland, has fortified resident engagement through the development of neighborhood groups. These groups are empowered to help guide the way limited resources are distributed across the community. He has improved relationships with the city council, the school district, reduced municipal debt, and established important external relationships with the state, county, and federal government that are yielding significant benefits for East Cleveland. This project seeks to build on this momentum by surveying a range of East Cleveland stakeholders, asking the central question "What is the vision for East Cleveland?" now that political and administrative stakeholders are aligned and the development community is indicating keen interest in moving forward projects of scale.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

The Visioning Project

In mid-2019, Mayor Brandon King and the city of East Cleveland engaged the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University and its partner, Policy Bridge,¹¹ to complete a project to establish a set of vision statements and recommendations for revitalization based on citizen and stakeholder input:

The visioning process included five steps:

1. Public engagement through a community meeting convened by the Northeast Ohio Alliance For Hope (NOAH), and a public survey to gain insight and feedback on a vision for the city;
2. Extensive one-on-one stakeholder interviews to understand the key issues, strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and threats facing the city as it revitalizes;
3. Preliminary data development on potential development sites, and key city demographic, housing, and market conditions affecting the city's future;
4. Synthesis of the information gained to develop a vision statement, SWOT analysis, and recommendations for action steps;
5. Review with the public and key stakeholders, and finalization into a summary report.



Photo credits: NOAH



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Public Engagement

Public input was a critical element in the visioning project. Public engagement for the project involved public meetings convened by NOAH, a community survey, and stakeholder interviews. These valuable opportunities for input and feedback informed the development of the vision statements, community values, SWOT analysis, and recommendations.

The results of community meetings and the survey were integrated into a coherent set of vision statements, as reported in the Vision Statements section of this report. Key themes of community input centered on community members' strong and lasting memories of East Cleveland's past health and vigor, and hope for a vibrant future. Residents identified East Cleveland places most important to them, and told stories of youth and later years spent in an environment fostering education, growth, adventure, and exploration. They also recognized that a safe and sustainable community is supported by good jobs, good schools, strong community leadership, and vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Stakeholder Interviews

In addition to citizen and community member engagement, the visioning project team engaged 37 key stakeholders through in-depth telephone interviews. Stakeholders represented government, development, nonprofits, funders, and businesses, and were selected for their current or potential interest in East Cleveland, as recommended by the city. Insights were sought on stakeholders' perception of East Cleveland's assets and challenges, key elements of a vision for the city, values that should drive the vision, and important strategic actions and projects that help jump-start economic and community revitalization.

Summary of Interview Responses

Overall, stakeholders were well aware of East Cleveland's assets, including its location adjacent to University Circle, excellent public transit and the road network, and its array of developable sites. They were also aware that population and job loss, along with housing decay, now challenge the city's future. While acknowledging the city's past success, stakeholders well understood that East Cleveland will need a long period of time to become a thriving community once again.

Stakeholders offered a strong vision for East Cleveland's future as a livable, sustainable community if fundamental economic issues can be overcome and government and community capacity continue to improve. Stakeholders were aware of the potential of development to adversely impact community members whose fragile economic status may be further eroded by an increase in property values. They made recommendations for strategies such as community benefits agreements and tax abatements to offset these effects.¹²

There was agreement among interviewees that the city and key stakeholders, in consultation with residents, should develop a master plan for economic and community development that identifies priorities for real estate development and historic restoration of targeted assets. Key to this plan will be gradually incorporating development along Euclid Avenue, extending the HealthLine corridor from University Circle. There was recognition that initial investments will be crucial to establishing credibility and viability of development in East Cleveland, and should be executed by developers with demonstrated capacity to implement quality projects.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Summary of Interview Responses - *Continued*

Stakeholders expressed differing views concerning the focus for attention and investment. Some felt parks, greenspace, and neighborhood enhancements were critical to East Cleveland's future vision; others felt that job training and attention to the greater needs of residents' overall wellbeing were a higher priority. Meanwhile, development interests expressed concern about "over-amenitizing" present development, thereby driving up future development costs.

