## Inside

**Cleveland approves millions for North Coast Connector, City Hall design work**

Cleveland officials approved millions of dollars in additional professional services for the North Coast Connector and City Hall modernization projects
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CLEVELAND OBSERVER

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# Camara paints the soul, captivates the senses

SCAN TO LISTEN

A'Niyah Williamson

Camara Goodrich creates multidisciplinary mixed-media artwork that explores identity, nature, spirituality and the human experience. Through texture, unconventional materials and pieces that change under different lighting, Goodrich creates work designed to engage both the senses and emotions.

**Who is Camara?**

Goodrich's mixed-media art pieces explore the mind, heart and soul. She offered a look inside her studio and creative process at her home in North Ridgeville.

Goodrich is committed to nurturing young people in the arts through mentorship, workshops and programs.

She is also an advocate for mental health awareness, author of the book "Artful Success: Mastering the Business of Selling Your Art with Confidence, Resilience, and Creative Therapy," and an educator.

Her artwork has been displayed in museums and galleries across Ohio and elsewhere in the United States, including the Patrick Losinski Gallery inside the Columbus Metropolitan Library and the Massillon Museum in 2025.

Based in Ohio, Goodrich creates work that explores the relationship between nature and identity. Her work also examines connections between spirituality and the senses.

**Art that stimulates the mind and soul**

"You feel different when you look at one piece than you do another," Goodrich said as she demonstrated two canvases under different lighting.

On the surface, the works appear one way, but when the lights are lowered and a black light is positioned over them, additional elements become visible. She also demonstrated how looking through 3D glasses changes the viewer's perception of the pieces, with different colors revealing forms within the artwork.

Goodrich said she hopes the effect surprises viewers before producing a sense of calm.

*Camara Goodrich sits beside one of her pieces. Photo courtesy of Cam Creates Art Studio.*

Her creative process extends beyond paint. She incorporates materials such as cloth, fabric, string and elements from nature. The combination of materials is what makes the works mixed media.

Each piece carries a different meaning and emotion that Goodrich intends to convey.

One painting depicts a woman who represents self-love, honoring one's worth and making oneself a priority.

"You can't pour from an empty cup," she said about the piece. "Embrace self-love as the foundation for every connection you build."

Another example is a painting of a man that was inspired by Atlanta cellist and composer Okorie Johnson, whose live performances combine storytelling and emotion. Goodrich said she

*Continued on page 2*

# Analysis: Which Cleveland nonprofit websites serve residents best?

SCAN TO LISTEN

*Asha Kartha*

**About this analysis:** *The Cleveland Observer reviewed nearly 50 Cleveland nonprofit and community development corporation websites from June 1 through Aug. 12, 2026, evaluating navigation, current information, resident resources and mobile performance.*

Many Clevelanders rely on social services and nonprofits in the community to get their basic needs met, but the digital age has exposed gaps in the quality of resources offered by local groups.

This isn't just a question of aesthetics; a website that is out of date and difficult to navigate can make even the best resources in the city hard to find.

The Cleveland Observer surveyed websites operated by local nonprofits and community development corporations, or CDCs, to assess how easily Cleveland residents could find useful, current information.

To receive a high rating, websites had to meet three criteria: easy and accessible navigation, regular updates and useful information tailored to the population the organization served.

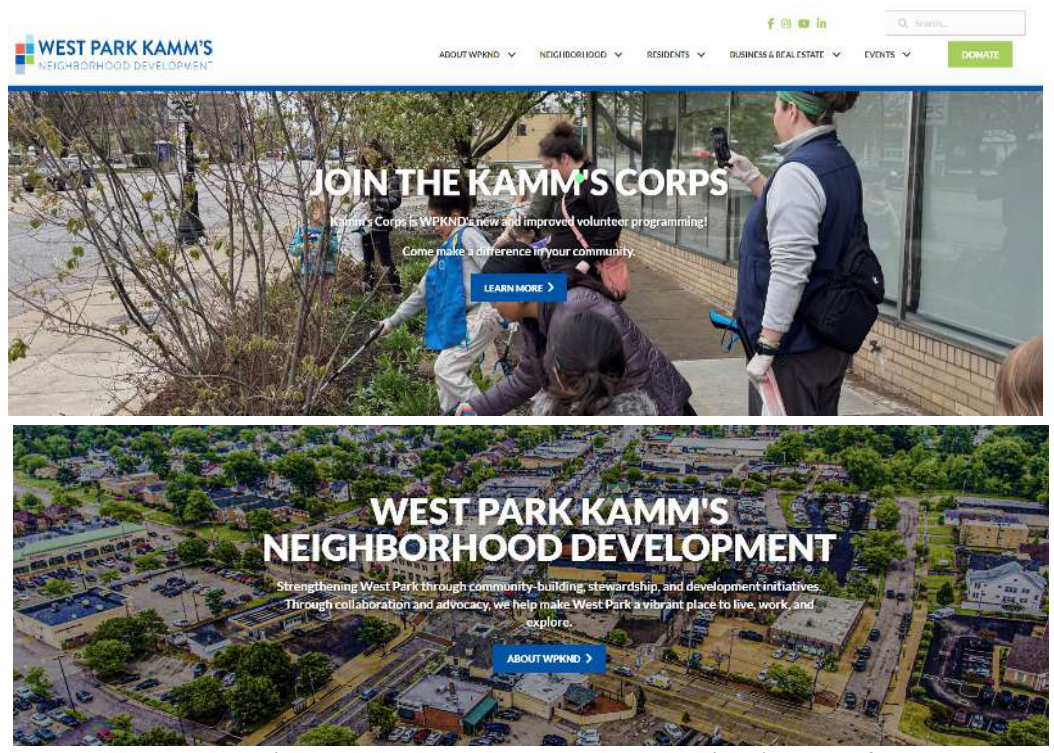
Modern and accessible web design that worked well across different devices distinguished the higher-rated websites from the rest. The Cleveland Observer reviewed nearly 50 websites from June 1 through Aug. 12, 2026, using Safari and Chrome on laptops and phones.

Each site was evaluated for navigation, current information, neighborhood-specific resources and mobile performance. Pages that failed to load were tested several times to distinguish slow service from nonfunctional sites.

