



MOREHEAD CAIN

2022

CIVIC
COLLABORATION
REPORT

AN ANALYSIS OF
INTERSECTIONALITY WITHIN
CLEVELAND'S INCLUSIVE
ECONOMIC EFFORTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although Cleveland’s history is one wrought by disinvestment, poverty, and institutional racism, a new era is slowly emerging with new leadership in critical stakeholder groups around the city. Many issues are at the forefront of these collaborative difference-makers’ missions, but inclusive economic development efforts at a neighborhood level have potential for positive change.

We are five Morehead Cain scholars from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who have been granted the privilege of spending eight weeks in the city of Cleveland through a program called “Civic Collaboration.” Our intention is to provide an unbiased account of the state of Hough and Fairfax economic development initiatives. We hope to guide the community members looking to represent and implement resident voices to make a difference through our findings and solutions.

The Morehead-Cain scholarship program is the oldest merit scholarship in the United States. It offers a fully funded undergraduate education, as well as four summer enrichment opportunities to explore their passions, embark on new adventures, and cultivate their leadership. The summer after completing the first year, scholars are grouped into mid-size cities to “investigate those communities’ challenges and opportunities and propose real solutions. Not as interns—but as citizens.” Each city host proposes a thought-provoking prompt to scholars to be the basis for their research. Proposed by Randy McShepard, we were tasked with answering the question: “How can the city of Cleveland ensure that economic development efforts are comprehensive, connected, and inclusive of historically underrepresented and underserved citizens in the city?”

Through interviews with residents, government officials, non-profit leaders, and business executives, we identified four focus areas that need to be at the forefront of inclusive economic investment with regards to Midtown: education, safety, housing insecurity, and systemic infrastructure.

Education. A large part of the economic success of a community relies on access to substantial education and workforce development. Since education is a far-reaching subject that is impacted by many factors, the approach to progress education must include a variety of aspects. Although the ongoing efforts for education reform are meaningful, the current state of education in the most disadvantaged communities continues to hinder their ability to participate in economic development. ●

Housing Insecurity. The lack of affordable housing developments in challenged communities continues to limit equitable economic mobility within Hough, Fairfax, and Midtown. Increased communication between investors and residents can help ensure real estate developments are affordable, inclusive, and beneficial to its community. ●

Safety. Due to historically biased policies such as redlining, many Midtown neighborhoods suffer from a lack of resources that ensure resident safety. A community member’s sense of safety is important and should be a driving force for developers within the area. For investors in Midtown to properly revitalize the area, the safety and comfort of the citizens must first be addressed. It is

imperative that safety is looked at holistically, with respect to a range of factors that contribute to residents' perspective of feeling safe. ●

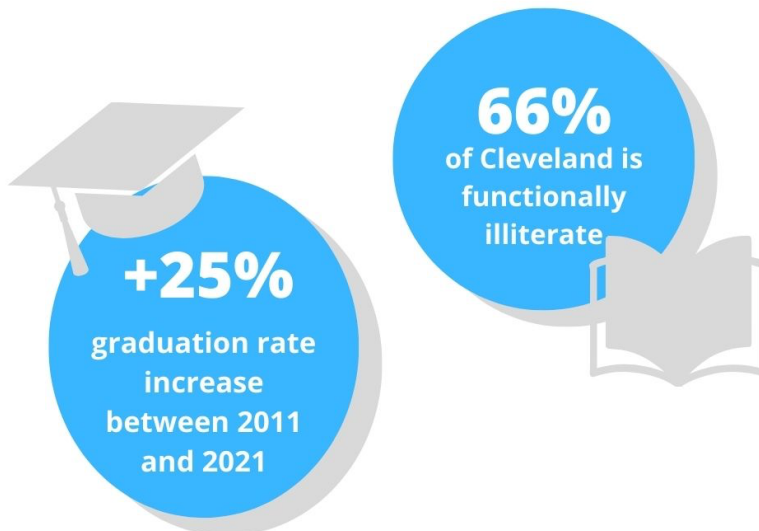
Systemic Infrastructure. It is important that communities receive adequate resources to guarantee that residents' vocalized needs are met. Yet, due to the lack of effective marketing towards areas faced with a digital divide, programs, organizations, and institutions that serve these communities are seldom utilized. ●

From these four focus areas, the themes of communication, trust, and ownership guided our research and recommendations. We believe through these themes, our recommendations can serve as a catalyst for inclusive economic development within Midtown, Hough, and Fairfax. It is our hope that as key stakeholders pursue our suggestions, community needs are at the front of each conversation.

