

# WATTERSON-LAKE SITE ENGAGEMENT REPORT

W. 74 St

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## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

In March 2021, Cleveland City Council approved Ordinance No. 75-2021 which authorized the Directors of Public Works and Community Development to enter into a property exchange agreement with the Board of Education of Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) to transfer various properties, including Watterson-Lake, between the parties to facilitate the efficient use of real estate for public purposes.

In August 2021, CMSD Segment 8 funding was approved by the State of Ohio Controlling Board, including the funding necessary for CMSD to demolish the existing Watterson-Lake building that remains on the site. Once CMSD completes abatement and demolition of the building, the site in its entirety will transfer to the City of Cleveland. Subsequently, it is the City's intention to issue a call for proposals to redevelop the site.

The more than 2-acre tract of land is a once in a generation opportunity to address unmet community needs in the burgeoning Gordon Square Arts District. Although the site's redevelopment will largely rely on private capital and investment, the fact that the site is publicly owned gives the community and the City of Cleveland increased sway and influence over the ultimate outcome and what is built on the site.

To ensure public voice in the City of Cleveland's disposition process, Ward 15 Councilmember Jenny Spencer and the Cleveland City Planning Commission released an RFP for community engagement consultants and in October of 2021 contracted with Free By Design LLC to lead a two month engagement process with the community immediately surrounding the Watterson-Lake site. The objective of the engagement process was to identify shared values, explore a community vision, and prioritize unmet needs (for example, filling current gaps in the housing or retail market, or other community needs).

Public input is what democratizes decision making. According to the American Institute of Certified Planner's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2009), "planners have as their primary obligation to serve the public interest and therefore owe their allegiance to a conscientiously attained concept of the public interest that is formulated through continuous and open debate. Therefore, engaging the local residents that will be affected by a certain project can be considered a moral and ethical obligation of both planners and of decision makers within a democratic society."

The purpose of public participation is to obtain better plans, meaning that they are well accepted by most locals residents and are therefore easier to carry out (Fiskaa 2005). Establishing a dialogue between the community and developer leads to improved outcomes for all stakeholders. When done authentically, this communication can reduce opposition to development projects, which can be costly both in time and money. Additionally, when developers value local knowledge, innovations emerge that could not have been generated through the sole perspective of the development profession.

The question then is how to utilize that input. This report intends to document local knowledge of how the Watterson-Lake site is currently used, as well as how the community would like to engage with the site in the future.

In addition, this Watterson-Lake Site Engagement Report will be included in the City of Cleveland's request for proposals (RFP) that will be released to solicit development proposals for the site. By indicating community values and preferences, the Report will be an integral component of the RFP and will be used to prioritize RFP responses received by the City.

*For more information about historic Watterson-Lake site and a detailed background, visit [www.wattersonlakecle.com/site-background](http://www.wattersonlakecle.com/site-background).*

## ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Free By Design was contracted to create and execute an engagement process that would:

1. Gather feedback from residents and business owners within .25 miles of the Watterson-Lake site in terms of what they value most.
2. Disseminate collateral promoting digital and in-person engagement opportunities regarding the Watterson-Lake site.
3. Synthesize findings into a report delivered to the Cleveland City Planning Commission.

To accomplish these objectives the following processes were employed:

**Website** In October, Free by Design designed and built the website, [www.wattersonlakecle.com](http://www.wattersonlakecle.com), to educate the public about the Watterson-Lake site history and current status, to answer frequently asked questions, and to alert residents of upcoming opportunities to share what matters to them most in terms of the site development. The website also provided a form for residents to submit inquiries or comments. This website should be maintained for a year with project site background and details. Spanish language translation was made available on the website.

**Site Signage** In October, Councilmember Jenny Spencer had a 48" x 96" sign installed on the Watterson-Lake site, at the corner of West 74th Street and Detroit Avenue to alert the public to the coming development and direct them to the website for additional information. Text on the sign included directions in Spanish for how to learn more about the project.