**Best overall websites**

The West Park Kamm's Community Development Corporation (CDC) and The Centers, a health and wellness organization, had websites that stood out.

These sites combined robust information with ease of use. Both offer extensive information for Clevelanders looking for resources and manage to break it down into easy-to-understand pages that are easy to use and up to date.




*Credit: West Park Kamm's Community Development Corporation (CDC) website front page*

West Park Kamm's CDC strikes a balance between enticing new residents and catering to current residents with questions or support needs.

The site is modern and attractive and offers resources and information for businesses, prospective residents and current residents, all separated clearly. It provides information about transit options, resources for housing or seniors in the neighborhood and a "New Neighbor Guide" for future renters and buyers. It also offers pages of information for local

*Continued on page 3*

# Camara paints the soul, captivates the senses

From front page

wanted the piece to capture the energy she experiences when she hears notes of worship in the music she loves.

Although her works differ, Goodrich said their messages and meanings remain spiritually intertwined.

**A woman of strength, belief and blessings**

Goodrich grew up in a creative household where her artistic abilities were encouraged. At one point, she became an athlete, and her father encouraged her to focus more on athletics than art.

She later built a fitness career, working with private clients, teaching kickboxing and working as a personal trainer.

But athletics was not what she ultimately wanted to pursue.

Everything shifted in 2017 when Goodrich was involved in a motorcycle crash on a highway and was airlifted to a hospital. She said she was given slim odds of survival. Though she survived, she later experienced depression and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, she said.

Goodrich said her mental health worsened during that period and that she turned to alcohol.

During that time, her husband suggested she return to art and reconnect with the creative spirit she had developed earlier in life.

Returning to art helped her confidence and supported her during physical therapy and recovery. People began complimenting her work and encouraging her to pursue art.

Goodrich recalled telling her husband, "Hey, that spare bedroom, could we turn it into a studio?"

He supported the idea, giving her canvases for Christmas, money for paint and supplies and, most importantly, encouragement.

She wanted to share her work with a wider audience. Her studio developed gradually as she added equipment, gained recognition and created and sold more work.

She began selling her artwork at Jamie's Flea Market in Amherst, Ohio. She rented two $15 booths and used folding card tables and minimal equipment.

Soon, she began selling every week, and customers came to expect to see her there. Goodrich said she never skimped on supplies or materials.

From the beginning, she either used recycled elements or painted on gallery-wrapped canvases using professional paints.

"If I started from scratch with nothing, I know other artists out there have the same opportunity to be where I am now," she said.

**Art is more than a medium**

"Each piece has its own intention," Goodrich said, describing each work as a singular being in its own frame.

Goodrich is expressive not only artistically but physically. When she paints, she moves with her whole body, and she said that physicality carries into the character of her work.

She does not repeat works. "That's the type of person I am; I have a lot of love for different things. And I don't ever want not to relay that through my art."

If something is important to her or she feels connected to it in some way, Goodrich said she hopes that emotion is what viewers remember.

She said she begins with intention and then allows intuition to guide the work once she enters a flow state.

Her work explores mental health, self-image and spiritual awareness, themes she hopes will encourage people to be kinder to themselves.

Goodrich's mother died by suicide in 2000, and she later experienced her own mental health struggles after the motorcycle crash.

Her experiences have influenced her desire to help and teach others.

She works with young people and older adults, using art as a way to connect with members of her community.

In Goodrich's view, art is not merely a medium but a connection to the soul.

Her work addresses subjects with personal significance, she said.

**Art, technology and artificial intelligence**

As technology continues to change the art world, Goodrich said she is not worried about artificial intelligence.

"AI could never replicate, or duplicate, or be me or my art," she said.

Goodrich said her work comes from her own mind and experiences in a way she believes artificial intelligence cannot reproduce.

She said artists can print an image and place it on a canvas, but the texture, 3D elements and different materials in her work create a physical quality that cannot be replicated in the same way.

Goodrich said her artwork sometimes draws people to touch it, prompting her to place signs that say "Do not touch" near some pieces.

She said she has never seen an AI poster or print produce the same reaction.

Goodrich said artists who are uncertain about the value of their own work might be more concerned about artificial intelligence.

**Where can you find her?**

Goodrich can be found on Instagram **@Camcreatesartstudio** and at camcreatesartstudio.com. Goodrich accepts commissions, sells gift cards and prints, and participates in art festivals and exhibitions. Her independently operated home studio reflects the artistic practice she has built over the years.

**Mentoring future artists**

Her advice to aspiring young artists is simple: "Come see me!" Goodrich said there is no single piece of advice that applies to everyone trying to find their footing in the art world.

"Just like art is subjective, we all have different likes and different intentions," she said.

Artists may pursue different fields, such as tattooing, music and theater. People have different motivations for creating art and different levels of confidence.

Goodrich said that when she mentors someone, she first gets to know the person, determines where they are in their development and meets them there.

Everyone starts somewhere. Goodrich's career reflects that.

*At left: a piece dedicated to Goodrich's late mother. At right: an unfinished piece in Goodrich's studio, made with paint, fabric and coffee, with a message about the female body. Photo courtesy of Cam Creates Art Studio.*

*A'Niyah Williamson is a digital artist and writer born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. She studies digital media production at Ohio Media School.*

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# Analysis: Which Cleveland nonprofit websites serve residents best?

From front page

business owners.

The event calendar is simple and up to date with upcoming events. Overall, the CDC effectively balances quality and quantity of information with a simple and clear system of organization.

The Centers' website combines a clear and simple structure with detailed information. The homepage highlights four main areas of service that users can rapidly access, but also has more granular information and drop-down menus that make information easy to find. Although the organization offers a wide variety of services at multiple locations across the city, users can easily find the information they need.

**Needs improvement**

The Westown CDC performed poorly in all three categories, making it an example of the importance of regular digital maintenance.

The site has a cover story from 2021, blank pages and web design elements reminiscent of the early 2000s. It also loaded slowly during repeated tests.

It wasn't always clear whether a page was not loading or if it had loaded but was hard to use.

The site appears to have gone without recent updates and has a layout that made information difficult to locate during the review, making it a challenge to find information about Westown resources.