EDUCATION

Throughout our interview and research process, we identified education as a key component towards cultivating economic development within Cleveland’s most impoverished communities. Because of the broad nature of education, we found that meaningful reform depends on a multi-faceted approach to solutions. From a structured K–12 experience to mending the digital divide, equitable economic development can be fostered within the communities that have historically been educationally overlooked. Additionally, we found workforce development to be a growing necessity for remediation in communities where unemployment and a lack of educational resources are highest.

Education is often referenced as a target area of investment, however, we found that educational success is dependent on factors that are not directly associated with academia. Specific issues such as housing and food security, safe and healthy school environments, teacher to student ratios, and Ohio’s unconstitutional system for funding schools are all factors that impact the state of education in Cleveland. Education is a critical piece of economic development that can potentially transform the living conditions of Cleveland’s historically underserved communities.



Currently, there are many efforts in place that are aimed to impact educational issues through zoning, funding, and reform. Some of these efforts include Cleveland’s Plan for Transforming Schools, the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland, the Youth Opportunities Unlimited Program, and Say Yes Cleveland, which all set ambitious and measurable goals for the future of education and opportunity in Cleveland. Although these organizations positively impacted educational reform,

there are still key gaps within these systems that must be addressed for the wellbeing of these communities. An example of this is the increased high school graduation rate juxtaposed with the literacy rate of Cleveland. **While the high school four-year graduation rates within the Cleveland Metropolitan School District have grown 25% from 2011 to 2021, it was alarmingly reported as of 2018 that 66% of Cleveland’s population is functionally illiterate.** This is an important dichotomy that reflects the complex nature of education.

Moreover, the intersection between these aspects of education is critical to mending this divide. During our interviews, residents of the Hough community expressed that **transforming the prosperity and wellbeing of their community starts with the youth.** Community members

expanded on this message saying that while the existing community organizations are at the heart of their neighborhood, they cannot be the only groups providing support for families. The efforts of organizations, such as the Fatima Family Center and the Rainey Institute cannot do it all for the youth of Hough. Based on resident feedback, additional organizational anchors need to be placed within these communities and partner with those existing organizations. Together, they can work to intercept the path of young students and the factors that stand in the way of fulfilling their educational potential.



A significant issue that a member of the Hough community voiced is safety. Safety is one of the most basic elements of an effective learning environment that, if jeopardized, can cause detrimental disruptions in the educational path of students. This needs to be addressed not only within the Hough community, but also in other underserved communities including, but not limited to, Fairfax, St. Clair-Superior, and Glenville.

Education today cannot be mentioned without assessing it through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many felt the impacts,

historically underserved communities everywhere endured extensive negative impacts. Community members familiar with the public schools in the Hough and Glenville areas described the environment of schools as a source of “trauma” for students in the wake of the pandemic. Among the many pandemics related consequences are the widened gaps in the student educational development. To address this setback, a local council person shared their belief in year-round schooling as a critical first step in remediating students. It is the responsibility of anyone aiming to mitigate the issues within education to do so in a way that considers and incorporates the consequential effects of COVID-19 within Cleveland’s public schools.

We believe education plays a significant role in inclusive economic solutions. To achieve this, there needs to be an adequate educational system that will allow the people in those communities to take advantage of the incoming opportunities. The many developments and programs in neighborhoods, like Hough, will be in vain if the literacy and educational access of the community does not prepare them to participate in it. Livable wages, affordable housing, food security, and community advocacy are all things that contribute to the economic development of a neighborhood, but highly depend on the literacy of the people. There is a clear need for meaningful collaboration between communities, education systems, and those who seek to support them to continue to address the educational barriers of Cleveland.

HOUSING

When considering the facilitation of inclusive and equitable development within Midtown, housing affordability and accessibility is essential. Several residents voiced their concern in a recent Ward 7 meeting where developers presented their plans for mixed income apartments within Hough and surrounding areas. Ward 7 residents questioned how affordable these new developments would be to current community members. Unfortunately, there was a clear difference between resident and investor priorities.

Hough’s median income is currently \$19,000, which is 33% lower than Cleveland’s median income. A staggering 42% of residents live below the poverty line. It was recommended by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development that one should spend no more than 30% of their monthly income on housing. Therefore, developers should not assume the average Hough resident can pay more than \$530 on rent monthly. Most of the investors at the council meeting proposed mixed income units, indicating both national market rate and below national market rate apartments (\$800-\$1000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment.) Specifically, one of the investors discussed their apartments being affordable for those making an annual income of \$40,000, which is unaffordable for the average Hough resident. We also heard residents voice the concern of elderly individuals looking to downsize at an affordable rate, which did not align with developers’ visions for urban revitalization. That alone does not consider other individuals who are not looking to downsize but need new multi-bedroom family homes.

