

The background image shows the Cleveland skyline at sunset, with the Key Tower on the left and the Terminal Tower on the right. A large, stylized graphic of blue and grey triangles and rectangles is overlaid on the bottom right, partially covering the text.

2026-2030 Cleveland Environmental Policy Platform

Prepared by the Cleveland Environmental Advocacy Coalition (CEAC)
Facilitated by Thornton Buckeye Group



Introduction

Cleveland stands at a critical juncture for environmental progress, equity, and resilience. Since the 2020 platform, the city has made meaningful strides in climate policy, urban infrastructure, and community engagement under Mayor Justin Bibb's leadership and through grassroots partnerships.

Yet gaps in equity, implementation capacity, and funding access continue to limit progress. This 2025 platform reflects the lived experiences of Clevelanders, the insights of environmental practitioners, and lessons from recent implementation efforts. It offers practical solutions that address the structural and political realities facing city government while advancing bold strategies for climate justice, environmental health, and economic equity.

THIS PLATFORM ADDRESSES SEVEN INTERCONNECTED PRIORITY AREAS THAT FORM THE FOUNDATION OF CLEVELAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE:

01

Water Justice & Affordability tackles the dual challenges of infrastructure modernization and equitable access. From replacing lead service lines to protecting Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River, this section charts a path toward affordable water for all residents while expanding public access to our waterfront and implementing green infrastructure solutions that reduce flooding and sewer overflows.

02

Parks, Vacant Land, and Green Infrastructure reimagines Cleveland's public spaces and underutilized properties as climate-resilient community assets. By implementing the 15-year Parks and Recreation Master Plan, transforming vacant lots into productive green spaces, and expanding the urban tree canopy, we can ensure every Clevelander lives within a 10-minute walk of a quality park while building neighborhood wealth and climate resilience.

03

Energy Equity & Community Power centers affordability and reliability in Cleveland's energy transition. This section outlines strategies to reduce energy burdens through weatherization and efficiency programs, modernize Cleveland Public Power's infrastructure, expand community solar access, and ensure frontline neighborhoods benefit first from clean energy investments rather than bearing the costs of an inequitable system.

04

Environmental Justice & Infrastructure Equity demands that new investments correct historical harms rather than perpetuate them. Through "Dig Once" policies that coordinate infrastructure upgrades, cumulative impact assessments for air quality, and community-informed prioritization of projects, we can ensure environmental improvements reach the neighborhoods that need them most and have waited longest for investment.

05

Workforce & Economic Inclusion recognizes that Cleveland's environmental transition must create pathways to prosperity for current residents. By scaling union-registered apprenticeship programs, supporting high-road contractors, and establishing capital funds for BIPOC-owned businesses, we can build a workforce prepared for green jobs while ensuring quality employment with health insurance and retirement benefits.

06

Innovation & Industrial Symbiosis positions Cleveland as a leader in circular economy development. By promoting industrial partnerships that share resources, supporting public-private collaborations to decarbonize legacy industries, and retooling manufacturing for the green economy, we can reduce waste while creating jobs and economic opportunity.

07

Transportation & Mobility reimagines how Clevelanders move through their city. From expanding GCRTA service and protected bike lanes to implementing Vision Zero safety improvements and building 15-minute neighborhoods, this section charts a course toward a transportation system that connects everyone to opportunity while reducing emissions and improving safety.



A Roadmap for Action

Each section provides specific, actionable recommendations designed for implementation by the city government in partnership with regional utilities, community organizations, and residents. The policies balance immediate needs with long-term transformation, recognizing that meaningful change requires quick wins and sustained commitment.

This platform serves as a living document and organizing tool for the Cleveland Environmental Advocacy Coalition and our partners. It reflects years of community input, technical expertise, and on-the-ground experience. Most importantly, it represents a shared vision of a Cleveland where environmental justice, economic opportunity, and community resilience are inseparable goals.

Water Justice & Affordability



Goal: Ensure every Cleveland resident has safe access to Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River, and affordable, reliable, and equitable water and sewer services.

