

Shaker Square has long been the subject of bragging rights for the East Side of Cleveland. It has played an important role in the development of the surrounding neighborhoods and served as a gathering place for the entire community. Among many great strengths of the Shaker Square neighborhood is its racial diversity.

Today, this historic treasure is at a critical crossroads, facing foreclosure and in disrepair. Floating unvetted schemes of acquiring Shaker Square for pennies on the dollar does not advance the vital mission to save it. Should it go to sheriff's sale, it will be sold to the highest bidder — most certainly an out-of-state buyer concerned more with their bottom line than this community — prolonging its painful, steady decay and negatively impacting adjacent neighborhoods, including harming home values.

A solid plan has been crafted after a year of work by the city of Cleveland, philanthropic organizations and others to make sure Shaker Square does not crumble into obsolescence. Cleveland City Council is considering an ordinance that would help ensure its survivability by putting it into the safe hands of capable, local development groups.

The proposal is a creative solution to a complex problem that has been years in the making. Encouraged by civic leaders, two community development groups that have contributed significantly to local neighborhoods — Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and Burten, Bell, Carr Development — have stepped up to ensure Shaker Square remains a vital economic and social anchor, and that 159 jobs and important conveniences, like a grocery store and pharmacy, remain in the neighborhood.

The proposal would:

Allow CNP and BBC to take control of the property; the city would provide \$12 million in low-interest loans.

Trigger an investment of \$4 million for badly needed repairs.

Engage the community in a planning process and, upon stabilization, identify a responsible, experienced local developer for long-term ownership,

Delays, continued deterioration and the wrong ownership will hurt the entire area, making it more difficult to attract investment to the surrounding Buckeye and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods and destabilizing other important arteries, including the Buckeye, Larchmere, North and South Moreland and Woodland corridors.

Every day we wait, debt, interest and fees increase more than \$3,000 while the property deteriorates. Leaking roofs, flooding and other critical repairs go unaddressed. We risk tenants

leaving and residents losing needed retail services.

Shaker Square is inexorably tied with our community being a destination and it is tied to a stronger future for contiguous neighborhoods and residents.

We are disheartened that some have chosen to discredit this good, collaborative effort. There are a few who have said the community should hold out for a better deal, that the bank will sell for less. That's false. The bank is in no hurry for a low bid and confident they can get \$12 million, or more, to recoup what they are owed.

It is telling that no credible, experienced local developer in Northeast Ohio has had any interest in buying it. None have deemed it a good opportunity.

While no single development can be a silver bullet to address all issues that neighborhoods face, Shaker Square is a vital part of our solution. The city often steps up to fund development efforts. Two decades ago, its investments along West 25th Street spurred Ohio City's renaissance. Its investment in the Square is critically important to the southeast side.

As members of the Shaker Square Alliance, we join many others in supporting the city's plan. Mayor Justin Bibb indicated this credible proposal is a step in the right direction. Many merchants — including the owners of Dave's Supermarket, Zanzibar, the Breakfast Club, Shark & Minnow and Goldenrod Montessori School — support this proposal.

We respectfully encourage Cleveland City Council to support this measure. Shaker Square's continued deterioration would result in a future that benefits no one.

Render is president of the East 128th Street Block

Club and the Ward 6-T precinct committee member.

Bromley is founder of the Shaker Square Alliance.

#### **CITATION (TURABIAN STYLE)**

and Charles "Chip" Bromley, Bob Render. "Support solid proposal to save Shaker Square, before it's too late." *Plain Dealer, The (Cleveland, OH)*, March 6, 2022: 002. *NewsBank: America's News - Historical and Current*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy2.cpl.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/1888D02530B3DD70>.

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