A local council person expressed two important points regarding the renting situation in Hough: most residents in Hough are renters, not homeowners, and there is a shortage of landlords accepting rent vouchers. They also shed light on the pressing issue that this causes many children within the Hough area to move housing units as many as three times a scholastic year. Home ownership is vital for creating generational wealth, preventing health code violations, and for general stability, which positively impacts various sectors of life. The council person put it eloquently, **“When you do not own the land, you don’t own your future.”**

Due to historical disinvestment caused by redlining, incoming developments can be viewed as a catalyst for economic development. However, at what cost? A concern is the correlation between



incoming investments and the increased value of the land surrounding those developments. One potential impact is the increase of one’s rent. Even if landlords were not to increase rent immediately, it is likely that property taxes would go up and in turn rent would eventually increase. This could cause units to become unaffordable for renters whose income remains the same, leading to displacement, the greatest harm brought about by gentrification.

Regarding developer attraction in Cleveland’s disenfranchised communities, tax benefits are

an incentive. There is a 15-year tax abatement benefit given to new developers that has caused some frustration within some longtime residents who wish for their own tax breaks.

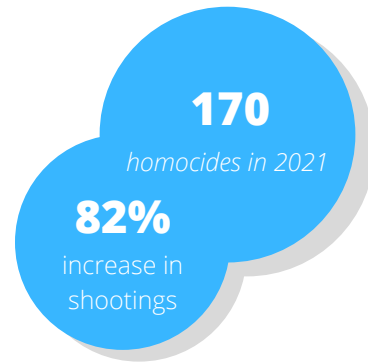
With an increase in developments in the area, the need for communication between investors and residents is larger than ever. Community members that spoke at the Ward 7 meeting expressed their desire to be more involved in development approval, as they had not previously been. Without this communication with residents, how can there be trust between the incoming developers? Inclusive economic development must include all stakeholders, especially the resident voice.

SAFETY

While now is an exciting time for investors in Midtown and surrounding areas, there are some concerns as to how safety will impact inclusive and equitable economic development within these communities. Research suggests areas that are redlined and overlooked are deemed less safe, but Frontline Development Group LLC’s project is looking to change that narrative. The project will spark retail and residential interest in Hough to revitalize the community, which has been historically disenfranchised.

These challenges have put into question how developers plan to acknowledge resident safety. While redlined communities face challenges of social organization and connection, there is also a direct correlation to crime rates. One research report conducted by Richard Powell of City University of New York finds that socially disorganized communities need to examine racially biased and charged policies to further strengthen the community. Some investors formally viewed neighborhoods with large minority populations as “risky,” leading to disinvestment, high unemployment rates and segregation. Through our research, we identified communication, trust, and internal development as a means for key stakeholders to ensure the safety of residents within these “socially disorganized” communities.

We spoke with a young resident of Hough who voiced their concerns of violence and safety within the community, specifically in relation to guns and violent crime. **Cleveland hit a jarring number of 170 homicides in 2021, the second highest on record in 30 years.** According to 2020 Cleveland Police Department data, the city faced a staggering rise in gun-related violence, with **an 82% increase in shootings within parts of Hough, University, and Central neighborhoods.** Although there are initiatives within Cleveland to promote safety amongst residents, such as the Downtown Cleveland Alliance Clean and Safe Ambassadorship program, there is still work to be done to ensure residents feel physically safe in their homes and beyond.



The right to feel *safe* within individual homes and the community should be a **nonnegotiable** factor going forward in Hough, Midtown, and Fairfax, with **emphasis** placed on fostering *effective* and *meaningful* conversations with **residents**.

The health-safety of the community is another target area that key stakeholders have addressed, specifically within lead-safe housing initiatives. The Lead Safe Cleveland Coalition works to advocate for the removal of harmful health and environmental toxins discovered in lead. Lead exposure, found within paints, can alter brain development, and there is no known cure at this time. Initiatives such as Lead Safe and the Cleveland Clinic’s \$53 million donation to ensure lead-safe homes mitigate some of the concerns. There are also opportunities to become Lead Safe certified through programs which incentivize developers to support the wellbeing of the community.