Though other CDCs around the city have weak points, Westown stands out for failing to meet all three criteria for a good website.

**Strong performers**

The Northwest Neighborhoods CDC is up to date, with a clearly demarcated and well-developed resources page for the Cudell, Edgewater and Detroit Shoreway neighborhoods. The Metro West site highlights helpful housing and economic development information, though the main page is scaled to be a bit hard to navigate.

Another notable site is the Fairfax Renaissance CDC website. Though the site could benefit from increased organization, the information is robust and stands out for publicizing hyperlocal resources well. It names programs and tools located in the neighborhood and designed for Fairfax residents specifically, including the Lunch Buddies program at Bolton Elementary and the Fairfax Neighborhood Technology Center.

**Usability issues**

Many sites had usability issues, including slow loading, pages that failed to display and outdated designs or content. Some appeared more modern but were not being kept up to date or were hard to navigate.

During the review on multiple days in July, the Little Italy website loaded intermittently and required repeated refreshes; when it loaded, the design was good, but when it failed, it was hard to use or required multiple reloads.

The Harvard Community Services Center, serving Lee-Harvard, Miles and Seville, was offline when the survey of local sites began, but it was online when rechecked July 27.

Upon returning to functionality, the site proved to be well designed and comprehensive. Barring future functionality issues, it is a great resource for Clevelanders.

The website for Project H.O.P.E., an organization offering health services to Clevelanders, mainly in the St. Clair-Superior and Glenville neighborhoods, has many useful pages describing its services and offering health education information, but can be difficult to navigate easily between sections.

Sites for organizations such as the Famicos Foundation, the CDC serving Hough and Glenville, and the Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc., the CDC serving Kinsman, provided useful information but had designs that could be difficult to navigate, especially on small screens, which may make finding important information a challenge.

**Confusing content**

Many CDCs had sites with usable and modern designs that focused primarily on attracting new residents or visitors and highlighting real estate options or commerce in the neighborhood.

Many provide programs and services for current residents, including housing, neighborhood development and other assistance.

Many website designs do not reflect this, mixing information for existing residents with marketing for new residents, or emphasizing neighborhood promotion to visitors over services for residents.

On the Tremont West CDC website, block club information sits alongside real estate company recommendations, mixing resident resources with promotional content.

The Little Italy CDC website is also up to date with current event and visitor information but has comparatively few resident-service resources.

The Ohio City CDC and NuPoint CDC websites were attractive and modern, but their dense layouts made some information difficult to locate.

During the review in July, the University Circle CDC website's "Live: For Current Residents" tab only featured out-of-date community meeting information and an empty job listing page.

Meanwhile, the "Visit" tabs contained significantly more information. The site provided more information for visitors than current residents.

The Westown CDC "helpful links" drop-down menu contained one page providing an empty list of nonprofit organizations, and another with general information for the Greater Cleveland area, rather than Westown-specific resources.

**What made websites effective**

For any groups starting from scratch, the Old Brooklyn CDC site is a good guide. It is not the most comprehensive site, but it is up to date and easy to navigate, and offers simple and helpful tools for residents.

Organizations experiencing slow load times and performance issues could ask their web-hosting providers or developers to review hosting performance and other technical causes to improve loading and rendering speeds and cut down on confusing and frustrating user experiences.

Nonprofits could form partnerships with residents, local companies, local computer science programs or student volunteers to improve website design and maintenance.

They could also compare their sites with effective local and national examples to identify best practices to make a website successful.

For sites without design issues but weaker content, a complete overhaul might not be needed.

Instead, they could focus on improving user experiences by separating resources for existing residents from promotional material and adding more neighborhood-specific information to improve usability.

For many Cleveland residents seeking assistance, an organization's website is the first stop. When information is outdated, difficult to find or overshadowed by promotional content, those residents may never reach the services they need.

The review found that clear organization, current information and resident-focused resources made services easier to locate, while outdated pages, difficult navigation and promotional content made them harder to find.

The best websites demonstrate that accessible, regularly updated sites do not require flashy design. Clear organization, accurate information and a focus on community needs are more important.

The review suggests that maintaining an effective digital presence is an important part of serving residents.

*Asha Kartha is a student at Case Western Reserve studying religious studies, theater and civil engineering.*

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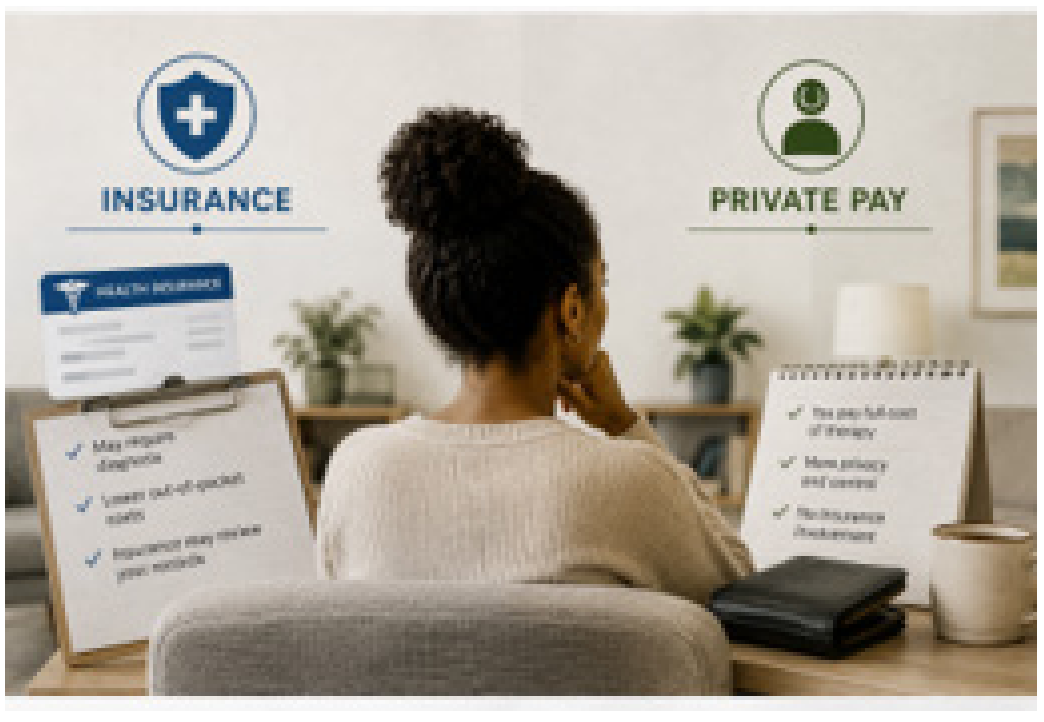
# Paying for therapy: Insurance or private pay?

