

# CUYAHOGA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY PLATFORM

December 2022



# INTRODUCTION

In 2021, to catalyze an urgent response to our water crisis, over 30 community organizations representing thousands of Clevelanders from across the city's diverse neighborhoods joined together with the Alliance for the Great Lakes to develop the Cleveland Comprehensive Environmental Policy Platform. The plan includes detailed policy recommendations aimed at addressing our city's water affordability crisis and helping to ensure water equity, such as banning water shutoffs when a resident is unable to pay, improving water quality through long-needed infrastructure upgrades, reducing contaminants and lead exposure in drinking water, and ensuring that Cleveland's existing codified ordinances addressing stormwater runoff and drinking and recreational water are consistently enforced.

The Cuyahoga County Comprehensive Environmental Policy Platform is the second iteration, expanded with a county focus. It serves as a resource aligned with work in the following Priority Areas:

- Water Quality & Infrastructure
- Environmental Justice & Climate Change Resilience
- Energy & Air Quality
- Infrastructure & Transportation
- Land & Green Spaces

# VALUES STATEMENT

We believe Cuyahoga County must become a more sustainable, diverse, and equitable place for all people – regardless of color or background. All residents deserve a county that: values their lives and trusts their lived experiences; invests in communities; acts intentionally to be inclusive and sustainable; and listens and responds to all people.

We are united around the common purpose of a cleaner, greener Cuyahoga County, and the belief that we can use our collective impact to ensure communities and residents who are not typically heard have a forum to address the environmental injustices present in their daily lives.

We believe that citizens empowered by real access to and influence in decision-making at every step yields only positives, which include: greater and deeper understanding among policymakers about the pressures and problems impacting people; creative and innovative approaches perhaps not contemplated before; and collective ownership over and investment in solutions.

We believe the most successful leaders in our community will be committed to our shared values of affirming all human life, and moving Cuyahoga County towards a refreshed set of policies that restore clean air, clean water, and public green spaces. We believe the key to a sustainable future is policy making driven more by the value of human and natural life and less by short-term economic gain.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It's a travesty that Clevelanders and many northeast Ohioans live within miles of one of the world's richest freshwater resources, yet many residents still don't have access to clean, safe, affordable drinking water. Sharp water rate increases in recent years have put an [undue burden](#) on residents during an already difficult time, with economically challenged residents feeling these impacts most acutely and disproportionately.

In addition to the struggles with water affordability, northeast Ohio also continues to grapple with the health impacts that lead pipes have on residents. In the Greater Cleveland area alone it's estimated that [between 59 and 89 percent](#) of water pipes are potentially made of lead – and while there has been some small progress like [replacing lead service lines to daycares](#), those represent only a tiny fraction of the lead pipes in the city. And to make matters worse, Lake Erie, which provides drinking water to more than 11 million people, is suffering the ongoing effects of toxic algal blooms caused by agricultural runoff pollution. These impacts are compounded by the impacts of Climate Change, resulting in a need for leadership to consider climate resiliency strategies in their overall planning.

Climate resilience is achieved when a community implements sustainable and environmentally just practices that allow communities to incrementally decrease their reliance upon carbon-emitting sources; inequitable policies and practices are eliminated; and local infrastructure can better absorb the shocks of climate impacts such as hotter temperatures, extreme weather events, and decreased air and water quality.

While we Ohioans have no shortage of high-profile races to focus on, including the Ohio governor's race and important congressional races, we understand that there is one race that is likely to have a big impact on our daily lives and addressing these pressing water equity/access, environmental justice and climate change/resiliency issues in our communities: the race for Cuyahoga County Executive.

This year marks the first time in eight years that the County Executive seat has been up for consideration, as Executive Armond Budish declined to seek a third term. The County Executive office serves as a direct line to the 1.2 million residents of the county and is entrusted with responsibly managing the county's budget of over \$1.5 billion.

