

Cuyahoga Valley Initiative Idea Package Summary Valley Art & Design

A new design paradigm forged from the Valley's legacy of inventiveness, inherent ability to inspire artistic expression and an immense need for regeneration.

The Valley is a place of art and design, Responding to the demands of the times, the Valley has long been the subject of inspiration for artists and fertile ground for industrial inventiveness. This idea package continues this legacy with the development of a design approach uniquely adapted to respond to the specific conditions of the current Valley. The world is in need of a model for integration of industrial vitality, ecological and social health. By honoring the source of creative inspiration inherent in our Valley, we find the seeds for a new approach and vocabulary for place making, new urbanism, ecological design and green building objectives.



Introduction

Steve Litt, a reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer describes in his article "The Forgotten Valley" the many resources of industrial heritage and nature and how they can serve as the baseline for future land development efforts. To exemplify this, the article outlines how the developments of Thornburg Station and Ohio & Erie Canalway Metropark create a "positive future" to realize in connecting development solutions with the resources around them. He states *"They will celebrate the life-enhancing magic of water, setting examples that all riverfront construction in the county should follow. Everyone in the region has a stake in their success."*

The article concluded describing the efforts of extending the Towpath Trail into Cleveland and south for the entire length of the Ohio & Erie Canal Corridor. He describes how these efforts are transforming the rediscovery of the historic and natural landscapes within the corridor, however its grasp has not been taken in the northern section of the Valley. He outlines this gap: *"This (renaissance) too could happen in the heavily industrialized northern section of the Cuyahoga Valley. But it will only happen if communities including the City of Cleveland finish the trail and realize the potential it has to transform much of the surrounding landscape for the better. If all we get out of the heritage corridor is a bike trail, we will have failed."*

For decades, artists have revealed the power of the Valley's landscape through photography, painting, sculpture, narrative and poetry. Industrial designers have applied their craft to the design of amazing and often monumental mechanisms to support manufacturing processes and transportation, awesome testimony to the capability of human intention. Today the rebirth of the valley rests in its ability to resurrect the natural systems as well as economic development. We believe that the marriage of these two needs offers an opportunity to evolve our human craft of design and art. The call is for an aesthetic that captures the unique heritage of the valley, a disciplines collaboration to realize integrated and wholistic results and a process crafted to respond

in a systemic and sustainable way.

The artistic and design vitality of the Cuyahoga Valley landscape will play a pivotal role in realizing the valley's full potential as an integrated resource. The future design of the Valley will greatly impact how the community as well as the world sees this region as a place to live, visit and conduct business.

This Idea Package will begin to articulate a vision for a valley aesthetic and design ethic by defining the inherent qualities and opportunities for design application and incorporation of artistic expression. The package will identify next steps for advancing the vision and for providing tools for communities to advance their land use and design decisions to create distinct places, connect with the historical and industrial resources of the Heritage Corridor, and reflect the natural processes and beauty of the river valley.

Current Conditions

Geography

The geography of a wide valley and a narrow river channel has constituted a great divide between the east and west sides of our city. As a result, the valley floor is often overlooked in the public's perception of the city. The valley has been left devoid of places for people to live, work and play concurrently along the river. And as was explored in Litt's article, the geography of the Valley is rarely considered in the design process. These distinct features of the valley landscape pose an opportunity to focus and structure the urban design for future development, preservation, restoration and connection to the corridor as a regional system. These resources may include promitories, terraces, floodplain, steep slopes, peninsulas, oxbows and the river's winding pattern itself. The crooked river and many bridge crossings create a tangle of places that are often confusing and disorienting to the user. This has long been part of the charm of the valley and large part of its mystic. Creating and restoring places that reflect these opportunities begins a new design response to the natural geographic form that will enable the integration of functioning natural systems.

Neighborhoods

The valley is made up of many distinct neighborhoods, Tremont, Ohio City, The Flats, Old Brooklyn, Cuyahoga Heights, Slavic Village, Brecksville, Valley View, Independence and others. Each had its own political boundaries and some within the city of Cleveland are overlapping. Healthy neighborhoods means many things including, multiple uses, safe surroundings, accessibility, good food produce availability, valuable schools, and/or community centers such as parks or gathering areas. These values are all available to varying degrees within the Cuyahoga Valley neighborhoods, but lack strength gained from cohesion, connection and a common vision.



