



### Inside

#### Opinion: Moderates and Independents Have Spoken—Will Someone Finally Listen?

On November 4th, these voters played a major role in shaping the election, stepping up because they're frustrated.  
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# CLEVELAND OBSERVER

Since 2018

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## Olivet Institutional Baptist Church Earns Cleveland Civil Rights Trail Marker



By Vince Robinson



SCAN TO LISTEN

A Cleveland Civil Rights Trail historical marker was unveiled at Olivet Institutional Baptist Church on Nov. 15. The Cleveland Restoration Society, in collaboration with the Ohio History Connection, placed the marker in front of Olivet, described by its former 33-year pastor, the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss Jr., as the Cleveland home base for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In his customary measured and deliberate cadence, Moss said, "So Olivet continues today as a landmark when it was dangerous to open these doors and bring in Martin Luther King Jr., and not only on one occasion, but to lead Olivet in becoming the headquarters of Dr. King in Cleveland."

In brief remarks, Moss provided a history lesson about Olivet and its former pastor, the Rev. Odie M. Hoover. Hoover's daughters, Carol and Pat, were also central figures in the narrative. According to Moss, Hoover did a



Mayor Justin Bibb, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church Pastor Dr. Jawanza Karriem Colvin, Pastor Emeritus Dr. Otis Moss Jr. and Steve Coon from the Cleveland Restoration Society unveil the Civil Rights Trail Marker. Photo Credit: TV20 News Cleveland, Ohio

politically incorrect thing by inviting Dr. King.

Hoover's daughter Pat became the youngest staff member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Hoover's daughter Carole accompanied him to Oslo, Norway to witness Dr. King's acceptance

of the Nobel Peace Prize. She became a member of the executive committee of SCLC. She gave remarks about the Civil Rights Trail and took a trip down memory lane that shed light on the history of that moment.

Carol said, "The story of Dr. King and some of the ministers

being nervous about having Dr. King at the church for fear of being bombed, that's a real story. And I remember some of the conversations that took place in this church. And there was not one officer of this church who thought it would be bombed before Dr. King had an office here.

*Continued on page 2*

## Warrensville Hts Elementary School Student and His NaNa Publish Their First Book



By Marissa Valentine  
Warrensville Hts City School District, Communications Coordinator



SCAN TO LISTEN

Warrensville Hts second grader R.J. Woodford's story as an author isn't by happenstance. His secure relationship with his grandmother whom he refers to as Nana, and his quest for knowledge were the perfect combination for a children's book to be created about his experiences. R.J.'s story begins in kindergarten.

His NaNa is Shayla L. Davis, former State Representative for the 11th District and president and CEO of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus Foundation.

Davis' work at the Ohio Statehouse was the catalyst for his interest in his local government

and how it works. When Rep. Davis brought R.J. and her great niece to the Statehouse on a 'bring your child to work' day, it was there that she formulated the idea to help him write about his experience through a children's book titled "R.J.'s Big Adventure at the Statehouse With NaNa", to share with his peers.

"I noticed that they were the only Black children in the room. It made me think about the amount of lost opportunity and barriers that Black children have just from simple lack of access," said Davis. "I would take him to the Statehouse often, and then we would talk about the experience."

Davis realized that R.J. likes to talk about politics and relates politics to her work. "We would always have these very interesting conversations," said Davis. They decided to write a book from his perspective to educate Black people on the voting process, civics, and government in general. "So I said, 'RJ, do you want to write

a book?' and he said, 'Yeah, sure!'"

After several visits to the Statehouse, Davis and R.J. began the long process of authoring a book, which was not a quick or stress-free endeavor.

Davis noted that they needed to find an illustrator from her local community because it was important for her to highlight the talent of Black artists. "I really learned a lot. I think R.J. giving me the okay that we could do this together and realizing that it could become a part of our legacy, his legacy for the future," said Davis.

When speaking to R.J. he mentioned that his grandmother supported him through the process and seeing the finished illustrations was his favorite part, even though it took a long time.

The book was completed in a year and a half. Rep. Davis says they intend to author more books about their close relationship and adventures together as a series.

The idea for their tentative



R.J. Woodford holds his first book.

next book is titled, RJ's Big Adventure to the News Studio With NaNa.

Davis is a political commentator for WKYC Channel 3 and has taken R.J. to the news

*Continued on page 2*

## Olivet Institutional Baptist Church Earns Cleveland Civil Rights Trail Marker

Dr. King's presence here in Cleveland really contributed a lot, in addition to a healthy community for voter registration and participation which led to the election of both Stokes brothers, Congressman Louis Stokes and Mayor Carl Stokes."