Critically, the new County Executive will also serve as a convener, bringing together the 59 mayors and hundreds of local organizations that make up Cuyahoga County to harness the power of the region to lead on developing innovative solutions to our biggest problems. It is our hope that the new County Executive will usher in a period of change and offer innovative solutions to finally tackle the water equity/access, environmental justice and climate resilience challenges our county faces and to improve the lives of the residents and stakeholders concerned about the new direction of Cuyahoga County.

The next County Executive has an immense amount of power to implement inclusive and equitable solutions like these. Not only can they move forward with specific reforms under their purview, they have the opportunity to work collaboratively with all stakeholders of the county to find ways to address water equity, environmental justice and climate resiliency issues.

As the next Executive begins to lead Cuyahoga County, this document includes educational information to inform answers to the questions Cuyahoga County residents hope will be addressed in the next administration:

Greater Clevelanders will remember that the County Executive role was established in direct response to the scandal wrought by former County Commissioner Jimmy Dimora’s indictment on federal corruption charges in an effort to restore a sense of trust and accountability between voters and the leaders charged with protecting their interests and well-being. The next County Executive bears great responsibility to get things done and to do so with integrity, transparency, and input from key stakeholders. They should also expect to be held accountable when they don’t.

Given that the [charter](#) also explicitly calls for “an improved focus on equity for all our communities and citizens,” There can be no better way to evaluate the next County Executive than closely examining how they will choose to tackle our county’s complex and pressing water issues.

# REFERENCE RESOURCES

The current county charter stipulates that the executive is responsible for the appointment and removal of county personnel, working with other local governments, introducing legislation to the county council, submitting budgets and capital improvements plans to the council, and many other duties.

[Cuyahoga County Executive Cleveland.com Endorsement Interview](#)

[Charter of Cuyahoga County](#)

[Cuyahoga County Charter Article II Section 2 Elected County Executive](#)

# OVERVIEW: POLICY PRIORITY AREAS

The next County Executive will be uniquely positioned to establish a vision for a time like no other in our lifetime. The opportunity before us is one where many voices can be heard as the County Executive sets the trajectory for how Cuyahoga County will prepare for 2035 and beyond.

In 2020, The Cleveland Comprehensive Policy Platform was developed in consultation with more than a dozen organizations, including local and regional nonprofits, community development corporations, and quasi-governmental institutions.

A number of organizations have come together to review the original platform, compare notes with other organizations and coalitions, and develop a narrower list of top priorities for the next County Executive and his administration to take action starting in January 2023. While not all of these are quick wins, these priorities were identified as high impact opportunities for action that will support a healthier and more sustainable Cuyahoga County.

This Cuyahoga County Comprehensive Policy Platform is a second iteration of this expanded plan, that is county focused, serving as an aligned resource with the work already underway. It details actionable objectives and locally-designed policy recommendations for issues including: Water Quality & Infrastructure, Environmental Justice & Climate Change Resilience, Energy & Air Quality, Infrastructure & Transportation, as well as Land and Green Space.

## Expectations from Cuyahoga County Youth

The Mycom Youth Development Initiative of Greater Cleveland (Mycom) is a network committed to igniting positive futures for Greater Cleveland's youth by connecting them with community based quality programming and services to help them become young adults that are able to navigate and give back to their communities as productive citizens. Our programs help parents and youth in Greater Cleveland traverse transition points in schooling and growth. The MyCom network has functioned as the anchor Neighborhood Collective Impact Project for over a decade. This work has been critical in the development of community-based systems that work to achieve common neighborhood goals through partnerships that increase youth engagement and college and career readiness as well as many other positive opportunities that are designed to empower young people to be successful and thriving adults.

In October, MYCOM youth from throughout Cuyahoga County met with both Cuyahoga County Executive candidates to discuss desired legislative priorities. The youth emphasized interest in

addressing utilities disconnections, poverty, urban blight and violence prevention. The youth would like to engage in the transition activities and have a seat at the table as a thought partner during this administration's tenure.