In the Valley

The Valley itself is largely industrial with few neighborhoods within the valley floor. One reason for this is the presence of the floodplain and the utilization over the years for “other” transient uses, such as bulk storage and landfills. The river has served as a commodity to move goods and is just now beginning to be seen as a resource for the entire community. The valley has been largely overlooked in terms of design standards and in some sections not clearly identified with specific Community Development districts.

Flats Area

The mouth of the river to Lake Erie is very flat and compact area that has evolved as an entertainment district over the past 20 years. Sharing the area with industrial uses, the entertainment district is a legacy from its historic settlement as a river honky tonk. The area has undergone a series of cycles of revitalization and decline and has evolved from a series of independent small operations to larger scale and often chain type of venues. A current revitalization discussion is considering ways to broaden the seasonal use with the expansion of family opportunities. Housing is beginning to be established within the Flats with the majority on the west bank and edge of the Warehouse District on the east side. Public realm improvements are difficult given the tight road network, operational concerns of restaurants and bars and existing truck traffic. Progress has been made with the nautical boardwalk, RTA waterfront line and preliminary plans for a pedestrian network and public park improvements.

There are distinct buildings and layouts that have been derived by the districts geography, bridges, road network, historic styles and industrial uses. The district has a very distinct character that is much beloved although perhaps not understood by the community. As the District plans for the future, these distinctive features offer significant opportunities to build on the unique inherent qualities of the district and to create a world class visitor destination, as the gateway for the region from the Lake Erie and the Great Lakes.

The Peninsulas

As the river winds its way through the valley, it divides numerous peninsulas that play a distinct role in the valley and the ecology of the river. These peninsulas include, Irishtown Bend, Columbus Road Peninsula, Main Ave. Peninsula, Scranton Peninsula, Duck Island and West 3rd Street Peninsula. These peninsulas currently serve as distinct areas with individual use patterns reflective of previous industries and heritage. Again, these isolated areas do not serve a 24 hour community and are largely single use. The river access and views to the lake and river are exceptional and pose an opportunity to utilize the natural topography with the river access as the key design elements. Many private developers have built upper end housing as well as The Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority is working on developing new housing on the rim of the Peninsulas that would complement the grand views to the river and lake. These ideas to create places that provide views to the people that live and work in the Valley as well as close proximity to the employment centers should be a baseline element in the new design approach for the Valley.

Significant development opportunities remain to build on the unique natural, historical and cultural context of the area. Forest City Enterprises, a nationally renowned developer who is working on large-scale communities in Denver and Santa Fe, is a large property owner on the Scranton Peninsula. This poses an opportunity to bring the efforts that are being conducted across the country to a locally based place and to truly serve as a place to create a new design approach for the valley's floor.

The Wide Valley

After the river leaves the peninsulas, the valley widens out to a distinct east to west divide with the industrial zone of the steel industry as the predominate landscape feature for over one hundred years. The river is largely indistinguishable and is rarely visible even on high points in this area. Many small tributaries enter the Cuyahoga River in culverts that diminish their connection to the adjacent communities. The ISG steel mill is the largest distinctive design feature within this area and serves as an architectural element with the landscape. Clearly the river is non-distinct due to

the enormous scale of the Steel Mill. The land area again provides opportunities for introducing new developments and design approaches. As the consolidation of bulk storage facilities is realized and the available land not being utilized in the new ISG production plan, design features could be introduced to enhance the river's presence for this area, provide more visual connections to the river and exemplify the industrial heritage that the valley was built upon.

The Wider Valley

The river valley continues to expand as one travels south into Valley View and Independence. The uses continue to be of an industrial nature but have less distinctiveness than the northern valley, since the structures were built in the 1960's and 70's. The river's edge is largely ignored in the current design approach with low end, and conventional industrial park layouts and commercial centers placed on the land with little regard to the ecology and topography the valley was shaped upon. The current design approach is to maximize parking lot cover, utilize detention basins as stormwater management and use the existing road network as the defining feature to layout development. The opportunity to utilize the river's resources as an amenity in design, to introduce innovative places for flood management could expand this area as a typical suburban town to a nationally recognized community embracing it's river as the driver for aesthetic quality and functional basis. As the valley enters into the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, there is a dramatic shift in character to a natural, pastoral setting. The distinct features of a river and valley are deliberate and reflective of the historical nature as a place to see the river and observe the valley in an interactive manner.

