

Future Heights

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Facilitating an equitable, prosperous and vibrant future for Cleveland Heights and University Heights, and engaging and promoting economic and social development through meaningful engagement of residents and collaboration with local organizations, businesses and governments.



FutureHeights Neighborhood Leadership Workshop participants with facilitator.



Heights residents enjoy Heights Music Hop 2021.



FutureHeights partnered with the Heights Chapter of the Greater Cleveland League of Women Voters to present the first ever Cleveland Heights Mayoral Debate.

From the President

Reflecting on 2021, our organization continued its evolution to a fully functioning community development corporation, focused on fulfilling its mission to facilitate an equitable, prosperous, and vibrant future for Cleveland Heights and University Heights, and to promote economic and social development through engagement and collaboration with residents, local organizations, businesses, and city government.

Cleveland Heights's city slogan is "All Are Welcome." FutureHeights fully embraces this vision, continuing its community engagement efforts to bring the entire community together on civic matters and issues, and particularly supporting diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as placemaking efforts to bring residents together.

Throughout the pandemic and continuing in 2021, we remained engaged in neighborhood revitalization, economic and business development, placemaking, and civic engagement, including the renovation of 20 abandoned homes. FutureHeights is committed to finding additional avenues for supporting redevelopment of blighted commercial properties on Taylor Road, the Noble neighborhood and at Severance Center.

Our award winning community newspaper, Heights Observer, continues to be an effective voice for members of the community to express their views and concerns, and a critical source of local news and event information.

Our Board of Directors continues to operate with a high degree of urgency and is focused on building FutureHeights's capabilities to further improve our community. To that end, we have embarked on an extensive strategic planning process and look forward to sharing the results of this work and implementation plan to advance our community to the next level.

As always, we remain grateful for the continued support from our donors, volunteers, and the City of Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

Sincerely,

Julie I. Sabroff, President
FutureHeights Board of Directors (2021-2022)

News and Notes

As the global pandemic wore on, Cleveland Heights celebrated its centennial and residents elected a mayor for the first time. FutureHeights, a citizen-led community development corporation, continued in 2021 to find innovative ways to strengthen our community's historic neighborhoods and walkable business districts through advocacy, civic engagement, community-enhancing placemaking, neighborhood planning, public forums and small grants projects.

Engaging and promoting our community

Following our success in 2020 with online programming, FutureHeights continued to offer several online public forums to encourage public dialog on issues and help the community connect during these challenging times. Topics included "Shared Space: What Makes a Neighborhood?" and "Shared Spaces: A Conversation About the Severance Neighborhood." In addition, during this historic election year, FutureHeights partnered with Citizens for an Elected Mayor to host "Electing Our First Mayor: Moving Cleveland Heights Forward," a discussion to help identify and prioritize issues that were important to residents as we entered the election season. We then hosted a series of candidates forums and the first-ever Cleveland Heights mayoral debate with the League of Women Voters, as well as published a primary voters' guide and a general election guide in the Heights Observer.

For the fourth consecutive year, the Heights Observer was recognized as one of Ohio's best community publications in the Press Club of Cleveland's annual All-Ohio Excellence in Journalism Awards. Congratulations to our production team for creating a strong community publication that reads well, is relevant, and reflects a broad range of community voices. Thank you to all of our community volunteers who write articles and assist us with editing and distribution, as well as our advertisers who support this important news source and community asset.

Since its inception, the Heights Observer has published more than 10,738 stories. In 2021, we published 12 issues of the print edition and 50 issues of the weekly e-news. One hundred nine new volunteers signed up in the member center to write, edit and distribute the paper, which brings the total number of people engaged through the Observer to 1,803. The local election had a positive effect on ad revenues, which were up 10% from 2020, and page count, which increased 5% over 2020. The number of advertisers, however, was down 4% from 2020 and 21% from 2019. The e-news, published each Tuesday, reaches more than 5,309 people and averages a 34% open rate.

FutureHeights programs, such as the Heights Observer's Holiday Gift Guide, and Best of the Heights Awards, and low-cost advertising opportunities in the Observer, support the locally owned, independent businesses that make up the majority of businesses in the Heights. In addition, "shop local" messaging to encourage residents to patronize Heights businesses, online forums to identify issues that are important to our business owners, as well as partnerships with the Urban League's Minority Business Assistance Center, help support these businesses, which add to the quality of life and unique character of our residential community.