**Community Values Survey** Free by Design developed a survey to identify and prioritize values, recognize which values currently exist in the neighborhood, and recognize the potential for the Watterson-Lake site to fulfill unmet demand for expressed values. This survey consisted of both qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey was open from November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, through February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

The survey was linked on the engagement website, included on flyers that were distributed to neighborhood residents and businesses, made available at community pop-ups, sent to attendees of a prior Watterson-Lake site meeting held at Bethany Church on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (attendee list provided by Northwest Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation staff), and distributed through block club listservs in the immediate vicinity of the Watterson-Lake site. The community values survey also contained a demographic section. This was intended to act as an accountability measure to ensure that input from residents reflected the demographic makeup of the community.

**On Site Pop -Ups** To increase touch points with neighbors and community stakeholders, two pop up events were held on the Watterson-Lake site. These events occurred on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and November 10<sup>th</sup> 2021, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. respectively, at the corner of West 74<sup>th</sup> Street and Detroit Avenue.

Events were designed to create an inviting, low risk environment to attract those who may not typically be engaged in a public process. To create the atmosphere a small tent was erected, hot drinks and sweets provided, lively music played, and balloons and seasonal decorations displayed. While both events were advertised, the primary purpose was to serve as an avenue for neighbors and stakeholders casually passing by to learn about the project and provide insights.

The pop-up events materials included flyers for upcoming community workshops; direct links for individuals to complete the community survey; a computer so individuals who do not have access to the

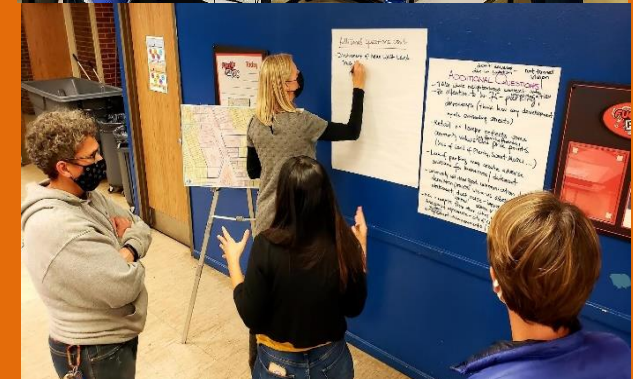
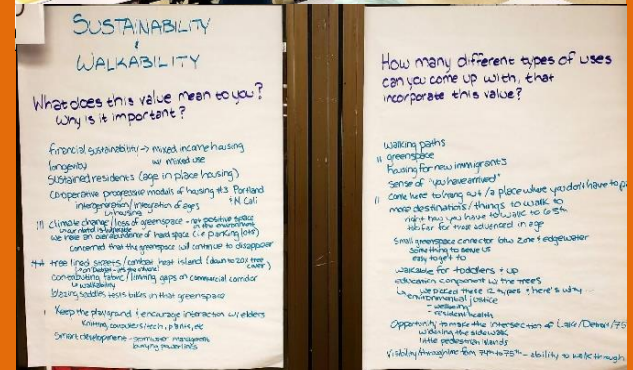




**Community Workshops** Two community workshops were held on November 17<sup>th</sup> from 6:00-7:30p.m. and November 30<sup>th</sup> from 5:30-7:00 p.m. The first was held in person at Joseph M. Gallagher School, a CMSD school in close proximity to the site, while the second workshop was hosted on the digital platform Zoom for individuals who were uncomfortable with in person engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In preparation for the community workshops, responses from the community values survey and pop-up events were synthesized. Outstanding questions submitted via the website or through the survey were compiled and a Frequently Asked Questions one-pager was created for the workshop (Attachment B). An FAQ section was also added to the engagement website. Through analyzing community responses, three overarching categories arose as primary values identified by the community.

