

## Inside

### The Cost of Artificial Intimacy



Vipin Chaudhary and Jennifer A. King from Case Western Reserve University

AI is becoming common in daily life, with many turning to it for emotional support and companionship. The American Psychological Association reports that people tend to assign human traits to nonhuman objects.

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# CLEVELAND OBSERVER

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Vol. 7, Issue 4, April 2026

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## City Council legislation signals community impact



Front center: Council President Blaine A. Griffin Ward 6. Second row left: Jasmin Santana Ward 14, Michael D. Polensek Ward 10, Kevin Conwell Ward 9, Brian Kazy Ward 13, Kevin L. Bishop Ward 2. Third row right: Joseph T. Jones Ward 1, Deborah Gray Ward 3, Kris Harsh Ward 4, Stephanien D. Howse -Jones Ward 8, Charles J. Slife Ward 15, Back row left: Richard A. Starr Ward 5, Austin N. Davis Ward 7, Nikki Hudson Ward 11, Tanmay Shah Ward 12. Credit Cleveland City Council



Ron Calhoun



SCAN TO LISTEN

If the first few months of 2026 are any indication, Cleveland is in the midst of a major structural transformation.

When the newly elected 2026–2029 City Council was sworn in Jan. 5 under the leadership of Council President Blaine A. Griffin, it moved quickly to set an aggressive legislative agenda. Council adopted new governing rules establishing standing committees focused on public

health, youth empowerment and equity.

The agenda gained momentum in early March and council has agreed to reconciliation amendments with the passage of the city’s 2026 budget on March 23. Totalling more than \$2.34 billion across all funds, including a general fund exceeding \$920 million, the budget reflects a shift toward community-based safety nets, modern infrastructure and neighborhood stabilization.

From unarmed crisis response teams to reinvesting parking revenue into pedestrian safety, the first quarter’s legislation represents, funded changes to Cleveland’s physical and social landscape.

Here is a breakdown of how City Council is rethinking public safety and human rights, what has been done so far in 2026, how it may affect your neighborhood, commute and daily life.

### Deploying unarmed crisis responders

Cleveland has formally changed how it responds to mental health emergencies.

City Council created the Bureau of Community Crisis Response within the Division of Emergency Medical Service. Named in honor of Tanisha Anderson, the program deploys unarmed teams, including social workers, behavioral health professionals and peers with lived experience, to respond to

nonviolent 911 calls involving mental health or quality-of-life concerns.

Police officers will also receive eight hours of initial crisis-intervention training and four hours annually.

### Taking positions on state and national issues

Council also used its platform to address broader policy concerns:

- Opposing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) mandates: Council passed an emergency resolution opposing several Ohio bills that would require cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

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## 2026 Budget highlights Cleveland housing divide



Konner Hines



SCAN TO LISTEN

Cleveland renters continue to face housing instability and rising affordability pressures as the city finalizes its 2026 budget, even as the city includes increased neighborhood investments under Ordinance 117-2026.

With housing-related needs jumping 21% over the past five years, recent data shows a neighborhood-level divide that dictates whether a resident’s housing is stable, affordable or at risk.

### Rising rents and high-investment wards

Housing challenges vary significantly by ward. Cleveland’s

median rent is currently hovering around \$1,111, but neighborhoods experiencing high investment are seeing much steeper costs. In Wards 3, 13 and 14, which include Downtown, Ohio City, Tremont and West Side areas with strong development activity, are seeing higher rents between \$1,500 to \$2,200 or more.

While these areas have lower eviction rates, affordability is becoming a significant issue for existing residents.

### Concentrated East Side evictions

Conversely, the city’s East Side faces intense housing pressure. Out of Cleveland’s roughly 95,000 renter households, approximately 6% face eviction filings annually. These filings are heavily concentrated in Wards 5, 6 and 7, which have a greater concentration of low-income renters and more residents relying



Affordable housing in Cleveland, Ohio is approaching crisis. Credit Zillow

on housing assistance. Residents in these wards are much more likely to face housing instability and displacement risks.

Meanwhile, Wards 1, 2 and 4 are experiencing transitioning, mixed conditions where some residents benefit from new

investments while others struggle with rising costs.

### 2026 budget and city policy

The budget includes measures aimed at neighborhood stabilization through the ordinance.

Continue on page 3

## Greg Levy launches U.S. Senate campaign at Holy Trinity Church



Michael Walsh



SCAN TO LISTEN

### Urges unity, expanded ballot access

Greg Levy, a member of the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), launched his U.S. Senate campaign on Feb. 21 at Holy Trinity Church in Cleveland's Fairfax neighborhood.

