Cleveland's Failed Institutions: Cleveland City Hall

Experts weigh in: Are better lead testing and abatement efforts the key to prevent poisoning in Cleveland children?

BY COLLIN CUNNINGHAM • CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT, HEALTH, PUBLIC SAFETY • NOVEMBER 27, 2024

Cleveland's city government is revising its dual-department approach to addressing local cases of lead poisoning. The goal is to enact stricter testing measures to help better identify which owners still need to rid properties of the toxic metal.

Podcaster Chris Quinn: "You shouldn't pay somebody for over a year not to work," host Chris Quinn said. "If they're going to fire him, fire them. Let him sue and make a settlement. If they're not going to fire him, put them back to work. But you can't do this with tax dollars." Shame on Bibb.

Strike Five: Cleveland's Lead Paint Debacle:

In February, Cleveland tried to blame the State of Ohio for the city's inability to spend millions to remove lead paint from homes here. That was a lie.

"Cleveland City Hall is 100 percent to blame," said Leila Atassi during February 16's episode of *Today in Ohio*. "The city got a $4.9 million state grant in January of 2024 to do lead abatement. By the end of 2025, it had spent about $200,000. And that was not because the state tied its hands, which is what they had been telling us, but because Cleveland tied its own hands."

Cleveland lost millions of dollars in grants meant to rid homes of lead paint that poisons children in part because the city could not find enough qualified applicants. Meanwhile, nearly **800 voicemails requesting help from the city's lead-safe hotline went unanswered because no one in City Hall had the passcode to access the messages.** The snafu stretched for nearly two years until Mayor Justin Bibb hired former City Councilwoman Rebecca Maurer as a new senior advisor to start dissecting Cleveland's slow spending.

Cleveland failed also because the city had imposed its own arbitrary limitations, capping projects at around $15,000 per home and restricting work to just windows and door replacements. The state allowed up to $50,000 per project and also covered siding and paint remediation.

"This is just blood boiling to think about," Atassi said, expressing the raw frustration felt by many who have watched this public health crisis continue unaddressed for years. The podcast hosts questioned whether Cleveland's leadership actually cares about protecting children from the permanent neurological damage caused by lead poisoning.

"If they cared, they wouldn't allow money to go unspent," said Chris Quinn. "How many times we've talked about this? How many times they've put grants in peril, how many times they've not gotten the job done? If they actually cared when they got this grant, somebody would have ridden herd and made sure every dime was spent."

The problem goes beyond a single grant or administration, the hosts said. Multiple Cleveland mayors have publicly declared lead poisoning a priority while failing to do anything significant to abate it. Now current Mayor Justin Bibb, who has publicly expressed disappointment and taken responsibility, joins the List.

Atassi said disorganization is a problem in administering the lead grants, noting that the department in charge has no continuity. "When the money started slipping away, no one currently in Community Development had even been there when the grant was designed," Atassi explained. "It's complete institutional instability."

This lack of institutional memory – with directors and key staff turning over during critical grant periods – forced new teams to reconstruct programs from scratch. The podcast hosts suggested that Cleveland's inability to address this crisis may require outside intervention. "I don't think Cleveland should be counted on to do this anymore," Quinn said. "I wish that the governor would declare a public health emergency and take this over. Cleveland cannot be trusted to look out for its children."

City activist and founder of Concerned Citizens Organized Against Lead Robin Brown stated that citywide collaboration should have been the city's approach since funds were received. Brown stated, "I feel disgusted as a resident. I have no trust that our administration could handle this because they didn't. They failed."

Strike Six: Bibb Stumbles on Burke Lakefront Airport's Next Chapter:

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The Bibb administration courageously finally advocated for closing Burke Lakefront Airport – BLA. But the team he gathered around the campfire to suggest its reuse is a total failure – so far.

This precious downtown lakefront land that has been held hostage for 80 years by an underutilized airport when if at long last is to be freed from its bounds should be tuned into an RV park? Seriously?! A dragstrip? More parkland?

In late March, the city of Cleveland and the North Coast Waterfront Development Corporation - NCWDC – released an 'impact study' of potential reuses. The two concepts were low density (above left) or recreation-oriented, both of which lack vision. The concepts presented are "intended to inspire meaningful community dialogue and shared visioning. Any development of Burke will incorporate significant engagement by the public, and an initial engagement sprint is currently underway." The city's two concepts include:

• Public promenade with restaurants and a marina to provide public access to the waterfront on foot or via boat. **Fine.**

• Competitive youth sports and recreation facilities estimated to bring hundreds of families to downtown Cleveland regularly while providing recreation space for Clevelanders. **Ridiculous. Read on.**

• Hotels and RV camping grounds that will bring additional visitors to Cleveland to drive economic impact. **RV camping?! NFW.**

• 7-10 miles of public walking and biking paths. **Depends…**

• A vertiport to serve healthcare industry. **No. Wrong location, plus all three hospitals have helipads making this unnecessary.**

• A public golf course that can also serve as free winter recreation activation with cross-country skiing and/or public park space with features that could include an observation tower, sledding hill, viewpoints, and other open space and/or public golf course that can also serve as free winter recreation activation with cross-country skiing. This is for *all* Clevelanders? A flat piece of land on a windy lake is hardly a highest and best use to be used by elites only five months out of the year. Good courses take at least 200 acres for 18 holes. **This is simply foolish.**

Real estate is often driven to greed or high purpose by the terms "highest and best use," which often causes development projects to be slaves to revenue production. But if downtown living is an objective, multifamily development needs to at least be a part of BLA's future. So does a commercial mix of food service alternatives to support commercial *and* non-commercial use.

But the sticky wicket becomes Cleveland's context with its flat population, and decades-long flat job base and with no success expanding our population - **so what can our city actually support,** particularly if Bedrock's riverfront development actually achieves any traction?

Bedrock's proposed 17-story office tower, which Bedrock has stated it could occupy completely with their own 100+ companies, is still not in a conceptual design phase and is now on the back burner. Those new jobs are what Cleveland desperately needs to grow its population and crawl out of last place on the nation's Job Growth List we have been occupying for far too long.

We probably cannot have both lakefront and riverfront development of consequence. The river is brown. The lake is not. Given a choice, we should vote for the lake. Downtown Cleveland's multifamily market of repurposed multi-tenant office buildings whose workers' jobs have evaporated is already showing signs of saturation. And BLA is physically separated from downtown by the Shoreway, rail tracks, very few actual points of access/ egress and a genuine change in grade.

Tom McNair, Director of Economic Development for the City of Cleveland has taken a stand pressing for a $65 million youth sports camp that he states could draw up to 600 families weekly. McNair stated, "Unequivocally, this is something we should be looking at, because it doesn't exist anywhere else."

McNair is guilty of being blind and stupid. McNair is obviously completely unaware of the Spire Academy in Geneva, OH, their

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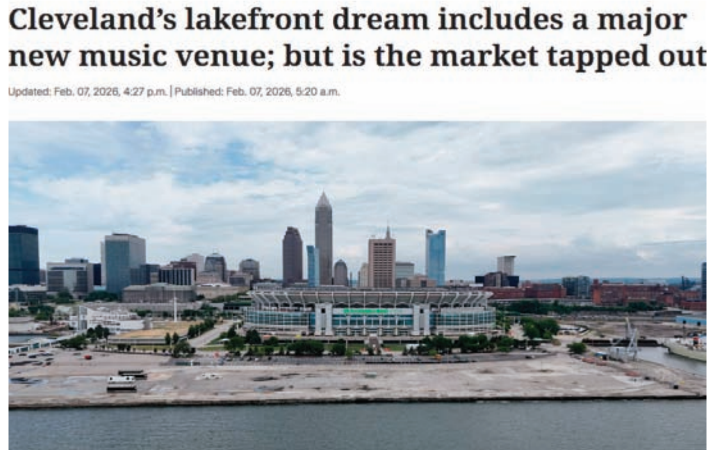

800-acre site – twice the size of the entire BLA site, their 850,000 square feet of athletic facilities, their on-campus resident facilities and the adjacent Marriott and Wyndham hotels that support their many camps. McNair was one of the four individuals presenting the two conceptual plans at the April 15 Council briefing. He needs to be locked in his office once his phone and computer are removed.

When City Council met on April 15 to discuss, emphasis on potential income (from trails and a park?) justifiably lead to media reports of “excitement, skepticism and concern.” And what then is the best use of the Muny Parking Lots? We should not be looking at the BLA site in a vacuum.

A recent report concluded that the soil substrate at BLA was quite acceptable for development and is not as unsatisfactory as the Browns claimed in 2025 when they rejected the lakefront site for the stadium without conducting appropriate due diligence.

The new NCWDC led the report analysis in collaboration with the Black Environmental Leaders Association, City of Cleveland, Cleveland Metroparks, Cuyahoga County, Destination Cleveland, Greater Cleveland Partnership, Greater Cleveland Sports Commission, and Port of Cleveland.

