

Future Heights

2020 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.

From the President

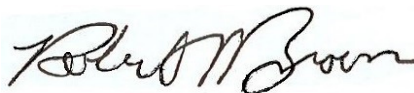
Under the leadership of Executive Director Deanna Bremer Fisher, working with a small group of talented professional staff members and a large contingent of highly motivated citizen volunteers, FutureHeights transformed itself during the past two years into a full-fledged community development corporation (CDC).

What does that mean? After years of advocating for positive change in Cleveland Heights, as well as University Heights, FutureHeights has now taken on a greater role in becoming the agent for that change – operating a successful program to rehabilitate vacant houses, embarking on a program to build houses on vacant lots, and taking a lead role in a plan to revitalize the Noble Road area.

These new initiatives joined the organization's long-standing engagement in assisting the work of neighborhood leaders, supporting local businesses and giving voice to citizens through the Heights Observer.

As we all work to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that you will join us through your participation and your financial contributions.

Sincerely,



Robert N Brown, President
FutureHeights Board of Directors (2019-2020)



FutureHeights Neighborhood Mini-Grant recipient Donna Johnson shows off the Little Free Library that she built and installed with her grant.



New signage at the Cedar Lee Mini-Park welcomes visitors.



Nicole Thomas, consultant and co-facilitator of the FutureHeights Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series, with Sruti Baz.



FutureHeights staff stands with contractor Frank Kuhar in front of a FutureHomes project.

News and Notes

As we all struggled during 2020 to cope with life under a global pandemic, FutureHeights found new and innovative ways to connect people, businesses and organizations for the betterment of our community.

As a citizen-led community development corporation, FutureHeights continued its work during 2020 to strengthen our community's historic neighborhoods and walkable business districts through its advocacy, community-enhancing placemaking, neighborhood planning, public forums and small grants projects.

Engaging and promoting our community

When the pandemic hit, FutureHeights conducted an outreach campaign to check-in with senior citizens and other Heights residents to listen to their concerns, share information and connect them to resources. We developed an online COVID-19 Resource Guide that compiled hyper-local information about housing, food assistance, and other resources for our residents and offered weekly check-in calls to those who requested them.

We quickly moved our public forums and workshops online to encourage public dialog on issues and help the community connect during these challenging times. Topics included "Advocating for Neighborhood Interests During an Economic Development Project," "Building a Just and Safe Community for All," and "The State of the Arts in the 'Home of the Arts.'"

FutureHeights developed a new video to help illuminate our activities and their impact in the community. This corresponded with the creation of a dedicated FutureHeights YouTube channel where recordings of our public programs are housed.

As the pandemic took hold in March and many local businesses and institutions closed to the public, Heights Observer advertising revenues declined by more than 30%. Paid advertising from our local businesses is what enables this self-sustaining, hyper-local community news project's free distribution at businesses, schools, libraries and city hall. Although the decrease in advertising forced us to reduce page counts, FutureHeights reaffirmed its commitment to keeping our community informed and connected. The June edition included Senior Shout Outs, copies were mailed to all FutureHeights membership levels during the height of the shut down, and owners of Little Free Libraries throughout the city were asked to be a distribution location.

At an online ceremony in August, the Heights Observer was named the Best Non-Daily Newspaper in Ohio by the Press Club of Cleveland's annual All-Ohio Excellence in Journalism program. Observer columnists Carla Rutenberg and Deborah Van Kleef earned first place for Public Service Coverage among non-daily newspapers for their monthly "Heights of Democracy" column. With more than 700 entries in various categories, this is quite an achievement. Carla and Deborah were recognized for their explanatory writing surrounding last year's public debate and vote over the city's form of government. The Heights Observer was recognized for its commitment to community news and for being in touch with its audience.

Since its inception, the Heights Observer has published more than 10,061 stories. In 2020, we published 12 issues of the print edition and 50 issues of the weekly e-news. One hundred twenty-three 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 1,694. The pandemic affected the size of the print edition, which in 2020, averaged 21 pages and 67 advertisers each month, a decline of 27% for the year. The e-news, published each Tuesday, reaches



more than 5,304 people and averages a 30.3% open rate and a 22% click 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. Many of these businesses, which add to the quality of life and unique character of our residential community, have struggled during the pandemic and several may be in danger of closing for good.

During the early months of the pandemic, FutureHeights assisted city staff in reaching out to our small business owners to learn how they were faring and help connect them to grants, loans and other resources.

We produced online workshops for local business owners on topics such as "Responsibly Reopening Your Business" and minority business enterprise certification. We continued our "shop local" messaging on social media and in print to encourage residents to patronize Heights businesses and help keep our community vibrant.

