

Inside

Making Ends Meet in a Rising Economy: Grocery Shopping Hacks to Help You Save Money

As a patron of your local grocery store, it is imperative to know your options as you navigate budgeting your meals in an economy where prices continue to rise.

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Cleveland Resident Walter Collins Continues to Speak Up for Veterans



By Mary Kate McNamee

Walter Collins, a Vietnam veteran from Northeast Ohio, has spent the past decade turning his service into advocacy for fellow veterans. Through Cleveland’s Rid-All Green Partnership and a community housing initiative in Union Miles, Collins works to address invisible wounds like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries.

His efforts highlight the urgent need for resources that support veterans’ mental health and community reintegration.

A Veteran’s Invisible Wounds

“A veteran that you see trying to cross the street with an amputated leg or an amputated arm ...if you see that veteran trying to cross the street... the odds are

you are going to try and help them, well you have veterans also that are trying to cross the street they have invisible wounds, they have wounds up in the brain,” Collins said.

While returning or trying to adjust to normal civilian life,

many veterans may face PTSD. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 7 out of every 100 veterans will have PTSD.

“People don’t seem to understand the importance of dealing with invisible wounds just as much as you deal with visible

wounds,” Collins said.

A Local Inspiration

Mark Silverberg, a Cleveland resident, has worked with Collins for a year and a half. Silverberg, upon immediately meeting Collins, thought he was an interesting guy and began working on a documentary highlighting Collins’ achievements.

“One of the things that I learned, against all odds, some folks find their gifts and stick to their values; they can accomplish amazing things, and Walter is certainly an example of that,” Silverberg said.

Silverberg mentioned how Collins’ service extended beyond his time in Vietnam.

“He took that experience of service, and turned it into service for other veterans since he came home,” Silverberg said.

Action Over Affirmations

Collins’ work goes beyond his words and advocacy, working with Rid-All Green Partnership, located Continue on page 3



Walter Collins, advocate for veterans and community leader. Credit: Mark Silverberg

Voter Information: Do Cleveland City Council Incumbents Deserve Your Vote?



By Angela Hay

This article is part of the Cleveland Observer’s voter information series designed to prepare Cleveland voters for the general election on Nov. 4, 2025.

The race for positions on Cleveland’s City Council includes two types of candidates: prospective candidates, who have not served in those roles before, and incumbent candidates, who currently hold the job. In Ohio, incumbent candidates are re-elected 96% of the time.

They usually have higher name recognition and more access to funding, but that doesn’t necessarily make them the best choice to serve the city. In the upcoming election, incumbent candidates are being challenged in Wards 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12. Here are some strategies you can



use to determine if the incumbent candidate in your ward deserves your vote in the upcoming election.

Strategy #1: Read Curated and Official Sources

All current members of City Council have official pages where you can find brief biographies, lists of committees on which they serve, and schedules of upcoming events. Some candidates also share ward newsletters, which they use to communicate directly with their constituents, offering a look into the personalities and priorities. These newsletters are usually linked at the bottom of the candidate’s official page.

New Ward 8 incumbent Stephanie D. Howse-Jones, for example, provides detailed accounts of City Council work via her ward newsletter, “Scenes and Sounds of 7.” The Summer 2025 issue highlights her legislative accomplishments, including the establishment of paid parental leave for city employees and the passage of the Pay Equity and Transparency ordinance which Howse co-sponsored.

-----Incumbent (n.):-----

In elections, the incumbent is the candidate who is already in office and is often running for re-election.

Examples of an incumbent during Connecticut's upcoming November 2025 municipal elections include the current mayor, first selectman or Board of Aldermen or Education member.

Credit: Facebook

Like all candidates, incumbents have campaign websites and social media pages run by themselves and their teams. These will give you a sense of what the candidate wants you to know but will leave out information subjectively.

Strategy #2: Search the Internet for a Broader Perspective

Balance the incumbent-

controlled sources with the rest of the internet. Search the candidate’s name with “Cleveland City Council.” This will reveal news stories, mentions, and alternative opinions that the official sites may not include. If nothing interesting shows up, try adding modifiers like “controversy,” “court case,” “attacks,” and “defends” to your search.

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Impact of Federal Interest Rate Policy on Small Businesses



By Ray'Chel Wilson, CFEI, CFT-I

The Fed's 4.5% rates aren't just numbers on a screen, they're changing how businesses survive.

Business owners across America have grown accustomed to their projections being inaccurate. First, supply chain disruptions threw off pricing models.

Then came inflation that made their cost estimates obsolete within months. Now there's a new threat reshaping business plans: persistently high interest rates that are hitting mid-market cities like Cleveland and Tulsa far harder than coastal metropolitan areas.

Take manufacturing shops in Cleveland's industrial corridors. Many had been planning equipment upgrades for two years, carefully budgeting based on 2022 interest rates.

However, the Federal Reserve has kept interest rates in the 4.25% to 4.5% range through its July 2025 meeting, according to the central bank's latest policy statement, creating sustained pressure on business financing across mid-market cities.

A Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland survey found that 64% of manufacturers expect higher rates and tariffs to hurt their bottom line. The Cleveland Fed's May 2024 Beige Book reported economic expansion at a slower pace, with the slowdown 'often attributed to diminished hopes for interest rate cuts.'

This pattern is fundamentally changing how local businesses operate in cities that rely heavily on small and mid-sized enterprises rather than large corporations with diverse financing options.

The Real Math Behind the Headlines

While big corporations can secure loans at around 6.5% interest rates, small businesses are paying closer to 10.5% and that gap is widening, according to Goldman Sachs Research.

Think about what that means in real dollars using standard loan calculations.

A \$100,000 five-year equipment loan at 6.5% would cost approximately \$1,950 per month, while the same loan at 10.5% would cost approximately \$2,150 per month, a difference of \$200 monthly, or \$12,000 over the life of the loan.

What Is Monetary Policy?