And others are talking about placing yet another music venue at the lakefront, as if the market here will be able to support Bedrock’s Cosm, their new amphitheater west of the Peak Performance Center as well as their third music venue in Phase IB of their Riverfront Master Plan.

At no point has a **market demand analysis** been commissioned to identify what the market will support for the BLA site and only now is the city soliciting opinions from citizens. Those should have been done **before** anyone bothers to sit down and poll irrelevant civic groups who have no skills or experience (except for Metroparks) to contribute to a meaningful dialogue on the subject.

Under more enlightened circumstances, a community with effective leadership that is committed to non-institutional collaboration would conduct a market demand analysis as a precedent to any responsible planning initiative.

NCWDC is a non-profit. Newly named Executive Director is Scott Skinner, formerly a VP of development at NRP Group LLC, a developer of multi-family housing. Prior to joining NRP in 2017, Skinner was a writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, a Peace Corps volunteer in the country of Georgia and a corporate fundraiser for Capitol Partners in Education. Skinner obtained a degree in English from San Jose State University and an MBA from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan.

Jason Russell has just been announced as VP on Real Estate Development and Planning, coming from Bedrock Detroit. His resume claims education as an urban planner. No relevant accomplishments are evident.

Ken Pendergrast of *NEOTrans* observes, “In addition to lacking staff to carry out lakefront development, another barrier to Cleveland realizing past plans is that advocates of those plans and their priority status would come and go depending on who was mayor at the time. Developing the lakefront is a decades-long process so plans and projects would not survive the change to a mayoral administration that didn’t consider the lakefront a priority. It remains to be seen how independent of the political process NCWDC will be.”

“The board at the existing nonprofit development corporation for the central business district, Downtown Cleveland Inc. (formerly the Downtown Cleveland Alliance), has not shown an interest in getting directly involved in real estate projects and competing with the private sector. That includes owning and/or developing land like other development corporations — Playhouse Square Foundation in downtown and University Circle Inc. (UCI) in Cleveland’s fast-growing second downtown.”

“So Bibb, with the support of the new Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne, the former director of UCI, led the creation of a second nonprofit development corporation for downtown Cleveland. The NCWDC is authorized under local and state laws to raise taxes and fees, issue debt, pursue local, state and federal

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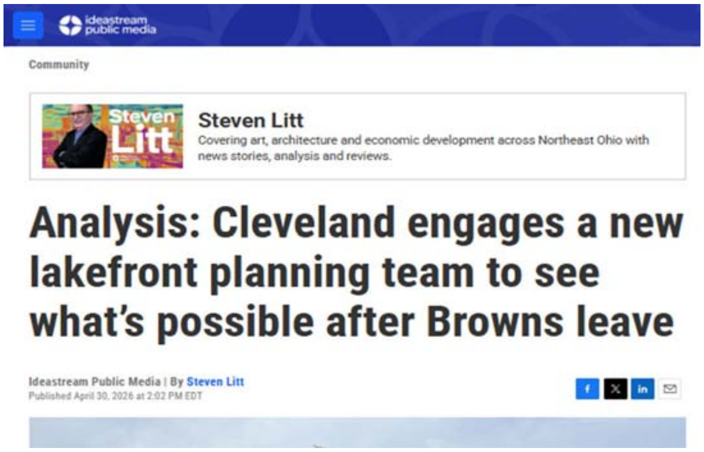

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Steven Litt

Covering art, architecture and economic development across Northeast Ohio with news stories, analysis and reviews.

Analysis: Cleveland engages a new lakefront planning team to see what's possible after Browns leave

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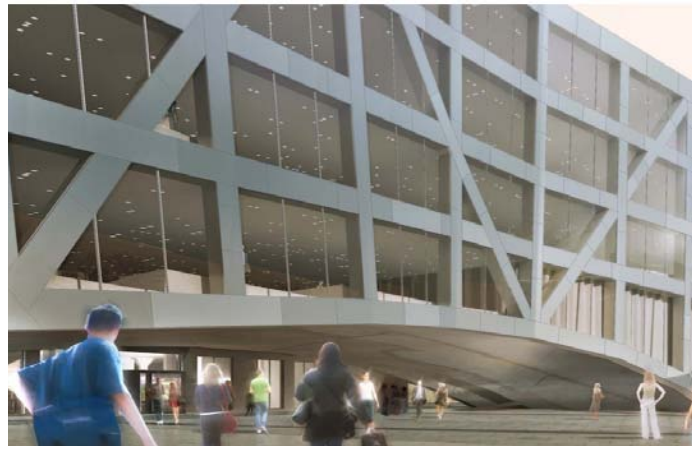

grants, seek value-capture funding mechanisms like tax-increment financing, and receive private-sector investment and philanthropy to implement the lakefront plan."

"While DCI will continue to provide downtown services like promotions, special events, public realm improvements, plus cleaning and safety patrols, NCWDC will get directly involved in real estate investment and construction on lands north of St. Clair Avenue in the central business district. Its area of jurisdiction, between West 6th Street and East 18th Street, is north of St. Clair Avenue and from West 9th Street to East 22nd Street along and near the Shoreway."

Bibb needs to get a rope around this initiative and elevate the process with quality market data and competent personnel.

Base Hit: New Design Team for Cleveland's Minuscule "Lakefront Master Plan:"

The absence of any experience or expertise in any level of waterfront development among NCWDC's staff may not be a fatal handicap for the Browns' lakefront stadium site with the city's hiring of Rotterdam's MVRDV to revise the earlier lakefront plan by Field Operations to capitalize on opportunities made possible by the planned departure of the NFL Browns from the city's lakefront stadium to a new covered stadium in suburban Brook Park in 2029.

MVRDV has worked on major waterfront plans carried out in cities across the world, including Oslo, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Shanghai and San Francisco.

The firm's work created conditions for new development in those cities, and in some cases, the firm also contributed designs for eye-catching buildings that resemble stacked shipping containers, rocky cliffs or a giant airplane hangar.

MVRDV was chosen from 15 applicants worldwide by the development corporation, city officials and DiGeronimo, Skinner said. The dozen members of the development corporation's board include Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb and City Council President Councilman Blaine Griffin, who represents Ward 6.

MVRDV and the waterfront corporation plan on holding additional public meetings, although nothing is scheduled yet. Skinner said a new vision should be ready for feedback and revisions by late summer or early fall.

Anna Gasco, head of MVRDV's 17-member urban planning division in Rotterdam, will co-lead the project with Huiberts. Their work will be overseen by Nathalie de Vries, one of MVRDV's three co-founding principals.

MVRDV's project will not involve any planning for the land occupied by Burke Lakefront Airport, which the city will close. Skinner said that while the airport remains open, it will have no significant effect on building heights on much of the downtown lakefront site, which he said is outside the flight path. That is not correct.

The lakefront assignment is not MVRDV's first in Cleveland. In 2007-08, Winy Maas, also one of the firm's founding principals, designed an expansion of the Cleveland Institute of Art's campus on Euclid Avenue at East 116th Street. The design called for an exposed steel structure that hunched in the middle like a giant inchworm to shelter the school's new main entrance (above right).

Clashing estimates raised questions about whether the school could afford the $55 million cost during the 2008 recession. The art institute opted for a boring new toilet-trained design by the Philadelphia firm of Stantec.

The final project, completed in 2015, was financed through a $75 million capital campaign. MVRDV's new assignment on Cleveland's lakefront gives it an even more prominent opportunity to shape the city's future. But its designers said their goal is to build on what exists, not create something entirely new or alien. But what exists is not worth building on.

Strike Seven: Bibb's Latest PR Joke Misses EVERY Relevant Target:

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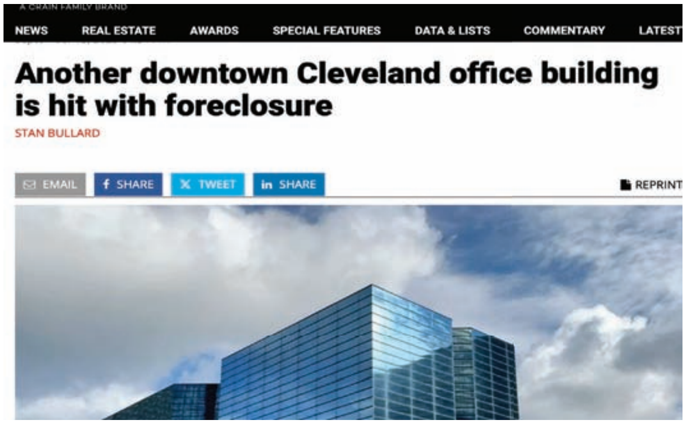

are emptying out," but then he claimed that Cleveland is "filling ours back up." If only it were true.

Bibb claimed to be on top of the problem: "From day one, my administration recognized that these challenges weren't temporary. They required a coordinated, intentional response. That's why I launched a focused 90-day action plan earlier this year to stabilize Downtown Cleveland and position it for long-term growth...This is execution, not theory."