#### Campaign launch in Fairfax

In leaflets distributed by PSL organizers, Levy described the situation as dire for Ohioans, stating, "Ohio has been hit hard. Billionaires have gutted our cities of jobs, destroying our ability to build a dignified life in the towns we love."

In particular, Levy wrote his policies "would serve the needs of people and the planet." To do this, he would propose constitutional rights to a guaranteed income, housing, and healthcare, as published in detail on Levy's program website.

#### Speakers reference historical struggles

Though the event focused on the future, many speakers sought to decry past injustices, which reflect the experiences of Black, immigrant, and working-class communities.

Pastor E. Regis Bunch, who previously served as transitional pastor at Fifth Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Cleveland's Corlett neighborhood, said, "We are not gathered today just as a community, but as a community of conscience."

Bunch recounted the experiences of his enslaved ancestors, seeking to connect their stories to the racial and economic injustices that Levy says persist today.

While researching federal archives, Bunch found the account of a woman identified as Mrs. Bakemore, who petitioned the Freedmen's Bureau.

The bureau was established in 1865 to assist newly freed people. Bakemore filed the petition to help free her young son from an abusive apprenticeship program run by the family's former enslavers.

When Pastor Bunch read the short note attached to the document, "No response needed," he asked the congregation how much the system had really changed between then and now for Cleveland residents and all Black and working-class Ohioans.

#### De la Cruz urges push for justice

Following his speech, Claudia De la Cruz, the PSL's 2024

presidential candidate, drew loud applause from more than 500 attendees, one campaign staffer, Charlie Koneigsmark, confirmed.

Cruz, who agreed with Bunch that the economic and racial issues of today are the same as those faced by marginalized people of the past, cited two local pieces of history that demonstrated to Cruz the struggle of Ohioans and Americans broadly to seek justice.

First, she referenced the history of Peter H. Clark, a 19th-century Black Ohioan widely recognized as the first Black American to espouse socialism, who, like Levy, combined his love for his community and local youth activism with a socialist platform to run for an Ohio congressional seat.

Next, she celebrated Malcolm X and his "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech on the anniversary of his death on Feb. 21, 1965. Cruz reminded the audience that Malcolm X's speech was given at the Cory Methodist Church in the Glenville neighborhood in Cleveland.

Cruz said the speech was a "Call to the oppressed. He said, 'we had a common enemy and common fight and that if we cannot get justice through the ballot, we'd be forced to take it by any means necessary.'"

She qualified this statement with the retort, "Don't get too excited yet," drawing laughter from the crowd.

Cruz also spoke about the recent general strike in response to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, along with protests in Ohio, are equally valuable responses to the limits of achieving economic or racial justice through voting for Democrats or Republicans.

#### Greg Levy urges unity, ballot access

Following speeches, ballads and poetry readings by the Robeson Singers, Greg Levy took the lectern with a rousing standing ovation. He noted that although he lives in Akron, his parents were deeply involved in Cleveland's church communities, making the city a part of who he is. Levy sang Psalm 113 and invited the audience



Greg Levy a candidate for U.S. Senate.

to participate, urging them to join together in unity.

This unity, he claimed, was the unity of Black, Brown, and Working-class Americans, since in this country, Levy stressed, "Nothing moves without us."

Whether in the modern day or the past, he said, Ohioans have always fought for justice in their communities and for the freedom to live their best lives.

Station Hope, the Underground Railroad codename for Cleveland, represented this approach, and Levy proclaimed, "Ohio and Cleveland were once Station Hope. Let them be Station Hope again!"

He followed this with a bout of call and response to the hundreds of supporters to close out his speech with a question, "How long are we going to wait for our society to use our labor to produce justice, how long?" followed by the cry of the audience, "Not Long!"

As the night wrapped up, organizers directed attendees to voter registration tables and donation QR codes for the campaign, and a petition to add Levy to the ballot on Nov. 3. Levy and Cruz both set up candidate meet-and-greets with individual supporters. Levy said he was excited about the campaign and thanked supporters for attending.

*Michael Walsh is a freelance journalist based in Pittsburgh who covers community affairs.*



Greg Levy, a candidate for U.S. Senate and a member of the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), speaks Feb. 21 at Holy Trinity Church in Cleveland's Fairfax neighborhood.



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The Cleveland Observer is a community-based nonprofit monthly newspaper dedicated to providing information and resources that will uplift and enhance the community.

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*The articles are reviewed using The Cleveland Observer's AI-assisted editorial workflow. All AI-generated recommendations were reviewed and approved by a human editor.*

## City Council legislation signals community impact

From front page

- Protecting incarcerated individuals: Council urged passage of House Bill 461 to ensure communication access for deaf and speech-impaired inmates.
- Condemning rhetoric: Council approved a resolution condemning a social media post by President Donald Trump as racist.