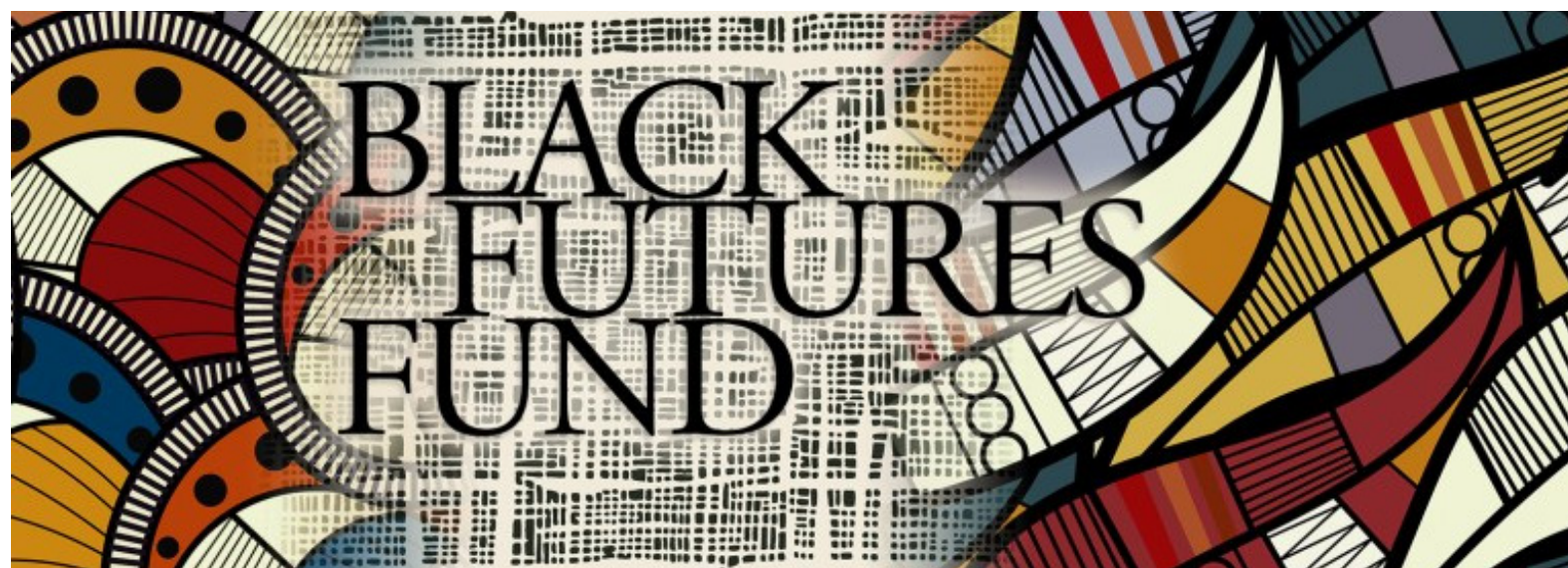
Cleveland theater professional Prester Pickett delivered King's Nobel Prize acceptance speech and received a standing ovation.

Obie Shelton, executive director of the Association of African American Cultural Gardens and a violinist, performed two musical selections, including "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb stopped by to witness the unveiling by Olivet's pastor, Rev. Jawanza Karriem Colvin, and Pastor Emeritus Dr. Otis Moss.



Dr. Otis Moss Jr. gives a history of Olivet's connection to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the involvement of Rev. Odie M. Hoover and his daughters Pat and Carole in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



## Warrensville Hts Elementary School Student and His NaNa Publish First Book

From front page

studio. According to Davis, these books are representations, assuring Black children see themselves represented in all spaces.

R.J. is a student at Warrensville Heights Elementary where he is a shining star among many bright scholars. Principal Takiba Thompson, who has been serving Warrensville Heights City Schools for eight years, takes pride in students' achievements. R.J. was recognized for his achievement by Warrensville Heights Superintendent Donald J. Jolly Jr. during a school board meeting.

Having a published young author in Warrensville Heights Elementary is especially rewarding. "It is refreshing to see such a young scholar co-authoring



Nana and Former State Representative Shayla L Davis

a book centered around his experience. I'm excited to have him as a student who inspires other students to pursue their dreams," said Thompson.

R.J. had a book signing at the Cuyahoga County Library Warrensville Branch in early August with more than 60 children in attendance. He also held a live reading. The book is available for purchase on Amazon via the link <https://a.co/d/dyNWLJb>.

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## Residents Provide Feedback on Cleveland City Council Redistricting



By Lisa O'Brien



SCAN TO LISTEN

With the Cleveland City Council community feedback meetings and the national election in the rearview mirror, it is high time for another update on the city's redistricting process. On Oct. 15, 16, and 17, the Cleveland City Council hosted three community feedback meetings across the city to give residents a chance to provide input and feedback on the map-drawing process.

Many council members, including Council President Blaine Griffin, attended at least one of the three meetings. Each meeting was led by members of the Triad

or council body has allowed the people to give feedback before a map is voted on. Indeed, these meetings were the first of their kind.

All three nights had mostly full rooms of people wanting to hear the council's updates and have their voices heard.

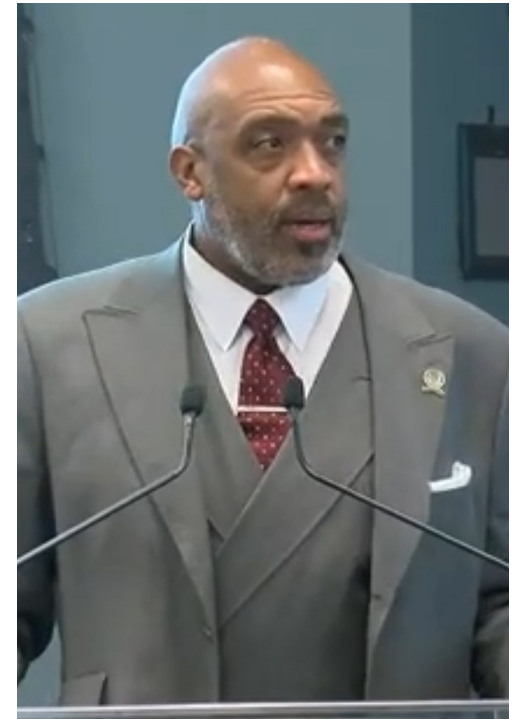
After opening remarks at each meeting, the consultants led a presentation on the parameters of the Cleveland City Charter that requires the number of wards to shrink from 15 to 17 and an overview on how to create maps and submit them on Dave's Redistricting App. This presentation is also accessible on the City Council's website.

A key highlight from the city charter states that the wards created must be "nearly equal in population, composed of contiguous and compact territory and bound by natural boundaries and street lines." Additionally, they

resident Leshawn Caldwell asked why residents only three weeks to complete this detailed information but City Council gets five months. Caldwell stated "We are the supervisors of City Council."

In response, Whitley replied that the accelerated timeline is because the census was delayed due to the pandemic. Council Member Jenny Spencer gave her input on the time crunch imposed on residents at the Oct. 17 meeting.