"In the first 45 days, I brought together more than 50 public, private, and civic partners, including developers, lenders, employers, and institutions, who collectively dedicated 350+ hours to identifying problems and advancing solutions."

"Together, we've assessed our major office buildings, engaged property owners and tenants, and begun direct intervention where it's needed most. That means real conversations with employers deciding whether to stay, and real interventions in buildings at risk of going dark. Now, the next 45 days are about delivering results."

"We are doubling down on tenant retention with a more proactive, hands-on approach. That includes direct outreach to companies at risk of leaving, a concierge-style process to move deals faster, and new tools to support smaller tenants, like a tenant improvement "TI bank" to help finance buildouts and create move-in-ready spaces."

"We've also launched a "Welcome Wagon" to support and promote new and expanding businesses Downtown, because growth doesn't just come from big deals, it comes from building momentum one tenant at a time. At the same time, we are taking decisive action on buildings. We are advancing partnerships with high-quality developers, focusing investment on our strongest assets, and directly intervening in distressed properties."

"And we are restoring energy to our streets. We're working with employers to drive return-to-office efforts, improving safety and cleanliness, and activating Downtown through small businesses, retail, and events, especially as we head into the summer months. Because Downtown is not in decline. It's in transition."

"And cities that succeed in this moment will be the ones that confront that transition head-on...Cleveland is well-positioned to do exactly that. Over the past decade, we've seen real momentum Downtown, including population growth and a wave of adaptive reuse that has transformed historic office buildings and warehouses into housing and mixed-use spaces. As recently highlighted by the Wall Street Journal, Cleveland has emerged as a national example of how cities can repurpose older buildings to meet modern demand, bringing new residents, new energy, and new purpose to Downtown."

But the problem is, our population is not really growing. And repurposing vacant office buildings for apartments simply means that the jobs that used to be in those buildings are gone. THAT's the problem you should be addressing!

The problem is not tenant improvement allowances for new leases. What new leases? Our absorption of office space has been and continues to be a national disgrace. Count the Foreclosures! That's why our office buildings are worth less than their annual rent! A recent report states that some landlords are choosing to let their buildings go vacant altogether to reduce costs and enhance their sale value.

Your Welcome Wagon is meaningless because we continue to be last in the nation in job growth. Virtually no one is coming here to create new jobs. You are right about one thing – it IS about jobs, but your 90-day PR joke will not help fix that – not in 45 days - not in 90 days - not in ANY amount of time.

Not until we fix what is wrong with our education, our crime, our poverty, our income inequality, our pollution, our lower graduation rates, our lousy streets, our lakefront – everything you failed to address - will we be making progress downtown.

Your silly PR program fails to address ANY of that. And you lose credibility with such nonsense.

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Foul Ball: Midline Concept is Great - But the Hype is a Bit Too Strong for Right Now

On May 13, Mayor Bibb and a gang of officials gathered on the near East side to announce a substantial redevelopment initiative to replace vacant and decayed industrial sites with new development. Labeled the Midline Priority Investment Area, the 350 acres in the Central-Fairfax and Kinsman neighborhoods intends to convert vacant land on both sides of the elevated Norfolk Southern railroad tracks into an indented connected employment area with trails, parks and transit access for residents.

The City of Cleveland, in partnership with the Site Readiness for Good Jobs Fund (SRF), Cuyahoga Land Bank, and Ohio Department of Development announced the redevelopment initiative that intends to reactivate that long-vacant industrial land. SRF claims to already have $80 million to move forward with its initiatives for 1,000 acres.

SRF has pledged to work "closely with the Cuyahoga Land Bank as our execution arm and partners with the City of Cleveland, JobsOhio, Team Northeast Ohio, Cuyahoga County, The Cleveland Foundation, the Fund for Our Economic Future, Ohio Means Jobs and community development corporations across the city. We maintain close ties with neighborhood groups to ensure development is consistent with the aims of residents. We also nurture relationships with real estate developers, financiers and impact investors across the region and country."

The development project, years in the making, aspires to bring together fragmented, contaminated, dilapidated and underutilized parcels along the NS rail corridor to form a unified district designed for advanced manufacturing, research and development and related industries. Of the 350 acres, 150 acres are currently occupied by functional businesses and institutions, breaking up the map into smaller zones of potential development.

The hoped-for outcome calls for at least 1.5 million square feet of new industrial and commercial space that will support over 2,500 direct jobs within reach of public transit. At full build-out - likely 20+ years in the future - the project is projected to generate up to $100 million in annual tax revenue for the city.

The redevelopment concept also includes a continuous greenway, parks and open space network designed to improve walkability, expand tree canopy and restore ecological function along the corridor. Community benefits are expected to include expanded access to public space, improved air quality and activation of long-vacant industrial corridors.

To fund that infrastructure and new housing, the city is pursuing a tax-increment financing (TIF) district for the Midline area. Legislation to establish the TIF district is working its way through City Council.

A complete master planning project is now underway for the site, led by the design teams of Merritt Chase and Utile. The detailed Master Plan is expected to be published in full by the end of summer 2026.

Ward 5 Councilman Richard Starr who represents the Central neighborhood wants Midline to be more than another PR hype on paper that never gets off the ground. Starr knows the wait has been long and quiet: "This Midline Priority Investment Area is about turning long-neglected, contaminated land into opportunity. For too long, Ward 5 has carried the burden of contaminated, vacant land while waiting for real investment. I support this designation but let me be clear: this cannot just be another plan on paper. This project area must lead to real cleanup, real jobs, and real opportunities for the residents who live here today."

The city gave the Site Readiness Fund $50 million in federal stimulus money to get started. The Cleveland Foundation showed up and kicked in another $10 million. They could and should do more. Help has also come from the state.

The Cleveland Clinic is a prospective developer for a 250,000-square-foot biomedical laboratory complex at the southeast corner of the Opportunity Corridor and East 79th Street. The rendering

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(above left) by *NEOtrans* is an unofficial presentation of what that CCF lab could look like.

The Midline is conceived for industries that maximize jobs, wages, innovation, and accessibility to economic mobility — including biomedical, food and beverage production, advanced light manufacturing, and emerging production-oriented sectors. It will be interesting to see if the magnetism of the District, its accessibility, aestheics and embedded amenities allow the city to be picky about maximizing jobs in sectors that are increasingly driven to automation and reducing jobs.

While the city's abysmal record of zero job growth for over a decade would suggest that any and every business would be welcome inclusion in Midline, the city has stated that the Midline District is not intended for low-job-density uses like data or distribution centers or for industries that pollute the environment. The goal is to create a modern urban employment district that provides good jobs while fostering vibrant public spaces for Clevelanders.

The Midline District concept (right) is admirable - and overdue. But it has a long road ahead of it and major costs to acquire and cleanup contaminated sites, repair and replace aged, worn or missing infrastructure – streets, utilities, lighting, etc. – to render the parcels safe, useful and marketable.

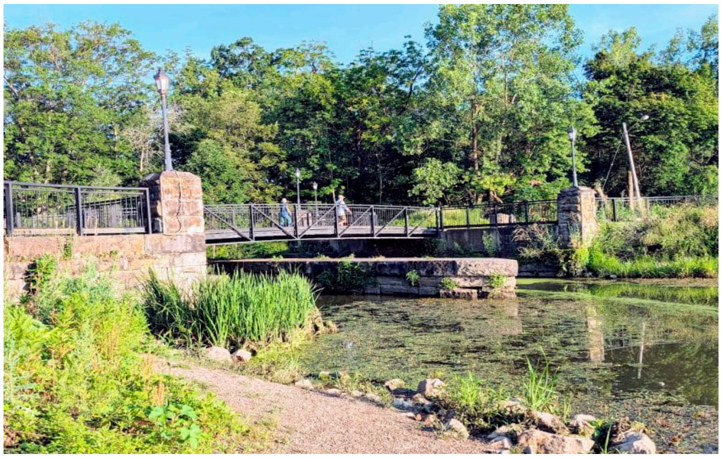
But the big hickey no one is yet talking about is where are the businesses that are willing to come to this city at this time and settle in these neighborhoods to start or relocate their enterprises?

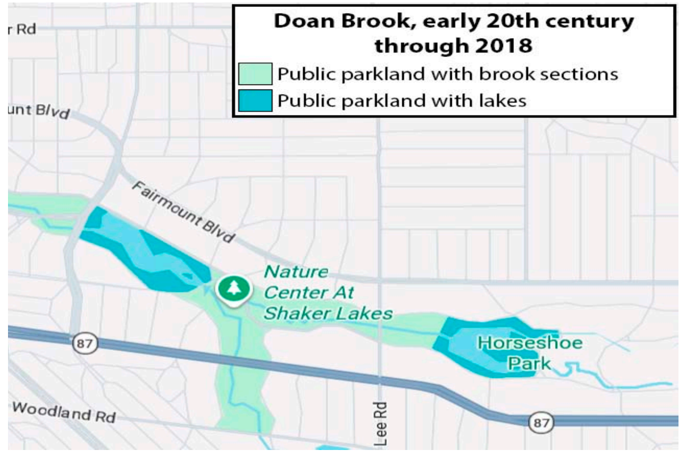
How long will it take to fill the 350 acres? Quite a while. The city's announcement has a 'Built It and They Will Come' flavor to its optimism. This initiative involves lots and lots of public money to aattempt to attract *some* private investment.