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## **Expectations from Cuyahoga County Constituents & Stakeholder Groups**

### **Water Quality & Infrastructure**

Improvements to drinking and wastewater infrastructure are necessary to prevent lead contamination and to protect Cleveland's vital freshwater resources from growing environmental pressures. The challenge for advocates and leaders is how to balance the need to fix failing infrastructure with the need to ensure water is affordable. Cleveland Water's upcoming rate restructuring process should provide an opportunity for greater equity in water rates for Cuyahoga County's residents.

#### **POLICY PLATFORM OBJECTIVES**

- Ensure Cleveland's water is safe, clean, and affordable for all.
- Discontinue water shutoffs due to inability to pay and restore water service for all Cleveland residents by 2025 in the spirit of embracing the human right to water and sanitation.
- Improve water quality through infrastructure upgrades, emphasizing the use of natural infrastructure, and advocate for significant increases in state and federal investment to support needed upgrades.
- Reduce contaminants and lead exposure in drinking water.
- Ensure Cleveland's existing codified ordinances addressing stormwater runoff and drinking and recreational water are consistently enforced.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Water Affordability and Access***

- With the goal of discontinuing water shutoffs and restoring water service to all Cleveland residents by 2025, establish a set of cohesive policies aimed at addressing water affordability that include:
  - Establish more equitable and income-proportional water utility rates and fees for customers.
  - Through increased marketing, and collaborative customer outreach, actively recruit participation in the city's emergency water assistance program that provides financial assistance to customers in the event of an emergency or other situation in which customers are temporarily unable to pay water service fees and charges.
  - Establish and streamline a debt relief program for delinquent water service fees and charges in which debt is forgiven after 24 months of continual income-based payment.
- Increase transparency and education with the community and stakeholders during remaining water rate setting processes in 2022.
- Working with stakeholders, advocate for policy change at the state and federal level to establish a new program modeled after the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) that would provide water utility assistance. Utilize these funds to support the city's low-income assistance program.

### ***Aging Water Systems and Transportation Infrastructure***

- Work with local clean water advocates, organized labor, and community activists to coordinate education of Cleveland's Congressional members to advocate for water infrastructure funding and lead service line replacement funding.
- Develop a plan to inventory all lead service lines in Cleveland by 2025 and to replace all lead service lines by 2040, similar to the Washington, DC lead service line map.
- Establish a cost-sharing program for lead service line replacement for low-income homeowners, and seek to remove barriers impeding water sample collection and testing for lead in low-income homes.
- Continue to support the implementation of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's (NEORSD) \$3 billion infrastructure projects to reduce combined sewer overflows through community education and outreach.
- Establish priority positioning for Cuyahoga County to leverage and maximize local, state and federal resources available as a result of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), etc.



## **MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- Water shutoffs due to non-payment are prevented because Cleveland residents, including renters and marginalized communities, increase their enrollment in water assistance and affordability programs.
- Key customer assistance programs for water and sewer service have been updated to better serve and respect low-income residents.
- Increased utilization of federal and state funding for water infrastructure updates, including for lead service line replacement.
- An accelerated pace for lead service line replacement to more quickly reduce residents' lead exposure in drinking water.
- Low-income homeowners have access to cost-sharing programs for lead service line replacement.
- Cleveland residents participate in greater numbers in the city water department's rate setting process and provide input and feedback on the program design for debt relief and customer assistance programs.

## **Environmental Justice & Climate Change Resilience**

Climate resilience is achieved when a community implements sustainable and environmentally just practices that allow communities to incrementally decrease their reliance upon carbon-emitting sources; inequitable policies and practices are eliminated; and local infrastructure can better absorb the shocks of climate impacts such as hotter temperatures, extreme weather events, and decreased air and water quality.

All people, regardless of race, ethnicity or national origin, have the right to live, work, and recreate in a clean and safe environment. In Cuyahoga County, we deserve equal protection from environmental harms caused by power plants, lead paint, waste facilities, poor and unhealthy soils from urbanization and industrialization, and degraded air and water quality exacerbated by a warming climate.

Today we are presented with unprecedented opportunities to weigh in at various points in the development and vetting of policies, but there are real barriers impeding community engagement on these issues. As the County addresses gaps in its engagement of impacted people, we will be better positioned to realize environmental and quality of life goals for Cuyahoga County.