"Off-script, me, speaking as a fellow citizen, would I have recommended our citizens create and go through this map-making process ahead of a national and state-level election? No, I would not," Spencer said. She closed her statement by arguing that while the Council's feedback process was a step in the right direction, it was far from perfect and could be improved upon for the next redistricting.



City of Cleveland Council President Blaine Griffin addresses residents at a ward redistricting feedback meeting.

Council Member Kris Harsh said, "The best way to be counted is to want to be counted."

Additionally, residents expressed concerns about the disproportional population loss on the east side. Many brought up the lack of funding and resources on the east side of the city as a result of fewer wards.

City Council members said this is a topic for another discussion but they were aware of this imbalance and hope to create wards that keep the east side neighborhoods together, though they are ultimately bound by the population requirements outlined in the census.

### What's Next?

Now that the community feedback meetings have concluded, the council members has made it clear they will not offer community feedback meetings for the drawn map before they discuss and vote on it. They will, however, continue to review citizen suggestions via email and the maps submitted through the Dave's Redistricting App.

### Key Takeaway

TCO's key takeaway from these meetings is the importance of having residents' voices heard. Resident input counted whether that was by completing the census, staying up to date with the process, or going the extra step to create your own map. More updates will likely come during the beginning of next year so make sure to follow us here at TCO.

### Update:

On Nov. 13, Ward 15 Council Member Jenny Spencer announced that she will not seek re-election. She said she plans to serve out the remainder of her term, which ends in January 2026. Spencer said redistricting had "no bearing" on her decision. Her live video announcement can be viewed on her Facebook page:



Community advocate and precinct committee member (Ward 6) Robert Render III (standing) provides input for city council redistricting efforts. Triad Research Group Bob Dykes and Urban Planner and consultant Kent Willey (seated Lf to Rt) listen too community members.

consulting group: Mark Saling, Bob Dyke, and Kent Whitley. The videos are available to watch on YouTube via the City Council website.

The Cleveland Observer examined the meeting series and responses from Cleveland citizens. Here are key takeaways. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiQ5uy3D-MU>

### Overview:

On Nov. 15, Council President Blaine Griffin opened the first community meeting explaining that the goal of the meetings was for residents to walk away with a better understanding of the council's methodology for redistricting, and for residents to provide their input.

Griffin remarked during these opening statements, as did several other council members across the three meetings, this is the first time any council president

explained that each ward must consist of approximately 24,800 people. The Triad consultants then explained how citizens could draw their own wards and submit them as feedback for the consultants to review.

The deadline for residents to submit their maps was Nov. 3, just over two weeks after the community meetings and two days before the general election. The consultants promised that "all maps will be reviewed" but, when asked, did not disclose their plan. After the presentation, the group opened the floor for questions and comments.

### Common Concerns

Residents raised many questions that tended to fall into a few central categories, including the short amount of time citizens had to provide their feedback through the mapmaking process.

At the Oct. 15 meeting,

Another common concern was that the census data did not have an accurate count of the population because COVID-19 and the "digital divide" prevented many from completing the census survey. The Council members remained firm in explaining that the charter mandates the city use the numbers from the decennial census.

Council Member Richard Starr expressed a desire to look at amending the city charter in the future and reminded the room that "the people created this charter."

Amending the charter could be a positive change for those dissatisfied with the current redistricting process and criteria. Additionally, this process should include reminding residents of the importance of filling out the census.

In a statement to The Cleveland Observer on Oct. 16 regarding the census, Ward 13 City

## Council Legislation Undergoes First Reading: Nov 2024



The Cleveland Observer is dedicated to keeping residents informed about legislative activities under review. By reporting on ordinances and resolutions during their initial stages, the Observer enables community members to engage with their Council members, providing feedback or expressing support before final decisions are made.

### How You Tax Dollars are Being Spent

The Cleveland City Council introduced a series of ordinances and resolutions during its meetings on November 1, November 8, and November 15, 2024. These measures address a range of issues, including infrastructure improvements, public safety, community development, and economic growth. After their first readings, the legislation was referred to the appropriate city departments and committees for further scrutiny before advancing toward final passage.

The legislative process involves multiple steps to ensure transparency and accountability. Following the first reading, each ordinance or resolution undergoes detailed review by city departments and committees. This is followed by a second reading and additional discussion during the Council of the Whole meeting, where members debate and refine the proposals before a final vote.

November 1, 2024

#### Ordinance No. 1164-2024

- **Purpose:** Amends Section 1 of Ordinance No. 432-2023 to authorize the Director of Public Utilities to extend contracts for materials and services required to maintain Cleveland Public Power's electrical systems.
- **Sponsors:** Council Members Kazy and Griffin.
- **Funding:** Increased from **\$500,000 to \$2,000,000.**
- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Public Utilities and Finance; Committees on Utilities and Finance.

#### Ordinance No. 1165-2024

- **Purpose:** Authorizes contracts with Ohio CAT for proprietary equipment parts and maintenance services for the Division of Water and Water Pollution Control.
- **Sponsors:** Council Members Kazy and Griffin.
- **Funding:** **\$1,500,000** from departmental funds.
- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Public Utilities and Finance; Committees on

Utilities and Finance.

#### Ordinance No. 1166-2024

- **Purpose:** Establishes a lease agreement for city-owned property to expand small business operations near East 105th Street.
- **Sponsors:** Council Members Hairston and Gray.
- **Funding:** Revenue of **\$12,000** annually.
- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Economic Development and Law; Committee on Economic Development.

#### Ordinance No. 1167-2024

- **Purpose:** Allocates funding for stormwater infrastructure improvements on the city's West Side.
- **Sponsors:** Council Members Mooney and Slife.
- **Funding:** **\$2,500,000** from the Water Pollution Control Fund.
- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Public Works and Finance; Committee on Utilities.

owned recreational facilities.

