Cleveland Heights, Ohio
City Council Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC)

Economic Development Advisory Committee Recommendations

Four Big Ideas – for next 24 months

Background

The Economic Development Advisory Committee was appointed by City Council under Resolution 033-2016 which says:

“... council has identified the need to create a special Economic Development Advisory Committee to offer advice and recommendations concerning the City’s economic development.”

Council charged the Committee with developing ideas that could be implemented quickly – i.e. within 24 months - to enhance the economic development activity of the city government. The Committee’s membership, meetings, and work are described in Appendix A.

The Financial Task Force appointed by Council in 2015 stated the need for action. It found that the City suffered from a “structural deficit” that was caused by several factors including the recent deep recession, lower median income, lower property values in some areas of the city, and lessened state support. That Task Force closed its report with the following challenge.

“We are facing a set of extraordinary challenges that will require resiliency, resolve, and resourcefulness to overcome. This is a pivotal moment in time that could ultimately serve as a renaissance for Cleveland Heights, an opportunity to reassess who we are and who we want to be.”

The City has already responded to this challenge by implementing two items the committee applauds. An Economic Development Department has been staffed and has engaged with this Committee in developing these recommendations. The City has also established a registry of available commercial properties for businesses, making it easier to find appropriate space.

It should be noted that the Committee focused on identifying guiding economic development principles rather than on specific development projects such as Severance Center or the “Top of the Hill” project.
The Committee discussed housing, since it has the largest economic impact on our city. Our recommendations, however, focus on business development, because the City Council intends to establish a separate Housing Advisory Committee to produce a set of recommendations. Nevertheless, the committee recognizes that our housing stock and the vitality of our business districts are intertwined. Good housing stock is necessary to maintain and grow our business districts; our business districts are also vital to maintaining our housing stock.

On the basis of the past seven months of discussions and research, the Economic Development Advisory Committee offers the following recommendations as a start to meeting the challenge set by City Council. Cleveland Heights has an extraordinarily well-educated and civically engaged population, which undoubtedly will continue working with City government to refine and advance this agenda for economic development in Cleveland Heights.

Recommendations

Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Community Development Corporations (CDC) are private, non-profit corporations that drive economic development and strive to improve the quality of residents' lives. Many of the communities surrounding Cleveland Heights have a CDC aiding those cities in attracting, maintaining, and developing business activity and often housing development. Future Heights, a non-profit organization formed in 2000 to facilitate collaboration and empowerment in Cleveland Heights and University Heights, is poised to become a CDC serving Cleveland Heights.

Every expert who presented to the committee supported the establishment of a CDC for Cleveland Heights. See Appendix A.

1. Create and provide seed money to a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to partner with the City and other organizations in pursuit of the following priorities:
   a. Develop: promote revitalization of mixed-use business districts; creating, supporting and coordinating Special Improvement Districts; serve as “developer of last resort” for key projects when a suitable private party is absent; and
   b. Plan: work with the City and civic organizations to create visions and plans for neighborhoods and business districts throughout the city; and
   c. Placemake: enhance the identity of the city and its unique neighborhoods and business districts; market the city and its neighborhoods and districts throughout the region; and
   d. Fund: develop funding in partnership with the City for a sustainable CDC to carry out these and other functions indefinitely into the future.
Supporting our Business Districts

One of Cleveland Heights’ great strengths is the vibrancy of its eleven business districts. The City could do more to support our businesses and the new Economic Development Department is a major step forward. Marketing our city as a walkable and bikeable place to live and work depends on having vibrant, local business areas. These recommendations are directed to the use of the new economic development staff.

2. The new Economic Development staff, assisted by the CDC, should develop targeted business district strategies guided by the following priorities.
   a. **Recruit**: Recruit and support office and tech businesses, including an innovation/new economy corridor along Mayfield Road to connect Cleveland Heights more directly to University Circle.
   b. **Improve Districts**: Work with the business community to improve the appearance, image, safety and economic competitiveness of current retail business districts with plans and programs tailored to the unique character of each district
      i. enhancing stronger districts with marketing, streetscape improvements, storefront renovation, parking improvements, etc. (e.g.: Cedar-Lee, Coventry, Cedar-Fairmount)
      ii. re-planning and re-configuring other districts to ensure economic viability and support for adjacent neighborhoods (e.g.: Noble, Warrensville, Taylor)
      iii. identifying/creating parking opportunities and access in the business districts
   c. **Facilitate business development** through the following actions:
      i. Facilitate city wide fiber optic infrastructure;
      ii. Reduce roadblocks to establishing a business; and
      iii. Strengthen and support commercial building inspections; and
   d. **Update Zoning**: Update the zoning code and map to implement the community’s master plan; and amend the zoning code to require review and approval of building demolition requests