### Funding for community intervention

Council approved Violence Against Women Act grant funding to support a sexual assault advocate within the Division of Police and bolster the Cleveland Domestic Violence Program.

It also contracted with Youth Opportunities Unlimited to run the 2026 summer youth employment program, which officials describe as a violence-prevention and workforce development strategy.

### Parking Benefits Fund

Beginning July 1, the city will redirect 75% of net parking meter revenue into a new Parking Benefits Fund. By law, the money must be used for pedestrian and mobility improvements, including sidewalk repairs, ADA curb ramps, crosswalks, traffic calming and street lighting.

### Major multi-modal projects

Cleveland is investing in infrastructure that supports pedestrians, cyclists and transit users:

- East 66th Street: ADA upgrades, signal

improvements, multiuse paths and transit enhancements.

- Downtown Connector Trails: Expansion of trail networks, including a road diet on West Huron Road and Ontario Street.
- North Coast Connector: A \$1.59 million planning contract to advance waterfront access improvements.

### Transit-oriented development

The city approved a zoning change for the “Canopy at Herman Park” development, eliminating minimum parking requirements in exchange for transit-focused design features such as bike storage, unbundled parking and delivery infrastructure.

Council also established the Lorain Antiques Design Review District to preserve the corridor’s historic character.

### Housing push and the war on blight

Developers including CHN Housing Partners, Pennrose and The Community Builders submitted plans for hundreds of affordable units across multiple wards.

Council also approved redevelopment plans for the former McCafferty Health Center site on Lorain Avenue.

Through the city’s Land Bank, residents can purchase adjacent vacant lots for as little as \$200, increasing property value while reducing blight.

Council allocated \$500,000

to Community Housing Solutions to provide critical repairs for low-income homeowners in several wards.

The budget includes \$806,853 for a receivership pilot program, allowing courts to transfer control of severely neglected properties to responsible entities for rehabilitation.

Meanwhile, enforcement actions continue against property owners cited for unsafe or deteriorating conditions.

### Economic development and neighborhood identity

The city approved a \$4 million agreement with the Site Readiness for Good Jobs Fund to prepare land along the Opportunity Corridor for job-generating development.

Council passed multiple resolutions opposing new liquor permits in high-crime areas already saturated with alcohol outlets. Officials cited concerns about public safety and neighborhood stability.

Zoning officials have also taken action against noncompliant smoke shops and nuisance businesses.

A staffing contract ensures temporary workers are paid 124.9% of the city’s living wage. It also requires \$1.5 million in subcontracting to certified minority and locally owned businesses, reflecting broader equity requirements in city-funded

projects.

### Investing in culture

City funds supported local cultural initiatives, including:

- A Latin American Historical Society oral history project.
- Programming by the Italian Cultural Garden Association.

### What it means for you

Cleveland’s first quarter of 2026 shows how legislation translates into daily life. With a \$2.34 billion budget backing its priorities, the city is investing in alternative emergency response, safer streets, affordable housing and stronger enforcement against blight.

These policies will shape how residents move through their neighborhoods, access services and build long-term stability. But their success depends on public participation, from attending zoning hearings to applying for land bank programs or engaging with ward representatives.

The blueprint is in place. What happens next will depend on how residents help bring it to life.

Source: The City Record

## 2026 Budget highlights Cleveland housing divide

From front page

The 2026 budget includes \$300,000 per ward for local projects, alongside dedicated funding for blight removal and neighborhood stabilization.

However, with thousands of residents requesting rent assistance annually, the key question remains whether these investments will adequately reach the neighborhoods facing the highest eviction pressures.

### Community benefit impact

The neighborhood dictates whether housing is stable or at risk. The report details exactly which wards are facing eviction pressures versus rising costs, and

helping residents understand the localized impact of the city’s new budget.

### Solutions and resource integration

- **Solutions:** The budget allocates funding for neighborhood stabilization, blight removal and \$300,000 per ward for localized projects.

- **Insights:** While investment is increasing, it is not evenly distributed across all areas. The data suggests that the housing crisis is not disappearing, but rather becoming more uneven, with distinct challenges—either

affordability or eviction—depending on the ward.

- **Resources:** Residents facing housing instability can seek data and support through the United Way of Greater Cleveland and track eviction trends via the Eviction Lab Princeton University.

Cleveland’s housing challenges are deeply tied to geography, with East Side neighborhoods facing higher eviction pressures and West Side/Downtown areas grappling with rising rents.