Stakeholders recognized that development cannot occur without expanding municipal capacity to process development proposals in a timely, transparent, and consistent fashion. There is an understanding that declining municipal revenues have limited staff capacity and rebuilding such capacity will need external help to jumpstart the redevelopment process. Key to this support will be the provision of professional economic development expertise to address business retention and expansion, as well as business recruitment. Additional capacity is needed in the areas of development review, processing, and management of neighborhood improvement efforts. Many stakeholders had specific suggestions in this area, which are outlined in the recommendations.

Stakeholders versed in workforce development spoke of improving residents' capacity and readiness for work, while working with area businesses to expand their offerings of quality jobs that provide sustainable wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities. As one such stakeholder noted, "improvement of the schools needs to continue, along with opportunities for post-high-school youth to learn work skills and gain a foothold in the workforce."

Stakeholders recognized that perception of East Cleveland is key to changing its trajectory into the future. In many cases, the reality is more positive, hopeful, and routine than what is often reported by the media. A coherent marketing strategy that targets the business community, residents, and regional stakeholders alike with positive messaging is needed to enhance the city's ability to attract residents and businesses, and engage citizens in supporting revitalization. Stakeholders had divergent ideas about the specifics of the message, highlighting the need for further engagement on the perception of the city and its future. Many felt that East Cleveland should embrace a future that encourages a "melting pot" of international, multi-cultural influences, in line with its proximity to University Circle. Other views on the future hearkened back to East Cleveland's history of blight and abandonment. Such views stressed a focus on enhancing property, fixing streets, and creating multiple opportunities for retail and grocery shopping.

Stakeholders noted that as redevelopment progresses, continued transparency is important. There was significant agreement that the present administration has vastly improved transparency and communication. Stakeholders want this to continue. As successful projects and investment take place, keeping the community informed will cultivate even more trust in leadership and support for change and continued investment. There is an awareness among stakeholders that public engagement comes in various forms, some more meaningful and useful than others. Stakeholders recognized that the most meaningful engagement establishes clear roles for all in ensuring the success of East Cleveland.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Community Vision Statement

East Cleveland Community Values

In the project engagement process, East Cleveland community members and stakeholders identified the core community values listed below to describe the principles that must guide current and future economic development and community development activities. Core values are critical to a common understanding of the community's vision for its future, and should underlie further planning for revitalization.

East Cleveland Visioning Statements

The Levin College project team consulted with community residents and stakeholders to develop the following statements, which taken together lead to a re-imagined city of East Cleveland. The collective “we” is used in places to denote the force and clarity that residents and other stakeholders expressed in their views.

- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders seek to **capitalize on the strong sense of community pride and engagement** that brought the city through difficult times. There is a strong reservoir of talent and community commitment that can be used for civic and community rejuvenation.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a community that is safe and free from personal and property crime. There is a strong willingness to engage in community activities that build on existing civic initiatives to help achieve a broader vision for **a safe East Cleveland**.
- Where others see abandonment and blight, East Cleveland residents see the opportunity to **restore dwellings in need of investment**, the creation of **new affordable rental housing**, and **affordable homeownership** that benefits those who have stayed and creates opportunities for growing families who see East Cleveland as a viable option.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a city where the business community is composed of a mix of entities that provide competitive goods and services such as **healthy food options** and **high-quality consumer and retail goods**. Further, new and existing businesses are supported through coordinated public/private ventures that support **economic growth and increasing tax revenue**.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

East Cleveland Visioning Statements - *Continued*

- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a city where **employment and training opportunities** provide community members with **livable wages and benefits**. No single entity can generate these training opportunities, and the private sector, Cuyahoga County, and the state of Ohio are encouraged to work with East Cleveland to create meaningful programs for residents.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision **safe and effective schools** that provide youth with a **high-quality education** that enables them to compete for 21st century employment opportunities along with helping them become engaged citizens.
- East Cleveland is close to some of the **best health care** institutions in the world, yet residents suffer from high rates of health disparities. We envision an East Cleveland where citizens and stakeholders collaborate with health care providers and others to **reduce East Cleveland's health disparities** as much as feasibly possible.
- East Cleveland residents and stakeholders envision a **“connected city”** that builds on our transportation assets. Our vision sees our residents gaining **transportation access** to the wider region for job opportunities and locally to engage in community life such as travel to recreational activities.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations & Conclusions

Recommendations

Throughout the visioning project process, stakeholders and citizens offered many specific recommendations. The visioning project team's analysis and professional experience, building on community input, resulted in additional recommendations. These are discussed below. Future planning is needed to identify priorities, action steps, responsibilities, partner roles, funding, and timeline for implementation for the recommendations below.