Additionally, what kind of workforce development is needed to provide a capable and trained workforce for these companies? And where is the educational initiative we have been waiting decades for from the Cleveland Foundation – and others - that not only never comes? It has never even been started.

Until the dots are connected and resources identified, focused and allocated and mobilized, this may be just more hype – rather like the lakefront, which has routinely been thrown up at us for the last 20 years, with yet another attempt at planning and design now again underway – for a what is actually a very small fraction of our lakefront.

NEORSD Has Failed the Community - Miserably!





The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District – NEORSD - has royally botched the Shaker Lakes initiative.

Perhaps we should not be surprised. This is not what they do for a living. They are completely out of their comfort and capability zones. By their own admission, they completely botched their initial calculations which they used to demand the elimination of Horseshoe Lake. And their public communications have reflected either incompetence or intentional deceit.

Horseshoe Lake and Lower Shaker Lake together make up the Shaker Lakes, connected by Doan Brook that flows northwest into University Circle, into Wade Lagoon by the Cleveland Museum of Art, through Rockefeller Park's Cultural Park, before emptying into Lake Erie.

The lakes date back to the 1820s, when the North Union Shakers first dammed the Doan Brook to power a sawmill located just west of what became Lower Shaker Lake, according to the Cleveland Historical Society. The lakes and the park that holds them became beloved resources to the suburbs for 200 years. NEORSD has proven itself to be unable to understand that and respond appropriately.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 2019 determined that the dams at both lakes needed to be replaced – not eliminated - replaced. NEORSD instead recommended removing the dam at Horseshoe Lake and replacing it with a wetlands park, but retaining and repairing the dam at Lower Lake. The cost of repairing the dam was estimated in 2021 to be about $13 million.

From the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, "In 1913 the Shaker Hts. Land Co. conveyed to the Van Sweringen Co. such reversionary interests as it had in the parklands. In 1947 Cleveland leased the parklands to the cities of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights, which agreed to occupy, use, and at its own expense improve and maintain what had become known as Shaker Hts. Park. The lease was last renewed in 1990 for a period of 50 years."

"The Shaker Lakes were threatened in the 1960s by the construction of I-290 (the Clark Freeway), but the highway was never built. In 1974 a symposium was held on the water quality of the Shaker Lakes and Doan Brook, but pollution of the watershed was problematic and in subsequent years, sedimentation also became an issue. By the late 2010s, the state of the dam at Horseshoe Lake had deteriorated to the point where the lake was drained for safety purposes."

"After a great deal of contention between local citizens and the Cleveland Regional Sewer District, it was decided in 2022 that the dam would be removed rather than replaced and the brook above it returned to natural channels."

"The Shaker Lakes, together with the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes at 2600 S. Park Blvd., have been designated a National Environmental Education Landmark."

In the late 2010s, despite past repairs, the Horseshoe Lake and Lower Lake dams were declared by the state to be failing. After promising to retain Lower Lake, NEORSD told residents that they would not pay to repair or replace the dam, and scared the two cities with huge projected replacement costs.

In 2021, NEORSD's proposed plan included removal of the dam at Horseshoe Lake, full restoration of Doan Brook and the subsequent replacement of the dam at Lower Lake. The cost for this plan was reported to be $28.3 million when presented to the communities during the June 2021 joint municipal public meetings. Two years later, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources trashed NEORSD's plan.

NEORSD crews breached Horseshoe's dam - about 30 feet tall and more than 600 feet wide – turning the lake into a marsh. Angry residents formed Friends of Horseshoe Lake and sued for a new dam. But they lost at trial in 2023 and on appeal in 2024, with judges saying they lacked power over the dam.

Horseshoe Lake Park was recently renamed plain Horseshoe Park. In the fall of 2026, NEORSD had planned to start a two-year, $31 million project at the park's 60 acres to remove that dam, tear down 1000+ trees, add native plants, create trails,

NEORSD Has Failed the Community - Miserably!

and add a nature playground, an outdoor classroom, a pedestrian bridge and other amenities. Shaker Heights expects to contribute $4.6 million and Cleveland Heights $2.5 million.

For a few years, officials said that locals who missed Horseshoe Lake could still enjoy Lower Lake, which is far more seen and used. **However, in July 2025, NEORSD reneged on its prior promise and stated its intent to now also raze the Lower Lake's dam, (photos pgs. 27, 30)** 600 feet long and 17 feet tall, because of soaring costs, and their "new calculations" which contradicted their original work which they referenced to promise to retain Lower Lake. NEORSD now claims that the Lower lake dam is not needed for flood control downstream.

NEORSD's Bait and Switch has infuriated residents.

So has the fact that NEORSD has failed to consider any alternatives to draining Lower Lake as the law requires.

So has the fact that NEORSD failed to openly admit to residents that it plans to remove over 1000 trees, and did not even present those facts until **after** public review and comment had been closed and **after** the cities of Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights had stupidly endorsed a Memo of Understanding to permit NEORSD's plan.

NEORSD's FAILED PROCESS & ITS MONOSEMIC CULTURE:

Shaker Heights resident Chad Anderson has suggested that the Metroparks should take over the Shaker Lakes project, given their success with the transformation of Wendy Park, the restoration of the Garfield Reservation and the restoration of Hinkley Lake. Anderson's idea is a good one. NEORSD – an organization dominated by civil engineers – not landscape architects, has proven themselves completely inept at addressing surface water and landscape issues with any capability or sensitivity. **NEORSD has tried to bully the community and they have withheld information in a most disturbing manner. They have been dishonest.** This is simply intolerable.

NEORSD has no business planning our public parks. They have proven this by their ineptitude. They begin and end with the wrong criteria – the lowest cost of maintenance for the sewer district. NEORSD has failed to comprehend that the Shaker Lakes function also as community assets, natural habitats and recreation areas and they play a meaningful role in defining what 'community' means in Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights.

In the five years NEORSD has been toying with the lakes, they have produced many drainage studies but **not a single environmental impact study.**

As Anderson pointed out, all residents in the Heights pay Metroparks taxes that mostly gets spent on outer suburb parklands. The shared responsibility for Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights to maintain the lakes has been an unfortunate stewardship problem. Anderson also points out that with the Garfield Park

project, the Metroparks successfully got NEORSD to contribute to dredging the pond.

NEORSD REALLY pissed off the community with its recent attempt to conceal their extreme plan to remove over 1000 trees from the next phase of work. The fact that this work by NEORSD has been in the work for years, and that they withheld this information until now tells us all we need to know about the appalling lack of integrity at NEORSD.

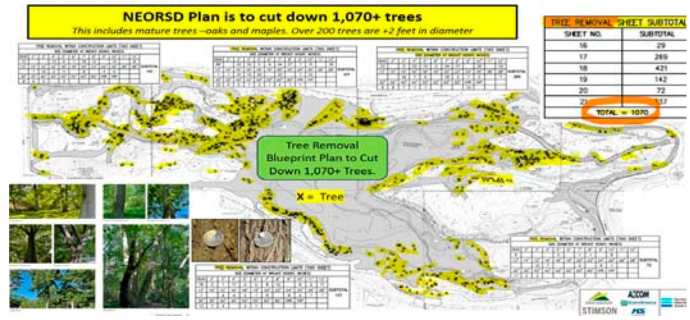
It was not until February 20 that NEORSD quietly posted an "Implementation update FAQ" to the project page which read, "Although some of the approximately 1000 trees are invasive or their health is declined, these trees constitute a minority of the trees being removed." The word 'some' is vague and ambiguous. So without any substantiation, NEORSD implied that many/ most of the trees were invasive species and in poor health. Neither is correct.

NEORSD has not been honest or straightforward with the community. After original promising that after draining Horseshoe Lake, they assured the community that they would maintain the balance of the lakes. Then they came back and asserted that they had erred in their previous drainage calculations and now needed to drain the balance, and that they would contribute zero funding except for their ideas to completely remove the lakes.

NEORSD put forth a multi-year public engagement phase in which the Sewer District consistently heard from the public that the community wanted them to prioritize the preservation of existing trees. During this phase, nothing was ever said by NEORSD about the fact that the project would also require mass tree removal.