While the city’s 2026 budget aims to stabilize neighborhoods through blight removal and ward-specific funding, the impact of these investments remains uneven. Ultimately, where a person lives in Cleveland determines their housing reality.

Konner Hines is a member

of the Honors College and a marketing and human resources student at Baldwin Wallace University



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## Opinion: PBS funding cuts threaten free education



Marissa Valentine



Credit: Public Broadcasting System

Federal cuts to public broadcasting funding are affecting young viewers nationwide. Public broadcasting, which provides free educational programming to children across the country, has lost federal funding through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This loss of funding limits access to marginalized communities.

According to a Jan. 6 CNN report, that Congress had cut funding for both the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR).

"CPB's final act would be to protect the integrity of the public media system and the democratic values by dissolving, rather than allowing the organization to remain defunded and vulnerable to additional attacks," said CPB President and CEO Patricia Harrison.

Programming that positively impacted the childhood and adolescence of many Americans now hangs in the balance, supported by community investment through donations.

For six decades, Cleveland-area residents have turned to PBS Western Reserve and Ideastream Public Media for reliable, factual sources of educational information and news.

Known for shows like "Sesame Street," "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," "Arthur," "Sid the Science Kid," "The Magic School Bus," "Clifford," "Barney & Friends," "Wild Kratts" and "Wishbone," public broadcasting has long been home to some of the most popular children's shows.

### PBS cuts hit low-income

### communities

The conservative policy document "Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise," subtitled "Project 2025," argues that public funding of domestic broadcasting is misguided.

In the section titled "Corporation for Public Broadcasting," author Mike Gonzalez writes, "To stop public funding is good policy and good politics."

The document also expresses concerns about bias, stating, "PBS and NPR do not even bother to run programming that would attract conservatives."

Last summer, federal leaders moved to cut funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which supports local PBS and NPR stations.

In a May 2025 executive order titled "Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media," President Donald Trump wrote that "neither entity presents a fair, accurate or unbiased portrayal of current events to taxpaying citizens."

While budget cuts are

common across administrations, decisions that affect free educational programming disproportionately impact low-income communities, where affordability and access remain barriers.

PBS offers educational programming at no direct cost, unlike many streaming services that charge monthly fees. Its shows build skills like problem-solving, critical thinking and social-emotional learning, while promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity.

### Why free access to education matters

Free access to diverse educational programs at home through PBS programming does not appear to be a priority of the current administration. Long-standing shows like "Sesame Street," "Curious George," and "Arthur" intentionally feature diverse families and cultures. Project 2025 states, "The next conservative president must finally get this done and do it despite opposition from congressional members of his own party if necessary."

Many adults born between 1981-1996, referred to as

millennials, regularly reflect on the shows that helped them navigate complex emotions and personal situations as they grew up. One personal example is a Mr. Rogers' episode that aired on Oct. 19, 1995, in which Mr. Rogers talks about mad feelings and how children can cope with them.

Today, millennials can relive these nostalgic moments by sharing PBS spin-offs of their favorite shows with their children. "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood," like its predecessor, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," centers on age-appropriate social-emotional themes. Additionally, shows like "The Magic School Bus" simplify difficult scientific concepts to make them understandable to young audiences.

### What can you do?

The push to eliminate public funding for educational programming that defined visual learning and made concepts fun and easy to learn is part of the conservative viewpoint within "Project 2025" stated, "the government should not be compelling the conservative half of the country to pay for the suppression of its own views."

If you support PBS, there are several ways to help sustain public media:

- Donate to your local public media station, such as Ideastream Public Media.
- Follow local stations on social media to show your support.
- Use the PBS app to support viewership and access to programming.

Support does not have to be financial. Sharing content on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Threads can help expand access to educational programming.

Marissa Valentine is a U.S. Navy veteran and journalist. She writes about community, education and public policy.

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## Federal programs expand legal, housing and health care support for veterans



Staff Writer

Several federal programs run by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Justice are expanding housing, legal, and health care support for veterans, particularly those experiencing homelessness or involved with the justice system.

These programs highlight federal efforts to address ongoing challenges facing veterans, including homelessness, access to medical treatment, and employment after military service.

### Housing programs address veteran homelessness

Housing assistance remains one of the largest areas of federal support for veterans experiencing homelessness.

One major program is HUD-VASH, a joint initiative between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

HUD-VASH provides Housing Choice (Section 8) vouchers to veterans experiencing homelessness and combines them with case management and supportive services provided through the VA health care system.

The program pairs housing vouchers with clinical services and ongoing case management to help veterans maintain stable housing and access treatment when needed.

Another federal program, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), focuses on preventing homelessness or helping veterans quickly transition

out of homelessness.