It's what the Fed does to accomplish two key goals mandated by the U.S. Congress:

- promoting maximum employment—which is the highest level of employment or lowest level of unemployment that the economy can sustain while maintaining a stable Inflation rate
- promoting stable prices—for the goods and services we all purchase

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graph TD; A[FOMC monetary policy decision] --> B[Affects current and expected short-term interest rates]; B --> C[Affects overall financial conditions]; C --> D[Influences decisions of households and businesses]; D --> E[Progress toward maximum employment and stable prices]
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Credit: Federal Reserve Website, [federalreserve.gov](https://www.federalreserve.gov)

Recent surveys and industry reports confirm these impact patterns across both cities. In Cleveland, manufacturers such as Cleveland-Cliffs have postponed major equipment investments and idled capacity, citing persistent high interest rates and demand uncertainty; they plan to resume upgrades only when credit costs decrease and pricing stabilizes.

Across mid-market cities nationwide, businesses are facing challenges financing equipment due to persistent high interest rates and tariff uncertainty.

According to an August 2025 Equipment Leasing and Finance Foundation's Monthly Confidence Index, the majority of equipment lenders reported slower new business volume and a 'wait-and-see' approach for capital purchases, with business conditions expected to remain tight until interest rate relief arrives.

According to Goldman Sachs Research, by 2024, interest



Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

payments as a share of small business revenue nationwide climbed from 5.8% in 2021 to about 7%, with forecasts suggesting it will rise closer to 8% as older loans reset at higher rates. The math is straightforward: higher borrowing costs mean less capital investment, restrained growth, and fewer new jobs across mid-market cities like Cleveland and Tulsa.

Why Mid-Market Cities Feel It More

Here's the reality that doesn't make headlines: mid-market cities like Cleveland and Tulsa are experiencing this interest rate squeeze more intensely than coastal metropolitan areas.

Large metropolises have diverse economies with multiple industries, abundant venture

capital, and businesses that can access various financing options. Mid-market cities rely heavily on local banks and community lenders, which means fewer financing alternatives when rates spike.

Moreover, the businesses that drive these local economies—manufacturers, energy service companies, family restaurants—typically operate on thinner margins than their big-city counterparts. They don't have the financial cushion to absorb sudden increases in borrowing costs, and they can't easily pass those costs on to customers who are also feeling economic pressure.

Cleveland and Tulsa might seem different on the surface, but they're experiencing remarkably similar pressure points. Cleveland's manufacturing base is dealing with a double hit—higher interest rates and new tariffs are making it expensive to both upgrade equipment and manage supply chains. A Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland survey found that 64% of manufacturers expect these combined pressures to hurt their bottom line.

Meanwhile, in Tulsa, energy service companies that keep Oklahoma's oil industry running are finding it harder to lease equipment or expand operations.

Oklahoma State University's December economic outlook noted that business investment growth has slowed significantly in 2025, with companies reporting that tariff-fueled inflation and costly capital outlays have forced more cautious spending decisions.

Pipeline maintenance companies are putting truck purchases on hold because financing costs would eat up nearly all their projected profit margins.

But here's where it gets personal: the restaurants, coffee shops, and retail stores that give these cities their character are getting squeezed the hardest.

These businesses typically need working capital to manage cash flow between slow and busy seasons.

With banks tightening lending standards and charging

higher rates, nearly half of surveyed small businesses report declining revenue and profits, with many expecting no near-term improvement without rate relief, according to a Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis study. Many are going into survival mode instead of growth mode.

The Survival Playbook

If you're a business owner feeling this pressure, here's what actually works right now:

- 1. Know Your Numbers Inside Out.** Before you even think about borrowing, understand exactly how much additional monthly payment you can handle without choking your cash flow. I recommend calculating three scenarios: best case, realistic, and "oh shit" situations.
- 2. Shop Multiple Lenders.** Don't just go to your usual bank. Credit unions, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and even some online lenders are competing hard for good borrowers. A difference in 1-2 percentage points can be the difference between hundreds or thousands of dollars.
- 3. Lock in Terms Now.** If you need financing in the next 12-18 months, start the process now. Most forecasts expect the Fed to begin cutting rates lightly in late 2025 or early 2026, but only if inflation trends down and the labor market weakens, Morningstar analysts report. There's no guarantee rates will drop significantly in 2026.
- 4. Build Cash Reserves Aggressively.** This isn't the time to operate on thin margins. Every extra dollar you can keep in reserves gives you options when opportunities arise or emergencies hit.

What's Really at Stake

This isn't just about individual businesses—it's about the economic DNA of small market cities. When local manufacturers can't upgrade equipment, they become less competitive nationally.

When energy service companies can't expand, they miss out on contracts that could employ dozens of people.

When that corner coffee shop can't get working capital, it closes, and the community loses a gathering place.

The Federal Reserve isn't trying to hurt small businesses, but its interest rate policy hit Main Street harder than Wall Street, and mid-market cities harder than major metropolitan areas.

Big corporations have multiple financing options and

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Does the Incumbent Deserve Your Vote?

From front page

Searching “Joe Jones Cleveland news,” for example, turns up a barrage of troublesome articles about this Ward 1 incumbent. Jones has been recently investigated for death threats, improper gift giving, and inappropriate behavior towards women.

You’ll also find Jones’s recent response to these allegations, as reported by SignalCleveland.org: “My people, they are a gracious people. They understand that this is a political season, and when you’re in a political season, people come after you.”

Strategy #3: Review Your Councilperson’s Voting Record

Reviewing an incumbent candidate’s voting record will help you understand how he or

she has shaped the city. This is a lengthy process that requires you to investigate each ordinance and resolution, but it may provide the information you need.

Start by opening the City Record, which is created after the Council meeting each week. Find “Ordinances and Resolutions” in the Table of Contents. Open each ordinance, read it to get a sense of what it is about, and then scroll to the bottom. The votes of all council members in attendance are recorded there.

