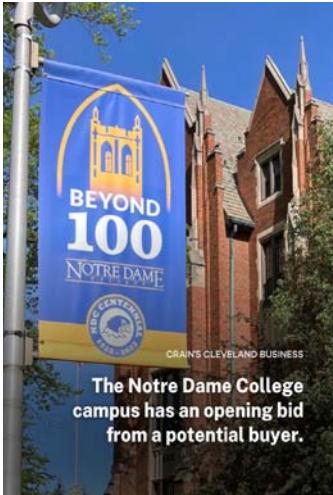


Cleveland Architecture Foundation

Vol. 5, No. 11, Spring 2026, Section A

Transitions:



The 17-story office building and doomed empty parking garage will be K+D's "labor of love to bring it back to life." Vandalism has inflicted damage beyond age and neglect for the 1905 building developed by John D. Rockefeller which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

K+D plans to replace former offices with 275 apartments at a cost of \$100 million that translates to \$364k per unit. That does not appear to pencil out for a successful development, but there is no more experienced developer of downtown office building conversations in Cleveland than Doug Price and K+D.

K+D plans to repair and open a surface parking lot off of W. 6th St. for 170-190 spaces and construct a new parking garage for 500 spaces available for residents and the public. Sherwin-Williams' HQ and parking garage captured a large portion of the parking in the Warehouse District, creating a new demand for parking. K+D hopes to capture a \$7.3 million brownfield grant awarded to the Cuyahoga Land Bank in 2024 based on an application from the former owner.

As Michelle Jarboe observed in April, "Downtown apartment occupancy slipped last year as new projects opened, flooding the market with hundreds of units. It's going to take a few years for tenants to fill them. That means developers are being more cautious and moving slowly on the next wave of deals."

Notre Dame College:

In the May 7 auction for Notre Dame's campus (above left), the city of South Euclid participated and emerged as the back-up bidder, meaning that if the sale with the successful high bidder does not close, South Euclid would have an opportunity to acquire the property.

Akron Children's Hospital was the successful bidder, intending to locate a pediatric specialty services operation on the property. The purchase price is \$8 million. South Euclid submitted a "minimum initial overbid" price of \$7.9 million.

In 2024, the Akron hospital opened a pediatric outpatient surgery center in Beachwood and expanded its existing health center in the city. The system also opened a Mayfield Heights pediatric practice the same year. Along with its primary hospital in downtown Akron, the system operates health centers in Boston Heights, Mansfield, Medina, Wooster, Ravenna, Warren and North Canton.

Notre Dame College shuttered in 2024 and went into foreclosure the following year after the school defaulted on \$20 million in bonds backed by Bank of America. The bonds, issued in 2008 by the Ohio Higher Educational Facility Commission, were for new student housing, improvements to the dining hall, classrooms and library and other repairs. The remaining debt sits at \$17.8 million.

The Rockefeller Building:

At the 11th hour, K+D Group stepped in and acquired the troubled Rockefeller Building (above right). In late April, the K+D Group paid \$5.13 million to Florida-based Bridgelnvest who ended up with the property when the previous redevelopment effort failed. Previous owners Kenny Wolfe and Agostino Pintus paid \$13.35 million for the Rockefeller Building in 2020.

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Judge clears way for sale of Reserve Square in downtown Cleveland

Updated Apr 19, 2020, 2:02 p.m. | Photo: Apr 19, 2020, 2:44 p.m.



Transitions:

Warner & Swasey Facility:

W&S owner Pennrose says they finally have their financing. Warner & Swasey (above left) built telescopes and machine lathes in the new, as well as the old, building on Carnegie Avenue. And in wartime, when the company built those armament parts that helped America win two world wars, thousands of Clevelanders worked there. They built parts for tommy guns in World War I. And in World War II, when 7,000 Clevelanders worked for Warner & Swasey, they built parts for planes, ships, and tanks.

From World War I through World War II and into the 1950s and the 1960s, the building on Carnegie Avenue was one of Cleveland's most important workplaces. People talked about Warner & Swasey in the same breath and in the same way that they talked about the city's other large employers, like Republic Steel, TRW, and Ford Motor Co.

But then the building on Carnegie Avenue began its downward slide, much like the city of Cleveland did in the same period. In the end it was a victim of high technology, and when it closed its doors for good in 1985, only a few hundred employees were still left to be sent elsewhere.

Different proposals over the years fizzled until 2018, when another new redevelopment proposal was put forward by Philadelphia housing developer Pennrose to convert the Warner & Swasey Building into an apartment building with some affordable housing units, some units for seniors, and some market-rate units. The proposal included a possible roof deck which would offer tenants excellent views of downtown Cleveland.

In 2025, Pennrose completed its acquisition of the Warner & Swasey Building and, in early 2026, it says it is now to begin its redevelopment and restoration of the historic building.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital:

The demolition of the 492-bed St. Vincent Charity Hospital (above middle) founded in 1865 on East 22nd Street was completed this spring.

Reserve Square:

The only foreclosure in the 40-year history of downtown multi-family development powerhouse K+D Group - Reserve Square (above right) - will be auctioned off later this year. K+D's Doug Price has stated that the court-appointed receiver, Hayman Co., has mismanaged the property while Hayman has claimed the property suffers from K+D's deferred maintenance.

The facts support Price's perspective. Price warned the receiver to heed advice from key contractors who had been maintaining the building. Now only 27% occupied, the receiver particularly treated K+D's HVAC contractor poorly who walked away. Price observed, "They didn't do anything to keep him. He was treated horribly and he left." A tough winter pushed the property into disrepair.

The city tracked developments while the building had no heat, resulting in significant flooding this spring. The city filed a suit in January with 20 misdemeanor counts for failure to comply with work orders, and informed the court in February of a list of issues the city demanded be fixed to avoid further threat to the health and safety of residents. Hayman has claimed they are making progress stabilizing the building but the city is frustrated as problems persist.

None of this threatens K+D's pocketbook. Price's loan with Fannie Mae is a non-recourse loan so the lender cannot go after the borrower for any gap between the auction price and the \$73 million left on the loan.

K+D paid \$39.5 million for the property in 2005. But thanks to renovations and repairs, K+D owed more than \$90 million to Fannie Mae. Prior to foreclosure proceedings, the building's occupancy was 90%. Due to the flight of many international students from Cleveland State due to the Trump administration's hostility to foreigners without citizenship and the building's maintenance woes, a very large gap between outstanding loan balance and the auction hammer is anticipated.

Franchester:

The Bolton Estate in Lyndhurst was previously hinted as yet another candidate for the Cleveland Clinic's pattern of destruction of its significant works of architecture in Cleveland. Then CCF President Tomislav Mihaljevic stated that they have no intention of demolishing Franchester, though unaddressed maintenance needs are evident. **CCF has now boarded up the windows!**



Cuyahoga County's nearly billion-dollar jail project could grind to a halt over a legal misstep



Rendering of how the sheriff's house will look at the new Cuyahoga County jail in Garfield Heights. Plans call for the jail to open in 2028. Cuyahoga County and HRC.

by [Nancy J. Hines](#) | [cleveland.com](#)

The Cuyahoga County jail project—nearly a billion dollars, years in planning, on the verge of actual construction — is teetering on collapse, all because of a procedural requirement that county officials somehow ignore.

Today on the [Today in Ohio](#) program, hosts described how County Executive Chris Ronayne and his administration have been burning fuel



\$70 million in taxpayer incentives in limbo as downtown Cleveland building faces foreclosure



The Commercial Tower, The ABS Building, Huntington Bank Building and The Union Trust Building at the corner of Euclid Avenue and East 9th Street. John Pardo. [cleveland.com](#)

by [David Weinbaum](#) | [cleveland.com](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Millions in public incentives tied to a historic downtown Cleveland building's redevelopment are now in limbo as The Commercial Building faces foreclosure.

A new lawsuit accuses embattled developer Millennium Companies of defaulting on a \$35.4 million loan from Deutsche Bank. But to transform the vacant office building at East Ninth Street and Euclid Avenue into more than 800 apartments — a \$450 million project — Millennium took on several types of public financing.

Transitions

In April, Preservation Ohio, the state's original statewide historic preservation organization, announced its official List of Ohio's Most Endangered Historic Sites for 2026. Three of the 14 properties listed are in Cleveland, **including Franchester**, the Rockefeller Building and Central High School, attended by John D. Rockefeller.