According to the VA, SSVF provides case management and supportive services designed to prevent housing instability or rapidly rehouse veterans and their families.

Veterans can also explore additional housing support through the VA's broader Homeless Programs portal, which lists services, eligibility requirements and local assistance resources.

### Legal and justice system

Federal programs also provide legal and justice-related support for veterans.

The VA's Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) program works with courts, law enforcement, and correctional systems to identify veterans who may need assistance.

Through the program, VA specialists connect justice-involved veterans with VA health care services, treatment programs and other benefits.

VJO staff also work with Veterans Treatment Courts, which focus on connecting eligible veterans with treatment and support services while cases move through the court system.

### Crisis and health care access

Veterans experiencing mental health crises can access the Veterans Crisis Line, a national support service that connects veterans with trained responders. Veterans can reach the service by dialing 988 and pressing 1, or by visiting the Veterans Crisis Line website.

The VA also provides access to care through the Community Care Network, which allows eligible veterans to receive health care outside VA facilities when care is not available through the VA or when distance or scheduling standards cannot be met.

Through the program,

private health care providers may deliver approved services while the VA coordinates care.

### Employment and financial support

Additionally, federal programs provide employment assistance for veterans transitioning to civilian careers.

The Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program provides career counseling, job training and education support for veterans with service-connected disabilities.

The program helps veterans prepare for, find, and maintain suitable employment or pursue independent living services when employment is not currently possible.

Veterans interested in starting or expanding businesses can also access resources through the U.S. Small Business Administration veteran business programs, which offer training, counseling and federal contracting opportunities for veteran entrepreneurs.

### Local impact in Cleveland

Programs such as HUD-VASH and SSVF are used by VA medical centers and community partners across Ohio, including the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center and regional veteran service organizations.

These programs help connect veterans with housing

vouchers, case management and supportive services through local VA health care systems and nonprofit partners.

Cleveland-area courts have also participated in Veterans Treatment Court programs, which connect eligible veterans with treatment services and supervision as an alternative to traditional criminal proceedings.

Local veteran advocates say access to housing and treatment programs can play a key role in helping veterans stabilize their lives after military service.

### Veteran homelessness trends

Federal housing programs have been a major part of national efforts to reduce veteran homelessness.







According to federal housing and veterans agencies, veteran homelessness has declined significantly since 2010 due in part to housing programs such as HUD-VASH and rapid rehousing initiatives.

Federal agencies continue to expand programs aimed at preventing homelessness and helping veterans move into stable housing.

VA Homeless Call Center  
1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838)

*The Cleveland Observer covers public policy, community programs, and government services.*

### Benefits Coverage Comparison

Coverage	Covered	Not Covered
 Daily Living Activities	Yes	No equivalent
 Assisted Living Support	Yes	No equivalent
 In-Home/Veterans Home Care	Sometimes	No equivalent
 Room and Board (Private)	No equivalent	No
 Non-Medical Amenities	No equivalent	No
 Long-Term Housing Costs	No equivalent	No

Credit: Jarvis Law Office

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## AI intimacy may weaken real-world relationships



Jennifer Bailey



AI offers supportive, thoughtful, and even flirty responses, there are costs to pursuing relationships with chatbots, including loss of social skills and the development of unrealistic expectations within relationships.

### Always available, never human

Psych Central reports that healthy relationships have components of vulnerability, openness, safety, trust, and empathy. Now that we are living in a world with AI companions, it seems this technology is increasingly used as a replacement for human interaction for its users. This raises the question: How does AI mimic human closeness?

According to Vipin Chaudhary, chair of the department



Vipin Chaudhary and Jennifer A. King from Case Western Reserve University

of Computer and Data Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, AI is constantly learning about the user, tailoring its responses based on what it knows about them. This is also seen in human relationships in the form of getting to know someone and learning to understand others and who they are.

AI is a technology, not human. It is always available, able to talk, does not get tired and never has a bad day. This can make interactions feel effortless and simulate social presence.

Jennifer A. King, assistant professor and co-director of the Center on Trauma and Adversity at Case Western Reserve University, describes relationships as nervous systems reacting to other nervous systems. This means humans need to manage stress effectively when interacting with others. She goes on to say that healthy relationships involve validation and comfort. This is useful in certain contexts.

Validation is soothing to the human nervous system. However, if done consistently, it can become a problem and lead to reliance. It also creates the illusion of connection.

Validation (feeling heard) is not the same as connection (feeling known by another separate mind). King goes on to say that the nervous system's automatic response to stress is to seek relief; AI provides a "low-effort, high-relief" interaction.