- **Sponsors:** Council Members Spencer and Polensek.
- **Funding:** **\$1,000,000** from the Public Works Fund.
- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Public Works and Finance; Committees on Municipal Services and Finance.

#### Resolution No. 567-2024

- **Purpose:** Designates November 15 as "Cleveland Small Business Day" to encourage economic growth and promote local entrepreneurs.

- **Sponsors:** Mayor Justin Bibb and Council Member Deborah Gray.

- **Funding:** Not applicable.

- **Status:** Referred to the Committee on Economic Development.

#### Resolution No. 568-2024

- **Purpose:** Proposes expanded city support programs for veterans, acknowledging their contributions.

- **Sponsors:** Council Members

Howse-Jones, Slife, and Maurer

- **Purpose:** Establishes the Department of Community Crisis Response to provide tailored approaches to crisis management, including behavioral health responses and unarmed crisis intervention teams.

- **Financial Impact:** Not specified.

- **Referred To:** Directors of Public Safety, Finance, and Law; Committees on Safety; and Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

#### Ordinance No. 1199-2024

- **Sponsors:** Council Members Polensek, Bishop, Hairston, and Griffin (by departmental request)

- **Purpose:** Authorizes a three-year lease of city-owned property near Waterloo Road/Marginal Road to Meadow City, LLC for developing native seed garden plots.

- **Financial Impact:** **\$900** per year lease revenue.

- **Referred To:** Directors of Capital Projects, City Planning Commission, Finance, and Law; Committees on Municipal Services and Properties; Development Planning and Sustainability; and Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

#### Ordinance No. 1200-2024

- **Sponsors:** Council Members McCormack, Bishop, Hairston, and Griffin (by departmental request)

- **Purpose:** Leases property under the Superior Viaduct Arch Number 6 to John G. Johnson Construction Company for parking and material storage. The lease is for five years with a renewable option.

- **Financial Impact:** **\$1,165** per year lease revenue.

- **Referred To:** Directors of Capital Projects, City Planning Commission, Finance, and Law; Committees on Municipal Services and Properties; Development Planning and Sustainability; and Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

#### Ordinance No. 1201-2024

- **Sponsor:** Council Member Griffin (by departmental request)

Purpose: Authorizes the Director of Finance to approve payments for moral claims totaling \$500 related to park maintenance incidents.

- **Financial Impact:** **\$500** from Department of Public Works funds.

- **Referred To:** Directors of Finance and Law; Committee on Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

#### Ordinance No. 1202-2024

- **Sponsors:** Council Members McCormack and Griffin (by

Continued on page 5



#### Ordinance No. 1168-2024

- **Purpose:** Approves the establishment of a digital literacy program at Cleveland Public Libraries to enhance technology access for underserved communities.

- **Sponsors:** Council Members McCormack and Griffin.

- **Funding:** **\$750,000** from the General Fund.

- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Education and Finance; Committee on Education and Finance.

#### Ordinance No. 1169-2024

- **Purpose:** Authorizes the Director of Public Safety to purchase body cameras and related equipment for the Division of Police.

- **Sponsors:** Council Members Griffin and McCormack

- **Funding:** **\$1,500,000** from the General Fund.

- **Status:** Referred to the Directors of Public Safety and Finance; Committee on Safety and Finance.

#### Ordinance No. 1170-2024

- **Purpose:** Provides funding for emergency repairs to city-

Santana and Polensek.

- **Funding:** Not applicable.

- **Status:** Referred to the Committee on Community and Veterans Affairs.

November 8, 2024

#### Ordinance No. 1197-2024

- **Sponsors:** Council Members Harsh and Griffin

- **Purpose:** Authorizes the Director of Community Development to enter into a grant agreement with United Way of Greater Cleveland to administer a tenant resources and outreach program aimed at increasing housing stability. The program includes tenant education, emergency housing assistance, and legal mediation services.

- **Financial Impact:** Up to **\$1,000,000** from Fund No. 10 SF 400.

- **Referred To:** Directors of Community Development, Finance, and Law; Committees on Development Planning and Sustainability; and Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

#### Ordinance No. 1198-2024

- **Sponsors:** Council Members

## Council Legislation Undergoes First Reading: Nov 2024

From page 4

departmental request)

- **Purpose:** Authorizes the Director of Port Control to hire professional consultants to conduct an economic impact study of Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.
- **Financial Impact:** Funded from Fund No. 60 SF 001.
- **Referred To:** Directors of Port Control, Finance, and Law; Committees on Transportation and Mobility; and Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

### Ordinance No. 1215-2024

- **Sponsors:** Council Members Bishop and Griffin (by departmental request)
- **Purpose:** Allows the Director of Public Works to apply for and accept a **\$150,000** "Talent for Tomorrow: Digital Equity Challenge Grant" and other grants for the REC-N-TEC Initiative. The initiative aims to advance digital equity and technology training.

- **\$20,000,000** allocation.
- **Referred To:** Directors of Finance and Law; Committee on Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

November 15, 2024

### Board of Control Resolutions:

#### Resolution No. 575-24:

- **J.W. Didado Electric** received approval to employ Safeguard Associates (CSB/MBE) for labor and material services related to maintaining substation equipment for Cleveland Public Power. The subcontract cost is **\$96,566.84**, representing 1.6% of the project.

#### Resolution No. 576-24:

- **Recipient: Catts Construction, Inc.** secured a **\$995,251.40** contract, including a 10% contingency, for the East 115th Street Sewer Project under the Division of Water Pollution Control.

Recovery Project due to non-compliance with expectations under Ordinance No. 1023-2023.

#### Resolution No. 581-24:

- **Recipient: The Land Reutilization Program** authorized the sale of a parcel at 3211 West 35th Street to Berardi Properties for yard expansion, valued at **\$1,533**.