In the City Record from Sept. 5, for example, you will find that all members at that meeting voted “yea” on every issue brought before the Council. A voter craving change in Cleveland may decide to choose someone who thinks differently

from the rest of the group.

Strategy #4: Review City Council Meetings

In accordance with the City Charter, all Council meetings are open to the public. They usually take place at the Council Chambers on Mondays at 7 PM. You can also find recordings of the meeting on the Cleveland City Council YouTube Live page. Of the strategies listed here, this one is the most time-consuming but will provide the most information.

Angela Hay is a journalism student at Capital University in Columbus, graduating in December 2025. She has written for Capital Magazine, the student newspaper.

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Walter Collins Continues

From front page

in the Kinsman neighborhood of Cleveland. Rid-All Green Partnership took an abandoned piece of land and developed it into a functioning farm, providing residents with fresh local produce.

Randall McShepard, Co-Founder of Rid-All Green Partnership, shared that Collins has worked with this farm since 2014. Rid-All Green Farm holds classes for adults, adolescents, and veterans, providing them with a healthy outlet.

McShepard reflected on Collins’ partnership and impact on the farm:

“(With) Walter, being a very proud and active veteran, and advocate for veteran issues, we learned that veterans coming through our training program, they were becoming very connected to the farm, they felt like they didn’t just want to leave after their training was done they wanted to remain, a lot of them were dealing with PTSD,” McShepard said.

Building Spaces for Healing

According to McShepard, Collins had also been advocating for housing for veterans, as well as urging veterans to participate in urban agriculture. Veterans feel the farm offers a rewarding experience.

“Through the efforts of Walter Collins and some of our staff, we actually built a hoop house dedicated to veterans. We call it the Veterans Hoop House... It’s like a drop-in center, where they can come and just have quiet

time, volunteer, they can plant, or whatever else they may want to do,” McShepard said.

Celebrating and Supporting Veterans

Celebrating and recognizing veterans doesn’t end there. Collins, along with the farm, has held four Armed Forces Day celebrations.

“We brought out numerous agencies that have helped veterans, for an all-day fair, where veterans can come out and get the help/ resources they need...Walter has driven that,” McShepard said.

Collins’ relentless advocacy for homelessness has resulted in raising money for a veteran housing facility in the Union Miles neighborhood, working along with the Rid-All Green farm once again.

Honoring a Cleveland Hero

Collins continues to inspire those in the community, continuously taking steps to not only advocate for veterans but to propel them on a path towards healing.

Considering Other Perspectives

While Collins’ work has earned admiration, some observers note that grassroots projects like Rid-All’s Veterans Hoop House cannot replace the scale of federal and state programs.

National veterans organizations have pointed out that larger systemic reforms and consistent funding are still

necessary to address widespread issues such as homelessness, mental health care access, and long-term housing stability.

These critiques emphasize that while community-driven solutions provide vital support, they must be complemented by a broader government investment.

“Walter Collins is a one-of-a-kind national hero who happens to be right living here in Northeast Ohio. He deserves to be celebrated and acknowledged,” McShepard said.

Community Impact

The impact of Collins’ advocacy is felt across Cleveland. His work with Rid-All connects veterans to agriculture, reducing isolation and helping them build new skills.

The Veterans Hoop House offers a safe place for reflection, social connection, and healing. Housing initiatives in Union Miles address immediate needs while promoting long-term stability.

By tying veterans’ well-being to the health of the community, Collins demonstrates how local action can complement larger systemic efforts.

His example shows that when veterans are supported, entire neighborhoods benefit through stronger connections, healthier lifestyles, and shared purpose.

Mary Kate McNamee studies English literature and history at Ohio University. She writes

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for her campus newspaper and was a summer intern with the Cleveland Observer.

Impact of Federal Interest Rate Policy on Small Businesses

From page 2

can weather higher costs. Coastal towns have diverse economies and access to various capital sources.

Mid-market municipalities often don’t have these advantages.

The Bottom Line

Business owners eventually find ways to adapt, often by securing financing through local

credit unions at rates 1-2 points lower than major banks quote. Monthly payments may still be higher than initially projected, but they become manageable. More importantly, successful businesses don’t give up on growth, they adjust their strategies.

That’s the lesson here: higher rates are a challenge, not a death

sentence. The businesses that will thrive are those that adapt quickly, maintain strong relationships with multiple lenders, and make decisions based on realistic math rather than wishful thinking.

Don’t let Washington’s interest rate games dictate your business future. Know your options, act strategically, and

remember, every economic cycle eventually turns.

Ray’Chel Wilson, a Toledo native, and author. She is a certified financial educator and financial therapist who researches stewardship, economic development, and leadership to promote financial flourishing.

Making Ends Meet in a Rising Economy: Grocery Shopping Hacks to Help You Save Money



By Marissa Valentine

Consumers across the United States can agree that the price of groceries has changed drastically over the last 30 years. Clevelanders and shoppers across Northeast Ohio often travel outside their communities for the most reasonable prices.

A recurring theme across social media and in news headlines is the increased price of eggs, dairy, and meat. As a patron of your local grocery store, it is imperative to know your options as you navigate budgeting your meals in an economy where prices continue

woven into the fabric of everything we do, as consumers, we must understand that not only has the cost of groceries increased, but so has the cost of living.

In 1988, the median household income was \$25,872, which would equate to approximately \$72,128.77 in 2025, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' CPI Inflation Calculator.

The median income for Americans varies based on region, but according to Yahoo Finance, the middle-class median income range falls between \$56,000 and \$169,000.

If you fall on the lower end of the earning spectrum and have a larger family, groceries may be more expensive to manage than for those who earn on the higher end and have a smaller family.

Consumers across North-east Ohio are struggling to keep up

myself switching from name-brand items to generic, bouncing between stores because of price differences, and having to sacrifice certain items because they do not fit within my budget.