1) East Cleveland should complete a Comprehensive Land Use Plan to ensure that future development is consistent with municipal goals, objectives, and citizen interests.

Real estate development interest in East Cleveland has begun, and it is becoming stronger, expanding eastward along Euclid Avenue from University Circle. This is evidenced by the recent purchase of the Hough Bakery site for redevelopment, and the Cuyahoga Land Bank's current effort to plan strategically for the target redevelopment area.

Specific recommendations include:

- Work with the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission to develop a Comprehensive Land Use Plan for greenspace, land use, development, urban design, housing, historic preservation, land assembly, multimodal transportation corridors, strategic priorities, and action steps. Cuyahoga County regularly provides comprehensive planning services at a reduced rate to its municipalities. County planning staff are already working with East Cleveland on a plan for greenspace. This work, along with the vision plan, could be folded into a full Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
- Continue to work with the Cuyahoga Land Bank on a specific plan for the target site land assembly. The target site is strategically located along Euclid Avenue and would be a good location for redevelopment, but it is encumbered by hundreds of vacant residential properties. The Land Bank's efforts will help to identify highest and best use of the target property overall, and the Land Bank will recommend actions for land assembly to facilitate high-quality development. This approach has been successful in nearby University Circle and should be helpful in East Cleveland.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - *Continued*

- As part of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, identify the best location for redevelopment of a walkable commercial main street and create a retail and development strategy for it. In public engagement, residents strongly identified the need for a walkable, vibrant, commercial street where local retail serving residents and visitors alike can provide a place for community interaction, as well as a place for local entrepreneurs to thrive. A comprehensive planning effort should identify the ideal place for revitalization of small-scale retail opportunities. While Euclid Avenue is a possibility, its wideness and significant vehicular traffic make it difficult for pedestrians to navigate safely.
- As part of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, develop a plan for historic preservation. This plan should identify potential historic properties needing immediate attention to prevent further deterioration, while assessing the potential for designation in a historic district and or placement on the National Register of Historic Places. Historic properties in East Cleveland have the potential to enhance property values, enliven residential and commercial neighborhood character, and support an overall sense of community identity and history, as they have done for scores of communities across the country. Opportunities for use of historic preservation tax credits as a part of redevelopment and restoration finance should be evaluated as well. It is critically important to stabilize properties that have value but could deteriorate past the point of repair.¹³
- As part of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, identify key sites as catalysts for jump-starting development. Key sites that should be examined include Nela Park, the Euclid Corridor, Hayden Avenue, and others identified in this report and the comprehensive planning process.
- As part of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, address strategic opportunities at the Euclid Avenue gateway to East Cleveland. A pleasant visual and safe pedestrian experience is an important component of the gateway between University Circle and East Cleveland on the west end of Euclid Avenue. The current uses along the first few hundred feet of Euclid in East Cleveland detract from the potential as a gateway to a vibrant main business corridor.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - Continued

2) Build capacity to attract and retain businesses.

East Cleveland should create an intentional plan to nurture and attract business of all kinds (micro and small- to midsize firms). A well-crafted business development strategy creates much-needed high-quality jobs with decent wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities to help East Cleveland residents build wealth.

Specific recommendations include:

- Develop a targeted economic development strategy to guide East Cleveland's efforts on business attraction, retention, and expansion. This strategy should identify key businesses with market potential that can thrive in East Cleveland.
- Increase staff capacity. Staff expertise is critical in building capacity to implement a strategic economic development plan. Cuyahoga County's Economic Development Office has shown great interest in helping East Cleveland's economic development efforts. This interest should be used to grow capacity for this key function. For example, the County may be able to broker a partnership composed of federal, state, and regional economic development agencies, as well as philanthropy, that then partially support the salary of an economic development specialist for a period of time. Without dedicated staff, it is unlikely that East Cleveland can implement a meaningful effort to help existing businesses and develop innovative strategies to retain and attract business.
- Continue work on developing food outlets in East Cleveland. In public engagement, residents expressed a strong interest in obtaining their basic goods and services within the city limits. The city and Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope (NOAH) have been actively working with the County Commission on laying the groundwork to attract and sustain a grocery store in East Cleveland. The grocery project would go a long way toward supporting this interest and helping to rebuild the retail market in the city.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - Continued

3) Coordinate workforce development training.