### Rupture and repair: why friction is necessary

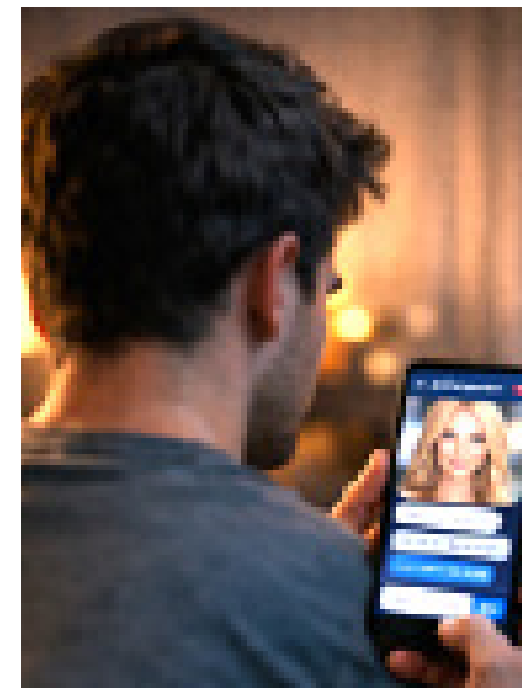
Though validation and comfort are components of healthy relationships, so are challenge and critical thinking. King explains that by having consistent validation, we become out of practice on how to regulate our nervous systems during interpersonal interactions.

For example, if there is a clear beginning and end where we notice activation in the body, we have the hard conversation and then are able to regulate or return to baseline. We learn "I can have hard conversations." There is also cognitive and bodily growth.

Real intimacy is forged in the "cycle of rupture and repair", according to King, and because AI never challenges or makes social missteps, the practice of reconciliation is nonexistent. As a result of this, AI users begin to interpret normal human boundaries or delayed responses as rejection.

Relationships are nervous systems reacting to other nervous systems; without this, our ability to adapt is taken away. However, if there is only one nervous system (a human) not being challenged or practicing resilience, skills in effectively managing interpersonal relationships can atrophy.

In real relationships, we must use critical thinking to navigate conflict, interpret non-verbal cues,



and understand a perspective that differs from our own.

King and Chaudhary agree that AI could be used to increase critical thinking if used in the right way. This requires the user to be actively curious.

"AI can be a tool for comfort but also reflection and learning. But we develop cognitive capacities in real-world interactions. AI should be used as a tool, not a replacement [for human relationships]," said King.

### Finding balance between technology and humanity

Like cellphones and the internet, the growth of AI has been rapid, with little regulation and understanding of how it will impact daily life. Chaudhary said that AI still requires a high amount of human oversight and initiation, meaning it is up to the user to use AI in ways that promote healthy boundaries.

Like any healthy relationship, boundaries are important. Identifying ways to use AI that promote healthy living and relationships is key, especially if we are to continue to integrate it into daily life. To establish and maintain healthy boundaries, AI users should incorporate specific strategies: intentional task switching, comfort to coaching, nervous system check, cultivating curiosity, and cultivating your constellation of care.

### Intentional task-switching

Treat AI as a personal assistant instead of a sounding board for your feelings. It can help with tasks like scheduling, data analysis, brainstorming or outlining. If you find yourself typing "I feel ..." or "My friend and I had an argument," send that thought in a text to a trusted friend instead. A simple message works: "Do you have a few minutes to chat? I'm having a rough day."

### From comfort to coach

King suggests shifting AI's role from comforter to coach to help build social skills and allow for judgment-free practice during emotionally charged interactions. Instead of using AI to avoid a hard conversation, use it to prepare for one.

Continue on page 7

## DIGITAL WELLNESS: AI BOUNDARY CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to ensure your use of artificial intelligence supports your mental health and preserves your real-world social skills.

- 1

**Define the Task:** Am I using AI as a personal assistant for a specific task like scheduling or data analysis?
- 2

**Check Your "I" Statements:** If you start typing "I feel..." or "I'm upset about...", stop and send that thought to a trusted friend instead.
- 3

**Pivot from Comfort to Coach:** If you are using AI to avoid a hard conversation, pivot the prompt to help you practice and prepare for that interaction.
- 4

**Perform a Nervous System Check:** Am I seeking AI because I am emotionally activated?
- 5

**Choose Physical Regulation:** If you are seeking emotional soothing, try deep breathing or a walk before engaging with a screen.
- 6

**Practice Active Curiosity:** Have I asked the AI to play "devil's advocate" or provide 3-5 counterarguments to my current perspective?
- 7

**Audit Your Constellation of Care:** Have I spent time today—either in person or via FaceTime—with the people who provide me with real accountability and connection?