*Jennifer Bailey*




When choosing to seek therapy, the next decision is not necessarily which therapist to choose; it is whether to pay privately or use insurance.

Both private pay and insurance have their benefits and challenges, which is why it is imperative to explore both options to decide which is best for your financial situation.

When using insurance to pay for therapy, the insurance company may cover part of the cost while the patient may be responsible for a copay, coinsurance, deductible or other cost-sharing, depending upon the plan.

To use your insurance, you need to find a therapist who accepts your insurance; this is known as being an in-network provider.

You can find an in-network therapist by contacting your insurance company. According to Mental Health Match, insurance billing may require a diagnosis to establish medical necessity, depending on the plan and coverage requirements.

A diagnosis required for insurance billing does not by itself indicate the severity or duration of a person's condition.

In outpatient therapy, many diagnoses may involve conditions that are mild, situational or temporary. For insurance billing, the diagnosis documents the condition being treated; by itself, it does not establish how severe or long-lasting that condition is.

Using insurance may require sharing certain health information with the insurer for payment and coverage purposes, including a diagnosis and dates of service.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, psychotherapy notes are kept separately from medical and billing records and generally require patient authorization for disclosure.

According to WebMD, insurers may deny claims for services they determine are not medically necessary.

Paying privately means covering the full cost of therapy directly. Choosing private pay can be costly; GoodRx reports that sessions may range from $100 to more than $200.

According to GoodRx, some insurance plans may offer out-of-network benefits that may reimburse part of the cost after a patient pays a therapist directly. The patient may then submit a claim to the insurer for partial or full reimbursement, depending on the plan. Not all plans provide out-of-network benefits or reimbursements.

Whether paying privately or using insurance, accessing appropriate help and support can be part of caring for your mental health.

*Jennifer Bailey is a licensed clinical social worker and registered drama therapist.*

# Let's talk about it: The cost of code-switching

*Jennifer Bailey*

The desire to be valued and accepted extends from our personal to our professional lives. But what happens when you don't feel like you can be yourself at work and you have to hide or change aspects of yourself to fit in? This is called code-switching.

Linguists began studying language switching in the mid-20th century. Hans Vogt's 1954 "Language Contacts" is often cited as the first use of the term 'code-switching' in linguistics, while Einar Haugen was among the early scholars who developed related concepts.

Later researchers applied the concept of code-switching to workplace experiences, including the experiences of Black employees. Researchers, including Courtney McCluney, expanded the definition to include adjustments to language, behavior and appearance in the workplace.

Mercedes Swan, a career coach, defines code-switching as changing your identity to assimilate into the workplace. Swan said that those who are members of minority or marginalized communities can feel pressured to code-switch.

"When we go into the workplace, in those social contexts, we're likely to change our language, maybe our accents, our dialects, just how we communicate with others in the workplace," she said.

Swan is the founder of Career Love, a social impact organization that creates safe, empowering environments for high-performing Black women.

"When we walk into the workplace, we're leaving some of ourselves outside the door, because we have to fit into these settings," she said.

It can be easy to assume that code-switching helps people connect with their colleagues, Swan said.

Swan distinguishes between code-switching and flexibility in the workplace, saying that code-switching is not about connection but conformity. "I'm switching to align to a power structure," said Swan.

The long-term effects of code-switching can be detrimental, damaging self-concept and individuality, Swan said. "Over time, that can degrade your mental and emotional health. How does it impact me knowing that I'm not accepted by people that I spend eight hours a day with?"

Swan suggested employers can reduce pressure to code-switch by examining existing practices and asking hard questions.

*Mercedes Swan, a career coach. Courtesy of Mercedes Swan*

She said organizations should evaluate whether their practices encourage their employees to show up fully, avoid tone policing and respond with curiosity rather than judgment when they encounter unfamiliar language.

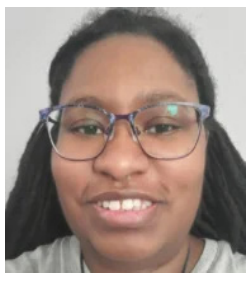
"Each leader is responsible for unpacking that," she added.

Swan suggested that employees who want to reduce their code-switching start with one small action, such as styling their hair differently or choosing a piece of clothing that feels authentic to them.

"Just whatever you can do to start detaching from that [code-switching] and taking one step forward to being a little bit more liberated and a little bit more yourself is powerful," Swan said. "Just one thing, try one thing."

*Jennifer Bailey is a licensed clinical social worker and registered drama therapist.*

# DEI policy changes during the Trump administration



*Amaya Gentry*

On Jan. 20, 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing." The order directs federal officials to terminate specified diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) programs and activities.

Executive Order 13985 was revoked the same day by a separate order, Executive Order 14148, "Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions."

About 14 months later, on March 26, Trump signed Executive Order 14398, "Addressing DEI Discrimination by Federal Contractors." The order defines racially discriminatory DEI activities as disparate treatment based on race or ethnicity and imposes requirements on covered federal contracts.

The rollbacks are associated with the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, a long list of policy recommendations that would change the executive branch under the Trump administration.

**How the Trump administration characterizes DEI mandates**

Executive Order 14151 characterizes the plans as "forced illegal and immoral discrimination programs" and says they demonstrated "immense public waste and shameful discrimination."

Executive Order 14398 says DEI activities in the workplace "impose artificial costs in hiring, promotion, and operations by precluding implementation of merit-based principles; creating excessive workforce turnover by elevating immutable characteristics over job performance; and jeopardizing the sort of employee collaboration and problem-solving that is essential to fostering efficient and high-quality work."