East Cleveland should take advantage of nearby job hubs and those in the broader region through increased collaboration with state and regional workforce and economic development agencies to coordinate workforce training for residents. East Cleveland stakeholders recognize that workforce development is the key strategic complement to business attraction.

Specific recommendations include:

- Continue to work with institutional partners to expand workforce training in East Cleveland. Enhancing the ability of East Cleveland residents to access quality jobs with decent wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities is critical to revitalization. Key stakeholders involved in workforce development with the city include the Cuyahoga County Workforce Development Board, East Cleveland schools, JobsOhio, Cuyahoga County, University Circle Inc., and other partners. Given the presence of these agencies, East Cleveland should consider forming a workforce development collaborative that sets training goals and targets for a collective effort.
- Work with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, workforce development board, and JobsOhio to evaluate and address the work-to-home transportation needs of the East Cleveland workforce. As with many other urban neighborhoods in the Cleveland area, there is a disconnect between the location of available jobs and the residence locations of workers who could fill them. Lack of transportation between jobs and housing is a significant barrier to East Cleveland's residents in finding and sustaining quality employment. Work on reducing those barriers includes collaboration with key employers, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, and business recruiters to provide more convenient and affordable transportation to quality jobs.
- Continue to work with the Cuyahoga County Workforce Development Board to evaluate East Cleveland's working-age population and identify workforce training needs in light of needed workers. Worker training is key to a successful match between East Cleveland residents and quality jobs. Worker training must be provided, but effort is also needed to educate workers about training available, and ensure that barriers to training are identified and overcome.
- Continue to work with East Cleveland schools to strengthen the district, support innovation, and create paths to college and job training. High school and K-12 education are the foundation of workforce readiness for quality jobs. The East Cleveland School District has launched a strategic process to prepare students for the workforce of the future, and should continue this important work in collaboration with the city.



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - Continued

4) Enhance neighborhoods through housing preservation and blight reduction.

East Cleveland should stem housing abandonment and decline through public, private, and nonprofit partnerships designed to establish strategic plans that result in neighborhood and community reinvestment.

Development of a comprehensive housing-needs assessment and implementation strategy are key to rehabilitating and providing housing for residents. Such a strategy would assess the condition of housing and neighborhoods; assess the housing market; and make recommendations for housing rehabilitation, demolition, code enforcement, maintenance, and repair, as well as new housing construction.

Specific recommendations include:

- Conduct a housing market study. Such a study should evaluate the need for new housing and rehabilitation to meet the needs of existing residents and residents East Cleveland hopes to attract. The city should explore the possibility of getting support for such a study from the regional HUD office.
- Update the 2014 housing condition survey work done by the Western Reserve Land Conservancy.¹⁴ The updated survey should be summarized and mapped, and conclusions drawn about priorities for rehabilitation, demolition, and new housing infill. It should serve as a guide for future action on structures in East Cleveland's neighborhoods, including identifying high-potential properties at risk for further deterioration.
- Implement a property maintenance code and enforcement program. A property condition survey is a "snapshot" of properties needing demolition and rehabilitation as of the date of review. It is complemented by an ongoing program of property maintenance programming and enforcement that provides clear criteria for evaluating property and requiring property owners to maintain their properties in livable condition.¹⁵