1. Maintaining or increasing diversity: Comments were primarily referencing economic and racial diversity. To a lesser extent, comments also referred to intergenerational diversity and/or to diversity broadly;
2. Maintaining access for the community: The highest number of comments referenced greenspaces and spaces for connection among neighbors. Community members specifically mentioned neutral public spaces where they could gather or play;
3. Promoting or increasing sustainability: Comments emphasized that neighbors highly value integrating sustainability measures such increasing tree canopy, decreasing impermeable surfaces and reducing heat islands. Additionally, the importance of pedestrian and cyclist safety as well as connections to neighborhood assets were highlighted.



The workshops were designed as an opportunity for highly invested neighbors to gather, systematically deconstruct identified community values, and creatively conceptualize how these values could be incorporated into potential site uses. Time was provided to review the history of the site, FAQs, and the intention of the engagement process. Following an allotment of time for general questions, participants could then freely move between five stations (or Zoom breakout rooms): Values Station #1: Diversity; Values Station #2: Public Space Access; Values Station #3: Sustainability; Neighborhood Context Station: Delving deeper into census information; Continued Q&A/Unaddressed Values Station.

At each of the values stations (or Zoom breakout rooms), participants were asked to respond to the following three questions:

- What does this value mean to you? Why is it important?
- How many different types of uses can you come up with that incorporate this value?
- What are some examples in Cleveland, or other places you've visited, that incorporate this value into a new development?

Facilitators were present at each station (or breakout Zoom room) to capture responses on flip chart paper and asked to follow up questions to elicit clear and in-depth responses.

For the in-person workshop, participants were provided post-its and invited to write their own responses to add to the flip chart paper. Spanish language translation was available upon request during the in-person workshop.

## ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

### *Pop Up Synthesis*

Approximately thirty community members were engaged at each of the pop-up events. Open ended comments captured through a range of brief and in-depth conversations were summarized and categorized into the following categories:

*Public Access* By far the value most often expressed by pop-up attendees was to maintain public access to the site, (>40 comments). These comments varied greatly from keeping the entire site as a City owned park to ensuring there is bike/pedestrian connection from West 74<sup>th</sup> Street to West 75<sup>th</sup> Street. The highest concern was for there to be continued access to the playground equipment that is currently on the site. Several participants expressed a desire for community space for meetings and/or gatherings such as a gazebo or picnic area.

*Housing* The next highest frequency of comments pertained to housing. Of note, many of those engaged during the pop-up held the assumption that housing was a predetermined outcome for the site. The majority sentiment was that any housing built should promote economic diversity in the neighborhood.

Several participants called for mixed income or all affordable housing units. Creating density was frequently cited as priority. Lastly, if housing was developed, residents would like to see the developer incentivizes tenants to engage, examples included: RTA cards, discounts for participating in block clubs or performing community services.

*Community Character* Several pop-up participants mentioned that maintaining the character of the community was of great importance. These comments broke down into two subsets: historical architecture and retention of current residents. Comments on architecture primarily focused on the height of buildings with several explicit requests for there not to be “high rises” and for the architecture to complement the surrounding area. Other comments asserted the importance of maintaining or promoting racial and economic diversity in the neighborhood. Latinx and immigrant communities were mentioned specifically.

*Amenities* Participants mentioned the importance of art and retail to the culture of the neighborhood. Several neighbors acknowledged that highlighting the cultural history of the neighborhood through art or other means is critical. They were receptive to the idea of retail that fits with the local establishments further east on Detroit Avenue. A few neighbors stated that they would love to see a supermarket with fresh produce specifically, but all comments mentioned that affordability must be retained in retail spaces both in terms of the lease and in terms of the goods and services sold. Participants expressed a desire for small businesses rather than big box stores.

*Parking* The impact that new development will have on parking was noted by several neighbors. The majority of neighbors commenting on parking lived within a few block radius of the redevelopment site. Notably, there were diverging perspectives expressed by neighbors. An equal number of comments were expressed both to ensure the availability of parking, and to reduce parking lots and encourage public transit. Offering an incentive to use public transit was one example of how the developer could encourage reduced parking.