In 2021, we amplified this support by purchasing gift certificates from our local businesses and creating gift packages for the annual Best of the Heights Awards. In 2022, we will again purchase gift certificates and enable each person who submits a valid ballot for the 2022 Best of the Heights Awards to receive a chance to win a package of gift cards valued at a minimum of \$250.

Supporting our commercial districts

In 2021, we continued our work to transform the Cedar Lee



Mini-Park, the walkway from the parking lot behind the Cedar Lee Theatre to the businesses on Lee Road. Following the presentation of a final design concept in September 2020, FutureHeights has worked with its landscape design partner, MKSK, to create construction drawings to finalize the costs. We are now working on an agreement with the city of Cleveland Heights, which owns the property, to enable construction to take place and develop a long-term programming and maintenance plan. Once this is in place, we can work together to obtain funding to make the design a reality.

FutureHeights continued to work with Noble Neighbors, the cities of Cleveland Heights and East Cleveland, and Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope (the CDC for East Cleveland), to reach consensus on next steps for the revitalization of the Noble Road Corridor. In the meantime, the partners have moved forward with the Noble-ity Project and installed five new benches along the right of way. FutureHeights then assisted Noble Neighbors in raising additional funding to enable artwork celebrating the neighborhood's rich history to be created and installed on the benches in 2022. The goal of this Early Action Project is to foster a cohesive identity, and utilize beautification as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization.

Another aspect of revitalization in Noble and other struggling business districts in Cleveland Heights, is support for local business owners, particularly businesses owned by women and minorities who have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic. In 2021, FutureHeights obtained funding through the city's Community Development Block Grant Program to hire a part-time business outreach manager who will help connect business owners to resources and assist them in organizing their districts to achieve lasting change. City funds were augmented by funds raised at our annual benefit, and we are looking forward to having a staff member in place by the end of the year.

One of the things Heights residents said they missed most during the pandemic shut down was the annual live music festival Heights Music Hop. With the support of several new funders, FutureHeights was able to host a pandemic-friendly event in September 2021 that featured live music, on one night, on three outdoor stages in the Cedar Lee Business District. We are hopeful that we will be able to host music inside our local businesses in 2022, but are also looking forward to keeping some of the outdoor elements that were available this year.

Strengthening our neighborhoods

The FutureHomes program, which seeks to renovate vacant, abandoned and blighted homes in our community and sell them to owner-occupants, continues to grow. Working in partnership with the city of Cleveland Heights and the Cuyahoga County Land Bank, FutureHeights acquires properties, develops a comprehensive scope of work, selects a contractor partner, and monitors the work to ensure completion to our specifications. In 2021, FutureHeights completed and sold eight homes in the Noble Neighborhood and the Mid-City area (neighborhoods

bounded by Mayfield, Cedar, Taylor and Lee roads) to new owner-occupants: one more home is completed and on-the-market and five more homes are under construction. During the renovation, all new heating and air conditioning systems are installed, plumbing is upgraded, and insulation added. FutureHeights takes care to preserve character-defining features, such as wood floors and front porches, whenever possible and looks for opportunities to enhance living space by adding a full bathroom or powder room, or finishing an attic or basement. The average market value of the homes post-renovation is 8.7 times their previous value.

FutureHeights marketed a new Neighborhood Mini-Grants program for small exterior home improvement grants to owners of owner-occupied homes in the block surrounding the high school and in a four-block area near Monticello Middle School. These improvements can include painting, porch repair, landscaping, and other improvements that enhance the curb appeal of the home.

FutureHeights' Community Capacity-Building program continues to help residents leverage neighborhood assets by providing tools to solve neighborhood challenges. To enable in-person meetings, FutureHeights held its seventh-annual Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series in fall 2021. Six participants learned effective community-building and place-making practices. The 2022 workshop series will take place beginning March 6, 2022. Applications opened Dec. 1, 2021 and are due Feb. 18, 2022.

FutureHeights expanded its Neighborhood Mini-Grants program in 2021 thanks to additional support from the Cedars Legacy Fund and the McGinty Family Foundation 1989. In 2021, we awarded \$10,452 to 14 projects in several Heights neighborhoods, including public art, community gardens, creative placemaking initiatives, youth activities, and sustainability education. Three of these projects were located in University Heights neighborhoods, which became eligible for the program this year. Two grant application rounds are held each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The next application deadline is March 15, 2022.