#### Resolution No. 582-24:

- **Recipient: Melonie Carlton** received approval to purchase 855 Rondel Road for yard expansion under the Land Reutilization Program for **\$200**.

#### Resolution No. 583-24:

- **Recipient: Karl Thomas Clark** was approved to buy 2298 East 85th Street for yard expansion under the same program, priced at **\$200**.

#### Resolution No. 584-24:

- **Recipient: Karen Taylor-Davis and Sanders Davis** were

2024, proposal.

#### Resolution No. 588-24:

- **Recipient:** Surplus parking equipment at Gateway Garage East was sold to the **Cleveland Guardians Baseball Company** for **\$50,789.72**.

### Zoning Appeals Decisions

(November 11, 2024):

#### Approved Appeals:

- **1089 Lakeview Road:** B3M Resident Care Facilities LLC was approved to operate a residential facility for five occupants in a B1 Two-Family Residential District.

#### Denied Appeals:

- **4703 State Road:** Willow Park Properties' request to establish a mental health center for substance abuse treatment in a C1 Local Retail Business District was denied.

#### Withdrawn Appeals:

- **10936 Drexel Avenue and 1147 Parkwood Drive:** Proposals to establish residential facilities for five occupants in B1 Two-Family Residential Districts were withdrawn.

#### Postponed Appeals:

- **13405 St. Clair Avenue:** Family Love Enterprise LLC's hearing was rescheduled for January 6, 2025.

### Adopted Decisions (November 4, 2024):

- **7413 Lockyear Avenue:** Approved as a Type "A" home daycare for up to 12 children.
- **3851 West 39th Street:** Fence installation approved in a B1 Two-Family Residential District.
- **1348 West 78th Street:** Construction of a three-story frame residence with a detached garage approved in a B3 Semi-Industry District.

These summaries provide a comprehensive overview of the City Council's ongoing legislative efforts, ensuring residents have the information needed to engage in the democratic process and advocate for their communities.



- **Financial Impact: \$150,000** grant, plus up to **\$50,000** from additional grants.
- **Referred To:** Directors of Public Works, Finance, and Law; Committees on Municipal Services and Properties; and Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

### Ordinance No. 1217-2024

- **Sponsor:** Council Member Griffin (by departmental request)
- **Purpose:** Updates salaries for various city classifications, reflecting recent amendments to Ordinance No. 194-2021.
- **Financial Impact:** Not specified.
- **Referred To:** Directors of Human Resources, Civil Service Commission, Finance, and Law; Committee on Finance, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

### Ordinance No. 1219-2024

- **Sponsors:** Mayor Bibb and Council Member Griffin
- **Purpose:** Allocates **\$20,000,000** to Gateway Economic Development Corporation for major and minor repairs to Progressive Field and Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.
- **Financial Impact:**

Approved subcontractors include LTC Trucking, Trafftech, Inc., and Cook Paving & Construction.

#### Resolution No. 577-24:

- **Recipient: RS&H Ohio, Inc.** was selected to provide construction administration services for Cleveland Hopkins International Airport's Membrane RTA Tunnel project. The contract totals **\$664,437**. Sub-consultants include G&T Associates and Somat Engineering.

#### Resolution No. 578-24:

- **Recipient: Northeast Ohio Trenching Service's** contract for Ridge Road Transfer Station Site Drainage Improvements was amended to **\$721,721**, correcting a prior clerical error.

#### Resolution No. 579-24:

- **Recipient: Mott MacDonald, LLC** was chosen for the Carnegie Avenue Rehabilitation Project. The **\$915,867** contract includes sub-consultants Chagrin Valley Engineering, Pro Geotech, and Surveying and Mapping, LLC.

#### Resolution No. 580-24:

The Board **rejected all bids** for the Tree Damaged Sidewalk

authorized to purchase 8117 Bellevue Avenue for **\$200** for yard expansion purposes.

#### Resolution No. 585-24:

- **Recipient: Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity** obtained parcels on Elwell Avenue and East 100th Street for **\$1,000**, designated for single-family construction projects.

#### Resolution No. 586-24:

- **Recipient:** Beverly L. Perry received approval to purchase 13714 Benwood Avenue for **\$200** for yard expansion.

#### Resolution No. 587-24:

- **Recipient: Amendments to CaremarkPCS Health's** contract for group prescription insurance for city employees clarified the use of its May 10,

**We need your feedback**

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TCO Survey



FutureLAND hosts an annual two-day conference to celebrate and amplify diversity in tech, small business, art and culture in Northeast Ohio.

## FutureLAND 2024 Attendees Leave with Cash Grants, and Contracts



By Rhonda Crowder



SCAN TO LISTEN

*This year's conference helped business owners "evolve."*

With 50+ speakers, more than 1,700 registrants, approximately 65 youth participants, and more than 15 sponsors, the FutureLAND 2024 has been deemed a success and impactful by conference organizers, the City of Cleveland, United Black Fund of Greater Cleveland, and JumpStart.

Although it has come to an end after two and a half days of fireside chats, workshops, exhibits, a keynote address by Everett Taylor, CEO of Kickstarter in partnership with City Club of Cleveland, networking, and parties, several entrepreneurs walked away with a lasting impact on their businesses.

"Knowing some attendees left the conference with financial

resources that could take their businesses to the next level aligns very well with this year's theme: Evolve," says Teleangé Thomas, FutureLAND founding partner.

During the opening night fireside chat, emerging, and established entrepreneurs were given practical tools and insights filled with inspiration. They learned to build their credit, refine their approach, cultivate confidence, strengthen their business practices and personal habits, and invest, and build wealth.

American financial literacy entrepreneur, philanthropist, author, and Operation HOPE CEO John Hope Bryant presented an impromptu \$20,000 contract to 29-year-old East Cleveland-based graphic designer Darin Gooch after he stood up, asked Bryant a question then told Bryant he planned to start a business. The contract will allow him to provide graphic services for Bryant's annual global summit.