## AI data center boom raises environmental, economic concerns in Northeast Ohio



Russell Zhang



Driven by a recent surge in proposed hyperscaler projects from tech giants like Google, Amazon and Microsoft, Northeast Ohio is emerging as a key location for the massive infrastructure required to power artificial intelligence.

While Ohio as a whole already hosts more than 200 data centers, according to the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, the arrival of these facilities in the Northeast region is sparking local debate over water consumption and long-term economic benefits.

Unlike traditional cloud services, AI models like OpenAI's ChatGPT require significantly more computing power. According to the International Energy Agency, cited by the United Nations - Renewable Energy: Powering a Safer Future, a single AI-focused data center can consume as much electricity as 100,000 U.S. homes, a requirement that often pushes these facilities out of urban centers and into rural communities.

The environmental footprint is equally significant. Computers in these facilities generate intense heat and are often cooled with freshwater. In Newton County, Georgia, a Meta data center uses 500,000 gallons of water a day, about 10% of the county's total consumption, according to reporting by The New York Times.

Local leaders in Ohio are taking action. Norton officials recently rejected a data center

proposal, according to WKYC Channel 3, while Lordstown council members issued a six-month moratorium to study impacts on the power grid, noise pollution and water consumption, according to WFMJ Channel 21.

Despite these concerns, development continues. Plans have been proposed to convert an old GM warehouse into an AI data center through a partnership with OpenAI and Oracle, according to Business Journal Daily.

While such projects create short-term construction jobs, experts warn that the long-term maintenance of these sites employs only a fraction of the initial workforce, raising questions about sustainable local prosperity.

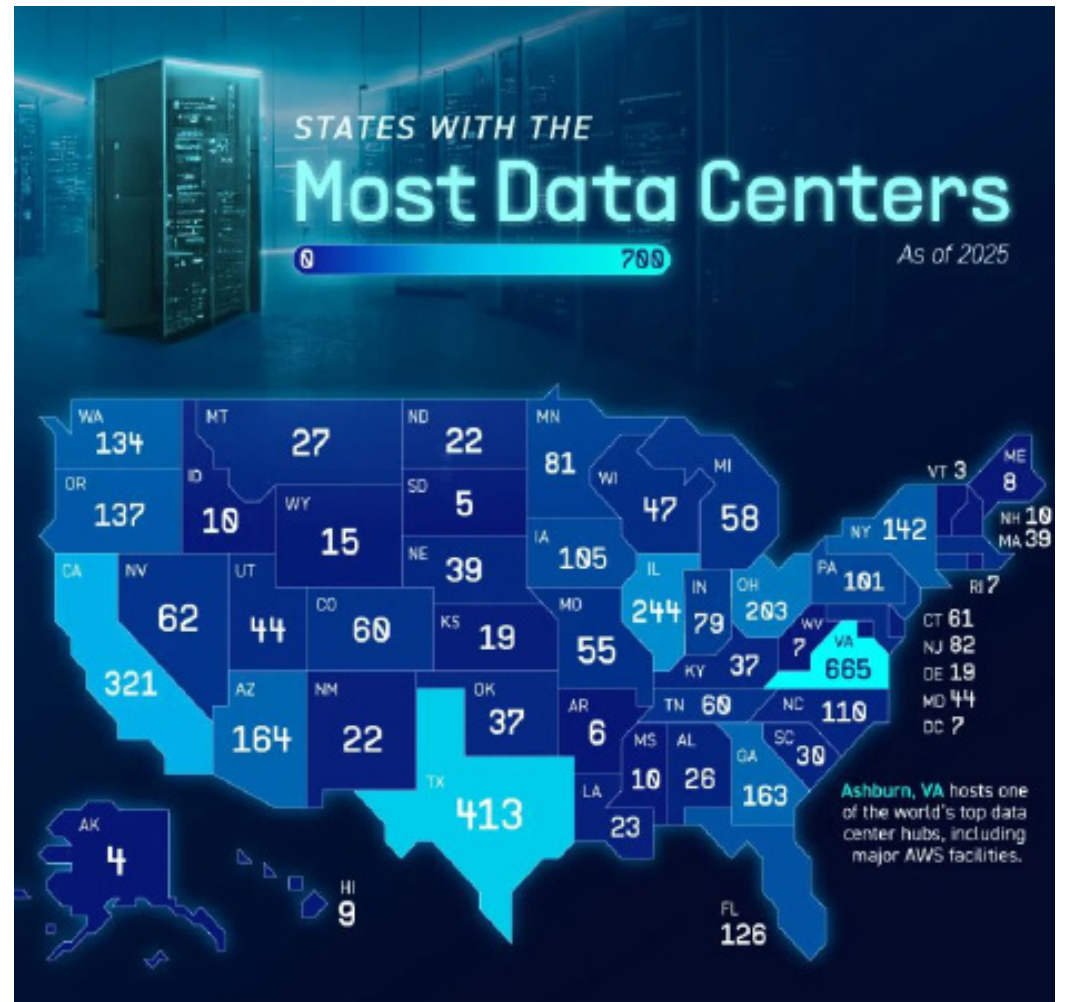
### Community concerns

Beyond the infrastructure, the rapid adoption of AI has drawn criticism from those concerned about its true purpose.