Cuyahoga County Juvenile Justice Center:

The demolition of the county's juvenile justice center on East 22nd Street (above left top) was completed this spring.

Cuyahoga County Jail + Justice Center:

Cuyahoga County has for three years been acquiring land and paying its architects and project manager to design a new county jail — a Central Services Campus — on site in Garfield Heights (above middle).

But in March, County Prosecutor Michael O'Malley pointed out that the team's work was illegal because it was not in conformance with Ohio law because the team had failed to form the committees to review and approve plans that the law requires before monies are expended.

Considering the fact that the project manager for the \$969.4 million project — which they originally budgeted at \$400 million — is headed by \$800 per hour attorney Jeff Appelbaum of local powerhouse Thompson Hine, more than a few eyebrows were raised at this disturbing failure.

Appelbaum's Thompson Hine subsidiary,

Project Management Consultants, has been paid tens of millions of dollars in the past few decades for their work — often questionable in its efficacy — on the Medical Mart/ Convention Center, Hilton Hotel, CWRU Maltz Performing Arts Center, Cleveland Guardians Baseball Park Renovation, Cleveland Public Square Renovation, Cuyahoga County HQ, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Cleveland Museum of Contemporary Art, UH Seidman Cancer Center and UH's Ahuja Medical Center. PMC's project management fees are in addition to Thompson Hine's equally substantial legal fees.

When the county on April 14 approved legislation for Cuyahoga County Council to adopt plans, bills of materials and specifications, O'Malley threatened litigation.

Ronayne and Co. swung into action and quickly did just enough to comply with the law by forging a tentative agreement with Judge Michael O'Shaughnessy, administrative and presiding Judge for the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court to invest \$150 million in the next six years to repair and modernize the existing downtown Justice Center (above left).

Given that years of study and cost estimates concluded years ago that the existing Justice Center was now too small, too costly and too inefficient to renovate, to say nothing of the logistics — and costs and time frame needed — to attempt a massive renovation while the property needs to be in occupancy to keep the courts in operation, the Ronayne-O'Shaughnessy agreement is suspect.

The 1976 Justice Center is comprised of a 25-story 676,000 square foot courts tower

that was deemed too small based on studies by experts in 2023 who concluded the courts needed 893,120 square feet.

The Justice Center also has an underground parking garage for 645 cars which totals 319,000 square feet and a 124,000 skylight-covered atrium, two jails blocks of 10 and 11 stories each and the Cleveland Police HQ of 280,000 square feet that will be vacated when the police move to the newly renovated Artcraft Building on Superior Ave. at I-90.

Years of planning and millions of consultant and project management dollars went into the county's 2023 programming and a design-build RFP for a replacement Consolidated Courthouse Facility, then projected to cost \$400 - \$700 million which was to be funded by a 40-year one-quarter percent county sales tax extension that narrowly passed 6-5 in December 2023.

Presuming that a portion of the space needed for the courts can be successfully captured and repurposed in the soon-to-be-vacated Cleveland Police Station, there is not a prayer in Hades that the county can possibly complete renovations that successfully address the deferred maintenance and functional requirements of the courts at the Justice Center for \$150 million — or even twice that amount.

But Ronayne's move enabled the county to get their jail back on track and vote 9-2 to pursue borrowing \$969.4 million for the jail project.

Huntington Building/ 925 Euclid:

Now in receivership in the hands

Transitions:



of Inglewood Associates, the long-vacant landmark at the corner of East Ninth St. and Euclid faces a long way back to productive occupancy. Inglewood managing Director Jim Myers acknowledges that their task is to find the *right* buyer — a party with the financial and human resources and development skills to do a proper redevelopment that will reenergize the building for the long term; “We’d love it (a sale) tomorrow, but it could take a long time. The last guys who did this reported it as a half-billion-dollar development. Is that going to happen in a day? Probably not. ... It might be a 10-year project, that’s what I’m thinking. ... It’s a five- to 10-year project, easily.”

The building went into receivership in January after Deutsche Bank sued for its unpaid loan balance of \$33.4 million. The prior owner, Millennia Companies, tried to redevelop the property with 850 apartments and then a mix of offices and apartments with a hotel.

Millennia bought the building in 2018 for \$40 million.

Myers observes, “It’s 1.4 million square feet, and everyone who’s looked at it has considered some sort of mixed-use development,” Myers said. “It’s got older floor plates that don’t lay out easily. Otherwise, it would have become apartments a long time ago.” And now the downtown multi-family market is showing signs of strain and saturation.

Fifth Third Center:

This 27-story high-rise (above left) designed by Hugh Stubbins for the Columbus Galbreath firm in 1991, contains 515,000 square feet. The lender took control of the property in 2023 and the building is now in receivership.

800 Superior/ Amtrust Tower:

Cleveland real estate investor James Kassouf has purchased 800 Superior (above right), also known as the AmTrust Tower.

Kassouf paid only \$4 million for the massive building, which has 475,000 square feet of space. That translates to \$8.40 per square foot and represents an absurd discount relative to the building’s

historical values - and every other multi-tenant office building sold here in the last ten years.

The property sold for just under \$7.5 million in 2011 when AmTrust purchased it. After the insurance company invested in the building and sold it to an LLC controlled by Allstate, Cuyahoga County gave it an assessed value of \$29.7 million in 2019, which was reduced to \$17.6 million in 2023.

Like others, the 21-story office building, which CoStar lists as Class B space, has lost value since the pandemic and faces the challenge of AmTrust moving all of its Downtown employees to the AECOM Building and Mayfield Heights later this year when its lease expires.

Celebrezze Building:

With the Federal Government planning to relocate its 4,000 employees elsewhere and sell the building after investing \$200+ million on a new roof and skin, there will be few takers for the oversized footprints.

Church of the Saviour:

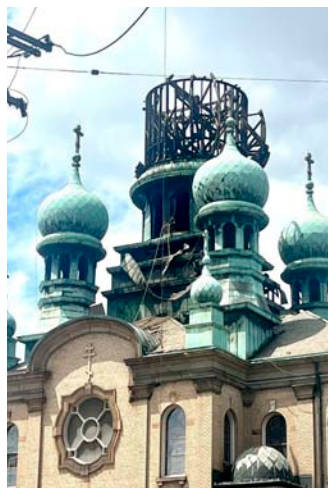
The exemplary Methodist Church of the Saviour on Lee Road in Cleveland Heights discovered during its sanctuary’s pipe organ restoration that its masonry bearing walls were moving - more than was acceptable. Structural engineers were summoned and the church made the difficult decision to close the sanctuary for a year and initiate emergency repairs to stabilize the structure. Work is in progress (above left) while the congregation worships in the Great Room instead.

Wolstein Center:

CSU continues to struggle. Their latest bungle is closing their Poetry Center. CSU claims it is losing money but the facts indicate that is another lie and that their poetry publishing initiative is alive and well. In the meantime, Wolstein Center (above right) is the unwanted child the college cannot find a way to get rid of. Rumors abound that The Ohio State University is studying the purchase of CSU.

In May, CSU released an RFQ for architects to undertake a

Transitions:



complicated and very costly renovation of and addition to Woodling Gymnasium that would at long last allow the university to programmatically rid themselves of Wolstein Center.

Currently, CSU's Woodling Gym (above left) hosts NCAA Division I women's volleyball, select basketball matchups, and community events like the Special Olympics Ohio basketball clinic. The 3,000-seat facility is part of the Physical Education Center and hosts university, high school and summer camps.

The school's RFQ acknowledges that the project they describe may cost \$30 million - \$60 million - and that may be optimistic, given their menu of requirements.

The proposed Athletics Complex project will include a new, approximately 16,000-square-foot addition along with renovated and/or reconfigured space in the Physical Education building, according to the project's description.

The renovation will likely require the existing gymnasium floor to be lowered into the sub-basement and/or raise the existing roof to increase ceiling height to accommodate expanded spectator seating and mezzanine space - both VERY expensive modifications. Additional structural modifications may include removing select walls between Woodling Gym and the Recreation Center and extending the east wall outward into the roadway separating it from the East Parking Garage and the historic Mather Mansion.

The project description states that the goal of these modifications is to modernize and increase seating capacity above 4,000 seats, create enhanced premium seating zones, and enhance event hosting capabilities.

CSU's RFQ for architects indicates that zero money for the Woodling project is coming from the state and that ALL of the funds required will come from CSU. The odds are long that CSU has enough traction with the community and its alumni for its athletic programs to come up with \$60 million with declining enrollment.