## **POLICY PLATFORM OBJECTIVES**

- A County Council and Executive that's knowledgeable about, embraces, and

aggressively advocates for environmental justice not only locally, but in state and federal policymaking.

- Increase shared decision-making on key issues at every step with community members.
- Expand and modernize the forums in which people can participate, provide input, and have their voices heard on policy decisions being made within county government.
- Maintain and continue to fund the programs that support the City's goal to be Lead Safe by 2029, ensuring that we reduce the number of Cleveland children with elevated blood lead levels.
- Increased residents of impacted communities employed with good paying, life sustaining jobs within the green and blue economy.
- Increase support of a circular economy best practices in the Cuyahoga County footprint.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Environmental Justice***

- Create an implementation plan for addressing the next phase (location, physical structure and culture) of the Cuyahoga County Jail that promotes sustainability-focused practices in the building industry (i.e. LEED certification) through an equity lens.
- Increased options for residents to provide public comment during county council meetings in order to expand when and how often citizens' voices and concerns can be heard.
- Continue virtual platforms for planning sessions, meetings, and other gatherings that were exclusively in-person prior to the pandemic.
- Encourage creativity and increase flexibility of county departments to host public meetings and informal discussions in locations where people naturally spend their time, meeting them where they are (i.e. walking through a park, street fairs, block parties, community conversations, etc.).
- Within the first six months to one year, examine and make changes to stakeholder engagement processes to ensure adequate frequency, information sharing, and free-flowing exchanges of ideas, and opportunities for coordinated action on environmental problems in the community.
- Continue to emphasize coordination between all county departments engaging with lead safe programming, and support efforts that provide funding for landlords to test for and abate lead paint in rental properties.
- Strengthen collaboration with community advocates to urge the state and federal governments to increase resources for lead paint abatement, lead service line replacement, and workforce training programs.

## **Climate Change Resiliency**

- Work with local advocates to leverage federal funding that will address environmental injustices in Cleveland. For example, advocate for the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the latest federal stimulus bill to aid public health and economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (Public Law 117-58, also known as the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law”) which provides approximately \$350 billion for Federal highway programs over a five-year period (fiscal years 2022 through 2026); and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 that makes a historic down payment on deficit reduction to fight inflation, invest in domestic energy production and manufacturing, and reduce carbon emissions by roughly 40 percent by 2030.
- Alignment to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future, to include the [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership.
- Participation in the [Regional Climate Action Plan](#) facilitated by the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) to address the global climate emergency and public support of prompt action.
- Coordinating with the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) Region 5 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center \(TCTAC\)](#).
- Develop Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) that emphasize workforce and community development measures; diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) principles in contracting and local hires, labor standards and access to union apprenticeship opportunities; and community greenspace and infrastructure reinvestment.

## **MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- Cuyahoga County leads its Midwestern peers in environmental justice protection by ensuring that racial equity is at the center of all policy decisions related to land use, water quality, climate mitigation, drinking water access, lead safety and equity, and urban planning and transportation systems.
- Cuyahoga County experiences a continued decrease in the number of children with elevated lead levels in their blood due to the efforts to abate lead paint and replace lead pipes in drinking water systems.
- Cuyahoga County’s elected leaders and environmental advocates, community development corporations, local labor unions, and neighborhood activists experience a strengthened relationship because they are regularly learning from each other and collaborating on priorities for racial and environmental policymaking for Cuyahoga County.

- Cuyahoga County residents have more options and accessibility to government officials' decision-making processes and increase their participation in City Council and Council Committee meetings, county departments and local commission meetings, as well as outreach events.
- Elected leaders in the US Congress and Ohio General Assembly have a deeper understanding and greater motivation to support and advance federal and state policies and funding sources that benefit Cuyahoga County's environment due to advocacy by the County Executive and County Council.
- Cuyahoga County has established itself as a leader for how to successfully accomplish equitable climate mitigation and resiliency by demonstrating a solid transition to accomplish 50% reduction in Ghg emissions by 2035 and net zero by 2050.
- Cuyahoga County incorporates a circular economy that can help meet our climate action goals that reach beyond our energy transitions.