On the Rim

As opposed to the 20,000 inhabitants on the valley floor, the rim is home to nearly 200,000 persons. This poses a poignant opportunity to connect this existing concentration of people and build upon their presence in a more active community base on the valley floor. Neighborhoods such as Ohio City, Tremont, Old Brooklyn and Slavic Village have had a resurgence of revitalization the past ten years as activity centers for living, working and community based organizations. As they continue to thrive, however, the lack of connection to the valley is void and limits this network of communities as a larger base of resources for residents and businesses.



Additionally, there are historic town centers that dot the valley rim in places such as Brecksville and Independence that are immediately adjacent to the valley, these are somewhat disconnected to the valley, specifically for recreation purposes. This condition limits their potential as valley resources for urban town centers.

The Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor underwent a planning initiative in 2000 to develop a Corridor Management Plan. The Vision provided themes for various regions of the Corridor to enhance the visual, cultural and historical assets of the Valley. The themes basically look at the Valley in sections and promote the idea of each section reflecting a distinct period in the evolution of the corridor. The Cleveland area is considered to be the "legacy of the canal". These themes can set the baseline in which to frame the local distinctiveness goals for future development.

Local Distinctiveness

As described above, the local distinctiveness is present from historic buildings, existing industries and revitalized neighborhoods. However the distinctiveness of the ecology of the river and its valley walls are not visible. Connecting the built distinctiveness that exists or has the potential to exist to the natural ecology of the river poses an opportunity to develop a unique community network.

Historic Distinctiveness

The historic buildings, districts and structures play a role in developing a design approach and code process that can enhance these places as distinct environments for conducting daily life activities with a restored recognition of our heritage. The Valley has an array of structures that bring these features into the strengthening of existing communities as well as a vehicle to direct design in future endeavors.

Ethnic/Cultural Distinctiveness

The Cuyahoga Valley is laden with distinct ethnic communities that include Slavic, Hispanic, African American, German and Italian to name a few. These diverse ethnic neighborhoods were developed as the first industrialization of the Valley occurred and served as the working class of the valley in the past. Today, these communities continue to thrive with cultural resources and knowledge of generations throughout the world. Utilizing this diversity as an asset for the Valley's rebirth should be realized in the design approach. One example is the utilization these diverse resources in food production. Providing niche agricultural markets that can serve the rich ethnic cuisine varieties surrounding the valley can engage the local communities and connect with their individual cultural heritage.

Aesthetics

The aesthetics of the valley communities are largely derived by the planning and zoning codes that exist by the individual communities. Some neighborhoods have design review committees to maintain the historic character of places. However, other communities have established setbacks, row and basic design requirements for facades, signage, parking, lighting and landscaping that minimize their effectiveness as distinct places nor the functionality of the ecosystem.

One particular aspect of this is the function of stormwater management as related to the valley. The allowance of over sized parking lots, non-vegetated detention basins and no setback for riparian or steep slope areas limit the functions that the river currently can enlist naturally to manage water quantity and improve quality in a ecologically based manner.

These connections to the code and how the valley functions and how it relates to the appearance of a place is reflective in many aspects of design, from road layouts, building layouts and landscaping. Determining this correlation will provide an added linkage to the valley as a ecological zone at which can function in harmony with the demands of the community.

Building Design

The valley currently does not have a coordinated approach to utilizing local or environmentally responsible materials and natural resources such as wind and solar to develop a green building template for new construction as well as restoration projects. The Environmental Center in Ohio City was the first green building in the state that restored a historic structure utilizing the US Green Building Council's LEED certification program. The valley's network of resources for energy, water, and materials production establish the foundation as a hotbed for green building opportunities.

