



BRINGING  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
PROJECTS TO LIFE,  
BLOCK BY BLOCK

YOUR GUIDE TO

# Getting Good Done in Cleveland

How to work with city government  
to improve your neighborhood

## GETTING GOOD DONE

ioby works with resident leaders to plan, fund, and lead positive change in our neighborhoods. We know that the best community projects are not solo endeavors - real change means collaboration, coordination, and teamwork.

But we also know how daunting it can feel to work with city government for the first time. That's why we developed this guide, to make it easier to connect and work with city officials to make our neighborhoods safer, greener, more livable and more fun!

Our biggest takeaways? It's not that hard, and you stand to gain a lot.

### Who we spoke to:



**Matthew Gray**

Director of Sustainability,  
Cleveland Mayor's Office



**Marka Fields**

Chief City Planner,  
Cleveland City Planning  
Commission

1

# Why work with the city?

## Grants

The Cleveland Climate Action Fund awards **grants of up to \$5,000** to local leaders spearheading environmental projects. **Neighborhood Connections** is another great local grantmaker and **networking platform**.

## Support

You should always keep city officials informed of their neighborhood projects so that they know what's going on in the city they work for, but keeping officials in the loop is also the only route to asking them for their help in promoting, attending, funding, getting permit approval, or otherwise supporting your efforts.

## Momentum

Unsanctioned pop-up projects have their place (check out **street-plans.com** if you want to go that way), but working with the city can give your project legitimacy, foster good relationships with local decision-makers, and help ensure the long-term success of your efforts.



# 2

## Start local and build up

Do your due diligence on the neighborhood level before coming to the city with your idea. Make sure to get local buy-in first:

- talk with your neighbors about your project;
- then talk with a representative from your most relevant [community development corporation](#) (CDC). If you don't have a relationship with someone at a CDC, you might first contact [Cleveland Neighborhood Progress](#), an organization that helps resident leaders connect with CDCs;
- THEN talk with [your ward's councilperson](#).

Doing all this talking at the outset lets you: **1)** find out if what you're doing aligns with someone else's project or initiative to be able to get their advice or support; **2)** find out if your plans conflict with another existing project; and **3)** get introduced to other key community actors.

Importantly, a CDC will be able to help you outline and think through your project: what's feasible and what isn't; particular steps you need to flesh out; help with clarifying your goals.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

When talking with your neighbors about about a community-based project or action, make sure to cover:

- 1** What are the neighborhood assets we're building on already?
- 2** What are our concerns?
- 3** How does this project build off those assets?
- 4** How does it address those concerns?
- 5** What specific outside support do we need to move this idea forward?

If you can answer those questions when you meet with your city representatives, you'll be in good shape to speak knowledgeably and be taken seriously.

3

# Prepare to meet officials

If you don't know which city agency to approach to discuss your project, contact the planning commission, and they will tell you where to go. All phone numbers are on [their website](#) and in the back of this guide. Most neighborhoods have a CDC that can help. Also try the [OSU extension](#): [extension.osu.edu](http://extension.osu.edu).

"We get a lot of people coming in with plans that aren't well thought out, and it's not a good use of anyone's time. So come in with a clear goal for your project, clear steps, and as much detail as possible. But do come to us early in the process; we'll tell you where to go next."



"We try to make our initial conversations with leaders somewhat informal. At that stage, we just want to learn more about how their project can help the city. Bring visual aids like photos, statistics, drawings, and charts to their meetings. It's so helpful to let people see your vision."

When presenting to the city, come prepared:



written  
description



visuals



evidence of local  
need from neighbors  
and others impacted



evidence of support  
from neighbors and  
others impacted



## ALIGN WITH CITY GOALS TO GO FARTHER

Whatever the project is, the city wants to make sure that what it's doing is sustainable. There's a major focus in Cleveland right now on health, equity, and sustainability, and priority goes to projects that will build equity, have positive health impacts, and be sustainable—beyond energy efficiency, beyond recycling.

For the City of Cleveland, sustainability has to do with the long-term, holistic impact on residents. Recent planning initiatives, [Connecting Cleveland 2020](#) and [Civic Visions 2010](#), underscored that the social side of change can't exist without the physical environmental side. It's all tied together.

So leaders seeking support from the city should address sustainability as a whole picture: good for the environment, good for health, good for equity.

# 4

## Apply for a permit

Cleveland has a Division of Special Events; if you throw a large event, you need to fill out their [application](#) (link in the back of this guide). It's many pages long and can be intimidating at first, but don't be discouraged.

It asks questions about issues that several different city departments have to handle: security, restrooms, vendors, insurance\*, trash cans... Then that info gets dispersed as necessary between the city agencies. So it's time-consuming, but it also makes you think through all the details and steps of the event, which is good for overall event planning.

Beside events, you also need permits for community gardens, since you're leasing the land from the city, not buying it. Some other projects might require a permit, too. Ask your city contact if your project might need one.

*\*For insurance, you can look into being added on to a nonprofit's existing policy to cut costs, or go through a broker (Marka once got \$1 million in insurance for \$500 for an event by going through a broker).*

## KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

### City Planning Commission

Marka Fields, *Chief City Planner*  
MFields@city.cleveland.oh.us  
Info: [goo.gl/roh4nX](http://goo.gl/roh4nX)

### Office of Sustainability

Jenita McGowan, *Chief*  
sustainability@city.cleveland.oh.us  
216-664-2455

### BUILDING PERMITS

#### Department of Building & Housing

Ronald O'Leary, *Director*  
216-664-2282

### STREET CLOSURE PERMITS

#### Special Events Office

216-664-2012  
specialevents@city.cleveland.oh.us  
Info: [goo.gl/Y5Y81g](http://goo.gl/Y5Y81g)

#### Parade Permit Application:

[goo.gl/EhsfbF](http://goo.gl/EhsfbF) (PDF)

### MORE HELP

#### Cleveland Neighborhood Progress

Jeff Kip  
*Director of Neighborhood Marketing*  
216-830-2770  
JKipp@ClevelandNP.org

#### Office of Community Relations

Blaine Griffin, *Director*  
216-664-3290

#### Department of Community Development

Daryl P. Rush Esq., *Director*  
216-664-4000

### Department of Public Works

Michael E. Cox, *Director*  
216-664-2485

*(The Department of Public Works directs Park Maintenance, Property Management, Recreation, Streets, Traffic Engineering, and Waste Collection and all City owned off-street parking facilities.)*

### Department of Parks

Richard L. Silva  
*Maintenance Commissioner*  
216-664-3550

### Department of Recreation

Sam Gissentaner  
*Commissioner*  
216-664-8207

### Department of Public Safety

Michael McGrath  
*Director*  
216-664-2200

### FIND YOUR WARD

<http://www.clevelandcitycouncil.org/find-my-ward>

### DON'T FORGET!

If you're working on a project in a school, at a library or in a hospital, you should start by getting permission from that institution. If you're working on a project on or near private property, you'll need permission from the property owner. If you're working on buildings under construction, you should seek permission from the building owner.



Learn more about how you can make your Cleveland neighborhood safer, greener, and more livable:

Indigo Bishop

*Cleveland Action Strategist*

216-930-4030

[indigo@ioby.org](mailto:indigo@ioby.org)

[@ioby](https://www.facebook.com/ioby)

[facebook.com/ioby.org](https://www.facebook.com/ioby.org)

## ABOUT IOBY

ioby mobilizes neighbors who have good ideas to become powerful citizen leaders who plan, fund and make positive change in their own neighborhoods. We are creating a future in which our neighborhoods are shaped by the powerful good ideas of our own neighbors.