After public engagement phase was over and during which the removal plans were completed, permitting began, and Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights city councils were pushed to approve $7 million of taxpayer funding for the project, the District then revealed their tree removal plan – albeit in a covert and tardy manner. During this phase, the Sewer District started to talk about - in places not many people would see it - the fact that their plans

NEORSD Has Failed the Community - Miserably!



would remove about 1,000 trees; but the Sewer District made it sound like most of the trees were invasive.

NOW, **after** the cities approved funding for the project, **after** public knowledge of the mass tree removal became widespread, and **after** city officials and Sewer District representatives started to tell people that the Horseshoe plans are a "done deal," the Sewer District quietly acknowledged that, in fact, **most of the trees are healthy, native trees.**

It is important to note that the plans presented by the Sewer District at the December 2022 park design open house did not require removing hundreds of trees – **it was not even mentioned.** At that presentation/ open house, people said that preserving trees was important, which is feedback that was consistently received during the public engagement process, which NEORSD's own reports confirm.

The two presentations that occurred about two months apart in 2025 - a March 31 public presentation and early June presentations to the Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights Planning Commissions - are especially interesting. Both these presentations occurred at the same phase of the planning process - in between 90% and 100% of design completion. The presentations contained most of the same content. In the middle, there was even a sequence of 13 consecutive slides in the Planning Pommission presentations that (with minor changes to some slide titles) appeared in the exact same order in the middle of the public presentation. Except one slide was missing from the public presentation; the other 12 were in the same order. What was deliberately left out?

The first time mass tree removal which was accompanied by the Sewer District's dishonest assertion that "most or about half" of the trees were invasive was during the Planning Commission presentations, which were low visibility events. It is also important to note that these meetings occurred **after public engagement was over**, and at those meetings, the District was merely informing the Planning Commissions of the basically finished plans, not seeking any feedback on the new content.

The following month, a public notice was sent to "project-adjacent property owners" - a small number of people - and also uploaded to the project web page. Buried in the middle of a complicated document was a mention of the removal of over 1,000 trees. It received almost no attention at the time. The post about it on the web page did not say anything about the number of trees, but instead said:

The Public Notice includes several drawings (Sheets C-016 through C-018) that depict the project's draft tree-removal plan (above right) which has raised some questions from neighbors. "Select tree removal is necessary to construct the project. The Sewer District's design team targeted tree clearing in areas dominated by invasive vegetation..."

Given what is now known, it is curious how this was written by the District. Saying "targeted tree clearing in areas dominated by invasive vegetation" insinuates that most of the trees are invasive. But in fact, because there are all types of non-tree invasive vegetation, it does not directly state anything about whether the trees are invasive. The updated implementation FAQ also talks about new tree plantings. "Trees: 1,106 (1", 2" & 4" caliper)." Those are miniscule! Given that the number of trees slated for removal in the 100% design plan is 1,070, this number seems very deliberate. About one new tree for every removed tree. But there is a very big problem here.

1. Replacing a very large, mature tree with a sapling is a poor substitution. More than 200 of the trees marked for removal are at least two feet in diameter, some much larger than that.

2. The new trees are being counted with a different counting system than the removed trees.

Trees that are one or two inches in diameter were not even included in the tree survey. There are hundreds of such trees that are in the way of the project and would be removed along with the nearly 1,100 larger trees. So if the trees being removed were being counted in the same way as the trees being planted, the number of trees being removed would actually be much larger. Replacing a very large, mature tree with a sapling is a poor substitution. More than 200 of the trees marked for removal are at least two feet in diameter, some much larger than that.

NEORSD Has Failed the Community - Miserably!

NEORSD has claimed that we must gut the Shaker Lakes because the Sewer District and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources need to prevent flooding downstream in University Circle. The District says that lives are in danger in the Circle. But no one has died in more than 100 years, making the District's fear mongering irresponsible and dishonest.

When the District came aiming to do away with Horseshoe Lake, the Friends of Horseshoe Lake was formed. FHL hired an engineering firm whose analysis said that Horseshoe Lake could be saved. NEORSD refused, but promised that Lower Lake would be saved. But in July 2025, the District came back and said that Lower Lake also had to go.

Bad Faith

In the late 2010s, despite past repairs, the Horseshoe Lake and Lower Lake dams were declared by the state to be failing. Crews breached Horseshoe's dam, 30 feet tall and more than 600 feet wide, making the lake a marsh. Angry residents formed Friends of Horseshoe Lake and sued for a new dam. But they lost at trial in 2023 and on appeal in 2024.

Horseshoe Lake Park was recently renamed plain Horseshoe Park. In the fall of 2026, NEORSD had planned to start a two-year, $31 million project at the park's 60 acres to remove that dam, tear down 1000+ trees, add native plants, create trails, and add a nature playground, an outdoor classroom, a pedestrian bridge and other amenities.

NEORSD now claims that the Lower Lake dam is not needed for flood control downstream. NEORSD's Bait and Switch has infuriated residents.

Again, NEORSD has failed to consider any alternatives to draining Lower Lake as the law requires.

NEORSD failed to openly admit to residents that it plans to remove over 1000 trees, and did not even present those facts until **after** public review and comment had been closed and **after** the cities of Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights had stupidly endorsed a Memo of Understanding to permit NEORSD's plan.

Critics accuse NEORSD of bad faith on previous discussions of Lower Lake's fate as well as their proposed destruction of the existing trees and ecosystem. "They've been deceiving the public for a long time," says Jeff Rusnak of the Friends of Horseshoe Lake. Chris Quinn, editor of cleveland.com and *The Plain Dealer*, has called for dumping NEORSD's director and trustees, the latter composed mostly of local mayors and their appointees. "You make a promise, you stand by it."

Matt Scharver, NEORSD's watershed programs director, denies the District has been deceptive. He says the district really meant to rebuild Lower Lake's dam. Studies had shown it is necessary to prevent floods downstream in University Circle, the Cleveland Cultural Gardens and elsewhere along the Doan's path to Lake Erie. NEORSD would have funded the project as part of its mission to protect water quantity and quality.

So NEORSD spent $1.7 million for a preliminary design. But the proposed structures looked obtrusive, with a second spillway 400 feet long and concrete floodwalls up to eight feet tall. Then, according to Scharver, new technology showed the proposed second dam would not block a crucial amount of water. Yet the aging structure's failure could release too much water all at once.

The Cleveland Museum of Art is currently making plans to redo its campus, which lies above the culverted Doan Creek. That should give the District an opportunity to run a second culvert there, carrying more water.

Scharver and many other experts consider natural marshes much better for the environment than manmade lakes. They slow down floodwater and filter pollutants. They do not host every species that lakes do, but host other native species.

Whether the dam is rebuilt or removed, Scharver says the work will reduce floods on Coventry and North Park. If the dam goes, NEORSD will probably add a pedestrian bridge and other amenities to the 17-acre marsh. Either way, current amenities should survive, including trails and the "Liberty Oaks," which honor victims of

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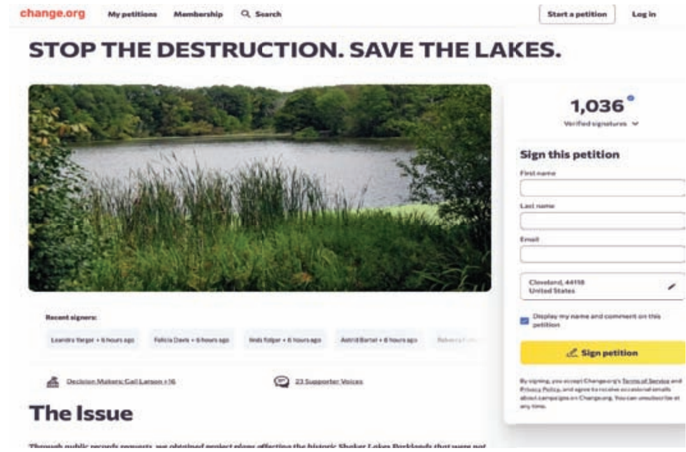

World War I.

Lawsuit Filed to Stop Cleveland's Shaker Lakes Project:

Local resident and attorney Erin Flanagan has filed a federal lawsuit (Erin R. Flanagan v. United States Army Corps of Engineers et al., case number 1:26-cv-00789, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio), alleging that the NEORSD's plan to erase Lower Lake will unlawfully alter an open-water habitat and water management system created by a 19th century Shaker community.

Erin Flanagan said in her complaint in Ohio federal court that historical and environmental reviews for the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's ongoing Doan Brook restoration project were conducted with an improper assessment of the baseline condition of the Shaker Lakes Parklands, a site listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"At its core, this case concerns whether federal agencies may authorize the transformation of a historic lake system into a constructed stream corridor **without first conducting the environmental and historic-preservation review required by federal law," Flanagan stated in her complaint.**

As part of the multimillion-dollar restoration project, the sewer district in 2020 drained Horseshoe Lake, one of the bodies of water created by the North Union Shaker Community's dams in the 1820s. But Flanagan's complaint alleges that in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' reviews for permits under the Clean Water Act and National Historic Preservation Act, the project's impacts were assessed relative to a condition in which the lake is already drained, rather than the status quo ante.

