

**Doan Brook Watershed Partnership**  
***Greenways or Highways? Looking Back to Look Forward***  
**Planning Grant Project Narrative**

**1) What do you plan to do?**

Doan Brook, a small watershed that includes Cleveland and several “Heights” communities, is unique as an urban stream system. Unlike other adjoining watersheds, most of Doan Brook is still open and maintains intact riparian corridors along much of its banks. However, a proposed highway expansion project in the 1960’s threatened to undermine what today is considered a rare urban treasure. This project centers around the creation of a narrative around three intertwined “epic” events that impacted this metropolitan Cleveland landscape: the retirement of Cleveland’s street-car system in 1953; the expansion of highways in Cleveland as a part of the National Highway Act of 1956; and the successful defeat of one section of the highway system that would have segmented parts of Cleveland’s east-side, Cleveland Heights, and Shaker Heights, impacting green-spaces, watersheds, neighborhoods, and vibrant commercial districts that make this area unique. These historical events have shaped east-side Cleveland communities in mostly positive ways, providing a case-study for the capability of communities to protect the natural and community assets that make them thrive.

We request support for a planning grant to lay the groundwork for a documentary film that can be used as a community engagement tool. The planning grant will support pre-production for the film (research, oral history collection, location scouting), formation of an advisory board, and preparation of a film treatment.

Specific actions that will take place for his project include:

- a. review of literature and written history (much of which is already collected) that details the east-side highway, the decline of the street car and intra-urban rail system, and contemporary projects including expanded bike and pedestrian infrastructure and the Opportunity Corridor;
- b. review history archives maintained by the Shaker Lakes Nature Center, Western Reserve Historical Society, and Cleveland Memory Project of Cleveland State University;
- c. location scouting, including photography and film footage of locations along the Doan Brook watershed and surrounding communities to provide b-roll or settings for interviews that establish a sense of place for the film;
- d. conduct 8-10 oral histories with local residents who experienced the transition of the street car system, individuals connected to the history of grassroots organizing in the Heights, and those that were involved with or have knowledge of the role of the Carl Stokes administration in halting the highway development;
- e. formation of an advisory board of 2-3 humanities scholars to inform the broader project;
- f. identification of a contact at WVIZ that can serve as a liaison for the film production;
- g. preparation of a written film treatment; and

- h. organization of a community engagement event with the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership to share some of the key findings and garner initial feedback on the presentation of this history as a part of a larger film project.

## 2) How do the humanities inform this project?

This proposed project is well-timed for the new “Toward a Beautiful Ohio” program introduced by the Ohio’s Humanities Council, a theme that will enable Ohio communities to understand human impacts, both beneficial and detrimental, on our rich natural legacy. Communities can leverage these lessons to take responsible actions today that move away from a history of equating economic progress with the rate of destruction of natural or community assets. Our project will provide a publicly accessible narrative about the successful defeat of a highway expansion on Cleveland’s east-side, connecting with the council’s intention to “uncover the stories that reveal human interactions with the environment, to better understand our past and present, and imagine our shared future.” This historical event both illuminates the positive legacies of preceding generations while pointing toward a shared future of resilience and community sustainability.

In the 1960’s, the Clark and Lee freeways, planned for construction on the east-side of Cleveland, would have destroyed many of the assets that make this area unique. Engineering studies completed and funding underway, the planned highway was pretty much a done deal. Yet it did not happen. A mix of grassroots organizing in Shaker Heights in combination with opposition from the Carl Stokes administration in Cleveland prevented the highway from going forward. What is the legacy of these decisions today? From open parkland and the preserved riparian corridors of Doan Brook to mixed-use districts with architecturally unique homes, many urban assets that we take for granted today were threatened by the highway’s construction. How does this history guide our actions today as communities weigh the impacts of health disparities, the planned Opportunity Corridor, or movements toward more sustainable forms of transportation? Can we look to the decisions that took place almost fifty years ago as a guide for creating a more inter-connected, sustainable, and healthy network of urban communities in metropolitan Cleveland?