St. Theodosius Russian Orthodox Cathedral:

The May 28, 2024 fire that heavily damaged the Tremont landmark

(above) was caused by roofers making repairs. Father Jan Cizmar reports that cleaning and mitigation has taken 22 months at a cost of \$3 million and in March, the church finally began restoration. Phase I's restoration cost is estimated to be \$6.5 million. Insurance has paid \$10.5 million.

The restoration of the sanctuary's Bohemian crystal chandelier from Europe is projected to cost \$1 million. Phases II and III will involve replacing the large central copper dome and "intricate" interior work. The church was constructed in 1911, is listed on the National Register of Historic Properties and is considered one of the finest examples of Russian church architecture in the US.

Fridrich Bicycle Shop:

A fixture at 3722-3800 Lorain Rd. just west of St. Ignatius for 141 years, Fridrich Bicycle Shop closed in 2024. Fifth generation Chuck Fridrich then offered the building for sale, but his asking price of \$2.9 million was wildly unrealistic, particularly with regard to the deteriorated condition of the building with the south brick facade separating from the structure.

The building has now been partially demolished by the city (top right) immediately after issuing notice of a "collapsing structure" violation which neither the owner or his attorney had seen before the city's demolition began.

Progressive HQ

Progressive's substantial Mayfield HQ (above right) was acquired for the remarkable price of \$6.75 million in April by investor George Simon and the Premier Development Group. Premier's Spencer Piszczak has stated that they intend to lease the main 530,000 square foot building to a single user and attract two to ten smaller tenants for the 100,000 sf building. The campus previously accommodated 2,000 - 3,000 Progressive employees. In 2020, Mayfield's income tax from the HQ was \$14 million, but by 2022, it had dropped to \$3 million. In April, Progressive announced its intention to hire 12,000 more people to accommodate its growth with a mix of in-office, remote and hybrid work environments.

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Introduction

The shocking truth about Burke airport: It's actually a money-losing parking lot in disguise

Updated: Feb. 06, 2026, 12:51 p.m. | Published: Feb. 06, 2026, 7:16 a.m.



Cleveland has been sliding down hill – economically, culturally, physically, intellectually – for decades. And a number of our key institutions that have a responsibility and an opportunity to slow, halt and reverse this decline have failed us.

Cleveland overspends public money on sports facilities that make incredibly wealthy white men even richer at the expense of taxpayers. What makes this fact immoral is the high level of poverty in the community. Cleveland has an overall poverty level of 30.8%, the second highest in the country. Cleveland's child poverty rate is 45.3%, the highest of any US city with a population over 300,000. Overall, Ohio's child poverty rate is 18%.

Leadership Dishonesty: Clevelanders are routinely lied to by non-profit and elected officials – particularly the Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP) and Downtown Cleveland Inc. - in the 'selling' of 'improvements' when our legitimate needs for adequate criminal justice facilities, economic development, road and bridge repairs, etc., are overlooked in Biblical examples of malfeasance.

- We were told that the Republican National Convention would contribute \$200 - \$300 million to our local economy. The Economics Department at Cleveland State University's analysis calculated after the fact that it delivered only \$40 million, only 13% of what GCP told us we would realize.
- The Cavs told us that Quicken Loans Arena was not competitive when they trotted out the idea of splitting the cost of a massive renovation with the public. At the time, Quicken was the seventh most successful facility in the US.
- RTA's researchers told us that the Health Line generated \$114.5 million in economic development for every dollar spent and that its \$331 million cost delivered \$3.8 billion in benefit. But well over two-thirds of the projects and costs on their list were in progress long before the Health Line was even conceived and virtually none were even influenced by the Health Line. Sam Allard profiled the Health Line in his April '19 piece, "The Worst of Cleveland."
- We have been told for years that Burke Lakefront Airport

has been a net economic benefit for the city. From 2000 – 2017, BLA flights dropped by 62% to 40,292/yr., one third of which are actually flight school practice take-offs and landings! The city previously projected 132,000 flights a year when the actual is now 26,000/ year. BLA costs the city \$1 million annually to keep open, which specifically makes it **not** an economic benefit.

- Convention Center/ Medical Mart Project Manager Jeff Appelbaum of Thompson Hine claimed that the cost of the Medical Mart was only 12% of the project's \$465 million cost when it was at least 55% of the total, if not more.

Lakefront: The city has not capitalized on its lakefront, which is cluttered with water treatment, salt storage, shipping, sports and a tiny under-performing airport instead of recreational, upscale housing and entertainment occupancies that celebrate the lake and enable citizens to appreciate it. At long last, the wheels are turning slowly, although in an example of the small vision of the community's leaders, our latest Lakefront Master Plan concerns itself only with the 1200 feet in front of the doomed lakefront stadium.

Medical Mart/ Convention Center: One of our most dramatic and recent shameful examples of abject ineptitude involves the expenditure of nearly a billion dollars on an albatross project that was funded by taxpayer money without any vote that was never vetted by attorneys or leaders who were paid millions to do just that. The project failed repeatedly, only to have our folks throw another \$50 million to add more meeting rooms because our so-called out-of-town expert architects apparently missed the boat by a mile in projecting our needs in the first place.

Education: The region's colleges and universities are sub-standard with a few notable exceptions (CWRU, Oberlin, John Carroll), and enrollment in the area's community colleges is down 43%-48% compared with the 7%-10% decreases at the nation's community college student bodies.

Cleveland State University is a mediocre university with an official enrollment of 13,000 down from 17,260 a few years ago. According to *US News and World Reports*, CSU is ranked #331

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Introduction



out of the 440 universities ranked nationally - the bottom quartile. CSU's FY 2022 revenue was \$317 million, and the university has an endowment of \$90 million. CSU claims a regional economic impact of \$897 million per year. That may have come from the Lie Machine.

Crime: Cleveland is the 6th worst city in US for crime. The US Justice Dept. has cited Cleveland for "Excessive force, poor & dangerous tactics." The Consent Decree has required retraining for the force which the city has botched and the union has now refused to submit to the training demanded by Justice Department to become responsive to the community.

Jobs: The recent Forbes' *Best Cities for Jobs* listing ranked Cleveland 71st out of America's 71 most populous cities.

The Economic Innovation Group, a bipartisan public policy organization based in Washington, D.C., recently called Cleveland the most distressed large city in the nation. *Business Insider* ranked Cleveland's metropolitan economy last out of 40 major markets.

CLE's Regional Economic Competitiveness Council set a goal of only 0.5% annually for 2015 - 2019, which amounted to 2,000 jobs/ year. Results? CLE grew by only **1,700 jobs over the last four years, or only 425 jobs per year!**

Columbus set a goal of 15,000 jobs/year – 750% more than Cleveland, and they reached their goal **two years early**. The US Census showed CLE lost jobs between '15 and '17 and 0.2% over a longer period.

Ben Armstrong, executive director of the Industrial Performance Center at MIT observes that cities with a state capitol – like Columbus, usually have large public universities and are more diverse and resilient in the face of economic changes. Cleveland's idea of economic development strategy has been to "take the city's strong manufacturing industrial economy and bring them back to the 21st century, and that didn't work."

Ed Hill and Fran Stewart, writer and senior fellow at the Ohio Manufacturing Institute interviewed political and business leaders

in Central and Northeast Ohio. They found that the Cleveland region has witnessed many high-wage manufacturing businesses fail, followed by lower-wage replacements. One political observer they interviewed commented, "Is there anything that will be the mass employer and the gateway to the middle class that manufacturing once was? I don't see it."

Cleveland, Ohio, is among those cities, ranking third among the neediest cities in the U.S., according to a report from *WalletHub*. Cleveland ranks behind only Brownsville, Texas, at second and Detroit, Michigan, which topped the list of neediest cities.

The *WalletHub* report compared 182 U.S. cities based on two key categories comprised of a number of metrics: Economic well-being, such as child poverty rate, adult poverty rate, unemployment rate, homelessness rate, median credit score and more; and health & safety, including food insecurity rate, share of residents without health insurance coverage, crime rate and more.

By category, Cleveland ranked fourth lowest in economic well-being and 10th-lowest in health and safety. By individual metric, Cleveland ranked third worst among U.S. cities in both child poverty and adult poverty.

Cincinnati has a city government of only at-large representatives. Unlike Cleveland's ward system where council representatives are advocates primarily for their ward's territory and compete with one another for block grant funds and city services, Cincinnati's representatives are focused on the city as a whole in managing resources for the well-being of the city - as a whole, eliminating the wheeling and dealing with other representatives for support of their ward's narrow interests.