## **Energy & Air Quality**

As a clean energy revolution takes hold across the globe, Cuyahoga County is poised to reinforce its status as a leader in responding to climate change, and accelerate its transition away from fossil fuels. Cuyahoga County made its mark as one of the first major Ohio counties to go 100% renewable in its community choice aggregation plan, and the county's ongoing commitment to the IceBreaker Wind Project as a pilot project for local clean energy production within the Great Lakes. County leaders have already created strong policies, administrative buy-in, and community support for taking action to address the impacts of climate change Cuyahoga County residents experience today.

Equally so, taking the county's municipal aggregation plan to the next level will create opportunities to address the needs of non-CPP households and can be used to promote what's necessary at this moment: A just transition to a clean energy economy in Northeast Ohio.

A broad and cohesive vision for this transition includes a bright future for Cuyahoga County and for the county's aggregation plan, with additional growth opportunities in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, energy efficiency, upstream project readiness and local renewable development.

### **POLICY PLATFORM OBJECTIVES**

- Reduce Cleveland's greenhouse gas emissions coming from the power sector and improve air quality in Cleveland.

- Fully enable community-owned solar energy.
- Strengthen the county's existing 100% renewable energy commitment by prioritizing new, local renewable energy projects in order to spur economic development opportunities and harness the fastest growing jobs in the nation in wind and solar.
- Support efforts for creating a path for Cleveland Public Power (CPP) to realize its full potential as a leader in clean energy innovation that promotes transparent governance and centers citizen voices when setting energy and air quality policy.
- Improve indoor air quality, reduce energy bills, and increase the comfort of homes through expansion of local energy efficiency and weatherization, especially in historically redlined neighborhoods with higher energy burden.
- Promote industrial energy efficiency and the use of eco-industrial parks designed to promote
- environmentally-friendly manufacturing practices.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Support the transformation of CPP to optimize innovation and economic opportunity
- Launch a community solar program that prioritizes frontline community ownership and local benefits by ensuring households and small businesses that subscribe to community solar gardens see monthly savings of 5-20%.
- Engage in long-term power-purchase agreements for clean energy produced locally, built with union labor and a diverse local workforce.
- Develop a countywide rooftop solar program, with a goal of deploying 3 megawatts of small business, residential, and non-profit rooftop solar by 2025.
- Engage in an energy economy in Northeast Ohio where Cuyahoga County can explore the benefits of long-term power purchase agreements with renewable energy developers and prioritize labor standards and union preferences to ensure good paying clean energy jobs are grown in the city and region.
- A broad and cohesive vision with additional growth opportunities in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, energy efficiency and local renewable development.
- Implement an internal revolving loan fund, or similar financing tool, for local government and residential energy projects.
- Plan for upcoming community choice aggregation contracts to require more locally sourced renewable energy through long-term power purchasing agreements, including labor standards and apprenticeship-utilization requirements.
- Cuyahoga County leaders educate state and federal officials on the success of, and need to increase funding for, Weatherization Assistance Programs for low-income weatherization, and continue to prioritize the hiring of local weatherization contractors.

- Urge Ohio’s Congressional delegation to stand up for Cleveland’s most vulnerable and vocally oppose any state or federal efforts to impede clean energy development or worsen air quality standards.
- Promote state and federal funding for growing a clean and efficient manufacturing sector, including for the purposes of industrial efficiency, repurposing industrial areas into eco-industrial parks, and growing the local supply chain for the environmentally and socially responsible products of the future.

## **MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- Cuyahoga County is recognized nationally as a clean energy innovator due to its bold action on climate change and success in equitably achieving climate mitigation, and growing the number of manufacturers involved in the clean energy supply chain, and people employed in the clean energy sector.
- Cuyahoga County neighborhoods have installed at least 10 megawatts of community-owned solar projects by 2025 and residential, small business, and nonprofits have deployed at least 3 megawatts of rooftop solar by 2025.
- Cuyahoga County has increased its competitive edge, embracing policies and programs like community solar, energy efficiency rebate programs, and smaller renewable energy projects within the county.
- Cuyahoga County meets its renewable energy goals and carbon neutrality goals through innovative and bold initiatives being carried forward by the administration, the county’s community choice aggregation plan, neighborhood groups, and local clean energy advocates.
- Cuyahoga County residents that suffer from asthma and other respiratory illnesses experience fewer bad air days by 2025.