### *Community Values Survey Results*

Eighty participants shared their values for their community via the survey.

When asked to think about their community, the values most important to those surveyed included: access to parks/greenspace, walkability, connection with neighbors, racial and economic diversity, and sustainability (Figure 3). Write-in responses included several mentions of more specific sustainability measures (tree coverage, air quality, reducing heat islands) as well as calls for affordable housing.



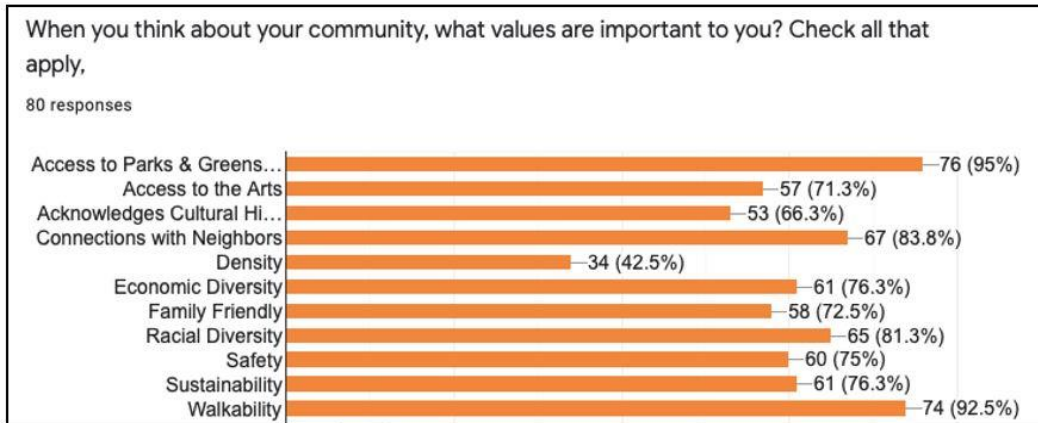


Figure 3. Most important community values

Participants reported that the neighborhood is currently very walkable (81% of respondents) and has great access to the arts (83% of respondents). The vast majority (75%) of respondents also determined that the neighborhood currently has access to parks and greenspaces, yet also indicated that they would like to see more expression of this value. A similar pattern existed as participants assessed connections with neighbors and the importance of being part of an inclusive community. Sustainability, economic diversity and racial diversity were values that were rated as both important to respondents and a value they would like to see more present in the community.