In June 2018, Jon Pinney, managing partner at the Korhman Jackson & Krantz law firm went public with his stinging critique of area leaders who have not performed and called on them to get out of the way for the next generation of leaders. Pinney pointed to the leadership community's focus on glitter over substance, noting PR claims from the 2016 RNC while economic growth stalled.

Pinney observed that Cleveland continues to fall further behind

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Introduction



Columbus Ranks No. 1 in the U.S. for Growth and Infrastructure

Site Selection's Global Groundwork Index Puts Columbus Metro at the Top for the First Time

September 2, 2025



in its economic health due to stagnant and absent leadership. If we are unable to generate new jobs, our population will continue its decline and the many new multi-family housing developments that take our eye off the ball will fail for lack of occupants.

In October 2019, Pinney observed that the region continues to lag behind. **Our population loss is the second highest in the country.** Pinney spoke at a Blockchain event and pointed out that while there are good things happening in Northeast Ohio, the region still struggles to create jobs, especially in technology and innovation sectors. We have a hard time attracting and keeping our young talent.

Pinney's 2018 speech titled, "Dead Last: Northeast Ohio's Economy is Lagging and It's Time to Do Something About It," called out eight people, whom he deemed important and effective leaders, to step up, speak out and lead a realignment of groups and set new priorities. All of them were white men - which caused a backlash.

Pinney continues to point out that no one thinks Cleveland is generating enough new jobs, particularly in technology and innovation. He ties that trend to the brain drain, the phenomenon of young Cleveland natives leaving for opportunities elsewhere. "If we don't find ways and strategies and incentives to keep our smartest minds here, our entrepreneurs and innovators, to not only fill open positions, but to create new companies," Pinney said. "This region is going to continue to struggle." And our design culture will continue its deterioration.

In the 8-24-20 *Crain's* issue, local economist and market researcher James M. Trutko backstopped Pinney by stating that the area's leaders "must step up and rebuild the service sector." Trutko noted that from February to June in 2020, Metro Cleveland non-farm employment dropped by a whopping 102,300 jobs, or 10% of the workforce, wiping out the 88,000 jobs gained from 2010 to 2019. Trutko noted that these losses disproportionately have clobbered the service sector, which accounts for over 70% of our economy. Metro Cleveland's private service industry employment fell by 87,700 jobs (-12%) while the goods-producing sector lost 800

jobs (-1%).

As of 2019, Metro Cleveland had 54,400 businesses, only 600 more than 2010, which is why the surveys Pinney quotes show Cleveland dead last in economic progress and job growth. Approximately 46,500 (86%) of those businesses are service providers with an average of 15 employees per business.

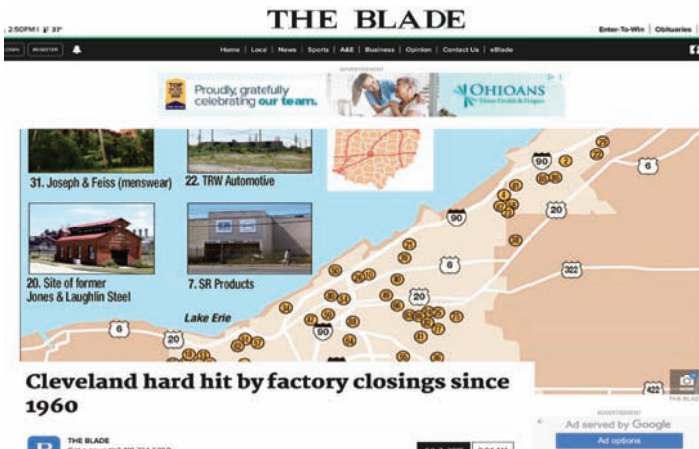
Trutko called on "political and community leaders (we don't have any) in Metro Cleveland ... to set the proper tone and take steps to reassure business owners that a safe, profitable business environment exists for service industries.... Which often depend on close face-to-face interaction ... for their transactions. Service industries are also clustered geographically within cities and derive a part of their appeal from the crowds they attract. Some of these factors have suffered great damage as result of the pandemic and protests."

- Area executives surveyed by *Crain's* Jay Miller agreed with Pinney. More than a few ticked off the names, consistently the same names, of people who have been in jobs leading organizations whose mission includes working to improve the regional economy for a dozen years or more: David Abbott, executive director of the Gund Foundation; Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson; Ray Leach, CEO of JumpStart Inc., the entrepreneur support nonprofit; Ronn Richard, president and CEO of the Cleveland Foundation; Joe Roman, CEO of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, the regional chamber of commerce; Barbara Snyder, president of Case Western Reserve University; and Brad Whitehead, president of the Fund for Our Economic Future, a coalition of philanthropies.

- "There's a vacuum. We're not grooming the next generation of leaders," said one early 50's business executive who has made a commitment to civic engagement. "The model needs to change for our city to move forward."

- As Miller noted in his June 2018 article, those who see the region as underperforming pointed to a few basic yardsticks, including the poverty rate and the lack of population growth. But most focused on the slow job growth that is underperforming to the

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Introduction



Report finds Cleveland lags in job recovery, state pay is too low

KIM PALMER



modest goals set in 2014.

- GCP's Baiju Shah, who has a background in consulting and led the bioscience-focused nonprofit BioEnterprise for years, described a local culture in which leaders and organizations are so focused on pleasing funders, boards and partners that the result is milque-toast rather than motivating. Shah is now President and CEO of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, who himself has been guilty of spinning bullshit.
- Currently, 54% of downtown stores are shuttered because unlike in 2019, when 90,800 people came downtown to work, today it is under 50,000, a 45% drop. And those people are not coming downtown every day.
- Retired Shaker Heights teacher Paul Springstubb in the August 2019 *Plain Dealer* nailed the Cleveland Foundation for distributing only 5% of its assets yearly. In actual fact, CF's 2017 distribution was only 4.0%. A *Cleveland magazine* piece in 2022 confirmed CF's distribution in 2021 was even less - only 3.8%.
- Springstubb identified that of the 19 foundations tracked by the Foundation Center with over one billion dollars in assets, CF placed 17th out of 19. The survey indicated that **the median distribution of all 19 foundations was 11%, nearly triple CF's distribution.** Springstubb also identified that all foundations in Ohio had distribution rates higher than CF. The Columbus Foundation whose assets are nearly identical to CF's has a distribution rate of 11%, 275% that of the Cleveland Foundation, and their issues are far less significant than Cleveland's.

Philanthropy consultant Bill Somerville, author of *Grassroots Philanthropy*, observes, "The justification of philanthropic sacrifice lies in the needs that surround us – the pain, suffering and injustice that can be denied only by those who shut their eyes against it." Springstubb pointed out that Cleveland's child poverty rate of 48.7% "is the worst of any large US city."

- Metro Columbus has nearly doubled in population since 1970, while metro Cleveland's population has dropped about 200,000.

Now, the two metro areas are close to the same size, though adding in metro Akron still makes this region larger.

- The Cleveland and Akron metro areas combined have lost 68,700 jobs over the past 25 years, while the Columbus metro area has gained 213,900 jobs, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show.
- A report this year from the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland concluded that Cleveland and Akron were among the worst metros in job recovery since the pandemic. The report noted a fourth-worst in the nation 1% slip in jobs for the Cleveland area and a 0.7% drop in metro Akron from February 2020 through March 2024. At the same time, jobs were up by 3.7% in the Columbus area and 2.3% in the Cincinnati area.
- JobsOhio, the state's workforce development arm, since the start of 2024 has announced in monthly reports grants and loans promising at least 1,407 jobs and \$617 million in investments for Franklin County versus 979 jobs and \$188 million in investments for Cuyahoga County.
- While Baiju R. Shah, president and CEO of Greater Cleveland Partnership, which describes itself as the region's leading economic development organization, said he was in on the recent meetings that Governor DeWine referenced, he declined to comment on whether Cleveland-area business leaders and organizations are doing enough to attract new business to the area: "It's not our scope, so I don't feel comfortable when it's beyond our scope." Then how do you dare to label yourself as the region's primary economic development organization?

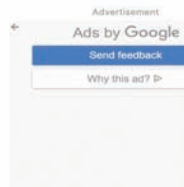
Shah deferred questions to Team NEO, where former state legislator Matt Dolan took over as CEO in February. Team NEO is the area's regional partner to the state's economic development corporation, JobsOhio. It serves 14 counties, from Lake to Erie and south to below Canton.