As prices have increased lately, it has been even harder to keep up. I have a growing teenager, and we have to sit down together and prioritize what I am buying and ration what we eat to make it through until the next payday."

Why Prices Continue to Rise

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), grocery prices have risen by approximately 28.2% since the start of the pandemic. Items that have most notably increased in price in 2024 were eggs due to an outbreak of avian flu.

As a result, customers have seen many wholesale stores, such as Costco and Sam's Club, providing a robust offering of eggs, with a disclaimer limiting the number of cartons customers can purchase at one time.

The U.S. Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) prices for food have steadily increased since 1968, so it is no surprise that Americans are paying more for groceries as the overall cost of living has increased.

However, in 2022 (post-COVID-19), as people returned to the office and restaurants started serving customers indoors, the rate of inflation reached an all-time high of 11.4%, the highest it has been since May of 1979.

Savvy Shopping: How to Reduce Costs

So the big question that many Americans are asking one another is, "How do we budget for groceries as prices show no sign of reduction?" In Cleveland, the monthly price of groceries for

GROCERY SHOPPING HACKS TO SAVE MONEY

USE A SMALL CART OR BASKET
Large carts encourage you to add more... and more! Use a smaller cart or basket so you have little room for impulse purchases.

LOOK UP AND DOWN
Fact: The most expensive items are often right at eye level. Look up and down when shopping to compare all prices.

SKIP CONVENIENT ITEMS
Avoid convenient items grouped together, like chips and salsa. You can often find cheaper alternatives elsewhere in the store.

SHOP CHEAP, HEALTHY STAPLES
Plan meals using cheap staples like tuna, beans, brown rice, and eggs. These items are not only affordable but healthy and filling too.

SHOP THE PERIMETER
Outside aisles contain healthy, fresh foods, like produce, deli meats, and dairy. Avoid inside aisles when possible to stop yourself from making impulse buys on unhealthy snacks.

SKIP PREPARED FOODS
Skip pricey prepared foods. Instead, chop and organize veggies and other food into containers. This way, you save money but can still easily assemble a quick meal.

SHOP VEGETARIAN
Switch to vegetarian-based proteins for a few meals to save big. Research suggests vegetarians can save at least \$750 more than meat-eaters per year.

Trust the stash to save some cash!

Credit Infostache.com

a family of four is approximately \$1,444, according to Livingcost.org. The monthly price for groceries may seem high, but the average weekly cost is \$361.

To help people offset the cost of groceries, there are discount stores that offer quality groceries at affordable prices:

- **Discount Stores** -Stores like Aldi and Trader Joe's offer healthy and organic meat, dairy, and dry goods that are often lower than larger competitors like Giant Eagle or Heinen's.

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Uniquely Tish \$\$\$Budget Meals. Credit Uniquely Tish YouTube

to rise.

Rising Cost for the Middle Class

In 1986, the price of milk was \$2.19; today, the cost of milk in Cleveland can range from \$3.48 to \$4.22 per gallon. As prices across all industries soar, Americans' grocery bills do so yearly.

To depict how money is

with rising grocery costs. "The cost of groceries has made a significant impact on my life," said Cleveland native Ashley Mueller.

"As a single mom, I have to stick to a budget. I often take advantage of different company apps to compare prices and create an online cart to show me exactly how much I will be spending. Over the last four years, I've found

Cleveland Tackles Food Deserts With Community Solutions



By Devon Jones

According to a research project during the 2018 Case Western Reserve University study, limited access to affordable and nutritious food, which affects more than half of Cleveland residents who live in food deserts, contributes to chronic health issues across the city.

To address this disparity, Food Strong, a nonprofit founded in 2018 by Sara Continenza, is working in neighborhoods like East Cleveland and around

66th and Superior Ave. to build food sovereignty through youth education, urban farming, and community partnerships.

What Is a Food Desert?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines a food desert as an area with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly in predominantly lower-income neighborhoods.

Cleveland experiences one of the nation's largest disparities in food access, with more than 50 percent of residents living in a food desert, according to CWRU's analysis of census data.

Cleveland's Food Access Gap

For many Cleveland families, Continue on page 5



Continue on page 8 Food Strong founder Sara Continenza teaching students farming. Credit: Food Strong website

Trump Order: Nationwide Birthright Citizenship Blocked



By Staff Writer

On January 20, 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14160 titled Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship. The measure sought to deny birthright citizenship to children born in the United States to undocumented or temporarily present parents.

Within days, lawsuits were filed. Spectrum News1 reported that 22 states and multiple advocacy groups joined together on January 21, 2025, to challenge the order in court. Judges across the country quickly issued injunctions, halting implementation before it could take effect.

The Supreme Court is now expected to rule on the order’s constitutionality in the coming term.

Legal Rationale Meets Judicial Pushback



The Trump administration argued that the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of citizenship to anyone “born or naturalized in the United States” should not apply to children of undocumented or temporary-status parents.

Critics pointed out that this argument was already rejected in 1898, when the Supreme Court ruled in United States v. Wong Kim Ark that children born on U.S. soil to foreign nationals are citizens at birth.

Federal judges echoed that precedent. PBS NewsHour reported that Judge John C.

Coughenour in Washington state called the order “blatantly unconstitutional” when issuing one of the first nationwide injunctions.

In June 2025, the Supreme Court considered Trump v. CASA. According to The Washington Post, the Court limited the scope of universal injunctions but did not rule on the order’s constitutionality. Lower courts then moved swiftly to reinstate nationwide blocks, warning that partial enforcement would create a “patchwork of citizenship rights” and widespread confusion.

What’s at Stake

The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified after the Civil War, was designed to overturn the Dred Scott decision and guarantee citizenship to all persons born on U.S. soil. That principle, known as jus soli, has been consistently upheld, including in Wong Kim Ark and in the 1982 case Plyler v. Doe. Opponents of EO 14160 say it would risk creating a stateless population of U.S.-born children.