Physical landscaping also contributes to resident safety. There were representatives from a new road-safety initiative at the Ward 7 meeting who announced their plans to widen sidewalks and plant greenery along E 66th. This is a collaborative effort from The Cleveland Foundation, Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, Midtown Cleveland Inc., and residents. The community was receptive to the idea of safer walking paths, in part to the prior communication investors had with residents, which instilled a sense of trust.

It is crucial that developers and organizations continue to keep safety, in every regard, at the forefront of investment plans to ensure there is a powerful sense of respect and trust for the community. **The right to feel safe within individual homes and the community should be a nonnegotiable factor going forward in Hough, Midtown, and Fairfax, with emphasis placed on fostering effective and meaningful conversations with residents.** This will ensure there is intentionality within future development as well as build community trust.

SYSTEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

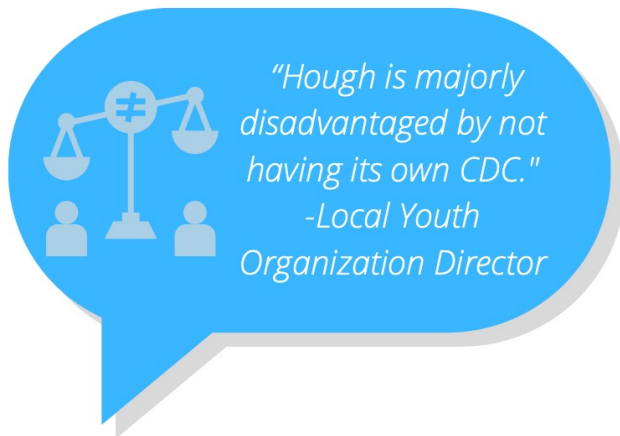
Community infrastructure lays the basis for organization that allows residents to better connect with one another, voice their needs and advocate for change. From our research, the Hough community faces challenges regarding this type of organization, which inhibits the success of its operations. Many of the economic development efforts in the neighborhood, housing for instance, do not align with the visions of residents. This is due to the lack of communication between developers and community members. Understanding the residents' visions for the future of their neighborhood is essential in preserving its history and a sense of ownership. Yet, due to the time it takes to collect this information, leaders and developers grow impatient and thus sacrifice the community voice to secure their individual economic prosperity. Inclusive economic development efforts can be achieved by restructuring the systemic infrastructure within historically disinvested communities.

After discussing with council representatives, we found that one of Hough's greatest needs is a centralized source for general information. Residents living in this area are unaware of which of their neighbors specialize in certain jobs such as construction or plumbing, and therefore they either search excessively to locate that help or live around their problems.

Communication is a consistent theme surrounding the heightened issues that Cleveland is currently confronted with. From Cleveland Clinic's recent \$1.31 million donation geared towards community benefit to the low-cost internet services offered by DigitalC, the city is inundated with programs that aim to support those residing in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Yet, the common person within the target communities lacks accessibility to become aware of those efforts. **After conducting interviews, we found that the typical marketing strategy is online based, but how does one expect this type of marketing to reach those that live without accessible technology?** A local council person works to combat this by hosting "walks and talks" at various places and times, giving their constituents the chance to raise their concerns. Yet, this is one small solution to a much larger problem.



Community Development Corporations are formed with the purpose of revitalizing neighborhoods through development, assessing residents' needs, engaging the community and so much more. Cleveland's CDCs are funded by the city, local foundations, and other corporations. We found that unlike Fairfax or Midtown, Hough is in a conjoined CDC alongside St. Clair-Superior and Glenville. After meeting with various foundations, we discovered that resources are often allocated to CDCs based on the most pressing community issues. Yet, if Hough is one of three neighborhoods sharing a CDC, then are they potentially receiving one-third of those resources? **A local youth organization director believes that Hough is majorly disadvantaged by not having one of its own.** This has led us to wonder if communities with the full dedication of one CDC are able to further combat their issues as their funding is delegated solely to one community.

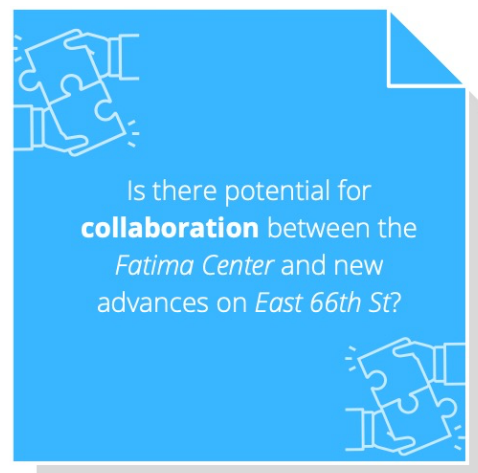


Similarly, it has become clear that CDCs are not made up of many residents living in their specific neighborhood. For instance, the Midtown CDC has very few Midtown residents on board. Yet, we have learned that funding from foundations is typically given to CDCs as they provide the resident perspective. So, the question arises, how can we ensure that CDCs are accurately representing their community while strengthening economic development?