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Investment and Marketing to Shift the Dialog

Many of those who presented to the Committee discussed a negative perception of the City of Cleveland Heights that harms the development of our economic base. Even within Cleveland Heights some residents have a negative perception of some areas of the city.
To be more attractive to existing and prospective businesses and residents, the Committee recommends a strong, proactive program of community and private investment and marketing be implemented immediately.

3. The City should improve its image by investing in the community and by marketing its assets.
   a. Invest: The City should take the lead by investing staff time and resources in community improvements in all areas of the City;
      i. Investing in facilities and property; and
      ii. Programming, such as recreational activities; and
      iii. Improving city services.
   b. Market: Create and implement citywide marketing plans to promote Cleveland Heights and its unique business districts as places to live, shop, visit and do business; and
      i. Marketing amenities in Cleveland Heights such as, Cain Park, Dobama Theater, and Coventry Village, and our proximity to Little Italy, University Circle, Case Western Reserve University, Severance Hall, and Shaker Square.
      ii. Targeting marketing to University Circle institutions and downtown employers.

Building on a Strength – the Arts

Cleveland Heights has more artists, writers, performers, musicians, and other creative people than most other places in Ohio. The new CDC, business support plan, and marketing strategy should have one of its focus areas squarely on the arts. Patrons of cultural events often become customers of other businesses in our city.

4. The City government should continue and increase its support for the arts, which are a catalyst for economic development.
   a. Promote the community’s arts and music events and venues collectively; and
   b. Market housing in Cleveland Heights to artists and other creative professionals; and
   c. Attract arts-related businesses to Cleveland Heights; and
   d. Support creation and installation of public art; and
   e. Capitalize on the power of Cain Park to attract young people to Cleveland Heights.

Conclusion

The Committee heard from many people who admire the strength of Cleveland Heights’ economic and cultural assets. We need to build on that base, and we hope that these recommendations are helpful in accomplishing that goal. We are grateful that our City Council is very involved and committed and seeks resident input.
APPENDIX A

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair, Gary Benjamin is an attorney who has practiced law in Michigan and Ohio and worked with economic development groups in both states.

Patrycia Ajdukiewicz is a relationship manager at a non-for-profit micro-lender that provides access to capital and technical assistance to small business owners. Born in Warsaw, Poland, she has lived in Cleveland Heights for the last 3 years and is eager to help the city reach its full cultural and economic potential.

Robert Brown is a city planner who has lived in Cleveland Heights for the past 40 years. He is the former City Planning Director for the City of Cleveland. Previously he worked for the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission.

Douglas Dykes is a Human Resources professional with over 20 years of experience leading organizational transformations. His broad experience includes compensation, benefits, organizational development, strategic planning, employee and labor relations and risk management. He has been a resident of Cleveland Heights for over 30 year.

Eustacia Netzel-Hatcher is a business and finance professional who has held leadership roles in many community organizations across the Northeast Ohio region.

Brenda H. May, a Cleveland Heights resident of more than 30 years, is a leader of Noble Neighbors.

Joy Roller, founder of Archer Consulting, as Executive Director of the Gordon Square Arts District, led a $30 million initiative to transform Cleveland’s Detroit Shoreway neighborhood into an arts and entertainment destination.

MEETINGS AND PRESENTERS

July 20, 2016 – Organizational meeting and presentation by Glenn Coyne and Patrick Hewitt of the County Planning Department describing the Master Plan process.

August 17, 2016 – Presentation by Dr. Mark Chupp of the Case Urban Affairs department regarding strengths of CH and ideas for economic development.

September 21, 2016 – Presentations by Deanna Bremer-Fisher and Marie Kittredge regarding the benefits of establishing a community development corporation.

October 19, 2016 – Presentation by Tracey Nichols, Economic Development Department Director of the City of Cleveland regarding Cleveland’s economic development department and its successes.
November 16, 2016 – Discussion of recommendations and report from Chair about meeting with SID’s and business concerns.

December 14, 2016 – Brenda May presented regarding efforts in the Noble Neighborhood to increase and maintain economic activity.

January 18, 2017 – At this meeting we finalized our report.