Bryant made an unexpected announcement regarding a new partnership between Operation HOPE and Shopify. Through this

partnership, he provided in-kind grants for Shopify ECommerce stores, valued at approximately \$25,000 each, to up to 10 business owners in the audience. Shopify award recipients will also receive an autographed copy of his book, Financial Literacy for All: Disrupting Struggle, Advancing Financial Freedom, and Building a New American Middle Class.

LISC Cleveland Small Business Services also awarded microgrants to business owners for \$1,500 (unrestricted funds to boost business) to FutureLAND attendees.

The grantees are London Mitchell, One Chance The Brand; Drevian Arrington, Andre Willis, Jasmine Willis of The Trash Boys LLC; Randa Jackson, Tru Balance Inc. DBA Cleveland Cotton Candy Machines; Brandi Gaye, The Lovely Corner LLC; Michael A. Crawford, Learning to Overcome Violence & Envy LLC; Courtney Dorsey, CoCo D. Luxe Beauty LLC; Kareema Morgan, Her Harmony Health LLC; Simone Powell, Swim Baby Swim Cleveland LLC; Marissa Denise Wilson, Capsoul; and Joseph "Jay

Kool" Glover, Kool House Media.

"It's really exciting to know that FutureLAND can be the reason an entrepreneur can keep their business open, grow it, and decide to remain in Cleveland," Alysha Ellis, FutureLAND co-founder.

### About FutureLAND Conference

FutureLAND Conference is an annual event designed to inspire innovation and foster collaboration among community leaders, entrepreneurs, and change-makers.

This year's conference, themed "Evolve" explored how members of the ecosystem can adapt to and shape the future of Cleveland through actionable insights and partnerships. Sponsors included the Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Saint Luke's Foundation, LISC Cleveland, Stand With Crypto, Jobs Ohio, PNC, Park Place Technologies, Westfield, Corporate College, College Now, Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, and others.

## Rejoice: The Lord is at Hand



SCAN TO LISTEN

By Pastor Ron Rollins

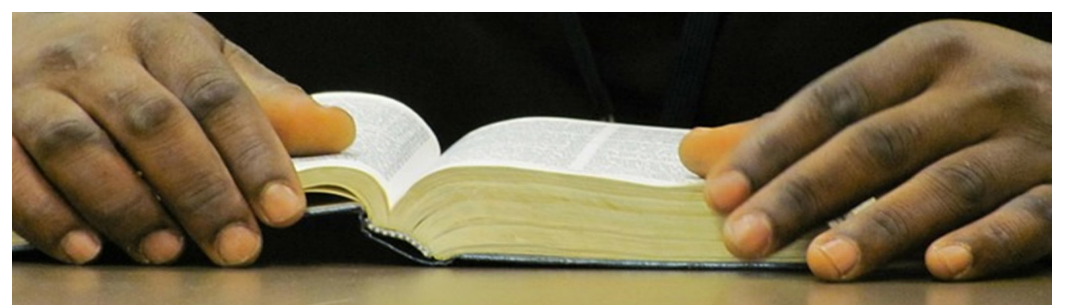
When was the last time you felt a moment of pure joy? In a world that often feels overwhelmed by bad news and uncertainty, finding reasons to celebrate can seem difficult. Our days are filled with stories of war, disasters, neighborhood tensions, and illnesses affecting those we love. We carry this endless stream of distress in our pockets, constantly tempted to check our phones for updates.

It's no wonder that words like doomscrolling, (which means spending too much time online consuming negative news or other content that makes the reader

sad, anxious, or angry), have entered our vocabulary, capturing the relentless cycle of negative news, resulting rise in anxiety and depression, particularly among young people.

Even in the darkest times, we are reminded that joy is still within reach. Life in the apostle Paul's era was far from perfect. He faced immense suffering, which he described in 2 Corinthians as "a thorn ... given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Despite these trials and his eventual martyrdom, Paul urged the Christians in Philippi to hold onto hope and joy. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ... The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:4-5).

This Advent season, we, too, can find joy in the promise that the Lord is near, just as He was when He came to earth over 2,000 years ago as a baby born to the Virgin



Mary. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human form, sharing our struggles and bearing the sins of all humanity. His death on Good Friday and resurrection on Easter Sunday marked His triumph over sin, death, and the devil — all for our salvation.

This is truly worth celebrating. Because Jesus came, we have the assurance of God's love and His unending care, no matter what challenges we face.

This is why we take time during December to turn to God's Word and reflect on the incredible gift of Christ's presence in our lives. Instead of getting caught

up in doomscrolling, pause and join us in contemplating what it means that God sent His Son to earth for us. The Gospel message of Jesus Christ isn't just good news; it's the best news the world has ever received, and it's meant to be shared with everyone.

We invite you to experience this message of hope at our upcoming Advent and Christmas Worship Services, themed "His Name Shall Be Called." Visit [www.stjohnnottingham.org](http://www.stjohnnottingham.org) for more details. Come and discover the profound truth of God's love and the joy that comes with knowing His Son, Jesus Christ.

## Gut-Brain Axis: Why You Should Trust Your Gut



By Sharon Lewis, MEd, CFNC  
*Certified Functional Nutrition Counselor*

One of today's hot research areas is the human microbiome and its effect on your brain and overall health. The human microbiome is the bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live in and on the human body. For the sake of this article, all the organisms that live in your digestive tract.

These organisms are beneficial because we suffer from deficient or poor health without them. These microbial species contribute to the broader genetic portrait of being a human. We have a helpful relationship with these microbes. They are more than just our genetics. (Human microbiome | Definition, Examples, & Facts | Britannica)

The gut-brain axis is a two-way highway, with information traveling down from the brain to the gut and information traveling up to the brain from the gut. This pathway constantly exchanges information that impacts your brain and your digestion.