Infrastructure Investment

- Leverage state revolving loan funds and federal dollars (IIJA, SRF) to upgrade water infrastructure, replace lead service lines, and improve access in underserved neighborhoods
- Create a public-facing dashboard with real-time information on infrastructure projects, 12-month planning outlooks, and emergency updates

Equitable Waterfront Access and Stewardship

Lake Erie and Cuyahoga River Protections:

- Support increased state and federal funding to monitor and reduce nutrient pollution, algae blooms, and combined sewer overflows
- Advocate for implementation of long-term control plans for sewer separation and gray/green infrastructure projects

Community-Guided Development:

- Ensure publicly-funded lakefront and riverfront developments prioritize community access, environmental restoration, and affordability
- Protect and expand public access points, parks, and recreational corridors along the water
- Require economic development along the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie to include stormwater management, native vegetation, and climate-smart design

Utility Assistance

- Advocate for expanding PIPP and LIHEAP eligibility to include water and sewer
- Build a city-led coalition to lobby the state and Ohio EPA for legislative flexibility
- Partner with legal aid and nonprofit agencies to help residents enroll in affordability programs

Cost-Saving Programs

- Design automatic enrollment for income - eligible customers in Cleveland Water programs
- Advocate for state legislation creating a self-sustaining Low Income Water Assistance Program
- Offer culturally relevant, multilingual outreach and support
- Prioritize ZIP codes with the highest shutoff and arrears data

Residential Water Infrastructure

- Fund residential water line upgrades, leak repair, and basement/foundation waterproofing
- Improve household water efficiency by promoting the installation of efficient fixtures
- Include roof/gutter repair, driveway sealing, and mold remediation in eligible city-funded housing programs
- Expand home weatherization assistance to include plumbing and flooding prevention
- Explore on-bill financing for essential repairs that promote water efficiency, quality, and stormwater resilience

Workforce & Administrative Capacity

- Invest in a dedicated water repair union registered apprenticeship workforce pipeline for lead line replacement, leak detection, and green infrastructure maintenance
- Fund administrative staff at city departments to manage grants, track progress, and reduce program backlogs
- Create a standalone water workforce development program, preparing residents for employment in water utilities and trades

Cross-Sector Infrastructure Planning

- Align city, utility, and regional capital plans to reduce duplication and prioritize high need communities
- Host quarterly coordination roundtables with NEORSD, CPP, Cleveland Water, and community-based organizations
- Incorporate community voices through health impact assessment (HIA) processes

Green Infrastructure Expansion

- Fund rain gardens, permeable pavement, bioswales, and tree planting in flood-prone neighborhoods
- Use green infrastructure to reduce stress on sewer systems and lower household risk from flash flooding
- Incorporate green infrastructure workforce training into city capital plans and public contracts

Parks, Vacant Land, and Green Infrastructure

Goals:

- Transform Cleveland's parks and recreation ecosystem to ensure safe, high-quality facilities, consistent community involvement, and climate resilience
- Implement recommendations from the 15-year Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Transform underutilized land into climate-resilient, economically empowering, and community-controlled assets
- Empower residents to improve park infrastructure in their own communities



Parks

In coordination with the Cleveland Parks & Greenspace Coalition:

- Ensure year-over-year city budget increases to support the Parks & Recreation Department and implement the 15-year Master Plan according to national best practices
- Establish a Parks & Recreation Resident Advisory Committee of residents, subject matter experts, and youth to advise on system-wide policies, processes, planning, and community engagement
- Partner with Trust for Public Land to finalize a plan achieving park walkability goals, with incremental progress toward getting 100% of Clevelanders within a safe 10-minute walk to a high-quality park
- Establish department-wide community engagement protocols based on the 2022 ARPICES report and 15-year Plan priorities for all projects and programs. Post this policy publicly to ensure residents know how to share their expertise
- Re-launch the Community Projects in Parks Program (CP3) with a publicly-accessible city staff coordinator conducting bi-weekly meetings to review and approve applications. CP3 creates a simple, transparent approval process for residents leading park stewardship, maintenance, and small improvement projects
- Formalize city recognition of resident park stewardship groups (Friends of Groups) and partner with the Cleveland Parks & Greenspace Coalition to convene resident advocates
- Develop a union-registered apprenticeship workforce development model utilizing youth and young adults to supplement the parks and recreation workforce and address deferred maintenance backlogs