**What DEI rollbacks mean in the workplace**

The revocation of Executive Order 13985 does not affect all DEI programs in place in the United States. Executive Order 13985 required all agencies to publish equity plans identifying barriers underserved communities face in accessing federal benefits.

Additionally, Executive Order 13985 says, "The Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) shall, in partnership with the heads of agencies, study methods for assessing whether agency policies and actions create or exacerbate barriers to full and equal participation by all eligible individuals."

Executive Order 14398 defines racially discriminatory DEI activities for purposes of covered federal contracting. It directs OMB to issue compliance guidance and directs contracting agencies to cancel, terminate or suspend contracts and suspend or debar contractors for noncompliance.

Federal contractors and subcontractors may face contract termination, suspension, cancellation or debarment for noncompliance.

This does not mean that companies' obligations to comply with anti-discrimination laws have changed, though.

Companies remain subject to applicable anti-discrimination laws, including requirements concerning harassment, disability accommodations and retaliation.

**Who is affected by DEI rollbacks**

By the 1980s, some U.S. employers were expanding workplace diversity initiatives addressing race and gender, while LGBTQ+ inclusion became more prominent in workplace policies in later decades.

The 1987 Hudson Institute report "Workforce 2000" drew national attention to demographic changes in the U.S. workforce, including the growing participation of women and Black and Hispanic workers. These workplace developments followed earlier civil rights and equality movements, including the 1969 Stonewall uprising and Congress' 1972 passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the states for ratification.

According to CNN, DEI initiatives may benefit more than just people of color. White women, people in the LGBTQ+ community, veterans and people with disabilities also are included under workplace DEI programs.

McKinsey's 2025 report found that women held 29% of C-suite positions, including 23% held by white women and 7% held by women of color.

**Takeaways**

Modern workplace diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices developed from civil rights, equal employment, disability rights and affirmative-action efforts and later expanded into corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Could the orders weaken workplace initiatives intended to address barriers faced by historically marginalized groups?

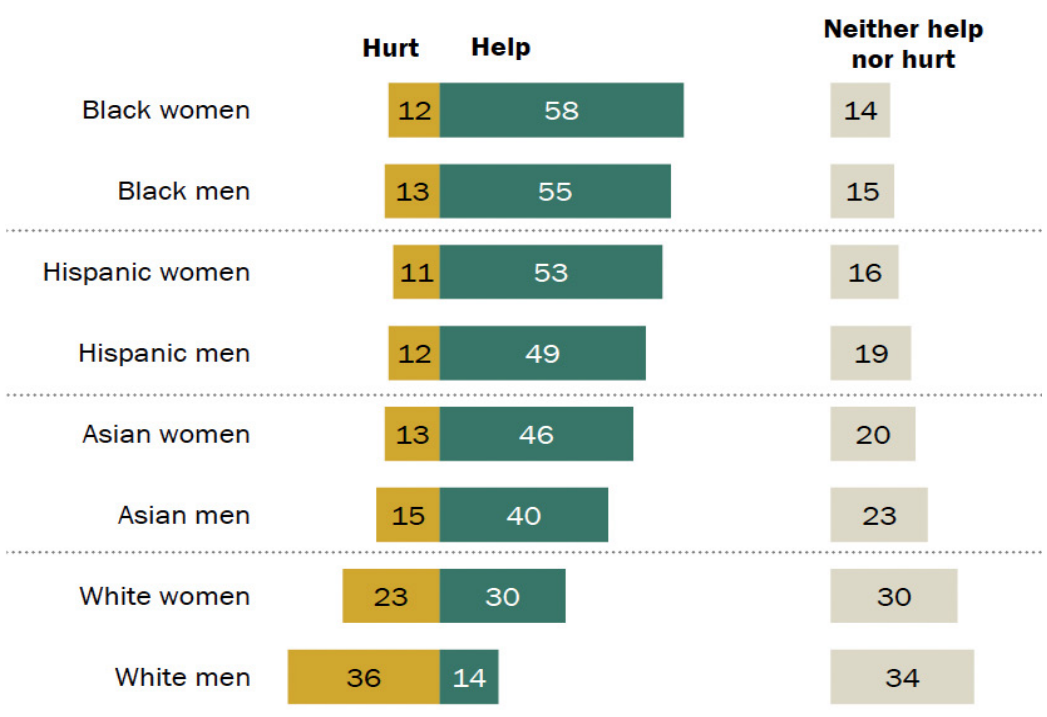
The orders align with several Project 2025 recommendations on DEI, which claim that DEI programs have wasted resources and have discriminated against applicants outside the groups targeted by those initiatives.

Workplace DEI initiatives have included efforts involving women, veterans, people with disabilities and other groups, not only racial minorities.

*Amaya Gentry has a bachelor's degree in biology and has worked as a quality control chemist.*

**Majorities of Americans say DEI practices help Black men and women in the workplace**

*% of U.S. adults saying that in general, DEI practices ____ each of the following groups in the workplace*




Note: Shares of respondents who didn't offer an answer or said they are not sure are not shown. Shares who said they are not sure ranged from 15% to 21%. Figures combine "Help a lot/a little" and "Hurt a lot/a little."
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2024.

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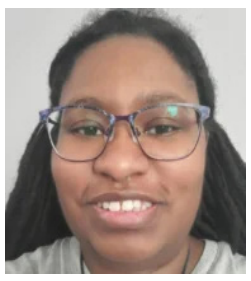
# Understanding the costs and benefits of tree removal