"Columbus and Central Ohio's success is not our failure," Dolan said. "We have to focus on uniforming our economic develop-

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Introduction

Business and income growing, but jobs stagnant: GCP report compares Cleveland to peer cities

Updated: Feb. 13, 2024, 3:28 p.m. | Published: Feb. 13, 2024, 8:31 a.m.



ment message and work on the three things that matter." Yes, Matt, it is. We are all competing for jobs and comparing Cleveland's failures to our neighbors speak volumes. Dolan identified those three keys as helping existing companies grow, securing sites that potentially attract new companies and making sure the area has a workforce to fill employer needs.

In a statement of the obvious, the region's business leadership has not been doing enough, said Mark Rantala, a consultant who formerly led the Lake County port authority, now known as the Lake Development Authority.

"We have too many groups trying to take claim for development," he said. "Team NEO competes with the Greater Cleveland Partnership. Then there is the city of Cleveland. Cuyahoga County. In Lake County we had the port authority. Every time I tried to engage, I fought with the Greater Cleveland Partnership about everyone stepping on each other."

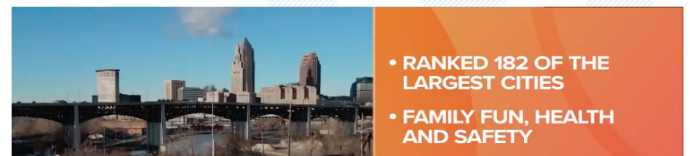
During a mid-February Cleveland City Council committee meeting, the topic of the Browns' possible move to Brook Park revealed tensions between the city and both the Greater Cleveland Partnership and Team NEO.

Councilman Brian Kazy said the Greater Cleveland Partnership is "more worried about the G than they are the C." Councilman Kerry McCormack said, "I think Team NEO has failed us over the years." And Mayor Justin Bibb said Team NEO needs to prioritize Cleve-

CLEVELAND

Cleveland is the worst city in America to raise a family, new WalletHub study reveals

WalletHub's data revealed that among the 182 largest cities in America, Cleveland is the worst city to raise a family.



Poorest Large Cities in the United States

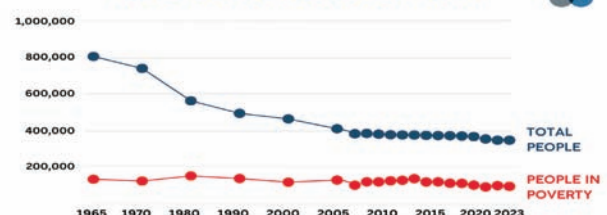
Overall Poverty Rate, 2019		
Rank	City	Rate
1	Cleveland, Ohio	30.8%
2	Detroit, Michigan	30.6%
3	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	23.3%
4	New Orleans, Louisiana	23.2%
5	Fresno, California	23.2%
6	Cincinnati, Ohio	23.1%
7	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	22.4%

Cleveland tops list of most miserable U.S. cities

Forbes: Cleveland takes the top spot in our third annual ranking of America's Most Miserable Cities. Cleveland won the position thanks partly to its high unemployment and lousy weather.



CLEVELAND POPULATION



Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall

It could easily be argued that Cleveland City Hall began failing the city when Ralph Locher was mayor - or Ralph Perk, or Dennis Kucinich. And then there are Frank Jackson's four terms of nothing. But recently, Cleveland City Hall and Mayor Bibb have gotten a few hits in their efforts to stabilize Cleveland and even bring it back, but they have also swung and missed badly of late.

Base Hit: Keep the Browns Downtown:

Mayor Justin Bibb fought hard but fair in endeavoring to keep the Browns in downtown Cleveland.

Base Hit: Close Burke Lakefront Airport:

The only real positive development to take place in the 16 years Frank Jackson was Mayor of Cleveland was in Jackson's last term, when discussions were finally held about the evaporated value of Burke Lakefront Airport (BLA) and the benefits of closing it for other uses.

This set the table for Mayor Justin Bibb to have responsible studies done to assess the merits and liabilities of maintaining vs. closing BLA. This gave Bibb sufficient political capital along with BLA's drastic falloff in usage to open the conversation with the public who support BLA's closing. Bibb and County Executive Chris Ronayne have together pushed the FAA for a timely closure of the airport. The cost to repay an FAA grant evens out the \$1million the city loses annually keeping Burke open.

Strike One: The Failure of Cleveland's Police Consent Decree:

The Cleveland Police have been out of control for quite some time. It got so bad that the US Justice Department had to come in and conduct a 21-month investigation. What they found was deplorable. They issued a 400-paragraph report that was essentially an indictment of the department and our personnel. And they required the city to enter into a Consent Decree to effect changes to remedy the situation. That was eleven years ago.

One of Cleveland's Greatest Shames is that City Hall, the Cleveland Division of Police and the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association have failed to successfully achieve compliance with the US Justice department's Consent Decree of 2015.

And in 2024, the Cleveland police union voted to refuse to comply with the Consent Decree's requirements for training on community policing!

And now Mayor Bibb has pushed to simply end the consent decree with five of its eight obligations unfulfilled. When a judge rejected the proposal, the city's law director accused the Community Police Commission of acting without proper authority and threatened the members with discipline. The Commission's attorneys pushed back, fairly characterizing the law director's actions as



an attempt to silence the Commission.

Context:

Living in Cleveland has meant that most citizens have to view the police as an adversarial mercenary force that too often endeavors to function as judge, jury and executioner. And it is not just the audacious injustice of the murders of Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams. This was tragically compounded by the subsequent acquittal of policeman Michael Brelo who jumped on the hood of Russell's car and emptied three clips – 49 shots (above right) – into the two unarmed victims thanks to Judge John P. O'Donnell.

O'Donnell somehow managed to reason that Brelo was entitled to feel fear from Russell and Williams because words over the police radio during pursuit falsely alleged that the couple had a weapon. Whatever Brelo was feeling when he jumped onto the hood of Russell's car – a violation of CPD policy – it was most certainly not fear. If he thought for one second that the two had a gun and was afraid, he would not have jumped on the hood of the car.

Judge John P. O'Donnell also said prosecutors failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that bullets fired by Brelo were the cause of death of Malissa Williams and Timothy Russell, or that Brelo had no fear for his own life during the volley of gunfire that ended a high-speed car chase on 29 November 2012. In other words, because the police fired so many shots at the couple – 137! – that made it impossible to conclusively determine which shots that killed the couple came from who, so no one could be convicted of killing the two. Thankfully, O'Donnell's term on the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court ended in 2025.

After the shooting, the US Department of Justice conducted a sweeping investigation into the Cleveland police department. Their investigation found Cleveland police officers frequently used excessive force, including shootings and head strikes with impact weapons; unnecessary, excessive, and retaliatory force, including Tasers, chemical sprays, and their fists; and excessive force against people with mental illness or in crisis, including one situation in

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall

Police pushed, cuffed Tamir Rice's sister after boy's shooting, video shows



In this edited version of a video released by the city of Cleveland, the sister of 12-year-old Tamir Rice is pushed to the ground, handcuffed and placed in the backseat of a patrol car after Tamir was fatally shot by an officer.

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Cleveland's police consent decree could end, and critics are furious

Updated: Feb. 20, 2026, 4:40 p.m. | Published: Feb. 20, 2026, 4:27 p.m.



which officers were called exclusively to check up on someone's well-being.

Police officers also used "poor and dangerous tactics" that often put them "in situations where avoidable force becomes inevitable and places officers and civilians at unnecessary risk," according to the report. The Justice Department attributed many of these problems to inadequate training and supervision. "Supervisors tolerate this behavior and, in some cases, endorse it," the report said. "Officers report that they receive little supervision, guidance, and support from the Division, essentially leaving them to determine for themselves how to perform their difficult and dangerous jobs."

Subsequent news reports consistently indicate that the CPD has failed to satisfy the Justice Department on the required reforms and training. What a surprise. The report requires the CPD to rehabilitate their culture and behaviors. The efforts over 11 years have been unsatisfactory.

Mayor Jackson did nothing. No surprise. Mayor Bibb has also done nothing apparent to address this except to brag about giving his police force a 25% raise!

And now Mayor Bibb and Trump's U. S. Justice Department have filed a motion to bring the unfulfilled consent decree to an end despite its numerous failures.