Vacant Land

- Partner with land bank stakeholders to expand access to vacant lots for urban agriculture, stormwater mitigation, and economic development
- Reform resident acquisition processes to reduce bureaucracy, promote adjacent lot ownership, and ensure land tenure rights for long-term community use
- Continue piloting and scaling innovative solutions for land and soil remediation, including various treatment options up to excavation and disposal, for vacant land leases and Summer Sprout gardens
- Align vacant land reuse with green infrastructure projects designed to absorb stormwater and mitigate flood risks, especially in East Side neighborhoods vulnerable to extreme rain
- Support practices that maintain topsoil health and stormwater retention (native plantings, bioswales) and incorporate these into city planning codes and site readiness investments
- Implement new processes and policies to increase strategic coordination between the Cleveland Land Bank and key internal groups on city-wide priorities

Urban Forestry

- Work with the Cleveland Tree Coalition to implement their Strategic Plan, focusing on increased tree plantings in low-canopy neighborhoods, workforce development, and community-wide education
- Adopt existing neighborhood-level urban canopy data, particularly data collected through the Cuyahoga County Healthy Urban Tree Canopy (HUTC) program
- Advocate for city and county budgets providing stable funding for urban forestry efforts, including implementation of the City of Cleveland Urban Forestry Management Plan, nature-based solutions in Climate Action Plans, and the HUTC grant program
- Advocate with the Urban Forestry Commission to update and enforce city policies supporting new tree establishment and maintenance

Energy Equity & Community Power

Goals:

- Deliver affordable, resilient, and clean energy to all Clevelanders, prioritizing communities historically excluded from energy decisions and benefits, by influencing regulated utilities' policies, and taking direct municipal actions.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Support household- and community-scale energy efficiency to lower utility bills, reduce emissions, and build local resilience:

- Expand weatherization programs for low- and moderate-income households
- Create energy-efficiency grant programs for small businesses and nonprofits
- Incentivize adoption of efficient technologies (LED lighting, smart thermostats, high-efficiency HVAC)
- Provide multilingual outreach and contractor support to encourage program uptake

Residential and Small Business Technology Adoption

Remove financial and technical barriers to ensure Clevelanders benefit from energy innovations:

- Offer no- or low-interest loans for energy upgrades
- Launch a local energy coach network to assist residents and small businesses with technology choices and contractor selection
- Prioritize support in neighborhoods with aging infrastructure, high energy burden, and asthma rates

Integrated Resource Planning (IRP)

Advance community-informed IRP that aligns with Cleveland's climate, equity, and energy reliability goals:

- Work with Cleveland Public Power (CPP), regional utilities, and the Office of Sustainability to conduct formal IRP processes
- Evaluate aggregated clean energy solutions (solar, storage, efficiency, demand response, and waste energy recovery)
- Center community engagement and public health in IRP priorities
- Align IRP workstreams with Cleveland's Climate Action Plan and Justice40 principles

Integrated Infrastructure & Capital Planning

Coordinate capital infrastructure investments across city departments and utilities:

- Establish a citywide infrastructure coordination working group
- Prioritize "single-pass" capital improvements in frontline neighborhoods
- Synchronize street, utility, broadband, tree canopy, and stormwater upgrades for cumulative impact and cost efficiency

Cleveland Electric Illuminating (CEI) Initiatives

- Continue green aggregation
- Offer expanded access to demand-side options through direct PUCO intervention
- Offer expanded access to low- and moderate-income programs

Grid Modernization & Community Power

Ensure Cleveland's energy grid can support clean, resilient, distributed generation and storage:

- Secure technical and legal assistance for CPP to modernize operations
- Support neighborhood-scale clean energy projects (microgrids, solar + storage) with community ownership and virtual net metering options
- Advocate for PUCO and state policy alignment with Cleveland's distributed generation needs

Whole Energy System Innovation

Plan Cleveland's energy system for long-term reliability, equity, and climate resilience:

- Explore innovative technologies for distributed energy systems, grid reliability, and localized energy storage
- Anticipate and prepare for new demand pressures (EV charging, electrified buildings)
- Evaluate community benefits and workforce potential of new technologies before citywide adoption

Sustainable Building & Energy Code Leadership

Make Cleveland a leader in green building policy while supporting affordability and equity:

- Set clear thresholds for sustainable building practices in new construction and major renovations
- Standardize green building incentives and permitting fast-tracks, including automatic solar permitting available in states like California
- Use code reform to promote net-zero and passive building techniques
- Reduce energy burdens on homes and small businesses while managing system wide demand

Cleveland Public Power (CPP) Initiatives

- Provide technical assistance, legal support, and state/federal funding advocacy to help CPP modernize its distribution grid
- Develop a Community Solar Program focused on locally sited solar that guarantees monthly savings and union-registered apprenticeship workforce participation, while providing resilient power resources that decrease power outage occurrences and durations
- Enable distributed energy solutions by creating rooftop solar pathways for homeowners, nonprofits, and small businesses through tax incentives, rebates, and policy alignment
- Offer expanded access to demand-side programs, starting with smart meter-driven residential and small commercial demand response
- Exit the Prairie State Coal contract if beneficial for consumers
- Leverage local generation and demand offsets to provide rate relief and seed future investments
- Address CPP geographical customer gaps and explore local subsidy models to bridge exclusions from state utility relief

Enbridge Initiatives

- Offer expanded access to demand-side options
- Offer expanded access to low- and moderate-income programs



Environmental Justice & Infrastructure Equity

Goals: Ensure environmental policies correct past harms, deliver targeted investments, and meet the needs of historically excluded communities.

Key Recommendations

- Reform the city's regulatory and zoning policies to prioritize land transfer to residents, small developers, and community land trusts
- Incorporate a "Dig Once" policy into capital improvements planning to coordinate street, sidewalk, sewer, and broadband upgrades in a single effort
- Expand and maintain the urban tree canopy as an energy justice and public health priority, especially in heat-affected neighborhoods
- Establish social determinant-based prioritization for lead service line replacement, home weatherization, and roof/pipe repair
- Build multilingual, neighborhood-based education and engagement campaigns to ensure transparency and uptake of environmental programs in environmental justice neighborhoods
- Incorporate green infrastructure within all traffic calming efforts where possible
- Educate the community and advocate for the addition of a cumulative impacts ordinance to ensure improvement of air quality in environmental justice neighborhoods
- Work with community members to identify their needs to ensure the city is educated by the community on what to prioritize
- Address the prevalence of air toxics in environmental justice neighborhoods to reduce childhood asthma rates and cancer risk

Air Quality

- Update Cleveland's Air Quality Code in 2026 to improve public health while balancing economic and employment opportunities
- Include a cumulative impacts framework in the revised code to reduce exposure to harmful air toxics, particularly near highways, industrial corridors, and railyards

Workforce & Economic Inclusion

Goals: Accelerate recruitment, training, placement, and retention of Clevelanders into high-road employment and Department of Labor-recognized registered apprenticeships. Create pathways to good-paying, life-sustaining careers in Cleveland's clean energy, water, and environmental sectors.

Key Recommendations

- Scale investment in workforce intermediaries such as Cleveland Builds and She Builds to connect residents to skilled trades training, union apprenticeships, and clean infrastructure jobs
- Align city environmental initiatives with union-registered apprenticeship workforce strategies and target career pathways for youth, returning citizens, and underemployed adults
- Secure philanthropic and public-private funding for capital-intensive career training programs focused on grid modernization, lead pipe replacement, green infrastructure, and solar deployment
- Support high-road employers and responsible contractors that classify all workers as employees (not independent contractors) and ensure they and their subcontractors offer health insurance and retirement packages to all employees working on infrastructure, capital improvement, and environmental projects under city contracts
- Establish a high-road contractor capacity capital fund that provides low-interest loans and grant opportunities for undercapitalized BIPOC businesses and BIPOC journey workers seeking to go into business for themselves, that offer registered apprenticeship job opportunities

Innovation and Industrial Symbiosis

Goals: Support circular economy development that reduces waste, enhances resource efficiency, and spurs job creation.