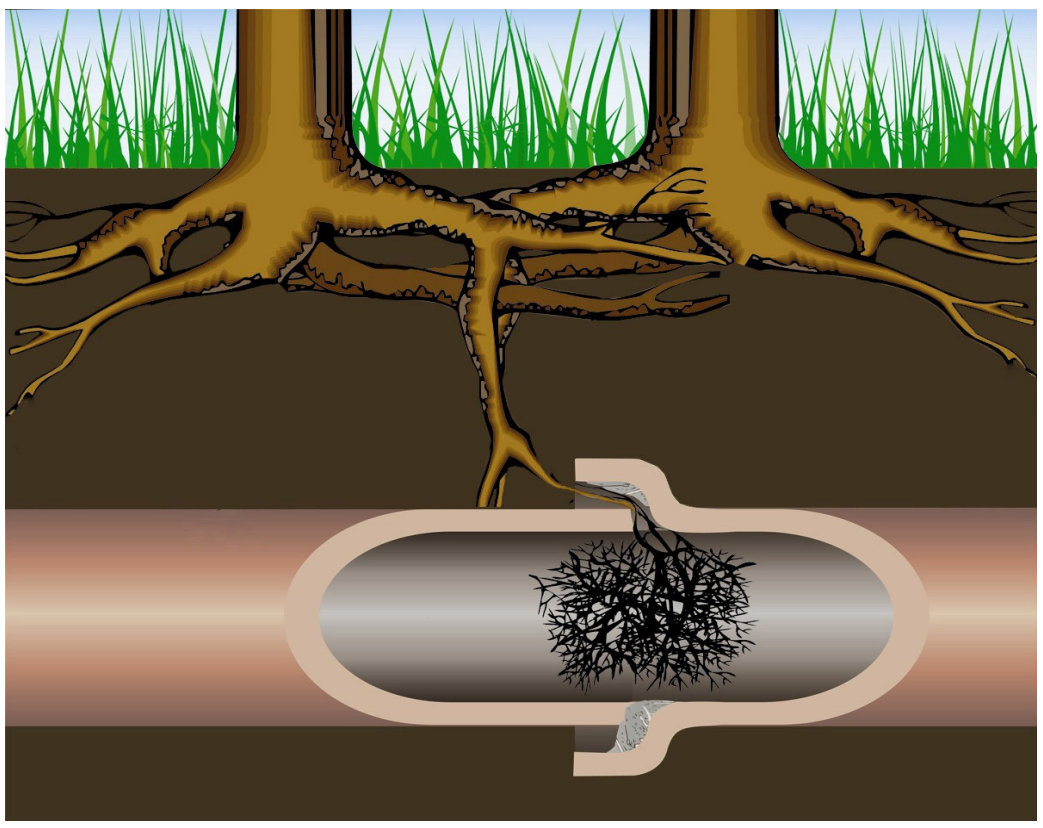
*Amaya Gentry*

Severe storms, high winds and ice in Northeast Ohio can damage trees and threaten homes, vehicles, utility lines and public spaces.

Property owners deciding whether to remove a tree should weigh immediate safety risks against the environmental and economic benefits of retaining a healthy tree. Tree removal may be necessary when a tree is dead, diseased, structurally unstable or interfering with essential infrastructure.

**When tree cutting may be beneficial**

Tree removal may be appropriate under certain conditions.



*Ohio Urban Forestry infographic showing root damage. Credit: Adobe Stock.*

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, removal is generally considered when a tree is dead, diseased, structurally unstable or cannot be made reasonably safe through pruning or other treatment.

Signs of these conditions include deep cracks in the tree's bark, discolored leaves, soft, crumbly wood and the appearance of fungi. Other signs can include a sudden lean, a hollow trunk, fungal growth near the roots, root sprouts and poor overall growth.

However, even healthy trees can pose a risk. High winds and lightning can damage limbs or entire trees. The American Public Power Association reported that trees caused about 16% of public power outages in 2023.

Removal should not be presented as the default preventive measure. Depending on the tree's condition, professional inspection, pruning or monitoring may address the risk without eliminating a healthy tree.

Healthy trees can add value to residential property, while dead, damaged or poorly placed trees may detract from a property's appearance or safety. A 2021 University of Nebraska-Lincoln study estimated that trees add more than $31.5 billion annually to the value of private residential properties nationwide.

Like other parts of a yard, trees require maintenance. Tree-care costs vary according to a tree's size, condition, location and accessibility.

According to Affordable Tree Services of Ohio LLC, the cost of care also depends on the equipment required.

Tree-removal costs vary widely. Affordable Tree Services of Ohio LLC estimates that removals in the region typically range from $2,000 to $4,000, depending on the tree and site conditions.

**Environmental and community costs of tree removal**

A 2018 U.S. Forest Service study estimated that urban and community tree cover declined by about 175,000 acres, or approximately 36 million trees, annually between 2009 and 2014.

The study found that urban trees provide important environmental benefits, including helping regulate temperatures and providing wildlife habitat.

One benefit of urban tree cover is temperature moderation during hot weather. Urban trees provide shade and release water vapor, helping reduce the urban heat island effect during hot weather.

A 2026 study published in Nature Communications found that existing urban tree cover offsets about 41% to 49% of the maximum potential air-temperature urban heat island effect. The researchers estimated that tree cover reduces summer air temperatures by a population-weighted average of 0.27 degrees Fahrenheit.

Removing a hazardous tree can reduce the risk of injury or property damage. Removing a healthy tree, however, can eliminate shade, wildlife habitat and other community benefits. The decision should be based on the tree's condition, location and assessed risk rather than appearance alone.

Removal is not the only response to a potentially hazardous tree. Depending on the condition and location, an arborist may recommend pruning, continued monitoring or another corrective treatment. When removal is necessary, replacing the tree with an appropriate species can help preserve canopy benefits.

Cleveland residents should request an assessment before pruning or removing a public tree or a tree in the public right of way. The city requires permits for work on city-managed trees. Owners of private trees should consult a qualified arborist, while trees interfering with electrical lines should be reported to the electric utility.

**Takeaways**

Removing dead, hazardous or poorly placed trees can reduce some safety risks and may improve curb appeal, while removing healthy trees can reduce shade and habitat.

Homeowners concerned by the environmental impacts can invest in maintaining their trees and consider options offered by their energy company for tree maintenance.

For public trees in Cleveland, contact 311 or the Division of Urban Forestry at 216-664-3104. A city permit is required before pruning, removing or planting a city-managed tree, pruning its roots or grinding its stump.

*Amaya Gentry has a bachelor's degree in biology and has worked as a quality-control chemist.*

# Cleveland approves millions for North Coast Connector and City Hall design work

SCAN TO LISTEN

Staff Writer

*Recent city actions also cover fire equipment, property sales and zoning decisions*

Cleveland officials approved millions of dollars in additional professional services for the North Coast Connector and City Hall modernization projects, according to city records published Aug. 7 and Aug. 14.