In 2015, the city agreed to make sweeping changes following a damning investigation that found officers too often used force against residents improperly — and that the department did not have the needed training and policies in place to keep officers in line.

Mayor Justin Bibb supported additional police oversight when he first ran for office in 2021. During this first term, he also led the charge to increase officer pay, which was among the lowest in the state. The consent decree has cost taxpayers more than \$40 million, and reform proponents worry that ending it prematurely could result in "backsliding." That is partly because the city's Community Police Commission (CPC) currently has only one employee.

"We may have the structure," Bell Hardaway said, "but we don't

have the actual workings — personnel, resources, tested processes — to ensure those oversight mechanisms are functioning to the standard required."

The NAACP Cleveland Branch released a statement urging city leaders to reconsider. **"We are concerned about ending federal oversight while critical reforms remain incomplete,"** the organization said. "Residents report they have not yet experienced meaningful change in their daily interactions with law enforcement."

The CPC echoed similar concerns, noting that Cleveland has previously exited a consent decree only to reenter one year later. "We cannot afford to repeat that history," the commission said in a statement. "Police oversight should ultimately be handled here by the people who live and work in this city — but only when we are fully prepared, have proven we can sustain the reforms, and have confidence that a new system will work."

The commission, approved by voters under Issue 24 in November 2021, was designed to create a 13-member commission of civilians to oversee police discipline and misconduct. Jan Ridgeway, who left her position on the commission before her term ended, said she has serious doubts about whether Cleveland is prepared to exit the consent decree that has governed the department for years.

Ridgeway's skepticism stems from her experience on the commission, which she described as ineffective. During her two-year tenure, the commission failed to address a single police reform policy, she said. **"We never dealt with one case the two years I was on the commission, not one,"** Ridgeway said. **"And that was on us. We didn't do anything."**

Ridgeway said she would support ending the consent decree only if an objective evaluation of police policies and practices had been completed. She believes no such comprehensive review has taken place and she questions the reliability of progress reports issued by the police department. "I would be more inclined to agree to the release from the consent decree provided an objective, neutral assessment had been done... And I don't

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall



think that's been done," she said.

City officials have frequently complained about the financial burden of federal oversight for marginal or no results. Critics acknowledge the cost but are quick to point out that the cost of future lawsuits and settlements stemming from unconstitutional policing could easily outweigh monitoring expenses.

Longtime Cleveland advocate Mariah Crenshaw believes ending the consent decree would lead to regression and a return to unconstitutional policing patterns that led to high-profile deaths, including those of Tamir Rice, Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams. Rice, a 12-year-old Black child, was famously killed by a Cleveland cop in 2014. Russell and Williams, both also Black, were killed in 2012 after a notorious police chase ended in officers shooting the unarmed duo 137 times.

Without federal oversight, no internal or local mechanisms are strong enough to prevent the department from reverting to past practices, Crenshaw said. "Community policing strategies such as officers walking beats and officer engagement are not happening," Crenshaw said.

While Bell Hardaway said Cleveland leaders may have long wanted to end the decree, she questioned whether the present posture of the DOJ made the filing more feasible now than under prior administrations. "The consent decree wasn't just about fixing one issue," she said. "It was about rebuilding systems to ensure constitutional, accountable policing for the long term. That work, by the city's own filing, appears incomplete."

Bibb acknowledges that the work required by the consent decree is unfinished and that many of the 2015 goals are still undone. "In no way are we declaring mission accomplished," Bibb told reporters. But Cleveland has not shown adequate progress on bias-free policing, community engagement or supervision. Bibb told cleveland.com in January that Cleveland had completed about 70% of the goals in the consent decree, saying at the time he wanted to get close to 100% to encourage Judge Oliver to rule in the city's favor.

Cleveland Mayor joins Trump DOJ to end decade-long consent decree with goals unmet

Updated: Feb. 19, 2026, 5:00 p.m. | Published: Feb. 19, 2026, 9:48 a.m.



Subodh Chandra, a former city law director and a civil rights attorney who represented Tamir Rice's family, called Bibb's move to end the consent decree "a betrayal." He wrote an open letter to current Law Director Mark Griffin pleading with him to withdraw Cleveland's motion.

Chandra points to a voluntary agreement Cleveland reached with the DOJ from 2002 to 2004. He argues it was too short, saying the reforms the city made then were later undone, something he said was noted by the DOJ when it investigated Tamir Rice's death.

"Cleveland's hard-lived experience teaches that unless the police division is under supervision for a generation, it will backslide," Chandra wrote in an open letter. "It happened the last time there was a short-term consent decree. It will happen again."

Asked if Cleveland is ready for the consent decree to end, Councilwoman Stephanie Howse-Jones said to look at "the scorecard." (above left) She pointed to multiple areas where consent decree goals were unfinished.

"In 10 years, is that what good progress looks like?" Howse-Jones asked. Howse-Jones said the real question is whether residents, especially Black men who are often on the wrong side of improper policing, feel safe and protected. She said Trump's DOJ approving Cleveland's incomplete reforms does not make residents feel confident.

Ayesha Bell Hardaway, a law professor at Case Western Reserve University and former federal monitor of the Cleveland police consent decree, argues that while progress has been made, **the city has not yet demonstrated the comprehensive, sustained reform required to exit court supervision.** "This consent decree requires far more than positive use-of-force numbers," Bell Hardaway said. "It was designed to fix structural problems that led to unconstitutional policing in the first place."

Overall use-of-force incidents increased in 2024, particularly those involving violence toward officers and obstruction of justice. Injuries to members of the public also rose compared to the previous year.

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall

I-TEAM

Cleveland mayor spent \$50K on trip to conference: I-Team

by: Ed Gallek, Peggy Gallek
Posted: Feb 23, 2026 / 07:08 PM EST
Updated: Feb 23, 2026 / 07:22 PM EST

SHARE     

CLEVELAND (WJW) – The **FOX 8 I-Team** has found the mayor of Cleveland spent more than \$50,000 of your tax money while taking police with him for protection on one trip.

Last August, Mayor Justin Bibb took two Cleveland police officers with him to an economic forum in Martha's Vineyard, a luxury vacation spot with breathtaking views. A New England hotspot known as a getaway for the rich and famous.

Until now, city hall has refused to tell the I-Team what it cost.

Now, we see the total. Records show expenses for the mayor and two police officers over six days



“Three out of eight is not passing:”

Bell Hardaway said the city's motion highlights progress in only three of the decree's eight major reform areas: search and seizure, use of force and crisis intervention. In total, the eight reform areas include 18 subparts. “If we look at this simply through use-of-force compliance, then we've missed the point about why the consent decree was necessary,” she said. “Three out of eight is not passing.”

“It is the monitor's job to evaluate progress across all areas of the consent decree — not just the three the city selected,” she said, adding that she expects the monitor to present a comprehensive assessment in court.

Bibb's effort to escape the consent decree represents an abdication of his obligations to Cleveland's citizens was rejected by a Federal judge on May 11.

Strike Two: Bibb's Travel Expenses:

The FOX 8 I-Team has found the mayor of Cleveland spent more than \$85,000 of the city's tax money while taking police with him for protection on one trip. Last August, Mayor Justin Bibb took two Cleveland police officers with him to an economic forum in Martha's Vineyard (above right), a luxury vacation spot with breathtaking views, known as a getaway for the rich and famous. And Bibb refused to provide the information on the trip for six months until FOX News sued to get it.

Records show expenses for the mayor and two police officers over six days totaled \$50,825.62. But that does not include the cost of the two policemen whose salaries and related costs – another \$35k – are buried in the police department's budget.

The staggering bill for taxpayers started to come to light at a city council budget hearing. Councilman Brian Kazy asked about \$35,000 just for the mayor's security. “Who OK'd or thought that it was OK for the mayor to take two police officers to Martha's Vineyard for a week and charge the city \$35,000 for their overtime

or their detail?” he asked the Cleveland police chief. “We have a policy in place, the executive protection detail,” Chief Dorothy Todd responded.

“Why do we feel the need to take police officers to travel with the mayor? (He's) not the president,” Kazy also asked. “We do evaluate the risk and where the location is where he is traveling to. I know that not all travel is two members. Sometimes it's just one of them,” the chief said. That was supposed to make us feel better.

“It's problematic for sure, and it's wasteful spending of taxpayers dollars,” said local activist Cassandra McDonald, who works as a law and policy analyst. She wondered why the mayor needed two officers in Martha's Vineyard, and why the city held back records. “It is a lack of accountability. A lack of transparency. When you look at security, when you're going to Martha's Vineyard, what is the threat assessment that requires \$35,000 in security?” she added.