Amplifying this message, each person who submits a valid ballot for the 2021 Best of the Heights Awards will receive a chance to win a package of gift cards valued at a minimum of \$250. With pandemic-related categories, such as Best Curbside Pickup and Best Pandemic Pivot, we encourage residents to appreciate the innovative ways our local businesses have adapted to serve them during the pandemic.

Supporting our commercial districts

In 2020, 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. In an effort to create a vibrant community space, we again worked with artist Tom Masaveg and local students to plant flowers, weed beds and add to the interactive mural that we had installed on the theater building last year.

Throughout 2020, we worked with landscape design firm MKSK to create design concepts for long-term improvements to the space and presented the final design to the community in September. We are now working on construction drawings to finalize the costs and are exploring funding opportunities to make the design a reality.

In 2020, FutureHeights assisted the nonprofit tenant organizations housed within Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus (CPC) negotiate a 15-month lease, with an option to convert to a long-term ground lease, with Heights Libraries. This was a difficult process, given that many of the arts and culture organizations had been severely impacted by the pandemic; however, in the end, we were able to assist these organizations in creating a pathway forward to pursue their vision to create a thriving arts and culture center and community gathering place in the former school building.

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), on a revitalization plan for the Noble Road Corridor. FutureHeights held discussions with stakeholders and members of the development community about possibilities for redevelopment of vacant sites along the corridor, while seeking to reach consensus on next steps.

An Early Action Project to expand the planted pots and hanging baskets throughout the entire 2.2 miles of the street was put on hold as Noble Neighbors sought to implement another idea: installing benches along the right of way that feature artwork celebrating the neighborhood's rich history. The goal of this project, called the Nobility Project, is to foster a cohesive identity, and utilize beautification as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization.

Unfortunately, the Heights Music Hop was a casualty of this year's pandemic. We are hopeful that we will be able to organize an event for 2021.

Strengthening our neighborhoods

In March 2019, FutureHeights launched the FutureHomes program to renovate vacant, abandoned and blighted homes and sell them to new owner occupants. Working in partnership with the city of Cleveland Heights and the Cuyahoga County Land Bank, FutureHeights acquires the properties, develops a scope of work that maximizes benefits to the neighborhood, selects a contractor partner, and monitors the renovation to ensure completion to our specifications.

Using the city's 2017 Master Plan as its guide, FutureHeights identified two target areas in which to focus its housing renovation efforts: the Mid-City area around the high school, and the Noble-Monticello area along the Noble Road Corridor. In 2020, FutureHeights completed and sold three homes to new owner-occupants; two more homes are completed and on-the-market and one home is near completion. Two of these homes are located directly across from Cleveland Heights High School. In addition, seven homes, six in the Noble target area, are starting renovation.

Although it is too early to fully measure the impact our work is having, the renovations of the four FutureHomes that have been completed and sold have resulted in an average market value that is 6.5 times their pre-renovation value.

In 2021, FutureHeights will expand its Neighborhood Mini-Grants program to enable 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. For example, in the spring of 2020, FutureHeights held its sixth-annual Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series where 17 participants were trained in effective community-building and place-making practices. In hopes that the 2021 cohort will be able to meet in person, the 2021 workshop series has been moved to the fall. Applications will open on July 15 and are due Aug. 31, 2021. The workshops will take place Sept. 19 through Nov. 14.

In 2020, we awarded \$6,000 to 11 projects through the FutureHeights' Neighborhood Mini-Grants program, including public art, little free libraries, creative placemaking initiatives, youth activities, and the creation of a community orchard in the Noble Neighborhood. In 2021, FutureHeights will expand the program to enable University Heights residents to participate. Two grant application rounds are held each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The next application deadline is March 15, 2021.

FutureHeights continues to work with community-based groups acting as fiscal sponsor for Noble Neighbors, Spirit Corner, Cleveland Heights Garden Walk, the Bradford Cinder Path and Heights Tree People. This support enables the organizations to seek funding and present programs that enhance our community.

Strengthening our organization

2020 posed unprecedented challenges for the organization as it sought to continue to grow to fulfill its new role as a comprehensive community development corporation. In April, all full-time staff took a 25% temporary pay cut and hours for part-time staff were reduced. Because of the pandemic, we did not hold our annual gala that generates much needed operational support. Fortunately, many of our generous donors responded to our call, giving generously to an annual benefit mailing campaign and to our membership and annual fund campaigns. In addition, FutureHeights successfully obtained a Payroll Protection Program forgivable loan. These initiatives enabled us to restore salaries and hours to enable staff to continue the organization's important work.