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - *Continued*

- Work with neighborhood groups to strengthen local property and street awareness. East Cleveland's neighborhood block clubs are a vibrant force in creating a culture of property maintenance and keeping public areas in good condition.¹⁶ Their work should be recognized and supported to the extent possible by the city and local philanthropy.
- Create a comprehensive housing rehabilitation program to assist seniors and low-income residents with the maintenance and repair of their properties. Such programs often complement a property maintenance code with financial and logistical support for residents, and a wide range of similar programs have been implemented in Ohio communities.¹⁷ Examples include volunteer-run programs that provide repairs for seniors and those with disabilities; tool lending libraries and workshops; programs that provide repairs while training youth in the trades; and programs that offer low- or no-interest revolving loans for repairs.
- Partner with nonprofit programs that purchase, rehabilitate, and resell homes, with the proceeds funding continued rehabilitation efforts.
- Develop a strategy to identify properties at risk of abandonment or foreclosure and connect owners with assistance and information. Vacancy and foreclosure result in removal of residents from their homes, while adding to blight and the deterioration of neighborhoods and surrounding property values. Properties at risk of foreclosure can be identified through various means, including bank and county auditor's office notification, as well as neighborhood networks. Many banks have programs to assist borrowers with foreclosure prevention, but owners often are not aware of their options. East Cleveland should adopt a vacancy and foreclosure registration policy and work with private and nonprofit partners to help homeowners keep their homes out of foreclosure.¹⁸
- Develop a strategy to identify target blocks for improvement and housing market restoration through a comprehensive approach. Such a strategy will address demolition, renovation, street improvements, and homeowner assistance and education. Lessons learned about comprehensive integrated housing rehabilitation strategy in Cleveland neighborhoods can be applied in East Cleveland through a collaboration of public, nonprofit, and private partners.¹⁹



City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

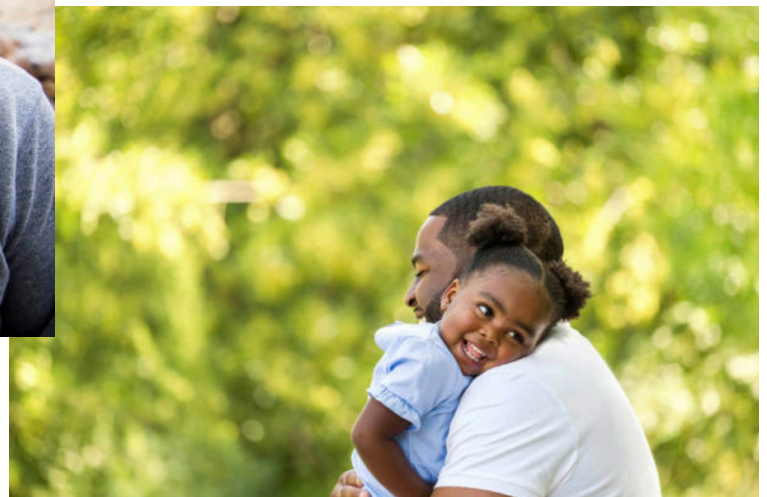
Recommendations - Continued

5) Strengthen and redefine East Cleveland's image and perception.

East Cleveland should address and change its local and regional image as a challenged municipality to a perception that it is a place with upside potential for economic and community development. Improving the perception of East Cleveland is central to attracting residents and businesses, and engaging current residents and businesses to support economic development and community revitalization.

Specific recommendations include:

- Develop and undertake a citywide branding and marketing strategy aimed at promoting a positive view of East Cleveland.
- Branding and marketing can be expensive, but with the use of digital media, including the city of East Cleveland's website and social media platforms, the possibilities for developing high production value messages are within reach. East Cleveland should seek out pro bono partnerships with marketing firms and/or area business schools with marketing programs who can help create digital content using resident enthusiasm to create positive narratives.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - Continued

6) Enhance parks, greenspaces, and community amenities while promoting sustainable development.

East Cleveland should use its natural assets such as parks, greenspaces, and community amenities as part of a concerted effort to redefine its image, to promote economic and community development, and to promote environmental sustainability. Such assets not only provide public attraction and incentive in community and economic development, but also combat climate change by mitigating air pollution, absorbing carbon, improving water quality, promoting tree growth, controlling storm water, and enhancing biodiversity.²⁰ Though resources are limited, East Cleveland would do well to consider parks and greenspaces as inseparable from sustainable development and invest time and resources in this category. The city's current Greenspace Planning Project with the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission is an important first step in this effort.