As PBS NewsHour noted, judges have warned that enforcing the order would cause “chaos

in record-keeping and federal benefits.”

Supporters counter that citizenship is “a priceless and profound gift,” as Trump said when signing the order, and that it should not extend to children of parents who entered the U.S. unlawfully (White House Statement).

The Heritage Foundation has also argued that automatic birthright citizenship reflects “a fundamental misunderstanding of the 14th Amendment.”

Community Impact in Ohio

The debate is more than theoretical in Cleveland and across Ohio. In a July 2025 commentary, the Ohio Capital Journal wrote that “immigrants and their children made Ohio what it is” and that birthright citizenship has been essential to the state’s growth.

If EO 14160 were enforced, Cleveland hospitals such as MetroHealth and the Cleveland Clinic could issue birth certificates that federal agencies refuse to recognize. That would complicate access to passports, Social Security numbers, and even

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Clevelanders Tackles Food Deserts With Community Solutions

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the nearest meal often comes from a corner store or fast-food chain rather than a grocery aisle filled with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Relying on packaged and processed food may be convenient, but over time, it increases the risk of diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that communities with limited food access face far higher rates of chronic illness, a reality that highlights just how urgent Cleveland’s food crisis has become.

Food Strong’s Mission and Vision

Food Strong’s mission is “to cultivate food justice in Northeast

Ohio and beyond by building enduring local food systems from the ground up.” Founder Sara Continenza describes this work as advancing food sovereignty, “the right of people and communities to define their food and agricultural systems based on culturally appropriate and sustainable practices.”

Programs in Action: From Gardens to Markets

The nonprofit operates programs in three main areas:

- Youth Education
- Urban Restoration
- Community Engagement.

Food Strong runs activities at the Coit Road Farmers Market

in East Cleveland and the Superior Farm Fix-Up in Cleveland’s Superior neighborhood.

These projects aim to connect residents with fresh produce, create hands-on gardening opportunities, and build stronger ties between families and local food systems.

Building Community Through Food Sovereignty

“We are seeking to build relationships and collaboration with residents and other community organizations,” Continenza said. “We are focused on long-term sustainable impact.”

Public health advocates support this grassroots approach, noting that food access is closely tied to health outcomes. “If we want to reduce rates of diabetes and heart disease in Cleveland, we must start by increasing access to fresh food,” said a representative from the Cuyahoga County Board of Health.

East Cleveland resident Maria Johnson, who shops weekly at the Coit Road Farmers Market, said Food Strong has changed how she cooks for her family. “Before, we ate a lot of packaged food because that’s what was around,” she said. “Now I can get fresh greens and tomatoes in my own neighborhood, and my kids are learning how to garden, too.”

Still, some policy experts question whether small-

scale programs can meet the magnitude of Cleveland’s food crisis. They argue that without major investments in grocery infrastructure, zoning reforms, and expanded food assistance, nonprofits may only address part of the problem.

Community Impact

In neighborhoods where fresh groceries are scarce, the cost goes far beyond what shows up on a receipt. Families without access to healthy food often face higher medical bills, shorter life expectancies, and fewer opportunities to break the cycle of poverty.

Programs like Food Strong can ease that burden by putting gardens and markets back into communities, but residents say the challenge is too big for nonprofits to solve alone. Real change will take both grassroots action and public investment. As Cleveland struggles with one of the nation’s starkest food access gaps, the question remains: will every neighborhood be given a fair chance at fresh, nutritious food?

Devon Jones is a research associate at Case Western Reserve University and program manager at the Cleveland Observer. He co-founded Crown Connections Nonprofit Consulting and co-hosts the Neighborhood Hero’s Podcast.

Only 7% of Cleveland voters participated in the 2025 municipal primary election.

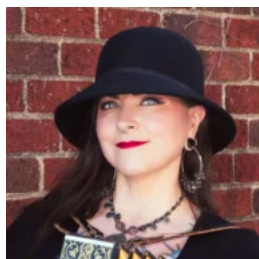
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What do *you* think it would take to get Clevelanders to trust our representatives and local government are worth voting for?

Our CLE Voter/Non-Voter Listening Project helps Cleveland’s own neighborhood and community media publishers inform, engage and listen to their own community members around the 2025 municipal election. This program will gather the needs of Cleveland residents and any related actions taken by their elected leaders into 2026. Neighborhood Media Foundation presents this new grassroots initiative with support from The Collaborative Journalism Resource Hub.

Voter Information: How to Research New City Council Candidates



By Angela Hay

This article is part of the Cleveland Observer's voter information series designed to prepare Cleveland voters for the general election on Nov. 4, 2025.

Informed participation in local elections is a crucial way to shape the city. Unfortunately, getting reliable non-biased information about the candidates and their beliefs can be challenging.

With incumbent candidates, we can review their voting records and accomplishments, but for new candidates, we have to cast a wider net.

Here are three questions that will help you determine if a candidate's vision aligns with your hopes and dreams for the city.

Question #1: What experience does this candidate have?

Most candidates share their biographies on their official campaign websites. A good biography will tell you what they've done and how that applies to the work they hope to do on the city council. In most cases, new candidates have less specific political experience than incumbents, but they may have life experience that applies to the role.

Ward 12 candidate Tanmay Shah keeps it simple by describing himself as "a union organizer, lawyer, and truck driver." Ward 9 candidate Alana Belle uses the words artist, activist, and organizer, then offers details about her Cleveland childhood, her experiences with direct action, and her work in grassroots organizations.