### The Vagus Nerve

According to the Cleveland Clinic, the vagus nerves are the primary nerves of your digestive system. These nerves control specific body functions such as digestion, heart rate, and immune system. This nerve is the physical highway of the gut-brain axis.

The gut is the "second brain" because it has its own nervous system, the enteric nervous system (ENS). This part of the nervous system is involuntary and outside your control. Coordinated signals from the ENS generate movement and stimulate digestive tract functions, ranging from nutrient absorption to the release of enzymes that assist with the breakdown of food to elimination.

The ENS is not capable of the type of thoughts generated by the brain but is known to trigger significant emotional shifts experienced by people who suffer from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and chronic bowel problems

like diarrhea, bloating, stomach/intestinal pain, and constipation accompanied by bloating and gas.

### Digestive Disorders of the Gut-Brain Axis

A recent article by Johns Hopkins, "The Gut-Brain Connection," states that "for decades, researchers and doctors thought that anxiety and depression contributed to these problems. But our studies and others show that it may also be the reverse. Researchers are finding evidence that irritation in

### Neuropsychiatric Disorders

We know that an imbalance in the gut microbiome causes impaired brain and nervous system function. As a result, cognitive disorders such as age-related dementia and its associated chronic inflammation develop.

Other conditions studied for their relationship to this gut-brain microbiome imbalance include:

- Schizophrenia
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder

### Gut Health

According to an Eating Well magazine article, "12 Foods to Improve Your Gut Health Overnight," include eating probiotic foods daily. Probiotics are the beneficial bacteria found in fermented foods such as kefir, sauerkraut, kombucha, Greek yogurt with live cultures (watch the sugar), tempeh, and kimchi.

The best sources of probiotics are in the refrigerated cases at the grocery store. When adding them to your diet, go slow because if you are not used to them too much too soon it could cause bloating and intestinal discomfort.

### Add These to Your Diet

Prebiotic foods are also beneficial. Prebiotics are indigestible fibers found in food. The best sources are oats/whole grains, artichokes, garlic, mushrooms, soybeans and dragon fruit. Again, go slow when adding new food to your diet. You need to see how your body reacts to them to determine if they are suitable for you.

Eat healthy fats. That would include the Omega-3's from fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines), walnuts, and flaxseeds (ground or oil). Healthy fats reduce inflammation and support a healthy brain. Also, consider finding ways to reduce your stress and get daily exercise.

*12 Foods to Improve Your Gut Health Overnight (Ref)*



the gastrointestinal system may send signals to the central nervous system (CNS) that trigger mood changes." Brain Basics: The Life and Death of a Neuron | National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

This new information explains the correlation between a high percentage of people with IBS and functional bowel problems developing depression and anxiety. Some of the other issues of the digestive tract are dyspepsia (indigestion) and Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). These chronic conditions are disorders of gut-brain interactions.

*The Gut-Brain Axis Explained in Plain English | Diet vs Disease (Ref)*

### Mental Health and

- Parkinson's disease
- Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

*Gut-Brain Connection: The Key to Better Mental and Physical Health - Cielo Daily (Ref)*

### Trauma and the Gut-Brain Axis

Other recent discoveries include the link between trauma-related disorders and the gut microbiome. Research reveals that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) are associated with imbalances in the gut-brain axis. A better balance of the intestinal flora can best manage these conditions.

*Gut-Brain Connection: The Key to Better Mental and Physical Health - Cielo Daily(Ref)*

### Practical Tips for Improving Your

Modern medicine is making great strides in understanding the Gut-Brain Axis. However, for centuries, Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic Medicine have recognized that the issues expressed by the brain are connected to the gut and vice versa. You can embrace sayings like "trust your gut" and be confident when you have a "gut feeling" about a situation because the "butterflies" in your gut are giving you accurate information.

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## Opinion: Moderates and Independents Have Spoken. Will Someone Finally Listen?



By Ron Calhoun  
Cleveland Observer

CLEVELAND— The 2024 election has come and gone, but it left behind a big lesson: voters in the middle—moderates and independents—made their voices heard. These aren't the loud partisans who dominate the headlines. They're the millions of people who don't fit neatly into the "blue" or "red" box, and they're tired of being ignored.

On Nov 4th, these voters played a major role in shaping the election, stepping up because they're frustrated.

reporting that housing affordability has fallen to record lows (Federal Reserve Economic Data). Polls show that over 60% of Americans think the economy is heading in the wrong direction (Gallup).

Many families are barely making it, and it's no wonder voters feel let down. They don't want empty promises or political slogans like "Bidenomics." They want solutions that actually help—better job opportunities, affordable housing, and fair healthcare costs.

### The Culture Wars People Want Peace

The economy isn't the only thing bothering moderates and independents. The nonstop fighting over culture—race, gender, and what's "politically correct"—is exhausting.

Social media makes it

### The Two-Party System: A Dead End?

Moderates and independents also face another frustration: the two-party system. Right now, you're either a Democrat or a Republican. But what if you're neither? A lot of people hoped this election would be a chance for third-party candidates to shine.

Unfortunately, candidates like Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Cornel West couldn't gain much traction. Why? The system isn't set up for outsiders to succeed. Issues like ballot access restrictions and lack of funding made it nearly impossible for them to compete (NY Magazine Ref). On top of that, many voters feared "wasting" their vote on a third-party candidate, pushing them back to the two major parties.

### What Moderates and Independents Want

It's not complicated. Moderates and independents want politicians to do their jobs—solve problems, stop fighting, and listen to real people. They're tired of gridlock, where nothing gets done because of constant partisan battles.