## **Infrastructure & Transportation**

Infrastructure, public transit, and housing are crucial to take Cleveland to the next level. An individual’s ability to move around freely and easily is the single most important factor influencing social mobility and access to jobs, training, healthy foods, and health care. In this light, transportation is not just a minor issue of convenience; it shapes the opportunities available to each person in Cleveland and impacts their health. Transit routes, housing density, and integrated and smart technologies are foundational needs for a climate-resilient city.

Lowering the carbon footprint of how people move around is essential to improving air quality and responding aggressively to climate change. Investing in electric vehicle fleet upgrades and charging infrastructure is critical to improving Cuyahoga County’s climate resilience. The challenge for policymakers and community advocates in Cuyahoga County

is how to balance the need for improved infrastructure and safety with affordability. Better state and federal funding for these purposes is required.

## **POLICY PLATFORM OBJECTIVES**

- Prioritize multi-modal transportation options in an effort to broaden access to the places where people recreate, work, and live.
- Streamline county departments, transportation planning and economic/community development functions in order to both improve internal coordination and decision-making on transportation investments, and optimize benefits to health, equity, and economic justice.
- Enable and support the transition towards electric fleets.
- Embed equity, access, carbon reductions, safety, health, and connectivity in planning related to active transportation and transit to ensure economic opportunity.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Integrate the functions within Cuyahoga County government that involve planning and project management as it relates to transportation and transit; streamline the collaboration with Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) on infrastructure and resources with a focus on racial and socioeconomic equity along with public health.
- Develop a county-wide multi-modal transportation plan that focuses on moving people efficiently and equitably while engaging public transit users where they are in order to solicit input in the plan.
- Conduct health impact assessments of publicly-funded infrastructure projects, prior to finalizing, so the community and developers can fully understand implications of economic and community development efforts and ensure any negative impacts from proposed projects are addressed, mitigated and/or creatively resolved.
- Working with state and local transportation advocates, educate Cuyahoga County's delegation to the Ohio Statehouse and US Congress to advocate for more funding for public transportation and trail linkages in the State Transportation Budget, as well as federal appropriations.
- Commit to partnering with RTA for a full fleet conversion to electric by 2040 and to pilot an electric bus route along a major corridor (e.g., the Healthline). Promote state and federal funding for these purposes.
- Commit to eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries in the City of Cleveland by continuing to support the [Vision Zero Action Plan](#) through increased funding as well as an expanded countywide bikeshare program.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- All County residents can bike or walk to school, work, and green spaces on a stress-free street. Public transit becomes more of a primary choice.
- Cuyahoga County Council approves and dedicates annual funding to implement a multi-modal transportation plan that connects economic centers, neighborhoods, and greenspaces, and integrates Vision Zero goals to reduce the number of injuries and fatalities related to pedestrian and motor vehicle accidents.
- The Ohio General Assembly and US Congress allocate increasing levels of dedicated funding for Greater Cleveland's multi-modal trails, public transit, and biking infrastructure.
- Cuyahoga County residents experience faster transportation and infrastructure improvements and expanded educational opportunities through access to increased user data and metrics.
- Community infrastructure investments build wealth locally, provide access to good union jobs, and promote greater shared prosperity.

## Land & Green Spaces

Cleveland is fortunate to have beautiful parks and greenspaces where people can rest, rejuvenate, and recreate. The city's Emerald Necklace, Lake Erie, and our extensive walking and biking trail systems provide a strong foundation on which to build. However, more should be done to expand the regional tree canopy and connect local greenspaces through urban farming and gardening. Doing so will build climate resilience and serve community health needs. Additionally, racial trauma associated with open space has led to the perception that green spaces are not for minority communities creating a disparity between perceived ownership and a sense of belonging in parks.