No campaign website for Ward 4 candidate Rehan Waheed



SCAN TO LISTEN

September 9, 2025 Primary Election Profile

Updated 9/12/2025

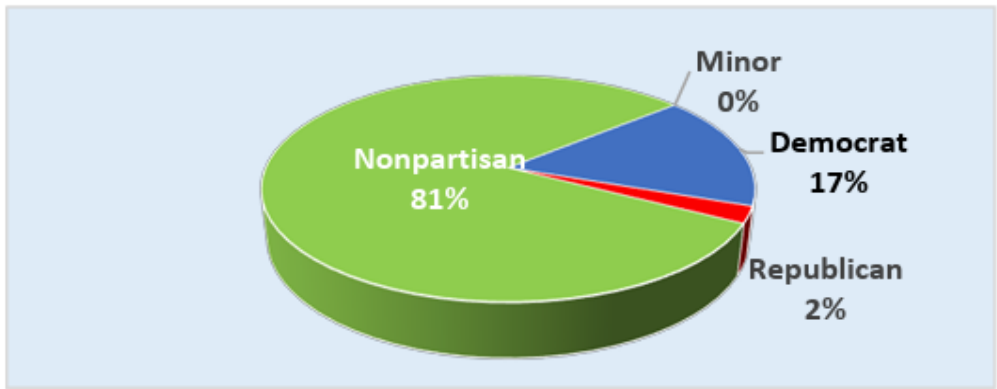
Election Overview

6 Municipalities 192 Precincts
67 Polling locations 40 Candidates (including one write-in)
3 Municipal Issues

189,389 Registered Voters
31,184 Democrat 4,475 Republican
153,730 Nonpartisan 0 Minor Party

20,654 Total Ballots Cast

11% Turnout
14,313 Election Day
4,836 Vote-by-Mail
1,505 Early In-Person



Credit Office of the Connecticut Secretary of the State

or Ward 3 candidate Erich Stubbs shows up in the first three pages of a Google search, which may make it difficult for voters in their wards to learn about their qualifications.

The candidate's narratives are likely to highlight their accomplishments and downplay controversies, but they are a good place to start.

Question #2: What is this candidate's vision for my ward and for Cleveland?

Because new candidates haven't yet demonstrated their vision for the city, they need to be able to express it in other ways. Their game plans should be easy

to find and understand on their official channels.

Per her campaign page, Ward 8 candidate Charlotte Perkins intends to focus on community initiatives such as "neighborhood cleanups, youth mentorship programs, senior support services, small business workshops, resource fairs, and events that celebrate our local culture." Ward 12 primary winner Shah wants the city to invest in "housing, food access, and city services...for working-class families." He also promises affordable groceries.

Compare the new candidate's plans with the actions of the incumbent candidate in your ward. There is no guarantee the candidate will accomplish what they set out to do, but you can measure their intentions against your own hopes.

Question #3: What else, good and bad, has this candidate been involved in?

Reading pages the candidate controls may not give you the full story. Fortunately, the internet has a long memory. You can search for news that confirms their accomplishments, contains quotes from them, or reveals controversies.

Searching for Ward 1 candidate Juanita O. Brent reveals that, prior to running for city council, she served as the Democratic representative of District 18 in the Ohio House.

Searching "Juanita O Brent

news" will take you to an interview about why she's transitioning from state to local government. Searching "Juanita O Brent controversy" uncovers news stories about her response to threats from another Ohio representative.

Waheed has an active LinkedIn page where he publishes articles and re-posts on Cuyahoga County finances, racism, and comedian Jon Stewart.

What to do when Googling isn't enough

There may be things you want to know about new city council candidates that an internet search can't uncover. Fortunately, there are several other resources at your disposal.

SignalCleveland.org created a Voter Guide for the city council race. They publish candidates' views on Cleveland issues like affordable housing, term limits, and government spending.

At the time of this writing, the guide still included candidates that did not end up on the ballot, but you can sift through those to read the current candidates' responses.

Some organizations offer support to candidates in the form of official endorsements. Check in with groups you respect for their opinion on who deserves votes.

Planned Parenthood has announced its endorsement of Alana Belle, and the Ohio Working Families Party has made endorsements for Wards 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12.

Finally, many of these candidates are actively campaigning as the election nears. Check their social media pages for updated schedules, and meet them face-to-face. Their behavior in person could cement you as a supporter for life or send you running the other way.

Angela Hay is a journalism student at Capital University, graduating in December 2025. Over the summer she interns with the Cleveland Observer, where she focuses on telling unique stories from Greater Cleveland.

PRE-ELECTION

- Engage in activities to exercise suffrage and informed choice
- Register during the voter registration period
- Stay informed on candidates' issues, platforms, and personalities
- Set guidelines for selecting leaders based on social affiliations, competence, lifestyle, and performance records
- Conduct/participate in public debates to inform citizens and hold candidates accountable to citizens' interests

DURING ELECTION

- Vote according to your values and beliefs
- Safeguard the integrity of your ballot against external pressures
- Volunteer with organizations advocating for fair and peaceful elections
- Monitor for signs of election fraud and alert fellow voters to any concerns

AFTER ELECTION

- Maintain vigilance during the counting and canvassing of votes
- Engage in governance once elected officials assume office
- Participate in local development planning and public consultations at the barangay level
- Get involved in the political process by running for office, supporting candidates, engaging with civil society, and voicing opinions to elected representatives

ACTION POINTS FOR CITIZEN-VOTERS

Credit Office of the Connecticut Secretary of the State

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Anger is a Signal, Not a Weapon: Understanding Anger



By: Jennifer Bailey, LCSW & RDT

The Signal Behind Anger

Anger is an emotion that comes with cautionary tape, reminding us that there is a line that we must not cross. Experts say it's a signal telling us something needs our attention. Instead of running from anger or letting it control us, we view it for what it is: a signal, a message about our needs, boundaries, and well-being.

According to Psychology Today and NHS Inform, anger often arises in five common situations:

- When a boundary has been crossed
- When we have an experience of something being unfair or an injustice
- When we feel hurt or vulnerable
- When our needs aren't being met
- When we experience stress

Unchecked anger can harm our health and relationships, but listening to what it signals helps us respond thoughtfully.

When Anger Goes Unspoken

When anger or any emotion goes unexpressed, it can result in negative outcomes. Repressed anger is pushed out of our awareness, while suppressed anger is consciously ignored.

