



# The Power of Density

**Cleveland rediscovers a vital key to vibrant urban life.**

Look up, Cleveland. Your skyline is changing and your city is taking on an entirely new form. Density isn't something we've had our eye on in Cleveland for several decades, yet some neighborhoods — from downtown to University Circle, Lakewood to Little Italy, Ohio City to Larchmere — have us reacquainting ourselves with higher-density neighborhoods, and with them, walkable, transit-connected, vibrant communities.

As Cleveland ranks eighth in the nation for the return of millennials, neighborhoods hosting their return are those of a higher density. These are places where Uber thrives, bike sharing is hot and people walk to the market. Been on a stroll along West 25th Street lately? Think about your favorite urban places and what you like about them. If you like vibrant street life, busy storefronts and vital parks, chances are that the common factor in that vibrancy is density.

Cleveland was once a dense city. At our center city's population peak we housed in every square mile of the city a population roughly the size of today's suburban Beachwood. In 1950, our city's population per square mile numbered 11,774. That's roughly the density of the cities of Chicago and Philadelphia — the third- and fifth-largest U.S. cities today. But among today's 100 largest cities, of which Cleveland is now 51st, Cleveland's closest of kin when it comes to density is Detroit. Since our respective population peaks 60 years ago, Detroit has lost 8,183 persons for every square mile and Cleveland has lost 6,667. Yet our city is battling back with names like



The 9, nuCLEus, Battery Park and One University Circle.

Why should a region of more than 2 million people in Northeast Ohio care about the density of the center city? Three reasons come to mind — with density comes a greener city, a growing city and a more productive city. Residents of dense cities use less gas, land and water. By that standard, New York City is the greenest city in America with the smallest carbon footprint per capita — 30 percent less than the national average.

Adding to regional sustainability, dense center cities catalyze further population growth. Local area economists Daniel Hartley and Kyle Fee from the Cleveland branch of the Federal Reserve

*As Cleveland continues to attract millennials, many find Lakewood an intriguing place to live.*

Bank conducted a study which found growing cities have maintained dense urban centers. In addition to growth, they found that economic productivity comes with dense urban places, noting “denser places seem to be more productive than more diffuse places.”

Cleveland can be a greener, growing and more productive city if we target certain opportunities for density. Blueprints for strategic densification exist with cities like Vancouver and Seattle, where location-efficient neighborhoods

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are intentionally the focus, and dense housing built near transit nodes, jobs and retail are the means to greater city vitality and livable neighborhoods.

Some Cleveland-area communities never lost their urban density. The highest-density community in Ohio is Lakewood, where more than 10,200 people live in every square mile of town. While urban density isn't for everyone, a look around Lakewood reveals a community of vibrant storefronts, active parks and a strong social cohesion.

Across town, the University Circle neighborhood has countered city out-migration with double-digit resident growth in the last decade. It's doing it with density. Our vision for University Circle has been to build the "complete neighborhood" — where everything from parks to transit to groceries can be accessed within a 10- to 20-minute walk and where density is the pre-requisite.

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While Cleveland rides a national wave of 37 percent more millennials since 2000 returning to within 3 miles of city central business districts, density is not exclusive to center cities. Smart communities are adopting smarter zoning codes and focusing on better-designed main streets, where single-use districts, deep set-backs, height restrictions and parking requirements are yielding to walkable communities with people working, shopping and living closer to "Main & Main."

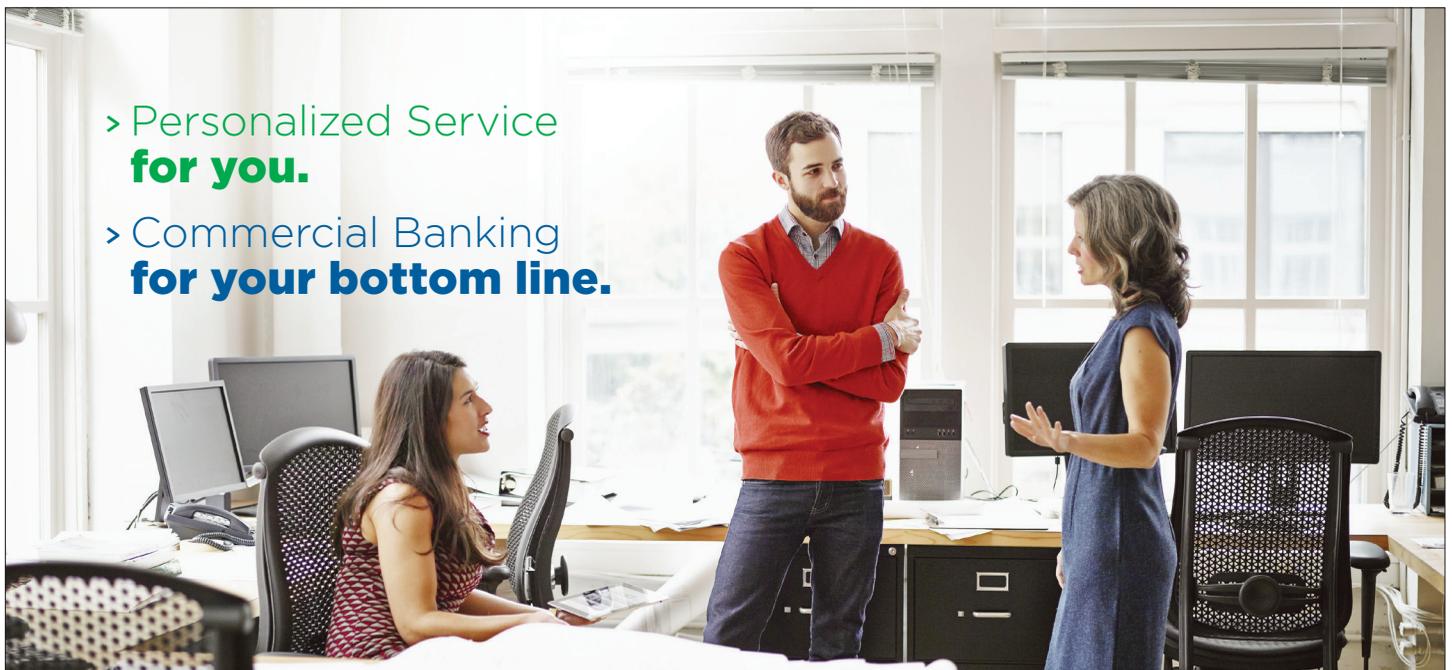
At University Circle's "Main & Main" street intersection, Euclid and Mayfield, we've been able to achieve an economically integrated neighborhood with those receiving housing assistance living next to those paying some of the higher rents in the city. In our case, den-

sity brings diversity.

Earlier this summer in University Circle, we launched another density development. At the site of the original trolley circle on Euclid Avenue, a company called First Interstate turned back to the city and initiated a signature residential development on the RTA HealthLine.

At New York City density that uses less land and energy and promotes a walking community, an elegant 20-story tower will begin to rise on a site overlooking Cleveland's cultural district and the Circle's Central Park — Rockefeller Park. The view could be a look into where the new Cleveland is emerging — as a vibrant community where density is not a dirty word but a recipe for urban success. ■

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