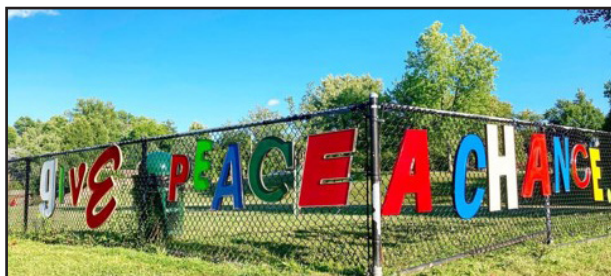
The pandemic also posed other challenges. In March, FutureHeights closed its office to the public. Staff began working remotely as much as possible, and safety protocols were put in place for those times when staff needed to be in the office. Thanks to a generous donor who enabled the organization to purchase a Zoom subscription, all committee meetings moved online, as did community meetings, webinars and public forums.

In March, we welcomed new part-time staff member Sally Kramer. In July, Hannah Morgan completed her fulltime Americorps VISTA position made possible through the Ohio CDC Association. Sarah Wolf and Joel Moss, graduate students at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences (MSASS), completed their field placements with us in the spring. Sarah then completed a summer VISTA placement. This fall, Sydney Chickos and Tabitha Givens began their MSASS field placements.

As we look ahead to 2021, we know that the full effects of the pandemic on our residents and local businesses are not yet known. We expect many challenges ahead. Yet, with the continued support of our members and volunteers, we remain hopeful knowing that our community is resilient and resourceful. We care about one another and look for opportunities, both large and small, to ensure a vibrant and sustainable future for the Heights!



Deanna Bremer Fisher
Executive Director



Temporary art at Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Campus.

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FutureHomes Contractor Frank Kuhar leads a tour of one of the FutureHomes projects for Cleveland Heights City Council.

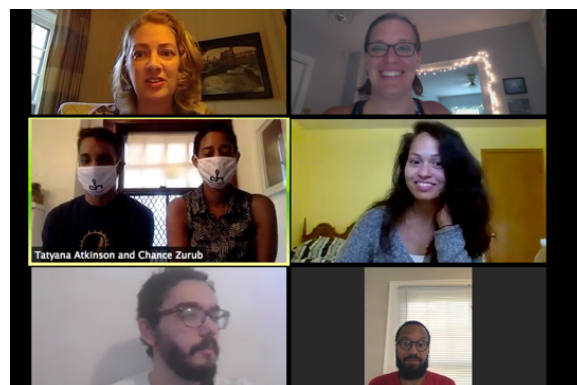


One of the homes completed under the FutureHomes program in 2020.

Arts & Culture in the Heights

The State of the Arts in the "Home of the Arts" during COVID-19.

December 10th
 7:00 - 8:30 pm



A screen shot of one of the public programs held online in 2020.

Future Heights

2843 Washington Blvd., Suite 105
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www.futureheights.org
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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
- 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

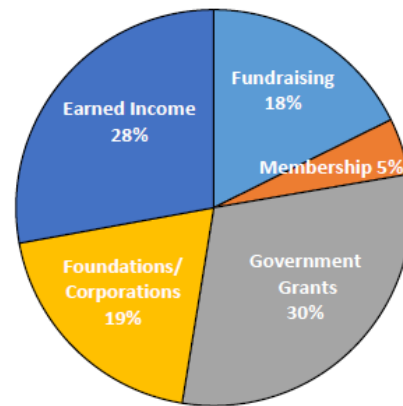
Members Of



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.

FUTUREHEIGHTS FUNDING SOURCES 2020 BUDGET



2019 Financial Statement Audited statement of activities

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
Public Support			
Grants & Contributions	\$ 88,472	\$ 15,000	\$ 103,472
Special Events	58,071	-	58,017
Government Grants	106,362	-	106,362
Membership	30,241	-	30,241
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	19,756	(19,756)	-
	<u>302,848</u>	<u>4,756</u>	<u>298,092</u>
Revenue			
Heights Observer Advertising	125,978	-	125,978
Heights Observer Subscriptions	3,840	-	3,840
Other	294	-	294
Real Estate Development Fees	30,902	-	30,902
Interest Income	69	-	69
	<u>161,083</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>161,083</u>
Total Public Support and Revenue	<u>463,931</u>	<u>4,756</u>	<u>459,175</u>
Expenses			
Programs	402,605	-	402,605
General and Administration	36,437	-	40,523
Fundraising	24,240	-	24,240
	<u>467,368</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>467,368</u>
Change in Net Assets	(3,437)	(4,756)	(8,193)
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	56,498	29,481	85,979
Net Assets at End of Year	<u>\$ 53,061</u>	<u>\$ 24,725</u>	<u>\$ 77,786</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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Future Heights

Our thanks to former board members Barbara Anderson and Elmer Turner for their dedicated service to the mission of FutureHeights.



Participants in the 2020 Neighborhood Leadership Workshop Series prior to the shutdown caused by Covid-19.