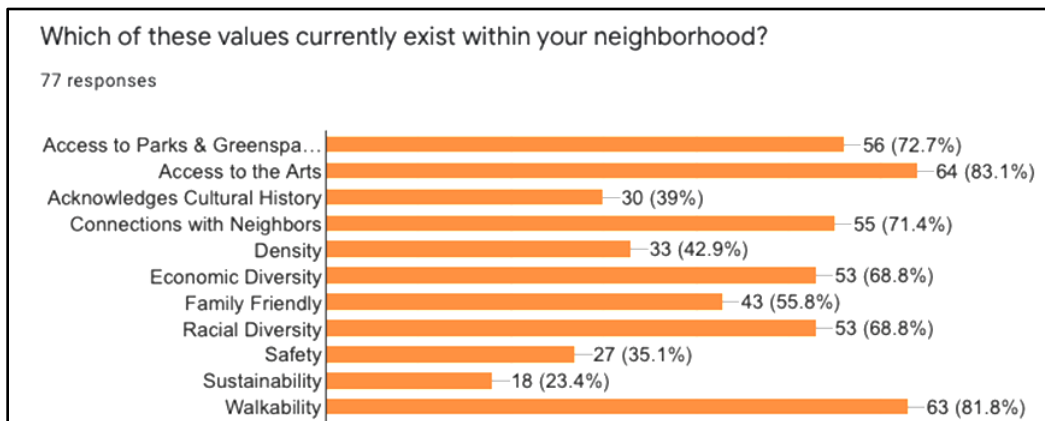


Figure 4. Values currently demonstrated in the community

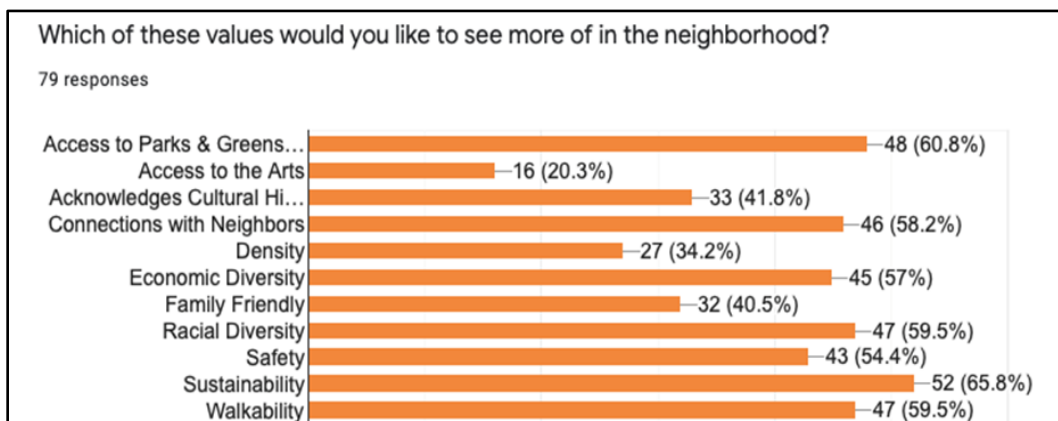


Figure 5. Community values to still be fulfilled

**Community Workshops Synthesis** Thirty-three community stakeholders attended the in-person workshop, while the virtual workshop had ten participants. The intent of the workshops was to further explore the top values identified in both the pop-ups and the surveys and how those values could realistically be incorporated into the redevelopment of the Watterson-Lake site. The following is a summary of the input from the two workshops:

**Public Access** Comments regarding public access largely reinforced conversations held at the pop-up events and survey comments. Participants placed heavy emphasis on maintaining a welcoming space in the community where neighbors could be without having to spend money to utilize. Suggestions included; a public gazebo for picnics, freely accessible community rooms, playground equipment, and an amphitheater for events.

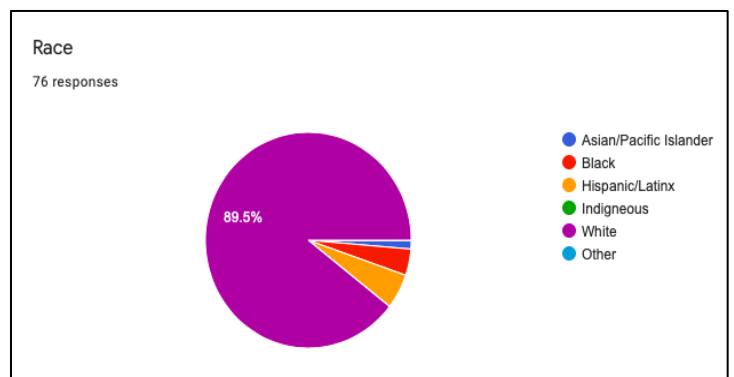
**Diversity** Participants expressed racially, economically, and generationally diverse neighborhoods are more livable, whole, and rich. When asked how the development of the site could support this, attendees were most concerned with people being able to live in the neighborhood affordably. In addition to affordable housing, it was noted that retail options should also be accessible for low to moderate income neighbors, (Ex: Sweet Moses ice cream that recently left the neighborhood). A handful of residents were interested in housing developed specifically for intergenerational dwellings, aging neighbors, or the growing immigrant and refugee populations in the neighborhood. There were recurring sentiments that high end luxury apartments would not be appropriate for this site.