FutureHeights expanded its support of all-volunteer, community-based groups in 2021, acting as fiscal sponsor for Noble Neighbors, Spirit Corner, Cleveland Heights Garden Walk, Bradford Cinder Path, Heights Tree People, Lower Edgehill Neighborhood Association, Delmore Community Orchard and Cleveland Heights Green Team. This support enables these organizations to seek funding and present programs that enhance our community.

Strengthening our organization

As the pandemic wore on, FutureHeights found ways to connect with members and supporters both online and in-person. Rainy weather and technical glitches didn't dampen the enthusiasm for gathering at Boss Dog Brewing Company in June for FutureHeights' annual meeting, where Cleveland State University Professor of History J. Mark Souther gave a keynote presentation on "A Century of Civic Engagement in Cleveland Heights" and FutureHeights updated the community on its activities.

Nor did the unprecedented heat and humidity in August, detract from the spectacular site of our 2021 annual benefit: Beaulieu, the home of Ted and Sally Smith. Love for this special community was evident as we celebrated Cleveland Heights' centennial, and recognized author and honoree, Susie Kaeser, who has been a steadfast champion for racial justice. We enjoyed performances by Cleveland Wind Trio, Shakespeare Exchange and master of ceremonies, Peacock. The Fairmount provided delicious featured dishes, and we enjoyed sumptuous bites from Luna Bakery & Cafe, Marchant Manor Cheese, and Mitchell's Fine Chocolates. We sipped signature cocktails (100-Years-Old Fashioned and Nuclear Free Kool-Aid) and CLE Urban Winery's handcrafted wines. We even had Mac's Backs Books on Coventry on hand to sell signed copies of Susie's book, *Resisting Segregation: Cleveland Heights Activists Shape Their Community, 1964-1976*. The event generated much-needed unrestricted revenue to support FutureHeights operations and help support the

organization's new Women- and Minority-Owned Business Outreach Initiative.

Staff shifted to hybrid in-office hours to enable social distancing during the pandemic, working remotely as much as possible and hosting many meetings online. As 2021 grew to a close, FutureHeights put on-hold plans to move to new offices within Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus (CPC), when Heights Libraries suspended plans to enter into a long-term ground lease with CPC. This new location would have given FutureHeights more room for staff offices and a conference room that is triple the size of the current one, enabling more social distancing space for committee and community meetings. FutureHeights has supported the creation of a thriving arts and culture center and community gathering place in the former school building and hopes to see it continue to grow.

In January, we welcomed Melaney Cook as an Americorps VISTA member supporting our FutureHomes program, a position made possible through the Ohio CDC Association. Sydney Chickos, a graduate student at CWRU's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS), completed her field placement with us in the spring and stayed on to serve as our Summer Americorps VISTA member. In August, we welcomed Sarah Wolf as a full-time staff member. Sarah, who had previously served as an intern and Americorps VISTA member, assumed a new role as Community-Building Programs Manager.

Sadly, in October, we had to say goodbye to Sruti Baz, who had accepted a new position that would enable her to work from home with her new baby. Sruti was instrumental in creating the Community Capacity-Building Program, including the Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series and Neighborhood Mini-Grants Program. She built strong relationships with many community groups and other stakeholders; her expertise and sanguinity are greatly missed.

As we look ahead to 2022, we know that the pandemic will have a lasting effect on our residents and local businesses. Yet, there is much reason for optimism. We know that with the continued support of our members and volunteers, we can build back our community. The future for the Heights is bright!



Deanna Bremer Fisher
Executive Director



FutureHeights honored author Susie Kaeser (left) at its 2021 annual benefit. She is pictured here with her daughter Sarah Blake.

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The FutureHeights 2021 annual benefit.

FutureHeights

FutureHomes



FutureHeights AmeriCorps VISTA Melaney Cook, FutureHeights Real Estate Programs Director Abby Lawless, contractor Frederick White, and Cleveland Heights Council Member Davida Russell in front of the newly renovated home on Whitby Avenue in the Noble Neighborhood.



The living room of the Whitby house after renovation through the FutureHomes program.



The living room of the Whitby house prior to renovation.

FUTUREHEIGHTS FUNDING SOURCES
2021 BUDGET

Future Heights

2843 Washington Blvd., Suite 105
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118
www.futureheights.org
216-320-1423

Our Mission

To facilitate an equitable, prosperous and vibrant future for Cleveland Heights and University Heights and to engage in and promote economic and social development through meaningful engagement of residents and collaboration with local organizations, businesses and governments.