With the new establishments moving into Midtown, and next door to the Hough neighborhood, it is correct to assume that concerns have risen from nearby residents. This region in Cleveland has experienced extreme disinvestment over the past couple of decades, which has formed increased distrust towards large corporations and leaders. Many residents have responded to the incoming projects with a vast range of opinions. A consistent response is the “wait and see” mentality, yet they have hope for positive outcomes. However, others posed the perspective that this investment is not for them, but it is for investors to attract other people. Overall, residents want the new investments to remain livable for those that have lived in the neighborhood for decades.

On the line of communication, residents fear that they are often an afterthought when it comes to developments in their neighborhood. We have heard of issues where property is bought, and residents are not informed until after plans for development have been finalized. The proposed Midtown Innovation Center on East 66th Street has the potential to affect residents in an equivalent manner. We found that the most impactful way that the Cleveland Foundation, and others, could reach the residents is through a community gathering where ideas are shared and discussed. Since many of the recent open discussions have been online, not all residents can participate in these types of meetings. We have found that in-person events, with door-to-door information flyers, will result in a more engaged community.

As it is concerned with the new investments on East 66th street, a major worry is that people are going to be drawn away from establishments that are already rooted in Hough’s culture. The Fatima Family Center has been located off East 66th Street since 2000, however their target audience is like that of the Midtown Innovation Center. Therefore, competition becomes a concern. **Is there potential for collaboration between the Fatima Center and technology driven activities on East 66th Street?** By executing this, the economic developments coming into the community become inclusive to long standing neighboring businesses.



RECOMMENDATIONS

RESIDENT INPUT ON DEVELOPMENT POLICY - In a recent Ward 7 meeting, we heard extensive affordable housing plans for incoming developments. The minimal communication between residents and developers was highlighted as investors shared unknown plans to its community. Because the developers had already purchased the land and planned elaborate designs, it felt as though there was a lack of resident supported input. While the developer's intent was to engage with the community at the meeting, their time to present was limited and those in attendance were not fully representative of the neighborhood affected. One community member questioned whether investors had spoken to the property owners directly adjacent to the new development; the developers replied that they had not. This is a major issue relating to community trust and transparent communication, thus creating a further divide between developers and community. This is especially true when residents feel that these developments will not be made accessible to them.

For this reason, we propose a measure of ensuring that developers are held accountable to consulting community members prior to the planning of a new development. We find that the voices of the neighbors to a new development are essential when fostering a cohesive community. Through in-depth conversations regarding investment, resident trust will be established in future economic development plans. ● ●

COLLEGE COUNSELING & LIFE COACHING - It is important that there is a hands-on approach to bridging the gap between individuals seeking higher education and those seeking vocational professions. We recommend allocating resources toward providing college and/or professional counseling connected with community organizations. Potentially, an advisor could be hired through a local university in a graduate program as a part of their community service work. This could form relationships between residents and prestigious institutions to make education more accessible and attainable, while building a sense of trust. This position would not be limited to just college counseling; our hope is that the advisor could also serve as a life coach for those seeking an alternative path. This encourages greater workforce development within disinvested neighborhoods for a more equitable educational approach. For the Hough community, this resource could be housed in local organizations such as the Fatima Family Center or the Midtown Innovation Center once built. We anticipate this providing a direct source of college support and workforce development for underserved communities to take part in their local economic developments. ● ●

SPECIAL IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS – As it was emphasized through community interviews, we found that both council members and residents often perceive their neighborhoods as unsafe. This not only contributes to disinvestment within these areas, but also inhibits the ability to create a sense of place. While speaking with a local developer, we became aware of Special Improvement Districts. A SID is a private, non-profit organization where “property owners elect to pay an additional assessment in order to fund public improvements and services that benefit the district.” SID assessments are based on the value of an individual’s property and typically subject to an annual increase of 1-3%. Services include community upkeep and maintenance and are

chosen by property owners through a Board of Directors. To begin a SID, 75% of community residents must sign a petition in agreement; from then on, improvement decisions are made by residents and local business owners. This collective approach ensures ownership and public involvement.