Instead of making Mayor Bibb available to the media to answer questions about the irresponsible cost of this trip, Spokesman Tyler Sinclair issued a statement, saying: “The Mayor's previous travels to attract investment in Cleveland has directly resulted in an influx of \$130 million towards lakefront development. This specific trip, in which he met with Black leaders from multi-billion dollar companies, has positioned the City for even more investment – potentially another multi-million dollar grant. Simply stated – if the Mayor does not take these trips and develop these necessary relationships, the City does not receive these extraordinary investments.”

FOX has asked for details on the \$130 million city officials said they got for the lakefront development, including what trip the mayor took that resulted in that money being given to Cleveland. Substantiation of that claim has still not yet appeared. McDonald said the city needs new rules and guidelines around travel. “It's not like he's the president,” Kazy continued. “It's not like people know who he is. It's not like he's got some rockstar fanbase. It's overkill.”

Shame on Bibb for showing such poor judgment on every aspect of this trip. And for trying to hide the trip and its outrageous cost.

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall



Strike Three: The Pitiful Hopkins Airport Replacement Design:

It appears that Mayor Bibb has completely blown the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a dramatic, dynamic, welcoming and appropriate front door to Cleveland with the atrocious design approved for the replacement of Cleveland Hopkins Airport.

When every city in the world – regardless of size – is creating truly exemplary and dazzling facilities for their own residents and their visitors with soft, organic forms, lush daylight, welcoming hearth spaces, abundant amenities, top tier retail and food and beverage alternatives, Cleveland is instead planning to deliver a boring glass box with little scallops in the roof. It does not even bother to shelter curbside drop-offs or pickups with entry canopies that extend out to and over at least the curb lane of the road. The design includes **no** hearth space and **no** mention of substantive amenities that all other airports are delivering. The apparent reasons for this are:

1. **Inept architectural talent** lacking a capability and commitment to deliver design excellence;
2. **An inept project management team** from the City of Cleveland unable to demand more and recognize glaring deficiencies in functionality when compared to the prevailing design standards in the industry;
3. **An inept Design Review Committee** lacking in design expertise to demand excellence from the city's architects.

Cleveland's airport team overseeing the Hopkins replacement includes:

- a. Bryant Francis, Director of Port Control
- b. Henrietta Brown, Assistant Director of Administration
- c. Scott Carr, Assistant Director for Commercial Business and Revenue
- d. Megan O'Connell, Assistant Director for Marketing, Communications and Guest Experience

- e. Frank Williams, Assistant Director for Airport Operations and Public Safety
- f. Dennis Kramer, Assistant Director for Airport Development
- g. Christine Gilmartin, Assistant Director for Finance and Procurement

There is nothing in the resumes of this cast that suggest they have **any** awareness of current airport design standards of what constitutes architectural excellence. But one would have thought that Williams in his responsibly for airport operations and public safety would have at least demanded the safety of covered drop-off and pickup zones with our climate conditions.

Cleveland's airport design team includes:

- Airport: Corgan Architects, Dallas
- Parking & Public Transportation Structure: CLE Connection Group, which includes Pickard Chilton Architects, interior design from Vocon, Orborne Engineering, Desman Parking Consultants, Gilbane Building, Donley's Next Generation Construction

The failure of this project will dog Bibb, his record and his memory for the rest of his life – and beyond.

Our Foundation has previously written about the lousy design the Bibb administration has approved for the replacement of Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. This project is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to recast and elevate the image of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.

In May 2025, Cleveland Hopkins Airport announced and released its proposed renovation of Hopkins Airport, which is not a renovation at all – it is a complete replacement!

And the design presented for that complete replacement is totally lacking in design integrity and requires a complete re-conceptualization if it is to position Cleveland as a destination of substance and delight, worthy of coming to via the air, like the any of the new terminals at O'Hare in Chicago, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Tampa, Newark, San Francisco, Seattle, Orlando, Portland, Char-

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall



lotte, or New York's LaGuardia or JFK International.

Project Overview:

While the official announcement stated that the project's cost would be \$1.1 billion, the architect's web site reports that it is actually a \$3 billion project. The stated objectives are "transforming the airport's infrastructure, enhancing passenger facilities, and boosting long-term economic growth for the region."

That does not go anywhere near far enough and is yet another shining example of the lack of vision of our so-called leaders.

What is unstated is that the meaning of a 'transformative' project is the opportunity to redefine the region's identity into something distinctive, memorable and high in quality and excitement. Officials are referring to the project as TMDP - Terminal Modernization Development Program, a two-decade block puzzle that involves the demolition of massive existing elements that began with the demolition of the nine-story Airport Sheraton Hotel in late 2024.

The City hired RS&H of Dallas in 2019 for \$4.5 million to create a Master Plan for Hopkins that now instead has AECOM on board as Master Planner. At the time the planning began, then-Mayor Frank Jackson defined the objective was to "ensure that Cleveland Hopkins International Airport's remains competitive in the industry and continues to grow in the number of flight options offered and passengers it serves. This Master Plan process will identify investments that will make Hopkins a more modern, user-friendly airport to attract business flyers as well as leisure travelers."

That did not go far enough, but then Jackson was never credited for having any vision.

The Players:

At the end of 2024, the city's Department of Port Control that manages Hopkins and Burke Lakefront Airports hired the Paslay Group of Fort Worth, TX to provide executive program management services to deliver the city's TMDP for Hopkins Airport. *NEOtrans* has reported that Paslay is partnered with Corgan, a nationally recognized architecture and design firm, and Connico, which specializes



in cost estimating, scheduling and phasing for airports across the US.

The airport planning team also includes Cleveland-based firms Robert P. Madison International and Van Auken Akins Architects, since renamed DVA Architecture, to provide additional design services. Both local firms are often attached to public works projects for being minority-owned firms, not because of their expertise or a commitment to or a capability for design excellence.

Corgan is the No. 2 firm in the US when looking only at annual fees for airport-related design services with annual revenues in that market sector of \$161 million, behind Gensler who takes in \$214 million. Corgan is responsible for the Terminal C at LaGuardia Airport, JFK JetBlue Terminal 6, Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport Terminal C South Concourse (with Smith Group for design), Montrose (Colorado) Regional Airport Master Plan, LAX 15-Gate West Concourse (with Gensler for design) and Nashville's Airport Arrival Facility.

It would not be accurate to characterize Corgan as a firm known for design excellence, and their design for Hopkins makes that regrettably clear.

At Mayor Bibb's press briefing, the design was described; "This design is a symbol of fluidity," Port Control Director Francis said. "It's a structure that dances with sunlight gliding through glass and steel to create a sense of calm and movement for travelers." That is what is known as Design BS.

In actual fact, the design is an ungraceful assembly of orthogonal planes in both plan and section that has no fluidity to it at all. "*Dancing sunlight gliding through glass and steel?*" One only has to throw up a glass wall to achieve that. Is that the height of Cleveland's aspirations for this project? Is that all your Port Director could proclaim that the design achieves? That is pathetic. That is just BS to try and take your eye off the fact that there is not a wonderful hearth space(s), no significant amenities – at all?! - or quality materials at work here.

The Corgan terminal is a tall rectangular metal shed with no creativ-

Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall



Above: Portland Int'l Airport; ZGF Architects



Above: Chicago Int'l Terminal at O'Hare; Studio Gang, Studio ORD

ity and seven slits in the roof for a bit more daylight. A sophomore architecture student would be given a D grade for this. And our client team does not have the intellectual or aesthetic acumen to recognize this, dramatically demonstrating the continued deterioration of our community's architectural design culture.

Design Standards for Airports:

The design of airports around the world has been elevated in the past two decades which now are providing welcoming, exuberant places for passengers that are hospitality-driven with daylight, live plant materials throughout, excellent lighting and quality finishes and are filled with multiple amenities to allow patrons to pleasantly pass their wait times in comfort (above). The best airports also have substantial 'hearth' spaces, many with water and daylight that are terrific places to sit, wait, watch people, relax with a beverage and pass the time in a pleasant manner.