The goal of this project is to complete research on this history and produce a treatment for a documentary film that can be used as a community engagement tool to connect communities to this rich history and an understanding of how the actions we take impact the health and vitality of our communities today and in the future.

At this point, the story for the film is being conceived around three questions:

**A) How did the highway proposal come to be?** The Clark and Lee highways were a part of the national Highways Act of 1956 in which there was a nationwide shift to favor highways and the automobile as the dominant form of transportation. Like cities nationwide, Cleveland dismantled its extensive network of street-cars and inter-urban rail systems, with the last rides taking place in 1953. The residual of this streetcar system can be detected in the design patterns of inner-ring

suburbs such as Cleveland Heights, which include a mix of design features favored in “sustainable urban neighborhoods” popular today: walkability, mixed-use commercial and residential districts, cultural diversity, density, and publicly accessible green spaces. Highway expansions were seen as key to the growth of the metropolitan area, replacing the street cars that some saw as archaic relics of an earlier age. However, these highways had a number of unforeseen consequences, including division of neighborhoods, hastening outmigration of jobs and residents from the urban core, reduced transit options, increased public service costs, and a vacancy problem that continues to strain Cleveland and its inner-ring suburb today.

**B) How was the seemingly inevitable momentum of highway expansion stopped?** Despite overall momentum for highway expansion, the highway project was stopped on Cleveland’s east-side through a combination of grassroots organizing and city leadership. The 1960’s represented a period of change for the status of women in public life and the highway project comes out of this dynamic time. A group of women affiliated with a Shaker Heights garden club realized that the planned highway would destroy the parks that they were actively planting with wildflowers and trees. They established the Shaker Lakes Nature Center almost 50 years ago at the exact location of the planned highway interchange. The center has since served as an important educational resource for generations of urban residents from across the metropolitan area. Meanwhile, down-hill from Shaker Heights, the Carl Stokes administration in Cleveland also actively opposed the highway development, but for different reasons. From the perspective of the Stokes administration and his planning director Norm Krumholz, the highway would only hasten outmigration of residents and businesses from the central city. Additionally, Stokes already witnessed the impacts of highway development on the displacement of African-American residents in the Central neighborhood where he grew up.

**C) What is the significance of this project to our understanding of 21<sup>st</sup> century urban challenges?** While perspectives and motivations between the Heights and the central city differed, they represented a rare moment when communities came together around a more “metropolitan” vision for Cleveland that connected the fates of the city and its surrounding inner-ring suburbs. This cross-community collaboration is important today as the 56 municipalities that comprise Cuyahoga County struggle with common challenges of health disparities, transportation access, storm water management, vacant land issues, restoration of historic streams and riparian corridors, and continuing urban sprawl. The third section of the film will investigate current challenges facing communities today, such as the Opportunity Corridor, social equity differences, access to green-space, and the promotion of transportation alternatives (such as protected bike lanes along old street-car routes). What can we learn from this history? Like the garden club of Shaker Heights and mayor Carl Stokes, what legacies can we leave today that will improve community vitality for future generations?

Ultimately, this history and the connected challenges, while focused on the east-side of Cleveland, will pose more universal questions around sustainability and the future habitability of our urban communities in Ohio and the broader nation. This story can be used as a community engagement tool to better connect us to our history, understand the long-term benefits of

environmental preservation, and the participation of diverse communities in establishing and preserving the assets that make our communities thrive.

### 3) Who are the humanities professionals and what will their roles be on the project?

As a planning project, outreach and engagement with humanities scholars as subject experts for the larger documentary film will be one of the activities for the planning grant. A budget covering the engagement of at least 3 humanities scholars and community advisors in the process will be used for framing the film and reviewing materials for a film treatment. Humanities scholars and community advisors who have been contacted and expressed willingness to be involved include:

1. **Sandra Chappelle** works for Strategic Solutions Partners and was active with the Cuyahoga Place Matters initiative, which looks at health disparities between Cleveland neighborhoods and the importance of a sustainable physical environment to personal and mental health. Sandra can facilitate connections with the Kerwin institute and the generation of historic maps of highway routes and the communities that would be affected.
2. **Jacqueline Gillon** is a Community Engagement Specialist with the Thriving Communities Institute, an initiative of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. She brings a familiarity and history with Cleveland neighborhoods and can also be helpful with engagement around issues of the Opportunity Corridor and other contemporary neighborhood challenges for Cleveland's east-side.
3. **Mark Souther** teaches at Cleveland State University and specializes in 20th-century United States and urban history, currently focusing on urban decline and revitalization and perceptions of metropolitan change. Souther is co-founder and Director of the Center for Public History + Digital Humanities. Among the Center's projects are Curatescape, a mobile framework for publishing location-based humanities content. Souther also helped to create the Cleveland Regional Oral History Collection (CROHC), which now encompasses more than 1,000 interviews, Cleveland Voices, a showcase of oral history highlights from CROHC, and numerous other public historical projects. Souther can assess both the accuracy of historical content of the project and inform how to best utilize digital resources to share these stories.
4. **David Stradling** who has taught urban and environmental history at the University of Cincinnati since 2000. His research has focused on urban environmental history and his most recent book, *Where the River Burned*, will serve as a reference for the project, particularly the role that the Carl Stokes administration had in stopping the east-side highway development.

#### **4) How will you publicize the project?**

Given that this is a planning grant, most of the emphasis will be placed on research and preparation of a narrative. The community engagement event for the project will be publicized through audiences and partners connected to the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership and other relevant community partners.

#### **5) Who is the intended audience?**

The intended audience will mostly focus on community residents, local government officials, educators, or students with an interest in topics of urban history, sustainability, watershed planning, transportation, and neighborhood planning.

#### **6) What are the goals and outcomes of the project and how will it be evaluated?**

The ultimate goal for the project will be to leverage the public humanities as an engagement tool to enable people to better understand how the natural environment is shaped by human priorities, whether to the benefit or detriment of natural ecosystems. This project will focus on a set of community decisions that took place in the 1960's that had an enormous beneficial impact on the integrity of natural ecosystems and the communities around them. How can a better understanding of this history shift the conversation around contemporary challenges that threaten the sustainability and resilience of Cleveland and the broader region that surrounds it? How do we leverage the lessons of the past to better chart a course toward a sustainable future and movement toward a "green-city on a blue Lake"?

Some of the broader outcomes of this project will focus on:

- a. How do people think critically and carefully about development projects today and how those will impact the health and integrity of communities tomorrow?
- b. How do projects successfully incorporate multiple viewpoints and priorities that will differ on the basis of socio-economic locations within the community?
- c. The legacy of the defeat of the highway project was the creation of natural and community assets that benefit the larger Cleveland metropolitan area today. How can those assets continue to be preserved for the future?
- d. How can we create an archive of community memories around this important historical event to better connect communities today with the generations that preceded them?
- e. How can we provide a historical context to the Opportunity Corridor project and insure that future developments enhance and do not undermine community assets, such as those preserved by the halting of the highway expansion in the 1960's?

Most of the immediate outcomes for the project will focus on the creation of preliminary materials needed to support the development of a documentary film, including:

- completion and archiving of 8-10 oral history interviews;
- formation of advisory board of humanities scholars for the project;

- location scouting for interviews and b-roll that provide sense of place and capture beauty of Doan Brook Watershed;
- identification of a liaison for WVIZ; and
- completion of a film treatment and narrative arc that betters the community's understanding of a shared past and a shared future.

As a planning grant, this project will involve a less rigorous evaluation process. Evaluation will be based on:

- Successful completion of key project milestones (8-10 oral histories archived, advisory board formed, producer identified, treatment prepared, and community engagement event completed)
- number of participants in community engagement event; and
- review of film treatment by content experts for narrative flow and historical accuracy.

### **7) Who is the sponsoring organization?**

The Doan Brook Watershed Partnership will serve as the fiscal sponsor for the project. The Partnership works with diverse partners along the Doan Brook watershed, which includes parts of Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights, and Cleveland. The Partnership, along with the Shaker Lakes Nature Center, are also two key organizations for the stewardship of many of the natural assets protected by the successful defeat of the east-side highway expansion.