Nicole Artz, a licensed marriage and family therapist, writes, "repressed anger doesn't disappear; instead, it often shows up as physical tension, anxiety, mood swings, or self-doubt, affecting both your mental and physical health." Like many repressed emotions, repressed anger can occur for many reasons, the most common being childhood trauma.

The Cost of Unexpressed Anger

When anger goes unacknowledged, it may show up physically and emotionally:

- Potential Physical Impacts
- High blood pressure
- Chronic stress
- Heart problems
- Insomnia
- Higher risk for chronic illnesses
- Difficulty concentrating

Anger is a signal that there is a problem. It is usually not the best tool to fix a problem.

Potential Mental & Relational Impacts

- Lowered self-esteem
- Anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions
- Higher risk for addictions
- Impulsivity
- Less open and honest communication
- Poorer relationships
- Impaired work performance
- Numbness

Knowing that unacknowledged anger can hinder our physical, relational, and mental health, it's important to use strategies to manage it.

How to Manage Anger

Here are some ways to effectively manage anger when it occurs and avoid negative outcomes that accompany suppressing or repressing it. When anger arises, we suggest a three-step strategy to name it, claim it, and tame it.

Name It

Start by using I-statements (e.g., "I feel angry that the event didn't go as planned."). Notice where anger shows up in your body (tight jaw, racing heart). Naming helps you choose words thoughtfully, so we don't say something we could regret later.

Claim It

Claiming our anger means we are acknowledging the emotion as

valid without judging ourselves. The Mayo Clinic suggests avoiding grudges, asking for support, and even using humor to reframe situations.

Tame It

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), "simple relaxation tools, such as deep breathing and relaxing imagery, can help calm down angry

are other valuable tools to lessen the intensity of our emotions.

Two simple mindful breathing exercises to help tame anger:

- Square breathing: Breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, hold for four seconds.
- 4-5-7: Breathe in for four seconds, hold for five seconds, and breathe out for seven seconds.

Mindful breathing and relaxation are tools to manage anger

Jennifer Bailey is a wife, mother of three, and therapist. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and Registered Drama Therapist (RDT).

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Trump Order to Block Nationwide Birthright Citizenship

From page 5

Medicaid enrollment for newborns. Local legal aid clinics warn they could face a surge in cases as families scramble to defend their children's citizenship rights.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost has defended the order, telling the Ohio Capital Journal that the Fourteenth Amendment does not guarantee automatic citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants. For immigrant families in Cleveland, that stance feels deeply personal. Parents worry their children could grow up without the protections and opportunities that citizenship provides. Advocates caution that the policy would destabilize

everyday life for families who have built their futures in Ohio.

Outlook

As of September 2025, EO 14160 remains blocked nationwide, but its fate lies with the Supreme Court. The Court's ruling will determine whether the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of citizenship at birth holds firm or can be narrowed by presidential order. Until then, immigrant communities in Cleveland and across the country live with uncertainty, wondering whether their children will be recognized as full citizens of the nation they call home.

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Controversial Definition of Gender Tucked into Ohio Budget Bill



By Angela Hay



The Budget Bill Beyond Numbers

On June 30, 2025, Governor Mike DeWine signed Ohio’s state budget bill into law, with Republican-led tax cuts and a definition of sex and gender inserted late in the process, though it remains unclear which legislator proposed the language.

Lawmakers said the language was intended to establish a foundation for future legislation, while critics warned it would fuel discrimination and legal challenges for Ohio residents.

How the Bill Defines Sex and Gender

A “male,” according to the 3156-page bill, is “an individual belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the small reproductive cell.” A “female” is “an individual belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the large reproductive cell.”

“Sex” was legally defined for Ohioans as “the biological indication of male and female, including sex chromosomes, naturally occurring sex hormones, gonads, and unambiguous internal or external genitalia present at birth, without regard to an individual’s psychological, chosen, or subjective experience of gender.”

For the definition of “gender identity,” the legislature chose “an individual’s internal and subjective sense of self, disconnected from biological reality and sex and existing on an infinite continuum, that does not provide a meaningful basis for identification and cannot be recognized as a replacement for sex.”

After defining these terms, the legislature used the budget bill to declare Ohio’s official stance on sex and gender identity, stating that “it is the policy of the state of Ohio to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality.”

These definitions closely mirror those used by the federal government under President Trump.

Legislators Silent on Who Added Language

At the time of writing, The Cleveland Observer was not able to determine which legislator proposed the inclusion of this language in the bill. The Observer will continue to seek clarification.” That shows ongoing accountability.

According to a staff member at the office of Rep. Brian Stewart (R-Ashville), this information is not considered a matter of public record and could not be disclosed. Rep. Stewart is the primary sponsor of the bill.

Per an auto-reply from the office of co-sponsor Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Delaware), “it is difficult for (the Senator) to provide an immediate and individual response to each concern.”

A staff member at the office of co-sponsor Sen. Jerry Cirino

in his statement. “At the end of the day, it’s Ohio taxpayers who will be paying the price for defending a law that was never needed in the first place. If Ohio passes this language into law, we will be sued. And we will lose.”

Community Voices Push Back

Dwayne Steward of Equality Ohio opposed the gender definitions, defunding homeless shelters, and banning queer books for minors.