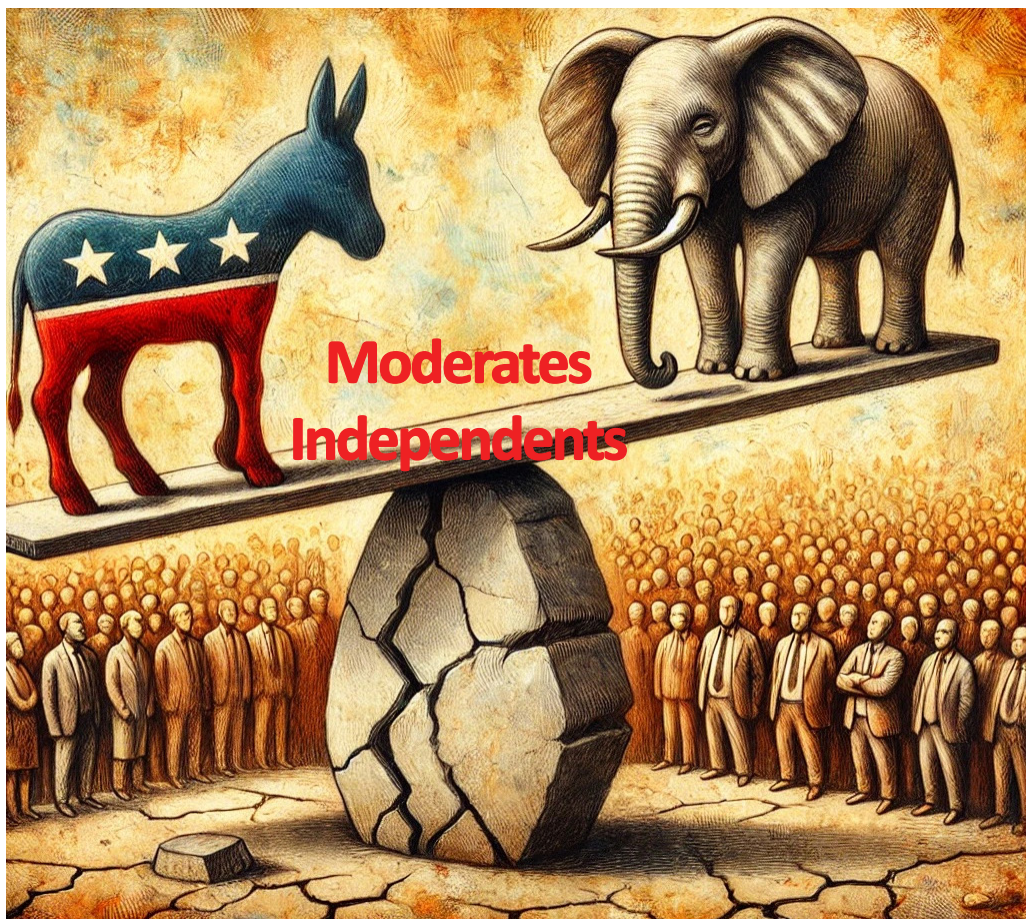
A recent Brookings Institution study shows that Congress has passed fewer bipartisan bills over the last decade, leading to increased frustration among voters (Brookings). People want leaders who will work together to fix issues that matter: better schools, safer streets, and good-paying jobs. They want a government that focuses on results, not just soundbites.

### Why This Matters to Cleveland

In Cleveland, we know what it's like to feel overlooked. Our communities are resilient, but we've faced our share of struggles. The voices of moderates and independents reflect the needs of people in cities like ours.

If politicians keep ignoring these voters, it will be at their own risk. The message of the 2024 election is clear: the middle matters. It's time for leaders to step up and deliver on the promises that can truly make a difference.

Ron Calhoun is the publisher for the Cleveland Observer. This article reflects the views of the editorial board.



They feel like neither of the two big political parties fully understands their needs. And honestly, who can blame them?

### The Economy: Why It Matters

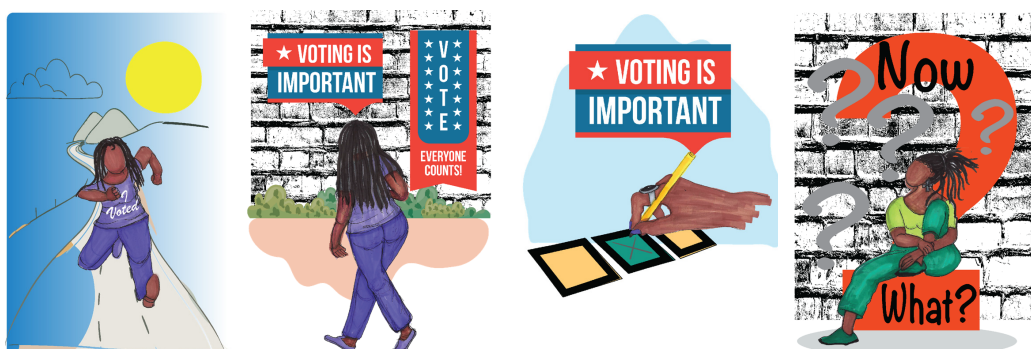
What do voters care about most? Their wallets. Rising grocery prices, expensive rent, and wages that don't keep up are everyday struggles for many people in Cleveland and across the country. Politicians talk about economic "success stories," but let's be real—if you're struggling to pay rent, does that really mean much?

Housing costs and mortgage rates have skyrocketed since 2020, with the Federal Reserve

worse by amplifying the loudest and most extreme voices, leaving everyday people feeling left out of the conversation.

Data from Pew Research highlights the growing divide on cultural issues like race, immigration, and gender roles (Pew Research Center).

Most voters, especially here in Cleveland, just want politicians to focus on real issues that make their lives better: safer neighborhoods, better schools, and fixing roads. They don't want endless debates about who's "right" or "wrong" in culture wars that don't pay the bills or solve local problems.



## There is hope.

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### Need Support Now?

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.

988 offers 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help individuals experiencing mental health-related distress.

That could be:

- Thoughts of suicide
- Mental health or substance use crisis, or
- Any other kind of emotional distress

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