The actions were approved by Cleveland's Board of Control and are documented in the city's official weekly record.

**North Coast Connector contract grows to nearly $13 million**

The Board of Control on Aug. 5 approved an additional **$11.4 million for HNTB Ohio Inc.** to provide the owner's representative and construction advisory services for the North Coast Connector project.

HNTB previously had a **$1.58 million** contract for the work. The additional authorization increases the total contract amount to nearly $13 million. The added money covers professional services identified as Task Orders 1B and 2.0; it is not the construction cost of the North Coast Connector itself.

The board also approved several subconsultants for HNTB, including Somat Engineering, Euthenics, Robert P. Madison International Inc., Charles P. Braman & Co., Compass Consulting Services, R Strategy and others.

**City Hall design contract receives another $240,000**

At its Aug. 12 meeting, the Board of Control authorized an additional **$240,000 for DLR Group Inc.** for design work associated with modernization and improvements at Cleveland City Hall.

DLR Group's initial contract totaled $656,585. The modification increases total compensation to $896,585.

**Cleveland Fire to purchase nearly $78,000 in helmets**

The Board of Control also approved a contract with Atlantic Emergency Solutions Inc. to provide MSA Cairns 1836 Traditional Fire Helmets to the Cleveland Division of Fire.

Based on estimated quantities, the purchase would total **$77,646**. The contract runs for one year and includes two one-year renewal options.

**City moves ahead with East 79th Street property transaction**

The city also moved forward with the transfer of a vacant industrial parcel at 2625 East 79th St.

According to the Aug. 7 City Record, Cleveland agreed to purchase the property from the Ohio Department of Transportation for $40,000 and convey it to the Site Readiness for Good Jobs Fund for the same amount.

**Ward 6 land-bank parcel approved for $200 sale**

The Board of Control authorized the sale of a city land reutilization parcel at 2179 East 83rd St. to Sofia Komrskova for $200.

City records identify the planned use as a yard expansion. The property is in Ward 6.

**Zoning board approves several development requests**

The Cleveland Board of Zoning Appeals reported approving several cases at its Aug. 10 meeting, according to city records.

The approvals included a proposal to convert an existing two-family dwelling at 10325 Joan Ave. into a three-family dwelling.

The board conditionally approved a proposal to add a **30,225-square-foot addition** for business offices and warehouse space at **4195 Bradley Road**. It also conditionally approved a proposal at **14301 Sylvia Ave.** to establish **three dwelling units and a household appliance store**.

A fence proposal at 873 Sheryl Drive was also approved.

None of the listed appeals was denied. The case involving 9903 Clifton Blvd. was postponed until Sept. 14.

**Fairfax rezoning proposal introduced as Ordinance 935-2026**

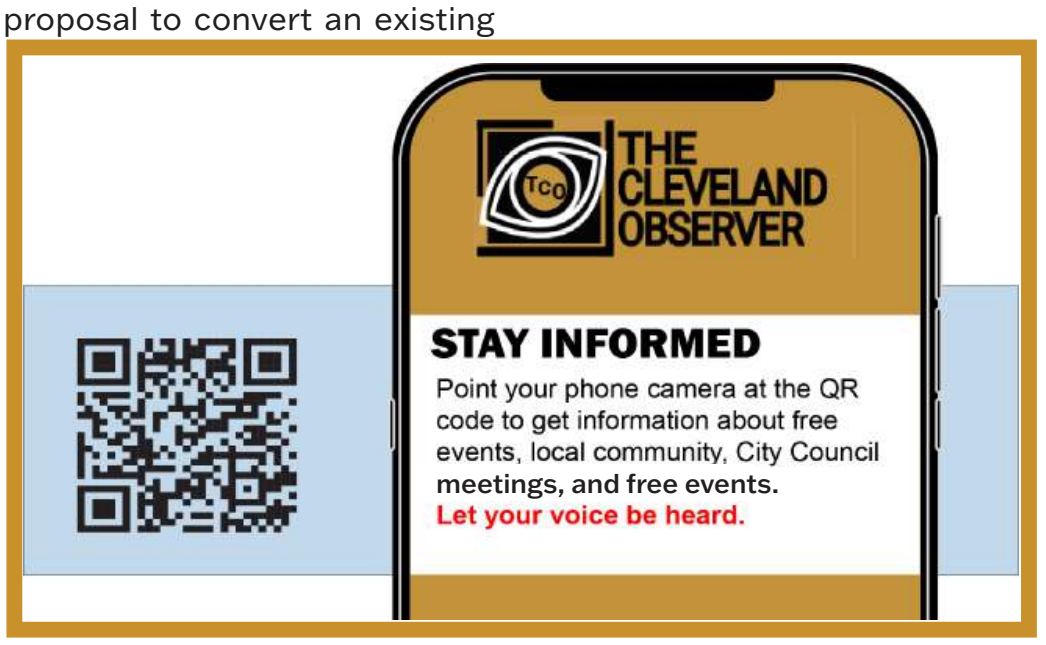
A proposed zoning change in Cleveland's Fairfax neighborhood was reviewed by the City Planning Commission.

**Map Change 2701** covers parcels east of East 89th St. between Beckman and Capitol avenues in Ward 6.

The proposal would change the use, height and area districts for the properties, establish a Site Development Boundary and attach an approved site development plan.

Map Change 2701 is now Ordinance 935-2026. The ordinance was listed for first reading at the Aug. 19 Cleveland City Council meeting.

*The Cleveland Observer based this report on the Aug. 7 and Aug. 14 editions of The City Record and City Council's Aug. 19 legislative record, which are available through the Cleveland City Council City Record archive.*



# Column: Charleston's International African American Museum

S.A. Lewis

SCAN TO LISTEN

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Cleveland Observer.*

Every culture holds fast to its history, and it is incumbent upon each of us to know our own.

Maya Angelou is quoted as having said, "I have great respect for the past. If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going."

The idea is simple: Lessons learned from the past can improve our future. Philosopher George Santayana wrote: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Museums are not always the first choice when planning a vacation, but maybe they should be, and the International African American Museum is a must-see destination.