"Courts have repeatedly held that agencies must assess impacts relative to the historic or natural condition of a resource rather than conditions created by the project itself or by prior unreviewed disturbances," Flanagan wrote. And **NEORSD failed to do that.**

Named as defendants in the suit are the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its Buffalo district commander, the sewer district, and the cities of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights, which each have authority over parts of the Shaker Lakes Parklands.

"The filing seeks to preserve the status quo and prevent irreversible changes to the Shaker Lakes Parklands pending completion of required federal review," Flanagan said in an email to Law360.

"The case focuses on ensuring that established legal processes are followed before actions are taken that would alter a historic landscape."

Flanagan also alleged that the defendants violated the National Environmental Protection Act by segmenting what was in fact a single undertaking into multiple projects for the purpose of environmental review. "The alterations to Horseshoe Lake, the proposed work affecting Lower Shaker Lake, and the broader Doan Brook channel modifications are interdependent components of a single watershed-scale undertaking," Flanagan wrote in her complaint. "Evaluating those actions separately obscures their cumulative impacts on the Shaker Lakes historic landscape."

In a separate emergency motion filed Thursday, Flanagan asked the court to issue a temporary restraining order halting construction on the project until the Army Corps review process is concluded. Representatives for the Army Corps, Cleveland and the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District were not immediately available for comment Thursday.

The case has been assigned to U.S. District Judge J. Philip Calabrese.

Additionally, resident James Nemastil has pointed out that NEORSD's conduct represents a misrepresentation that enables both cities to void the MOA without penalty for a number of reasons:

The fact that NEORSD failed to provide any alternative analyses - a requirement - to the cities about Horseshoe Lake, which is a requirement, resulted in the cities endorsing the MOA, unaware that a required task had not been performed and provided. This constitutes misrepresentation by omission due to the nondisclosure of a material fact.

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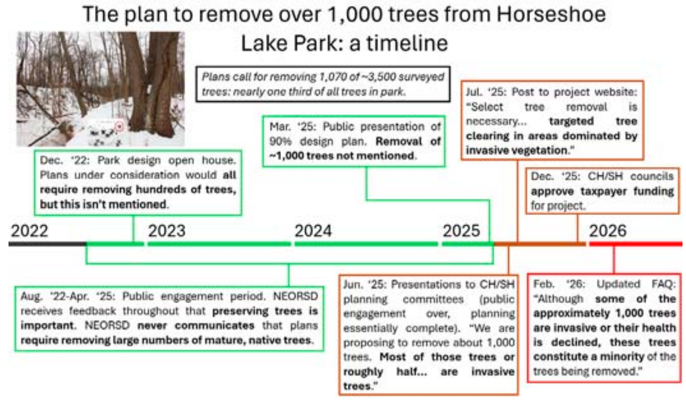


that a required task had not been performed and provided. This constitutes misrepresentation by omission due to the nondisclosure of a material fact.
A contract is voidable when one party fails to disclose a material fact they had a duty to disclose. **NEORSD had a legal duty to perform and disclose an alternatives analysis for a major project.** Failing to disclose that such analysis was required — and failing to provide it — is misrepresentation by omission.

Consequently, NEORSD's MOA is illegal for it is a contract based on an unlawful or noncompliant process. **NEORSD entered the MOA without performing legally required environmental review steps, so the agreement rests on an unlawful foundation.** Contracts based on unlawful processes are void or voidable. This is especially relevant because alternatives analysis is not optional — it is a regulatory requirement for major water resource projects.

This results in the failure of a condition precedent. If the City's consent was conditioned on NEORSD complying with required regulatory steps, and NEORSD did not complete those steps, then a condition precedent to the agreement was never satisfied. A contract with an unmet condition precedent is not enforceable.
Summary:

Considerable time and money has been invested to producing NEORSD's plans, correcting for their errors and trying again. But the results are simply defective and ignorant due to their incompetence and their irresponsible and monosemic approach to a matter with issues that involve much more that drainage.

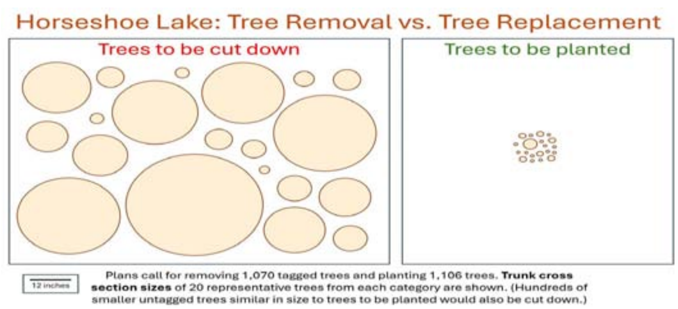
Cleary, the area's ecosystem and vegetation, wildlife, resident use and the aesthetic/ inspirational qualities have not only not been weighted as relevant criteria for decision-making by NEORSD, they have been ignored altogether. This represents a defective effort by NEORSD that must be rejected and a responsible process initiated with responsible professionals engaged to address the Shaker Lakes and storm runoff in a responsible and comprehensive manner.

Resident James Nemastil: "We must demand our cities to pull out of the NEORSD plan for Horseshoe Lake because residents were never given a fair process or honest numbers. There was no real alternatives analysis, no side-by-side cost comparison, and now we're being told to swallow millions in local spending for a project that was rammed down our throats. It was a hack job using sewer rate payer money. Our communities shouldn't be treated like a rubber stamp. Before a single tree is cut or a single dollar is committed, we demand transparency, accountability, and a full review of the lower cost options and more environmentally sound ones that were pushed aside." Go to the next council meeting and demand action before "The Eighth Wonder of the Cleveland Follies" moves forward."

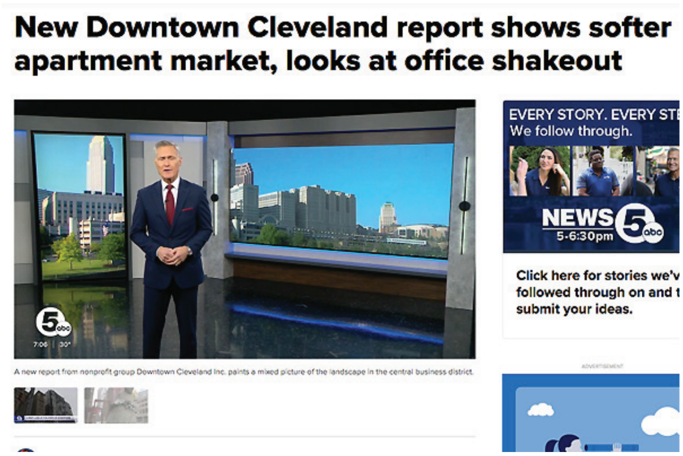
Dealing with community lakes with historic designation and protection is not what NEORSD is capable of doing. The facts prove it as demonstrated by the timeline of communications, incomplete examination of alternatives, faulty calculations, deliberate misrepresentations to the community and the cultural bias of an organization that is not equipped to factor in the value of a community's visual, historical, cultural and recreational asset into its narrow focus.

Consequently, their thinking and analysis has been limited and flawed and must be rejected and the issues addressed anew by capable representatives who also have accountability to the community. James Nemastil's suggestion that the project instead be turned over to the Metroparks warrants exploration while there is still time.

Then we can leave NEORSD to their $3 billion underground sewage tunnels.



The REAL State of Downtown Cleveland



Downtown Cleveland has released a new cheerleading piece entitled "The State of Downtown: Momentum + Impact." Unfortunately, in DCI's untamed zeal for positive PR, they have stretched the truth in a number of areas and outright lied in others. As a result, their flyer is more delusion than fact.

"More than $5 billion in public and private development (is) transforming downtown."

DCI's first puffed up highlight involved stating that "more than $5 billion in public and private development (is) transforming downtown." DCI is obviously counting every *proposed* development **over the next 20 years** to arrive at their $5 billion number – and characterizing that amount as being distributed now. Obviously, it is not.

First of all, $3.5B of the $5B number is Bedrock's estimate of their riverfront initiative that is proposed to take 20 years to unfold.

A. If a development is going to take 20 years to see it, you cannot and should not honestly state that it is 'transforming downtown' – in an active sense - until it is properly designed, completed and we can all agree that it actually *does* achieve some measure of transformation.

B. If a development is being proposed by Bedrock and Gilbert, one must apply an historically justified 'weighted adjustment factor' of half–to-one-fifth – or more - to reflect Bedrock's previous spectacular exaggerations of its project costs - remember the casino? That $600M riverfront oasis when what the design they presented would not cost even $100M, to say nothing of the actual resulting $10 million rehab of the two floors of the Higbee Building – **which reflected 1.6% of the $600 million they promised us?** And we should not forget the number of jobs created compared to the jobs actually ppromised vs. delivered, and the same with the taxes generated. Let us not forget Bedrock's casino, the arena and the riverfront with the fractional results delivered.