Currently, the standard building code that most communities utilize are out of date and are not conducive to green building technologies or quality urban design. Adoption of a more up to date building code such as a form based code could allow green building practices to be amended into a communities review program. The City of Cleveland, Lakewood and shaker Heights is currently exploring a green building amendment and can serve as a pilot for the other valley communities.

The US Green Building Council's LEED certification program is emerging as one of the largest building trends in the nation. It's simple and programmatic approach to ranking viable green building projects has created a mainstream approach to applying whole system principles to sites. However, due to its simplicity, the LEED program lacks the local distinctiveness and regional connection that is desired for a watershed approach to planning and ecological restoration.

Urban Design/Lifestyle Centers

Urban Design has been around for centuries, but was abandoned in the post war years for suburban growth and division of work and home zoning practices. As communities across the nation have begun to realize the loss of benefits to single use land use layouts, the resurgence of multi-use communities reflective of the Valley's neighborhoods and historic districts has occurred. However, these lifestyle centers have been developed largely on greenfields with little contribution to the existing urban cores within metropolitan cities. Additionally, the urban design and smart growth advocates largely ignore the ecological baselines in which to develop these centers and limit the restoration potentials for a truly collaborative design approach for the built and natural environments.

Components

The Design Idea Package will be derived from four components to frame a strategy; 1) Strengthen Neighborhoods, 2) Local Distinctiveness, 3) Aesthetics & Function, and 4) Green Building. These components will create a basis for evaluating what is needed to guide future growth and restoration measures that are in harmony with the Valley's geography and its past.

IV. Strengthen Neighborhoods (shared with Community Capacity Idea Package)

- A. Through Restoration
 - Building Re-use
 - Maintenance of Infrastructure
- B. Through Design
 - Traditional Neighborhood Design
 - Transit Oriented Design
 - Green Building
 - Greenspace and Trail Plan
 - Community Gardening / Urban Agriculture

VII. Local Distinctiveness (shared with Business Innovation and Destination Cleveland Idea Package)

A. V. Healthy, Distinctive Eco-System

- Native Species
- Bio-diversity
- Wildlife Corridors
- Riparian Areas
- B. Cleveland Vernacular
 - Aesthetic approach
 - Dense, mixed-use
 - Innovative architecture- Marriage of industrial design, ecological design, and Cleveland vernacular
 - Diversity (culture, income)
 - 24 Hour city
 - Authentic

C. II. Clean River and Tributaries (shared with Healthy Valley, Working River, and Business Innovation Idea Packages)

- A. Reduce / Eliminate Emissions
- B. Watershed Rehabilitation
- C. Public access to river, tributaries and lake

XII. Aesthetics and Function

XII. Green Building

Opportunities

Develop a **District Plan** for viable codes and design practices reflective of the local distinctiveness and ecology of the river valley within the districts. (i.e. Peninsula Plan) (areas for ecological restoration, areas for urban design centers, areas for connectivity, energy, landscaping, etc) This may include an ecology plan, development plan and a restorative infrastructure plan)

Development of a **Regional Green Building Certification** program.

Develop a Ecological/Industrial design Institute. This would provide a laboratory in which to explore the dynamics of ecological and industrial design in the Valley as the base setting to weave these two design disciplines into a new design approach.

Model a new design approach focused on collaboration and integration in a the form of a **Valley Design Review Board**. This would serve as a technical advisory board for communities to advance design decisions for communities to ensure the vision is realized. This collaborative would involve the interests of all issues, ecological, water quality, business activity, recreation, etc. to make the proper design decisions needed in the planning, design and construction drawing processes.

Current Efforts

Flats Oxbow Master Plan
Lakefront Plan
Brooklyn Heights Master Plan
Garfield Heights Boyas Development Plans
Convention Center Siting Process
Lower Big Creek Plan
Construction and Debris Reuse Pilot Project

Technical Experts/Partners/Stakeholders

Sadhu Johnston Cleveland Green Building Coalition
Ruth Durack – Urban Design Collaborative
David Beach – Eco-City Cleveland
Bill Doty, Jim Larue, Paul Volpe
Lisa Hong/Joe Pustai – eQuest
Dennis Mersky – EDG
Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority

Maps

Current Zoning Map
Current Density Map
Neighborhood Communities Map

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