**Location and significance**

At a recent family reunion in Charleston, South Carolina, we visited the International African American Museum. The museum stands at the historic site of Gadsden's Wharf along the Cooper River, where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans arrived at Gadsden's Wharf aboard slave ships from the late 1760s through 1808.

Charleston was a major hub in the transatlantic slave trade. The museum opened in June 2023 after more than two decades of planning and community effort. The museum was funded through a broad public-private partnership rather than a single primary corporate sponsorship.

The city of Charleston was among the museum's major founding funders. The state of South Carolina and major philanthropic organizations like Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina, The Duke Endowment and TD Bank also provided support.

While it did not open to the fanfare of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., I believe it is equally important in the preservation of the history of the African American people in America.

One such focus is showcasing the heritage that developed among Africans and their descendants in South Carolina's Lowcountry and became known as Gullah Geechee culture.

The Gullah Geechee Gallery explores Gullah Geechee history and culture and contemporary issues facing Gullah Geechee communities. Across the museum's galleries, exhibits also examine how enslaved Africans and free Black people shaped U.S. economic, political and cultural development.

**Atmosphere and exhibits**

I found the visit very emotional. The building has a striking contemporary design. It is elevated off the ground to honor the hallowed ground below. It also includes the African Ancestors Memorial Garden.

The museum combines historic artifacts, rare photography and large-scale video installations to trace local, national and global Black histories.

There are nine galleries that explore topics including the Middle Passage, rice culture, the Jim Crow era and the modern civil rights movement.

There is also the Center for Family History, a genealogy and ancestry research resource that helps visitors trace their family histories and connect with the African diaspora.

The museum specifically invites contributions such as photographs, Bible records, funeral programs and other documents.

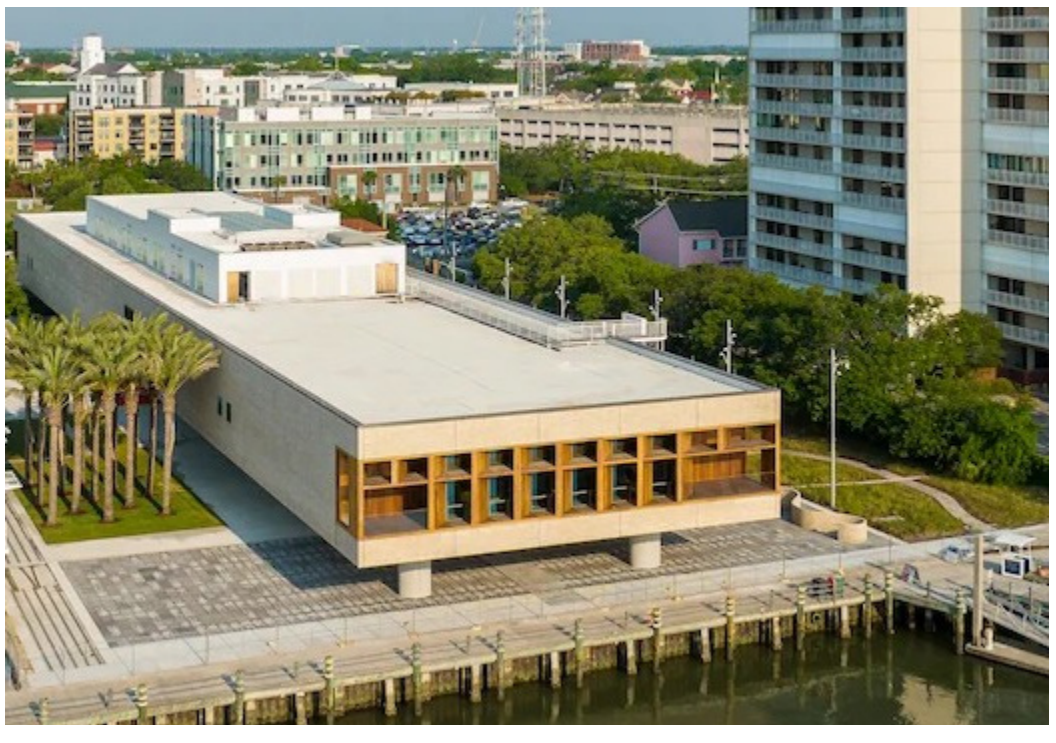
**Afterthoughts**

My wish after having visited the museum is that I could go back with my great-grandmother, who was born into slavery.

I met her when I was 4 years old, and she lived past 100. My maternal grandmother died before I was born, and my late mother was born in South Carolina.

In a recent conversation with my sister, I discovered that my mother spoke the Gullah language.

If only I could go back in time. I have so many questions. Many of those questions are now being answered by our family historians, and we even recently found a missing branch on our family tree.



Courtesy of International African American Museum

Courtesy of International African American Museum

**To Visit:**
International African American Museum
Address: 14 Wharfside St., Charleston, SC 29401
iaamuseum.org

*S.A. Lewis is an educator, certified functional nutrition counselor and licensed minister who founded Christian Quest Ministries in Cleveland.*

# Poem: The American Way

Brittany Ervin

My country 'tis of thee
Statutes of li-abil-ity
I WANNA BE FREE!

The divided states of
america
subscribed to immorality
This "so-called" pledge of
allegiance soundtrack of
greatness

Borrower servant
to the lender
rich agendas
Hands tied
Debt on deck
while Wall Street collects

Student loans
Charged with having the
college experience
turned into a life
sentence

Health care
no care
don't care
Poppin' pills like candy
Side effects may include
insanity

The national diet
Served up with empty
promises
and GMOs
POPULATION CONTROL!

We the American people
made sacrificial lambs of
combat
War games
the elite's pocket change

Deception of ownership
Credit line for a lifetime
Gentrification on the front
line
Leasing the dream
No such thing as white
picket fences

When do I collect my
stolen 40 acres?
Hidden in plain sight
Nothing social or secure

All the while
hypnotized by glowing
screens
we've forgotten what living
life really means

Subjecting society to
distraction
A subliminal forfeit to
revolutionary action

All
I can do
is sigh

U—S—A
The American Way

*Brittany "Miss Brit" Ervin is an author, speaker and a freelance journalist.*