How much of what is proposed for downtown at present is actually real?

- Global Peak Performance Project: $75 million?: Under Construction
- Cosm: 64,000 sf = $88 million?: Under Construction
- Medical Mutual HQ/ Rose Building/ Project Scarlet: $120M: Under Construction
- Former United Church of Christ HQ/ The Electric Bldg. at 700 Prospect; $40 million: Under Construction
- Erieview Tower Renovation: $68M: Phase I Under Construction
- Superior Midway Bike Bath: $24.5M
- Cleveland Lorain Cycle Track: $30.2M
- CSU Fenn Tower Renovation/ Biomed Project; $18M
- Cleveland Pro Soccer League Stadium $50M?
- United Pro Soccer Stadium $100M?
- Riverfront Infrastructure: $75M: Under Construction
- Marriott AC Hotel Renovation of Holiday Inn Express: $41M
- Cleveland Police HQ: $90M: Under Construction
- County Board of Elections/ 1801 Superior: $20M?: Pending
- Warner & Swasey conversion to apartments; $64M: Pending
- Lakefront Shoreway Reconfiguration: $59.5M: Pending
- Rockefeller Building Renovation; $100M: Pending
- Lakefront Development Infrastructure: $284M: Pending

Obviously we will not get two soccer stadiums. But even this list totals $1.28 billion, quite a bit short of DCI's $5 billion claim.

The Warner & Swasey conversion to apartments is in MidTown, so it should not count in any downtown survey. And we must now also cross off the list:

- Centennial/ Union Commerce/ Huntington Bank Renovation
- Masonic Building Renovation
- Lakefront-Downtown Greenway

1. "$5B Active Investment:"

DCI mistakenly states that the "over $5B active investment" will reshape downtown. *If and when* all of the proposed projects are completed and done properly, it *may* reshape downtown in a positive way. But until it does, DCI's $5B assertion is blatant disinformation – intentional lying – to refer to the menu of prospective developments as 'active.'

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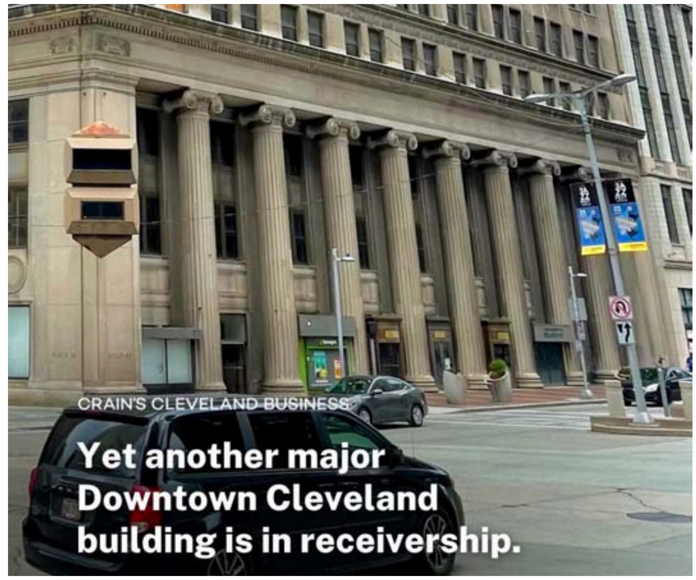

On DCI's own website, they even contradict themselves when they state, "Downtown Cleveland has $1 billion in projects currently under construction and a residential population that doubled in the last 10 years. Join us as we continue to build a dynamic city center."

That is 20% of $5 billion.

DCI also is counting previously completed projects to goose up its number – The Convention Center addition ($50M), Fidelity Hotel (DCI claims it was $57M), Skyline 776 (DCI claims in was $100M), Ten60 Bolivar ($38.5 million), Bulkley Apartments ($22 million – DCI claims it was $50M), Rock-n-Roll Hall of Fame & Museum Addition ($40M), The Bell/ 45 Erieview ($40.3M), and Thunderbird/ Collins/ Triton at Scranton Peninsula ($100M).

DCI should not count the always-promised-never delivered renovation of the Holiday Inn at 3614 Euclid into a Delta Hotel by Marriott – it is not downtown. Nor is the $1B Cleveland Clinic's Neurological Institute or their Cole Eye Institute $177M expansion. The proposed $500M Global Center for Pathogen Research & Human Health at East 100thth and St. Clair Ave. is still not downtown. The East Stokes tower at University Circle is also not downtown. The same criteria applies to the new $300M Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering Building at Case Western Reserve University.

2. "A market reset is a reinvestment advantage:"

DCI's statement that downtown Cleveland's real estate nightmare is a 'market reset' is optimistically attempting to recast the fact that downtown's commercial real estate market has collapsed. DCI wants us to be glad that therefore, this "financial stress" is a normal, cyclical reset of asset values that "is creating a window for acquisition, recapitalization and repositioning."

But there has never in Cleveland's history been a cycle like this where half of all the well-built occupied commercial real estate was selling for one-fourth, one-fifth or one-twentieth of its initial cost **or** prior sale price. So there is nothing remotely "cyclical" about this current state of affairs in downtown Cleveland real estate.

At the end of September, the sale of the 1100 Superior multi-tenant office building (above left) closed for a mere $8.13 million – for a Class A 576,500 square foot multi-tenant office building and attached parking garage. Replacement cost of the office building property is between $250 million - $275 million. **So the 22-story high-rise sold for 3% of its replacement value.** In 2017, the building sold for $53.75 million, which was a fire sale then, with a loan of $43.75 million. The September closing represents a purchase price of $14.10/square foot, equivalent to only nine months of the average downtown Class A downtown rent rate - assuming that the attached garage was *free*.

The new owners, Brady Sullivan Properties, expect to convert half of the building into apartments, despite the large 25,000 sf floor plates. Then there is the recent sale of 800 Superior for a paltry $4 million.

While there are a number of factors at play, it can be stated that the primary reason for the painfully low sale prices for real estate in downtown Cleveland of late is that virtually no one wants to own commercial office buildings in downtown Cleveland at this time. As *Crain's* Dan Shingler observed on 2-2-26, the context for existing buildings reflects "...difficult refinancing with significantly reduced values from their purchase prices."

The 1100 Superior deal reflects that the sale occurred at only 15% of its previous sale price ten years ago. And we are not even including the value of the 420-car attached parking garage (replacement cost of $16,600,000+) - *as if it is free*. So in reality, the sale is for far less than 15% of its prior transaction value

DCI references that "Cleveland is a national leader in adaptive reuse…" Said another way, **"Cleveland leads the nation in the loss**

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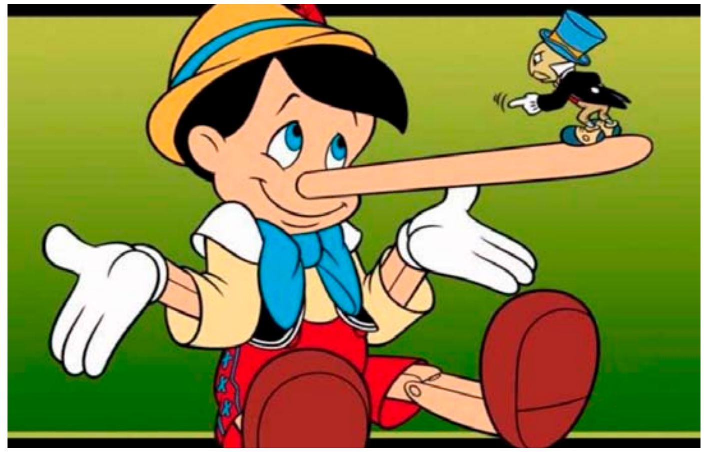

of downtown workplace jobs which is why so many existing office buildings have gone dark and have then been repurposed as building standard apartments."

DCI alleges that "tenant demands are increasingly concentrating in high-quality Class A environments downtown." That trend line is miniscule in magnitude, and cannot possibly be characterized as 'increasingly concentrating.'

Colliers Senior VP Mark Abood has observed, **"…more than 50% of Class A buildings downtown are under some form of waterfall scrutiny (by creditors) or all already in receivership."** That is not repositioning – **at 50%, that is the outright collapse of Cleveland's downtown office market.**

Abood points out that the opportunity DCI represents exists for investors is not generating **any** positive responses, as the sales of 800 Superior and 1100 Superior indicate; "The Cleveland market is not attracting (quality) out-of-state money for office buildings the way it has for houses or multi-family properties."

Vacancy rates continue to hover just under 18% - **before** the impact of Sherwin-Williams' move is taken into account, which will dump another 900,000 square feet of office vacancy on to the market. The absorption of office space continues to be abysmal.

DCI's disinformation on downtown's office market included the assertion that "demand for Class A office space in attractive, vibrant areas remains strong" - a complete hallucination.