Specific recommendations include:

- Continue to work with the County Planning Commission to complete the East Cleveland Greenspace Plan that has been discussed, as a strategy to enhance parks, recreation, and greenspace while promoting environmental sustainability and addressing the effects of climate change.
- Develop a vision for Forest Hill Park as one of East Cleveland's most valuable assets and restore it as a center for community pride and vitality.
- Work with the Cleveland Tree Coalition and other local partners to leverage funds and opportunities to plant and maintain trees in East Cleveland's neighborhoods, parks, and public spaces.
- As part of business recruitment and support, consider ways to encourage business activity that will provide critical local amenities including retail shopping, recreational, and cultural opportunities such as movie theaters, bowling, performance theaters, arts venues, and restaurants.





City of East Cleveland Visioning Project

Recommendations - Continued

7) Build on resident enthusiasm and support for East Cleveland's revitalization.

East Cleveland must continue to include resident voices and participation in economic and community revitalization. Efforts by the city administration and NOAH in recent years have greatly expanded resident capacity to communicate with leadership and participate in decision making. The city and NOAH's capacity to work with residents, businesses, and stakeholders should be expanded and supported.

Specific recommendations include:

- Continue to collaborate with NOAH on expanding neighborhood organizing and participation.
- Continue to support neighborhood participatory decision making on Neighborhood Improvement Fund expenditures.





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Recommendations - Continued

8) Expand East Cleveland's governance capacity to focus on and accomplish revitalization.

East Cleveland should use the interest and goodwill on the part of external and internal stakeholders to establish a discrete set of formalized ongoing partnerships focused on economic and community revitalization.

East Cleveland's leaders have made great progress developing partnerships (real and potential) and stakeholder relationships that can serve the city well. Some of these stakeholder relationships are public sector based (e.g., federal agencies, the state of Ohio, Cuyahoga County, and various quasi-governmental organizations), private sector developers, and anchor institutions that include higher education, regional banks, local corporations, and many others. East Cleveland should examine coordinating governance arrangements that focus stakeholder interest and resources. A good example of a coordinating mechanism is the Greater University Circle Initiative that served Cleveland's University Circle community (which is very close to East Cleveland). At its peak, the Greater University Circle Initiative (GUCI)—made up of a partnership among several anchor institutions to promote economic and community revitalization—was a force in creating several employee-owned companies, developing a workforce training center, initiating an employer-assisted housing program, and encouraging changes to the public transportation system benefiting University Circle. Assessment of the Initiative reports that it created “over \$140 million in new, public-private development, and helped direct more than \$3 billion toward local purchasing.”²¹





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Recommendations - Continued

GUCI is a great example of what is known as a “collective impact” process. Collective impact, when done well, is driven by several factors:

1. A commonly negotiated agenda that “requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.”²²
2. A shared measurement system that is able to drive a change agenda.
3. Mutual reinforcing activities that coordinate differentiated institutional agendas through a plan of action.
4. Continuous communication, over time, that develops trust among nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies.
5. A backbone-support organization that possesses a very specific set of skills and staff to manage the collective impact initiative.



Specific recommendations include:

- Create a branded, collective impact initiative that encompasses the various sector relationships, such as the East Cleveland Advisory Group, that have been built to date.²³
- Begin survey and discovery of who could play the role of a coordinating “backbone” entity for the recommended collective impact initiative.





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Conclusions and Next Steps

A community visioning effort is a strong first step in setting a path forward for East Cleveland's future. Gathering input from community members and stakeholders, identifying a clear collective vision, defining issues, challenges, strengths and opportunities, and establishing preliminary recommendations are critical to framing future actions.

Several key actions must be taken to further project recommendations:

- Develop a Comprehensive Land Use Plan for East Cleveland that establishes priorities and strategies for land use and development, supported by appropriate market and site analysis.
- Re-imagine and codify the city's development review processes, zoning, and review criteria so they are ready for development when it occurs.
- Increase the city's staff capacity to implement economic development policies that can attract and retain business.
- Enhance nonprofit capacity to catalyze development and a range of housing to meet all needs.
- Continue to develop networks and strengthen key institutional and intergovernmental relationships through a dedicated **collective impact** initiative perhaps based on the work done by the East Cleveland Advisory Group.

With this vision for progress, the opportunities for residents and business alike can be optimized, and hold within them a bright future for East Cleveland.



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