FutureHeights values:

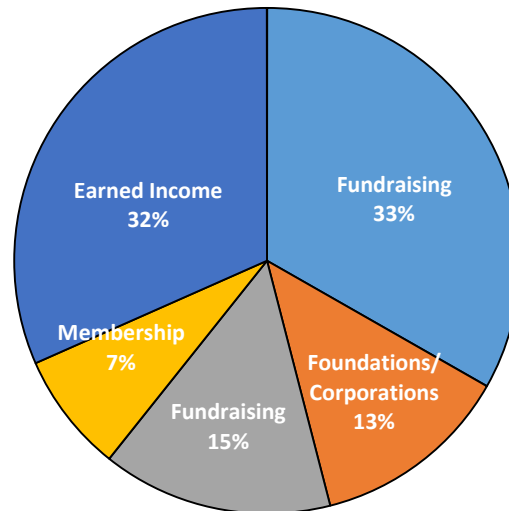
- Diverse, inclusive, active and informed public participation that engages and empowers people of all ages, incomes, races, ethnicities, religions, abilities, sexual orientation and gender identity
- A commitment to racial equity and justice in all actions, programs and policies of FutureHeights and our communities
- Open and effective communication and partnerships among nonprofits, schools, local business, city government and citizens
- A thriving local business community
- Preservation and enhancement of historic neighborhoods and commercial districts
- Sustainability in development, municipal operations and in management of natural environment, including our tree canopy
- Appreciation for the time, talent and various forms of support offered to our organization
- A regional approach to innovation, planning and development

Members Of



Join Us

Your tax-deductible membership contribution goes directly to supporting the community-based programs and projects of FutureHeights that help strengthen our wonderful neighborhoods. Join online today at our secure website, www.futureheights.org, or by calling 216-320-1423.



2020 Financial Statement

Audited statement of activities

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
Public Support			
Grants & Contributions	\$ 111,635	-	\$ 111,635
Special Events, Net	9,955	-	9,955
Paycheck Protection Program Grant	40,200	-	40,200
Contributions - Membership	41,518	-	41,518
Contributions - Other	35,873	-	35,873
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	24,165	(24,165)	-
	<u>263,346</u>	<u>(24,165)</u>	<u>239,181</u>
Revenue			
Heights Observer Advertising	97,586	-	97,586
Heights Observer Subscriptions	4,392	-	4,392
Other	3,002	-	3,002
Real Estate Development Fees	45,458	-	45,458
Interest Income	18	-	18
	<u>150,456</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>150,456</u>
Total Public Support and Revenue	<u>413,802</u>	<u>(24,165)</u>	<u>389,637</u>
Expenses			
Programs	304,492	-	304,492
General and Administration	39,685	-	39,685
Fundraising	20,965	-	20,965
	<u>365,142</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>365,142</u>
Total Expenses	<u>365,142</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>365,142</u>
Change in Net Assets	48,660	(24,165)	24,495
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	<u>53,061</u>	<u>(24,165)</u>	<u>77,786</u>
Net Assets at End of Year	<u>\$ 101,721</u>	<u>\$ 560</u>	<u>\$ 102,281</u>

The FutureHeights financial year begins January 1 and ends December 31.

FutureHeights is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Contributions to FutureHeights are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. FutureHeights participates in GuideStar, the online standard for nonprofit accountability. Please visit GuideStar.org to view the organization's Annual Form 990 and other organizational information.

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Faculty, John Carroll University

Future Heights

Donna Johnson
Executive Assistant, The Cleveland
Foundation

Jennifer Wintner
Consultant

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The Nonprofit Org Doc, LLC

Andrè Witt
Accenture

Matthew Wymer
WXZ Development, Inc.

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Director of Community-
Building Programs

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Graphic Design,
Heights Observer

Kathleen Fant
Bookkeeper

Sally Kramer
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Distribution, Heights Observer

Abby Lawless
Director of Real Estate Develop-
ment

Diane Roberto
Graphic Design,
Heights Observer

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Advertising and Marketing Develop-
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Jessica Schantz
E-news Manager,
Heights Observer

Kim Sergio-Inglis
Editor-In-Chief,
Heights Observer

Sarah Wolf
Community-Building Programs
Manager

Support Staff

Sydney Chickos
Intern, CWRU's MSASS; Ameri-
Corps Summer VISTA

Melaney Cook
AmeriCorps VISTA

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FutureHeights Community-Building Programs Manager Sarah Wolf (second from right) with members of the Cleveland Heights Green Team, a 2021 FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grants recipient.