Key Recommendations

- Promote industrial symbiosis projects that align industries for shared inputs and outputs (heat, water, materials)
- Encourage public-private partnerships that leverage innovation to decarbonize legacy industries and retool manufacturing for the green economy
- Embed innovation metrics in city and regional economic development plans

Transportation & Mobility

Goals: Build an equitable, safe, and accessible transportation system that supports workforce mobility, neighborhood safety, and climate resilience for all Clevelanders. Cleveland's transportation infrastructure should serve as a backbone of opportunity, connecting people to jobs, education, healthcare, and cultural life. Yet the current system often leaves behind low-income communities, people with disabilities, and neighborhoods historically denied investment. A transportation agenda rooted in equity, efficiency, and sustainability is essential to achieving broader environmental and economic goals.

Mass Transit Access and Reliability

- Advocate for increased funding and system modernization for GCRTA to improve route frequency, geographic coverage, and accessibility
- Support residential mobility, union-registered apprenticeship workforce development, and economic development
- Work with GCRTA to develop dedicated workforce transit routes aligned with major employment centers and second/third shift schedules
- Exempt GCRTA from arduous permit requirements for shelter installations to improve transit waiting environments citywide
- Support GCRTA-sponsored transit improvement projects, including bus rapid transit on W. 25th, Broadway, and other corridors
- Expand "Portland Loo" installations to provide public restrooms near major transit stations
- Ensure affordable fares, bus shelter improvements, and accessible rider communications in multiple languages

Equitable Biking Infrastructure

- Invest in protected bike lanes in every neighborhood, not just the urban core
- Continue and expand "15-minute city" efforts, enabling residents to meet basic needs (grocery, childcare, health, recreation) within a short walk or bike ride from home
- Collaborate with communities on neighborhood-specific biking plans that reflect local needs, infrastructure gaps, and safety concerns

Pedestrian Safety and Walkability

- Install and maintain high-quality street lighting, ADA-compliant sidewalks, traffic-calming infrastructure, dynamic technologies that increase pedestrian safety during peak periods, and crosswalk improvements prioritized in neighborhoods with high pedestrian crash rates and low car ownership
- Work with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to re-create a Safe Routes to School Coordinator position within City Hall

15-Minute City & Vision Zero

- Establish a funded, fully staffed Department of Transportation with baseline staffing levels comparable to cities of similar size
- Create driving education vouchers to help young Clevelanders complete driver education courses before high school graduation
- Implement the Cleveland Moves mobility plan, including \$5 million annually over the next three years for rapid implementation
- Implement the 3-year rapid buildout of Cleveland Moves to create an all-ages and abilities network
- Implement key actions in Cleveland's Vision Zero Action Plan to reduce serious injury and fatal crashes, moving toward elimination by 2032
- Expand the Cleveland traffic calming program and integrate traffic calming elements into all street projects, including residential resurfacing
- Establish a multi-disciplinary fatality review committee of city planners, engineers, police, and safety advocates to conduct exhaustive reviews of fatal and serious injury crashes and recommend quick-build safety interventions
- Pass policy recommendations that streamline safety enhancements, including no turn on red, leading pedestrian intervals, side guards on trucks, and more
- Support local charter changes to allow automated photo enforcement and advocate for state-level changes to remove implementation obstacles

Environmental Justice in Transportation

- Target street, sidewalk, bike lane, and transit investments in historically underserved neighborhoods as a matter of environmental and racial justice
- Ensure transit-oriented development and mobility upgrades include anti-displacement protections for current residents and small businesses

CONCLUSION

This platform is a community-informed call to action that balances vision with pragmatism. It honors the city's ongoing efforts, acknowledges implementation challenges, and provides a roadmap to deepen environmental justice and climate resilience in Cleveland.

The Cleveland Environmental Advocacy Coalition looks forward to advancing these priorities in collaboration with the Ohio Environmental Council, city officials, and regional partners.



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Land Conservancy

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Cleveland
Parks & Greenspace
Coalition



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CITY OF CLEVELAND

Mayor Justin M. Bibb

PUBLIC HEALTH

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