**Sustainability/Walkability\*** A consistent sentiment was that the new site would contribute to the existing fabric of the community and reduce gaps on the commercial corridor. Specifically, residents would like for RFP proposals to include tree plans, stormwater retention, and transit-oriented development. Additionally, ensuring that the new development does not negatively impact bike and pedestrian safety was of importance to attendees.

\* During the virtual workshop the Public Access and Sustainability/Walkability breakouts were combined into one conversation. This was done due to the overlap and interrelated comments between the two groups during the initial in-person workshop.

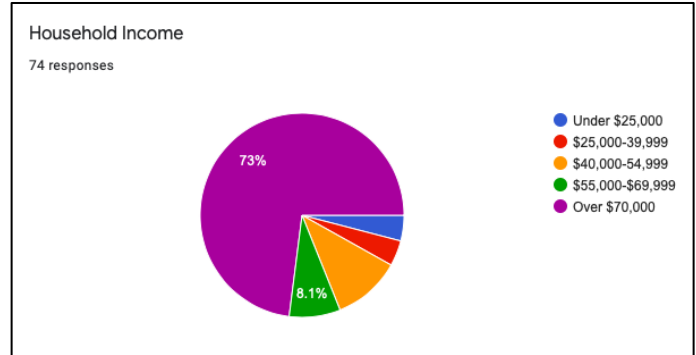
## LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this engagement process was that it did not reach a representative sample of the population. The average survey respondent identified as white (89.5%), is a homeowner (85.5%) and report household income over \$70,000 (73%).



Conversely, according to The Center for Community Solutions 2021 Neighborhood Fact Sheet, the makeup of the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood is as follows: 64% white, and the average household makes \$31,134/household.

With more time, Free by Design would have doubled back to the areas of the neighborhood with more renters and black and brown neighbors to do more intensive engagement there. While the survey and workshops yielded few responses from BIPOC neighbors, conversations at pop-up events reached a more racially diverse audience. This engagement tactic was critical in that it reached less often engaged residents who tend to be lower income individuals and people of color.



## ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Watterson-Lake site proposes a unique opportunity for a developer to partner with the community in creating a project that will benefit all stakeholders. The significant size of the site, the prominent placement on a main corridor in the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood, and the fact that the site is publicly controlled presents a set of circumstances likely to be unparalleled in the coming decades. This site has been used for the public good for over a century; it is paramount that the community can continue to influence its development and directly benefit from its investment.

Throughout the engagement process the themes of what the community values remained consistent. The neighbors engaged in the process were clear that they deeply care about community connectedness. A crucial aspect of that connectivity is creating a neighborhood that is accessible and welcoming to a diverse mix of residents racially and economically. This overarching value presented itself in design suggestions ranging from the strong emphasis on maintaining public access to the site, incorporating family-friendly intergenerational play spaces, creating connectivity between the eastern and western edges of the site, and requiring affordability as part of the development.

The majority of engaged residents acknowledged that a mixed-use development with a combination of housing, retail and a public gathering space could be ideal. How this is implemented will determine the success of creating a space that is supported by the community. Ultimately, the following factors were determined to be most important to residents engaged in this process:

- Promoting community connectivity, for example hosting community programming, incentivizing participation in community groups and civic organizations, or simply through its design (creating opportunities for spontaneous connection and engagement between neighbors).
- Public access to the part of the redeveloped space. Emphasis on accessible outdoor family

friendly space with structures for gathering (i.e. play equipment, picnic tables, lighting. etc.)

- Maintaining affordability in either rent or purchase price. Specifically, all low income or a mixed income with an emphasis on low-income development. There was also a desire for retail options to cater to varying incomes.
- Incorporating elements of sustainability, for example increasing tree coverage and building for climate resiliency.