The fate of abandoned and vacant lots is a critical factor in fostering greater equity in Cuyahoga County. Depending on the needs of the community, these abandoned areas could be made available for growing food, installing solar energy, planting trees, building playgrounds, or creating new green gathering spaces. Converting these vacant lots to be more useful to local residents is a time consuming and arduous process that could be served better by a more innovative, inclusive, and streamlined approach.

## POLICY PLATFORM OBJECTIVES

- By 2025 all Cuyahoga County residents live within a 10 minute walk of a high quality park.
- Increase collaboration and shared ownership over land use decisions.



- Invest in a healthier and more dense tree canopy that covers the entire city for the purpose of higher quality of life, carbon sequestration, decreased air pollution, and fewer heat islands.
- Increase access to vacant lots held in the county's land bank in the interest of expanded greenspace, urban gardening, or adjacent neighbor acquisition.
- Create a just and equitable system for Cuyahoga County residents to acquire land as a means of building local wealth and spur economic development.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Building on the existing success of the 10 Minute Walk Team, finalize the plan to reach park walkability goals with incremental progress each year to get to 100% of Clevelanders within a 10 minute walk to a high quality park. Build this plan on the best practices and lessons learned through the pilot programs and ideas being implemented in the identified priority areas: Clark Fulton/Slavic Village, Union Miles, Old Brooklyn, Mount Pleasant, and Kamm's Corner.
- Increase the number of vacant lots available for acquisition by residents of Cuyahoga County, and create a more efficient process for residents with proper monitoring by local community development corporations.
- Add a zoning overlay in select urban areas with a high density of the built environment or in areas with little to no park access, encouraging development that prioritizes adding green space and pocket parks.
- Working with the Cleveland Tree Coalition, municipal governments and the Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, craft achievable regional park plans for increasing the tree plantings on private property and public-right-of-way lands.
- In county budgeting, ensure stable funding for existing tree canopy, urban forestry, park maintenance, and improvements to infrastructure that will lead to greater walkability and safety in commercial districts – e.g., sidewalks, lighting, and ADA accessibility.
- Cuyahoga County solicits input from the community to create culturally-sensitive programming and education in parks, greenspaces, and other venues.

## **MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

- All Cuyahoga County neighborhoods are within walking distance of a high-quality green space, and as a result residents are healthier based on measurable public health determinants.
- Dense urban commercial corridors are softened by the addition of more usable, vibrant, and accessible greenspace.

- Zoning and planning functions in county government prioritize resident involvement to help achieve its goal of high quality parks within a short walking distance.
- The heat island effect caused by a warming climate has been noticeably lessened in local neighborhoods that have experienced new greenspace creation, as well as investments in tree plantings.
- County residents have greater influence over the fate of vacant lands in their neighborhoods, and have the ability to determine how best to use the land sustainably, whether it be a park, an urban farm, or a community solar array.
- Neighborhood-based organizations and activists successfully work with the county to increase tree canopy by 30+% on public and private properties.
- Prioritize tree planting to households and neighborhoods that face high energy burdens to provide shade that will reduce their utility bills.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Every Cuyahoga County resident deserves to live in a safe home in a healthy neighborhood.

We deserve clean air to breathe, safe water to drink, and high-quality, nearby green space to enjoy. We deserve access to reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy resources to power our homes, water utilities to provide for our families, and public transportation options to get us where we need to go.

Unfortunately, this is not the reality for all county [residents](#). There are many environmental issues and injustices that must be addressed in our community: air pollution increases the likelihood of severe asthma attacks, homes are not healthy enough to live in because of lead hazards, families experience water and energy shutoffs because they can't afford utility bill increases, and some neighborhoods do not have access to high-quality parks and green spaces. However, this does not have to be the end of our collective story.

It's important that decision-makers are informed on how environmental issues impact our community. Together we can realize a vision that includes a cleaner, greener, and healthier Cuyahoga County to the benefit of all.