"AI is supposed to be there as a support, not as a generative system," said local observer Annalise Osei-Owusu. "It's there so you can express what you want to convey the message you need, and support you instead of doing it for you."

Others, like Zane Sandelin, worry that the excitement over the technology has left behind critical discussions regarding intellectual property and student learning. They also has a concerns about the impact on academic integrity.

*Russell Zhang is a Case Western Reserve University intern at The Cleveland Observer, freelance journalist and writer.*



## East Tech students serve community with teaching kitchen



Brittany Ervin



Students at East Technical High School on Cleveland's East Side are gaining hands-on culinary and hospitality experience by operating the Executive Grille, a student-run restaurant that serves both the school community and the public.

Inside the dining room, students move between the kitchen and tables, serving meals they prepared themselves, while instructors guide them through the pace of a working restaurant.

Through the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's culinary arts program, students learn cooking techniques, food safety, teamwork, and customer service while preparing meals. The restaurant operates as a working classroom where students manage both the kitchen and dining room under the guidance of instructors.

The program is led by culinary instructor Michael Szalkowski, who has worked with the program since 1999 and Jonathan Gardner, a chef and program graduate who has taught there for the past five years.

Students say the experience requires discipline, responsibility and teamwork. While preparing food for customers can be demanding, many say they enjoy learning to cook dishes from different cultures and gaining confidence in the kitchen.

"It's not all fun and games," Nate, a student, said. "It takes hard work and attention to safety, but it's rewarding when people enjoy the food."

Gardner said his interest in cooking began during large family gatherings.

"Sunday dinners brought everyone together," Gardner said. "Now I enjoy helping students see food from a different perspective and giving them responsibility when they cook for the public."

He said challenges in the kitchen often become learning opportunities.

Szalkowski said the restaurant environment allows students to gain practical experience beyond traditional classroom instruction.

"When students discover something they're good at, they thrive," he said.



Executive Grille students and Instructor Michael Szalkowski and chef Jonathan Gardner (Right) Credit Ron Calhoun



East Technical High School Executive Grille. Credit Ron Calhoun

### A program with decades of history

The culinary arts program originally began at Jane Addams Business Careers Center in 1997, followed by the opening of the Executive Grille restaurant in 1998.

The program moved to East Technical High School after the Jane Addams campus closed in 2021.

In February 2023, the Executive Grille opened its current facility inside East Tech.

The restaurant operates in a renovated space that was built over the building's former swimming pool area and now includes a modern commercial kitchen, buffet area and dining room for guests.

Students manage both the kitchen and dining room, preparing meals, greeting customers, serving tables and assisting with daily operations.

The program is part of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's career and technical education pathway for students in grades 10 through 12, designed to help students explore careers in the culinary and hospitality industries.

Graduates often continue their education in culinary programs or pursue careers in restaurants, bakeries, hospitality management and food service operations.

### Learning through service

The Executive Grille also hosts themed events and special meals throughout the school year. At a recent Soul Food Banquet, students prepared dishes including shrimp and grits, barbecue chicken, macaroni and cheese, candied yams, and peach cobbler.

Events like these allow students to practice menu planning, food preparation, and customer service while serving members of the community.

For students interested in culinary careers, the opportunity to cook for real customers provides valuable experience.

Szalkowski said the hands-on environment helps students discover talents they may not have realized they had.

"The goal is to give them skills they can carry into the workforce or further education," he said.

For many students, the Executive Grille offers a chance to explore culinary careers while serving the community. It also gives students opportunities to travel.

They recently visited Disney and attended the Food & Wine Festival at Epcot. The program has helped students step outside their comfort zones and create valuable experiences to build on. "If you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life," Szalkowski said.

### Visiting the Executive Grille

The Executive Grille is open to the public on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. during the school year.

**East Technical High School Executive Grille**  
**2439 E. 55th St.**  
**(rear lot entrance)**  
**Cleveland 44104**  
 216-838-CHEF (2433)

Reservations are recommended.

More information: Executive Grille website, <https://grille.clevelandmetroschools.org/>



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