### *Implementation Examples*

The following are samples of projects with designs that incorporate specific desired values named in this community engagement process:

*Church + State*, a 158-unit apartment building in the Ohio City neighborhood is private development that incorporates placemaking. Most notably, it includes a 10,000 square foot publicly accessible area between its two structures. The resulting courtyard features play equipment, public seating, lighting, vegetation, local art, bike racks, and a pedestrian pathway.



*A.O. Flats at Forest Hills*, a transit-oriented, mixed-income housing development in the racially and economically diverse neighborhood of Jamaica Plains, Boston. The project creates 78 new units, 40 of which are affordable apartments for households earning at or below 60% of area median income (AMI). Eight of these units are set-aside for formerly homeless families who earn at or below 30% AMI. The project includes 38 units of workforce housing. The energy-efficient building has a Platinum level of LEED certifiability and includes 1,500 square feet of commercial space on the first floor.

*Battery Park*, an example development within the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood in which a large greenspace is maintained by the developer and used by the greater community. Most commonly it has become a gathering space for pet owners.



### *Recommended Next Steps*

- We recommend that the website [www.wattersonlakecle.com](http://www.wattersonlakecle.com) stay live throughout the process of identifying, hiring and working with a developer so the community can check back for updates on site progress. In the FAQ we supplied at the workshops and on the website, we explain that those who completed the survey and/or attended a workshop will be added to a list of residents who will receive email updates and that they can also go to the website for project updates.
- It is our sincere desire that the committee will craft a scoring process that rewards developer proposals that respect the community values described in this report.
- We strongly recommend that the City include resident representatives on the committee in charge of reviewing RFP responses and selecting a developer. The City could also engage the community in a process of reviewing the draft RFP and proposed scoring rubric before RFP release, expressing priorities for how elements would be weighted and scored.
- After a developer is selected by said committee, a community benefits agreement should be drafted by the committee and signed by the developer selected. Potential points of inclusion:
  - Develop a formal structure for community-based oversight and enforcement of CBA.
  - Partnering with non-profit/community groups on programming.
  - A requirement that at least X% of construction and non-construction employees be targeted workers, (such as veteran status, gender, race, residency in a low-income neighborhood, prior incarceration, or disability), with priority placement of underemployed residents in the immediate neighborhood.
  - An initial contribution of \$X, plus ongoing contribution to a coalition-controlled fund that may be used for specific community needs.
  - A grant program for local businesses that employ large numbers of local owners.
  - Extensive green building measures and community consultation on environmental issues.
  - Formal agreement about community access to created indoor/outdoor spaces.
  - For housing proposals:
    - Determine percentage requirement of affordable and workforce housing units.
    - Commitment to 3-bedroom units that reflect need for family housing.
    - ADA accessible or specifically designed for aging in place units.

## REFERENCES

AICP. (2009). 'AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct', American Planning Association.

Fiskaa, H. (2005). 'Past and Future for Public Participation in Norwegian Physical Planning', *European Planning Studies*. 13(1):157-74.



# WATTERSON-LAKE SITE DEVELOPMENT

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

The City of Cleveland is preparing to redevelop this site. Get your voice in the process through:

- **Learn details + ways to participate:**  
[www.WattersonLakecle.com](http://www.WattersonLakecle.com)
- **Join for community meeting:**  
11/17 6-7:30PM @ Joseph Gallagher School  
Gym 6601 Franklin Blvd.
- **Share your values and needs:**  
Scan with your phone here



¿Preguntas en español? Llame al (216) 664-4235.



# WATTERSON-LAKE SITE REDEVELOPMENT FAQ'S

The Watterson-Lake site is positioned for redevelopment and in 2022 the City will release a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit parties interested in re-envisioning the site. The following are a few FAQ's about the process, additional information and updates can be found at: [www.wattersonlakecle.com](http://www.wattersonlakecle.com)

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Q: Who owns the site now?