Under section 1710.06, “(2) Planning, designing, and implementing a public improvements or public services plan, including hiring architectural, engineering, legal, appraisal, insurance, consulting, energy auditing, and planning services, and, for public services, managing, protecting, and maintaining public and private facilities, including public improvements.” This suggests that services can include home improvements if they identify and fulfill needs in an equitable manner. This could be beneficial for improving the physical structures within Hough, both public and private, to benefit the entire community. If Midtown and Hough became a Special Improvement District, they could provide equitable services. While the taxes would be equal amongst businesses and homeowners alike, the funding would go to help support those areas of demonstrated need. With the help of larger institutions like the Cleveland Foundation, upcoming developments could benefit existing community members without the original concern of displacement. ● ● ●

PRO-BONO PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITIES - The lack of communication between investors and residents in Hough, Fairfax and Midtown has highlighted many concerns about residents’ rights as homeowners regarding incoming developments. It is our recommendation that through pre-existing pro-bono programs (i.e., Cleveland State’s Marshall College of Law program with Legal-Aid Society of Cleveland) or a new partnership with local law schools, current or hopeful homeowners can be advised on their property rights. The initiative could satisfy pro-bono requirements for law students to gain real-world experience at such an exciting time for Midtown and surrounding communities. It can also ensure residents are knowledgeable of the legal aspects surrounding development. This guarantees the community is educated on the processes involved through the Cleveland Foundation land trust. This program could potentially be housed under the Cleveland Foundation’s Midtown Innovation Center or through another local center within the area. ● ●

HOUGH ORGANIZED - Formed in 1968, the first Community Development Corporation in Cleveland was the Hough Area Development Corporation. This CDC relied on city funding to achieve positive results and, two years later, the Famicos Foundation was formed. In the 1970s, the HADC made efforts to “stabilize the lives and residences of low-income people” and were successful compared to other early CDCs. Yet, nearly 50 years later, this neighborhood is facing the same issues. Not long after its start, HADC was dismantled due to diminishing resources forcing them to join with the Famicos Foundation. Today, Famicos is 1 of approximately 30 CDCs in Cleveland. It makes one wonder why three of the lowest income neighborhoods in Cleveland are working through a joint CDC while other thriving neighborhoods have an entire CDC base of advocates. Originally, we planned to propose the creation of a Hough specific CDC; however, this community recently formed the Hough Community Land Trust. Alternatively, we now propose that Hough forms a group that addresses the organizational aspects, like connecting the community and addressing needs, which is missing between the Land Trust and the new responsibilities that CDCs take on.

Secondly, as it relates to furthering organizational efforts within the Hough community, we found that a lack of a communal website leads to decreased connectivity. The simplicity of finding a web designer to create a centralized place for neighborhood information could connect residents to programs and one another more efficiently. With communication being one of the largest barriers between community members, we believe that a website is an immediate solution.



REIGNITING YOUTH SPORTS - Cleveland is home to three major sports teams: the Cleveland Guardians, Browns, and Cavaliers. We believe this creates an incredible opportunity to influence the development of youth sports, although this potential seems immensely untapped. After speaking with the City of Cleveland Division of Recreation, it is clear the pandemic halted youth participation in sports. The organization “manages over 150 parks, playgrounds, and green spaces,” which can be a haven for at-risk youth. With evidence supporting a link between youth participation in sports and reduced rates of crime, the Hough and Fairfax communities would benefit exponentially from a greater investment in its youth. We recommend investing in a recurring program with the Cavaliers, Guardians, and Browns that secures annual funding for local youth sports programs. As pandemic-related regulations ease, it is a unique time for reinventing a standard for youth sports, and more importantly, youth investment in Cleveland. ● ● ●

CREATION OF MORE YOUTH COUNCILS - The Hough Youth Advisory Council is one of a kind. The council, consisting of youth from various Cleveland schools, comes together to execute special projects, as well as gather and provide perspectives to CDCs in the area. Once learning about the council’s current project, a Black Joy in Hough festival, we discussed the importance of a paid youth leadership team. It is imperative that we compensate our youth financially for their time, expertise, and contributions to the betterment of their communities. That is why we encourage the creation of similar youth councils sponsored by every CDC. They are essential in ensuring the youth and community perspective is heard and acknowledged, while developing Cleveland’s next generation of leaders. Youth-driven change will then serve as a platform for creation and ownership of their futures. ● ● ●

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TEAM CLEVELAND



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