Colliers reported **negative** absorption of 83,300 sf in 2025's third quarter and positive absorption of only 29,000 sf in the fourth quarter. That is **not** "strong" demand – it is pathetic. Strong demand was the 1980s and early 1990s when downtown was absorbing 400,000 square feet year-after-year.

And yet DCI and GCP routinely feed *Crain's* Pinocchio-like stories that they run - without vetting - that falsely assert that the downtown office market is coming back. It is obviously **not** coming back in any legible or significant way now or in the immediate future. **Not as long as we continue to fail to add jobs.**

Current major Foreclosures:

- 75 Public Square
- The Centennial
- Reserve Square
- The Luckman/ The Chesterfield
- Fifth Third Center
- Citizens Bank Building
- US Bank Center
- North Point I, II
- The Statler
- Key Tower (pending)
- Oswald Tower (pending)

DCI's statement that our city's "adaptive reuse track record reduces execution risk relative to peer markets" is an irresponsible ignorance of the fact that downtown's conversions may be reaching a saturation point, as these foreclosures cleary indicate. Multi-family occupancy downtown decreased last year from 93% to 86%, a further hint at saturation. These foreclosures are now the larger and more significant part of our track record, **which not only does not reduce execution risk, it elevates it!**

Pittsburgh's downtown office vacancy rate is 15.2%, with Class B reported to be 17.5%.

Dan Shingler quoted Newmark EVP Terry Coyne in October saying that the city's 25 million square feet of the downtown office market of the 1990's has shrunk to only 10 - 13 million square feet now - **a decrease of 50%!** JLL pegs that number at 16.1 million square feet. CBRE's research analyst Allison Clark notes that 2.6 million square feet have been lost to apartment conversions just since

The REAL State of Downtown Cleveland

2019. JLL's analyst Luke Brower notes 1.5 million square feet have been lost since 2020, and "another 1.8 million square feet has been proposed for renovation."

Pittsburgh has 35 million square feet of downtown office space and 118k downtown workers, 110k of which are daily commuters - double Cleveland's. Cleveland's average downtown office rent is $18.79/sf. Pittsburgh's Class A downtown office space goes for $29.86/sf - **37% more that ours** - per CBRE while Class B office space rents for $20.80/sf. The vacancy rate in downtown Columbus is 22.4% with apartment occupancy at 86.9%.

- Cincinnati's downtown office market has just over 16 million square feet of office space equally divided between Class A and B with a vacancy rate of 16.9% and 162k sf of negative absorption in Q4 alone. Asking rents are $20.57/sf.

- Cleveland has three Fortune 500 companies downtown: Sherwin Williams (#191), Cleveland- Cliffs (#221), and KeyCorp (#436), whose revenues total $53.1 billion annually.

- Pittsburgh has nine Fortune 500 companies downtown whose revenues are $126.68 billion annually, 240% of Cleveland's.

- Columbus has three Fortune 500 companies downtown – Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co. (#72), Huntington Bank (#375) and American Electric Power (#185) with annual revenues of $92.43 billion, 174% of Cleveland's.

- Cincinnati has five Fortune 500 companies downtown with Proctor & Gamble (#50), Kroger (#25), Fifth Third Bank (#321), American Financial Group (#470) and Western Southern Financial Group (#284), that combine for $267.2 billion in annual revenue, five times that of Cleveland's downtown Fortune 500 companies.

3. DCI's BS Claim as a "Reset:"

DCI used the word "reset" seven times in attempting to characterize the current state of real estate in downtown Cleveland. As Ken Pendergast observed in his February feature on DCI's release, "DCI reported softening in the downtown residential market, caused in part by a surge of new inventory. Another 888 housing units were added to the downtown market in 2025, sending residential occupancies to drop to 86% from the low 90s (96% in 2023) seen a few years ago. Thus, the word "reset" was applied to downtown housing as well."

Foreclosures on the 2677 apartment units in The Centennial, Reserve Square, The Statler Arms, 75 Public Square and the Luckman cannot reasonably be characterized as a "reset." DCI's semantics are disingenuous again. The foreclosure on 2677 units is instead a major faceplant in downtown's multi-family market.

In Dan Shingler's 3-2-26 *Crain's* article, "Downtown Cleveland apartment market hits saturation, stalling conversions," K+D President Doug Price stated that downtown is overbuilt by 1,500 apartments, a three-to-five-year supply; "We've got three to five years of product aleady built right now. Let's say we don't need another building with new apartments for five years That means you don't start building for two to three years."

Managing Director Jerry Fiume at SVN Summit Commercial Real Estate observed, "There's no question that market has peaked."

But with Erieview, 700 Prospect and the Rose Building/ Project Scarlet projects underway, those 512 additional units mean that downtown will shortly have over a six-year oversupply. The market is not calling for a 'reset' - it is in need of a 'time out.'

4. "Active Public Space Drives Economy Activity:"

Since DCI programs 'public activities,' they credit themselves for having 'more than 350 public activations generating "real foot traffic that supported safety, retail and vibrancy." Show us the list.

The REAL State of Downtown Cleveland

DCI then went on to assert that foot traffic "is the leading indicator of retail health and economic vitality." **Totally wrong! SALES** is the leading and **only** relevant indicator of retail health and economic vitality! DCI did not offer *any* statistics on retail sales that would have supported their PR thesis because *downtown Cleveland's retail remains in a coma.*

Why doesn't DCI revive the Parties in the Park (right) that were so successful and popular in the 1970s and 1980s? Those events every Friday in the summer were held in what was then called Chester Commons which after being sensitively renovated in 2012 is now called Perk Plaza.

"Every Friday in the summer a crowd would gather in Chester Commons Park to hear a band and unwind from the work week. In his book *"The Buzzard,"* John Gorman - who led WMMS during its glory years - talks about the Party in the Park and "the competition between the stations who produced the shows."

But in the 1980s and 1990s, during the week, without city maintenance of the grounds and fountain, the park became "a haven for homeless people at night and unsafe to venture into after sunset. That was reinforced when, in the wee hours of a morning in 2009, a 28-year-old man was shot and killed and his friend wounded when they were ambushed in the park." But the Park's subsequent $3 million revitalization was praised by *Plain Dealer* critic Steven Litt for becoming "a people-watching paradise, a patch of urban heaven and a powerful demonstration of why it's essential to make more places like it throughout the city's heart."

But the city had a population of 575,000 then compared to 375,000 now, and downtown then had 50,000 - 60,000 more workers every day than it does today.

Now, the Park Plaza office building fronting Perk Plaza is largely vacant – and its neighbors are in real estate distress also. A few years ago, noontime food trucks on summer Thursdays drew decent crowds at Perk Plaza. With Public Square designed for activation, why not re-birth P-I-P events there if the downtown population is even half of what DCI claims it is?

The Browns move to Brook Park will remove 600,000+ people annually from downtown.

5. Metrics + Market Signals:

DCI claims that downtown Cleveland had 39.5 million visitors in 2025. That is over 10% of the entire country's population and is simply not credible.

This repeats the vulgar lie previously fed by Greater Cleveland Partnership and Destination Cleveland who count **every** person who attends **any** sporting or Playhouse Square event as a visitor. This implies that there are 760,000 visitors downtown EVERY WEEK. If you live or work downtown, you already know how utterly absurd that is. It also implies that Cleveland's tourism is 53.3% of Orlando's 74 million.

Orlando's 450 resorts and hotels provide 140,000 hotel rooms at 71% occupancy with an average room rate of $195/night, producing over 34 million room nights.

Orlando's direct visitor spending is $59.9 billion. DCI claims that downtown's daily population is 116,500, which is double of what it actually is. Downtown Cleveland now has 45,000 – 50,000 workers – and those people are not downtown every day.

Columbus reports 53.2 million visitors - without MLB, NFL or NBA teams. Columbus had 349 conventions, trade shows & sporting events in 2025, generating $40B in direct visitor spending. Cleveland claims 149 events, 43% of the activity in Columbus.

Both cities claim to have 5,000 downtown hotel rooms. Columbus has 2,500 rooms connected or adjacent to their convention center while Cleveland has 1000. The Columbus Convention Center has 2649 parking spaces immediately contiguous to their facility. Cleveland has 982 contiguous spaces that are virtually always filled by tenants of Key Tower and the adjacent Marriott hotel.

Cincinnati has 4,500 downtown hotel rooms and a newly expanded convention center. The Queen City region claims 25.9 million visitors with $6.5 billion in visitor spending. Cincinnati's convention metrics are off because the convention center was closed from 2024 to January 2026 for renovation and expansion to 750,000 sf, double the size Cleveland's.

Remember when we were told we had to replace our existing convention center because it was too small and was not competitive, only to end up building a new one that was exactly the same size - and without its 500-car parking garage? Still Cincinnati's tourism generated $6.5 billion in spending in 2025. Cincinnati has 3,200 hotel rooms and 5,000 parking spaces in proximity to their convention center.

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