The design for the replacement of Cleveland Hopkins Airport provides **none** of those attributes despite its multi-billion dollar price tag. Why not? There're two principle reasons:

Lack of Design Consciousness:

The city lacks a commitment to design excellence that is painfully evident from major projects implements in recent decades - the Medical Mart/ Convention Center, Downtown Hilton Hotel, Rocket Arena Renovation, The Beacon, Lumen Tower, Skyline 776 (City Club Apartments), Sherwin-Williams HQ, Rock-N-Roll HOF Expansion, Museum of Contemporary Art, Ten60 Bolivar, Cleveland Clinic Peak Performance Center, Cleveland Clinic Neurological Institute, etc. - and its weak Design Review Committees and Planning Commission routinely rubber stamp mediocre design as the list indicates.

Maryland architecture professor Ryan Scavnicky who hails from Cleveland critiqued the proposed move of the Browns stadium to Brook Park as one that severs that historical connection between the Browns and downtown in favor of a sterile, suburban stadium that he compares to "a suburban Wal-Mart in a gaming PC cos-

tume."

He critiques the Browns' design by HKS Architects as lacking any distinctive identity or consideration of Cleveland's cultural or geographic context. Other than the roof scallops at Corgan's Hopkins design, the same is true for the latest mediocre architecture proposal to be dumped on Cleveland - at a very high cost!.

Cleveland's public officials and NGO executives today uniformly lack a baseline appreciation for architectural excellence to form even a fundamental awareness of what constitutes good design so they can contribute to an assessment and evaluation of design quality on important projects. Unlike their predecessors a century ago, they have not traveled to Europe or other locations of architectural significance to experience Architecture with a capital "A" to develop at least a basic awareness of architectural design excellence.

In presenting the design to the public in early May, Mayor Bibb claimed, "As Mayor, I am fully committed to advocating for the transformation of this vital asset. I stand proudly behind the Airport team's efforts to deliver a modern, welcoming experience that reflects the innovation, pride, and momentum of our city. Cleveland deserves, and will have, a world-class airport."

The design presented is not remotely 'innovative' and it is most definitely not 'world class' - it is a classic case of the Emperor's Clothes - which is precisely why it needs to be completely reimaged.

At the time industrial Cleveland was a hub for European immigration, it was natural for Cleveland's leaders to travel to Europe for politics, business, and cultural enrichment. Many made Europe the focus of their travel to experience high quality fine art and architecture. From 1876 to 1919, the number of art museums in the US tripled. Just as many of our citizens traveled to Europe to acquire fine art, they returned also with an understanding and appreciation for the architectural excellence they experienced abroad.

Hinman Hurlbut and his wife Elizabeth made repeated trips to Europe and left a collection and \$1.2 million (1916 dollars) to the Cleveland Museum of Art. Henry Ranney spent four summers in

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Europe visiting museums to contribute to his rendering informed judgment on the design of the CMA and assembling his personal art collection. Horace Kelley and Judge James Jones were similarly motivated.

They then put this knowledge to use in their selection of architects for important Cleveland projects, which most often focused on local talent. Despite the lack of experience with many of the building types, Cleveland architects rose to the occasion and consistently delivered exemplary results time and time again.

The result of the efforts of the community's elites to educate themselves to be able to effectively participate in the selection of competent architects for important buildings produced a "Golden Age" for Cleveland architecture.

Lack of Adequate Talent from Design Team:

Top tier design talent has been sought out by most modern airport owners who were serious about their project and sought to capitalize on the opportunity to elevate the stature of their community to the public. **That has not happened in Cleveland.**

The consensus architects of the best airports consistently that are recognized for their design excellence includes Moshe Safdie, HOK, Gensler, Grimshaw, Zaha Hadid, SOM, Renzo Piano and Sir Norman Foster. These firms have a depth of quality, talented personnel and a commitment to design excellence that simply distinguishes them from the 'building standard' architects that are typical to the industry and have been retained here and tasked to design Cleveland's replacement airport. In this context, Corgan has to be accurately characterized as a 'building standard' airport architect.

Just as Dick Jacobs did when the first design for the Galleria at Erieview was produced, he realized his project's success required a higher standard of architectural excellence so he engaged design guru Pietro Belluschi from Detroit to re-imagine and refine the project to produce the pleasant daylight-volume that stands today.

The Cleveland Hopkins Airport project is in desperate need of a



Above: Columbus John Glenn Int'l Airport; Gensler & Moody Nolan

major architectural redesign to provide a truly exemplary result to re-position Cleveland and reverse the downward trajectory of our mediocre architectural design culture that has been eroding for decades.

While the airport design presented does deliver on a level too often missing in NEOH buildings with its gently – understated - curling roof forms symbolically representing the short-chop waves of Lake Erie, the building fails to deliver a substantial and exciting experience for users that represents other important attributes of our community and our citizens.

It also fails to present a compelling rebranding image for Cleveland – a colossal "miss" of the once-in-a-hundred year opportunity that the project represents. With no Cleveland architect given an opportunity to design a major project since Piet van Dijk was entrusted to design Blossom Music Center in 1967, THIS project calls for a top tier architect to boldly put Cleveland back on the top tier architectural map it has not been anywhere near for decades. Seven shallow light monitors poke through the roof facing east to allow a little daylight into the terminal, though they are quite close to the exterior wall which is fully glazed and will make the terminal unbearable in the mornings as it faces southeast.

The short overhang to the southeast will do little to shield the monumental glass wall from solar heat gain – something that has been acknowledged internationally as a serious design error in all architectural design for well over ten years.

Another unforgivable sin that illustrates the lack of design skill on the part of the design team is the absence of a large and deep sheltered drop-off area that covers the entire drop-off apron and at least two curb lanes of traffic – something essential in our challenging climate. Hopkins currently provides more/ better protection than Corgan's replacement concept. New terminals in Pittsburgh and Columbus (above right) address this need effectively. **We should not be going backwards - on anything.**

The biggest unforgivable sin is the absence of a dramatic 'hearth' space that funnels passengers to and from their gates with a grand

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Above Beijing Daxing Int'l Airport; Zaha Hadid Architects & ADP Ingenierie

welcoming experience that lets incoming people know that they have arrived somewhere special. This kind of element appears in every significant new airport today – but not in what Corgan has proposed for Hopkins.

Those in charge can and should send Corgan back to the drawing board like the Cleveland Museum of Natural History did with the Fentress firm from Denver with their first design. CMNH was right to dump Fentress when they failed a second time, giving the baton to Paul Westlake and DLR Group here to produce the design that has just been completed and recently judged to be one of the best museums in the US. Given CMNH's success with the DLR Group riding in on the white horse to save their project, the city's Hopkins team should earnestly contemplate dropping Madison and DVA for DLR to help Corgan come up with something inspirational, bold and welcoming.

Airport design in the world today has become a key branding and marketing vehicle for communities. Europe, China and Japan are leading the way with bold and exciting designs. Cleveland's proposed replacement terminal for Hopkins cannot possibly be described as bold, exciting or innovative which reinforces Cleveland's second-class identity, hardly our objective.

The Corgan-proposed reconstruction of Hopkins Airport does nothing to advance Cleveland as an important destination of any consequence. While a challenging complex of functions to successfully stage over time, the design eliminates the existing terminal and places the new terminal where the existing massive parking garage is, which appears to leave the gate terminals for the passengers another 330' – 500' further away from their gates.

A rendering of a gate area actually illustrates an acoustical lay-in



ceiling which is the least expensive – cheapest – ceiling usually reserved for low-budget schools and offices, and wholly inappropriate in an airport for a city larger than 150,000. There should be no such second-class materials in any common areas of Hopkins Airport. The entry concourse and ticketing area is hardly pleasant and the design falls down even further as you take what will be a very long trek towards your gate.

Bibb's failure to recognize the poor work done by the selected team for this extremely important project and his failure to step in and up and make sufficient changes to save the project by infusing it with a commitment to genuine design excellence will damn his term as mayor for Cleveland's history.

Cleveland will end up with the worst airport in the country for another hundred years.

Strike Four: CLE's Phantom \$100+k Employee:

Today in Ohio's podcasters recently called out City Hall for employee Kevin Schmotzer (above right) and said that the Bibb administration should be ashamed for refusing to explain why and how Schmotzer was placed on leave way back in February 2025 and 15 months later is still collecting his \$105k salary without working a day.

There is no record of public discipline, lawsuits filed, announcement of any investigation – it is just a scandalous waste of the public's money and disrespect for Council and the public for not receiving a legitimate explanation. Back when he worked, Schmotzer was the executive director for Small Business Development. The city says it is not responding to questions out of respect for Schmotzer and is family. What about respect for the taxpayers paying for this nonsense?

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