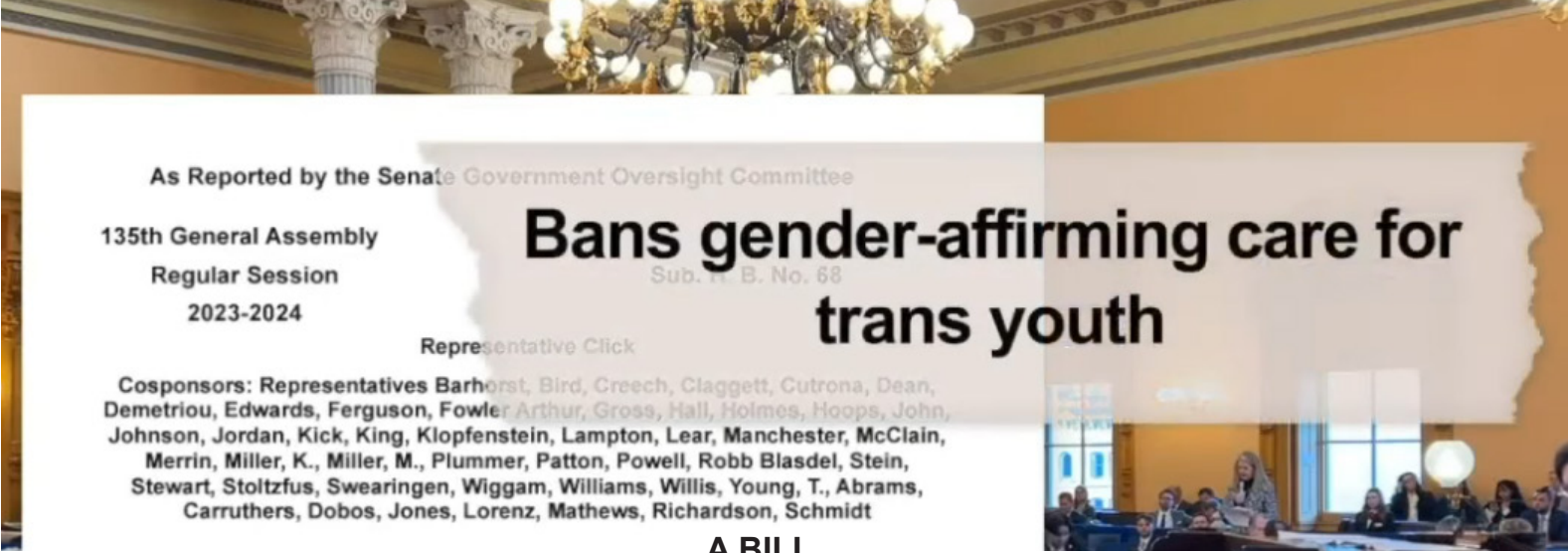
“There is no body of research

protection. It is unnecessary, and it is wrong.”

Evelyn Holbert of the TransUnity Coalition summarized the bill in two words: “inherently irrational.”

The Cleveland Observer was unable to obtain community quotes in support or opposition of the gender-definition section. The community is invited to share their perspectives at info@cleobserver.com

What Comes Next



(R-Kirtland) directed the question to Senate Communications Director John Fortney, who did not respond. In 2023, Fortney announced his online newsroom, stating, “We want to get you the facts on our policies and positions without the filters of the PC police.”

Supporters Defend the Need for Definitions

In the months leading up to the passage of the bill, Stewart insisted on the necessity of including these definitions in the budget bill. Speaking to the Statehouse News Bureau, Stewart compared defining gender to “saying the world is round instead of flat” and emphasized the importance of putting “that kind of discussion behind us.”

Medical experts and civil rights advocates dispute this analogy, noting that gender and biological sex are understood differently in scientific and social fields.

Legal and Fiscal Concerns Raised

Before the bill’s passage, many Ohioans went on record opposing the definitions and other anti-LGBTQIA+ provisions in the budget.

“HB96 doesn’t just propose a budget,” wrote James C. Knapp, Esq., of Cuyahoga County. “It proposes an agenda – one that disregards the dignity, rights, and survival of some of Ohio’s most vulnerable communities. This bill is cruel, unconstitutional, and fiscally irresponsible.”

“If passed, HB96 would expose Ohio to costly lawsuits, jeopardize federal funding, and create needless legal confusion for state agencies,” Knapp continued

A BILL
To enact daction 3313.5319 and 3345.562 the Revised Code to enact the Save Woman’s Sports Act to requires schools, state institutions of higher education, and private colleges to designate separate single sex teams and sports for each sex.

Credit CH 5 ABC news YouTube

that proves the need for these harmful amendments or any other anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, for that matter,” Steward said. “However, there is a large body of research that shows how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation hurts youth and families.”

“This bill endangers LGBTQ+ youth by isolating them, censoring their stories, and denying their existence,” said transgender veteran Ciara Keeton of the TransUnity Coalition. “It is abject cruelty wearing the costume of

While supporters of the budget bill argue the new definitions provide clarity for state policy, opponents predict costly lawsuits and challenges to Ohio’s compliance with federal law. Legal experts anticipate the language will be tested in court, and advocacy groups say they are already preparing for that fight. The ultimate impact of the measure — on both the state’s legal standing and the lives of Ohioans — remains uncertain.

Angela Hay is a journalism student at Capital University, graduating in December 2025. Over the summer she interns with the Cleveland Observer, where she focuses on telling unique stories from Greater Cleveland.

Grocery Shopping Hacks to Help You Save Money

From page 5

- **Buying in Bulk** -People have also purchased certain items in bulk from stores like Costco and compared grocery prices online to avoid overpaying for certain grocery items. Additionally, with drive-up grocery pickup available, customers who often pick up extra products that are not on their grocery list while in-store can avoid the extra add-ons by simply shopping online.
- **Reduced Food Apps** -Lastly, there are apps like the Flashfood app that allow grocery stores to add produce that they deem unfit to sell or to be purchased in bulk at a reduced cost to customers.

What Now?

As grocery prices continue

to rise, leaving Cleveland shoppers vulnerable to shifting their budgets to accommodate, community food banks and church food pantries can also be a great resource for those unable to make ends meet.

You can revamp your grocery list to shop and save by eating seasonal produce and buying discounted alternatives, which may help put more money in your pocket instead of on your grocery bill.

Marissa is a U.S. Navy veteran with more than a decade of journalism experience. She holds graduate and undergraduate degrees in communications and family therapy and enjoys writing and the arts