

## Statement Against Issue 9 submitted by Friends of BuildCLM

On behalf of the Friends of BuildCLM, we urge the voting members of this body to vote again endorsing Issue 9. Our opposition to this issue is based on two core concerns: first, what its potential passage will cause an impairment of contract for the Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook development project, and second the limitations and uncertainty surrounding this initiative's ability to deliver on its promised, but unfunded park.

At present, Cleveland Heights has a signed contract with developer Flaherty & Collins for the mixed-use Cedar-Lee-Meadowbrook project on a portion of the underutilized surface parking lot near the corner of Cedar and Lee and on the current 1-acre vacant lot at Tullamore, Lee, and Meadowbrook. The project went through a public Request for Proposal process, the city's contracting process over almost 1 year, and has received all necessary approvals and zoning variances from the city. It will create 206 market-rate apartments, up to three new retail spaces, and 1.3 acres of public greenspace, all built and maintained by the developer.

Since 2004, the City has been working towards mixed use development in this area. The parking garage was constructed in 2007, mixed use zoning confirmed in the 2011 and 2017 master plan updates, RFPs put out multiple times, with the most recent in October 2020 at which time two proposals meeting the specified requirements were received. City Council entered into a Memorandum of Understanding in the summer of 2021 with Flaherty & Collins, and had a first reading of the formal development agreement on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, a week before the petitioners submitted their first, insufficient round of signatures to put Issue 9 on the ballot. The development agreement was approved by all present council members upon the third reading on December 6<sup>th</sup>, three weeks before additional, sufficient signatures were submitted.

The CLM project is an example of infill development that contributes to Cleveland Heights being environmentally sustainable. Higher residential density reduces the need for sprawl and reliance on cars and fossil fuels. CLM is positioned along two major bus routes, near existing retail, allowing new residents to walk, bike, scoot, or take transit for many of their trips. By adding additional retail spaces and providing new patrons to ensure existing businesses stay open, this project also makes the neighborhood more walkable for current nearby residents.

CLM will add to the diversity of housing options in Cleveland Heights, allowing residents the opportunity to age-in-place and providing residential space to those not looking or not yet ready to buy a house in Cleveland Heights. Housing affordability is an important item for us to consider when speaking about this development. Affordable housing is in part impacted by supply and demand. New market-rate development helps relieve pressure on local housing prices. According to one 2020 study of low-income census tracts, the construction of new market-rate rentals resulted in rents for nearby buildings falling by 5 to 7 percent. New development reduces the displacement and eviction of existing residents. New market-rate housing also has a way of turning into affordable housing through a phenomenon known as "filtering." As buildings age, designs fall out of fashion and affluent residents move into newer homes, allowing prices to decline. Contrary to common concerns, new buildings slow local rent increases rather than initiate or accelerate them. If you rent an apartment built more than 50 years ago, you may well be living in a residence previously considered "luxury". Cleveland Heights is a community of more than 45,000 people. The CLM project's 206 market-rate housing units represent a small increase in the city's overall housing stock. Rents for CLM apartments will have a negligible effect on housing affordability in

Cleveland Heights. As you vote tonight, please keep in mind, the passage of issue 9 does nothing to increase the number of housing units in Cleveland Heights, affordable or otherwise.

Out of the total 1.3 acres of public greenspace which will be built and maintained as part of this project, included in the approved designs is a 1/3 acre park at the corner of Meadowbrook and Lee. For context,

the size of the public space in that area alone will be larger than the gathering space in Van Aken by Mitchell's Ice Cream, and similar to the space at Legacy Village in Lyndhurst. It will be built and maintained with private funds, but it will be for public use. Moving forward with CLM reduces the need for the City to spend taxpayer dollars developing, building, and maintaining this public park space, and it reduces the city's current maintenance costs in the Cedar-Lee area. With the developer handling these costs, funds can be redirected to other areas of the city in need.

Through the TIF funding process, the development will provide additional revenue to the Cleveland Heights – University Heights school district. Just south of Heights High School, an area often walked through by students, will also be improved by the removal of blighted vacant buildings and the creation and maintenance of inviting, well-lit public spaces and pathways.

If Issue 9 passes, it is not clear what happens next. The city has stated that if forced to exclude this parcel from the development, the project cannot move forward and that passage of Issue 9 would "render pointless the investments made by the City over the past years to promote development on this site." It is not clear what will happen if the city is unable to raise funding through grants or bond issues to pay for the "activity park." It is not clear how long the vacant lot will continue to remain empty and inactive. Per Section 2 of the ballot itself "All construction activities associated with the Site be suspended as of the certification of this petition," with no mechanism to restart construction for at least 2 years. The passage of Issue 9 also raises questions about the future of other local development opportunities, such as Severance Center, if it becomes clear that Cleveland Heights is a city where even a signed contract cannot be trusted.

What is clear is that the successful defeat of Issue 9 will allow for the fruition of nearly 2 decades of planning, community input, and legislative decisions: 50+ million dollars of investment into the Cedar-Lee district to build new homes, retail, and green space. This initiative, if passed, is only certain to block progress and development that benefit the city, local businesses, and current residents. Development of this land is sustainable, adds to the economic vitality of the Cedar-Lee district and allows funds to be directed to other areas of the city.

Again, we urge all Cleveland Heights registered voters to Vote No on May 3-and hope this group votes to not endorse Issue 9.