**A:** Currently, Watterson-Lake is owned by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD), but ownership is expected to transfer to the City of Cleveland in 2022. The City will then release a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit interested parties – private, nonprofit, or public sector partners – that are interested in re-envisioning the site and leading its post-school redevelopment.

### Q: What is the approximate timeline for the Watterson-Lake redevelopment?

**A:** Many steps have taken place to lead us to today, including the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD's) decision to close Watterson-Lake and merge it with Waverly School in 2019.

- In March 2021, Cleveland City Council approved Ordinance No. 75-2021 which authorizes the Directors of Public Works and Community Development to enter into a property exchange agreement with the Board of Education of CMSD to transfer various properties - including Watterson-Lake - between the parties to facilitate the efficient use of real estate for public purposes.
- In August 2021, CMSD Segment 8 funding was approved by the State of Ohio Controlling Board, including the funding necessary for CMSD to demolish the existing Watterson-Lake building that remains on the site.
- The current community engagement process, led by Free By Design LLC, will conclude in Fall 2021. Free By Design will prepare a report on the process, which will be integrated into the future Request for Proposals (RFP) for the site.
- The remaining timeline is **estimated**:
  - Spring 2022 – City of Cleveland to issue RFP for Watterson-Lake
  - Spring 2022 - CMSD finalizes demolition abatement documents
  - Summer 2022 – Demolition of existing Watterson-Lake Building begins and land swap between CMSD and City of Cleveland is formalized
  - Summer/Fall 2022 – RFP responses are received and evaluated; a contract is awarded for site redevelopment





**Q: How can I get involved and stay up to date?**

**A:** By completing the survey you are automatically added to a list of residents that will receive email updates. If you signed in at the meeting today you will also be added to this list. You can also go to the website [www.wattersonlakecle.com](http://www.wattersonlakecle.com) for project updates.

**Q:How exactly will the neighborhood input be used and who will have the final say in the design for the site?**

**A:** Ward 15 Councilmember Jenny Spencer allocated funding for this community facilitation process in order to identify shared values, explore a community vision, and prioritize unmet needs (for example, filling current gaps in the housing or retail market, or other community needs). The process facilitators, Free By Design LLC, will synthesize feedback into a final report that will be posted to the project website. In addition, the report will be included as an exhibit to the City's Request for Proposals (RFP), once released. The RFP itself will be a public document, which the community would have the opportunity to review. Under the Frank G. Jackson administration, the City's typical process has been for representatives from various departments to review and score RFPs internally. Councilmember Spencer will work with Mayor-elect Bibb's administration to determine how the RFP release and scoring process for Watterson-Lake will proceed. Because the site is located within the Gordon Square Landmark District, once a developer/development partnership is selected, their proposed site plan and design would also undergo reviews by the Cleveland Landmarks Commission as well as the Cleveland City Planning Commission. Councilmember Spencer is committed to keeping the community updated throughout the steps described above.

**Q: Are there certain uses that are more realistic to implement?**

**A:** The Watterson-Lake site could have one use, more than one use, or a range of multiple uses. It is our hope that developers - or collaborations between multiple development partners (whether public, private or non-profit) - will choose to respond to the RFP, and that numerous viable responses will be received. Any developer and/or development partnership choosing to respond must also demonstrate capacity and track record in terms of their ability to redevelop a site of this scale. Because the property will be City-owned, the RFP itself will be issued by the administration of Mayor-elect Justin Bibb. Current City policy dictates that the land would need to be sold to the selected entity for appraised value, but such policies could change under the incoming administration.

**Q: How will the project support the neighborhood (regardless of use) rather than be an isolated project?**

**A:** In addition to the developer (and/or development team's) capacity and other criteria that might be included in the RFP by the City, we expect that RFP responses would take into consideration factors including surrounding conditions, other nearby development projects, existing neighborhood plans, neighborhood amenities, and neighborhood demographics.