Chapter 2.0
REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

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Parks and open spaces play an important role in the quality of life for city neighborhoods in Northeast Ohio. Numerous studies have found that a neighborhood presence of parks and open space increases the value of surrounding properties. Parks and natural greenspace not only make our neighborhoods more attractive, but through conservation, they also provide opportunities for education and recreation.

There is a growing interest in the conservation of urban land. This is leading to increased attention to the economic valuation and viability of natural areas in urban environments. At the same time, land development continues to increase, resulting in a loss of important ecological areas. Destruction of riparian lands, wetlands and diverse plant communities continues at an alarming rate.

Population and housing trends in Cuyahoga County from 1970 through 2009

Cuyahoga County's population has declined by a substantial 24.6 percent since 1970. Population loss is due to the growth of surrounding counties as well as declining population trends for the entire Cleveland metropolitan statistical area over the past twenty years. In 2000, the United States Census Bureau listed Cleveland's population at 478,403. Cuyahoga County has also started to see a decline in population. The pattern of population growth shows much of the city and inner suburbs declining in population with the growth occurring at the periphery of Cuyahoga County and in surrounding counties.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Cleveland's growth was fueled by immigrants who flocked to the city seeking jobs generated by the industrial revolution. While the influx of immigrants fueled the unprecedented growth in wealth and commerce in greater Cleveland and across the country, this stream of humanity ceased during the depression and the Second World War. It was not until later in the twentieth century that new groups of immigrants have sought opportunity within the Cleveland Region. The largest of which that have settled in the City of Cleveland are Hispanic and Asian. Also, unlike the eastern and southern European immigration at the turn of the last century, many modern immigrants have the means to move directly to suburban communities.

Over the years, an increasing percentage of the city's population has been non-white. In 1990, just over half of Cleveland's residents were non-whites. During the 1990s that number grew to 61.2 percent, with the proportion of African-Americans and Hispanics increasing the most. In 2000, over 50 percent of the City's population was African-American. The segregation of African Americans from whites and of African-Americans from Hispanics exceeds the averages for many large cities. Cleveland's African-American population is concentrated on the east side of the city and in the near eastern suburbs. Hispanics are concentrated in the city's west side neighborhoods. The city's African-American population increased by 10,837 persons, from 235,405 in 1990 to 246,242 in 2000. This increase occurred primarily because births exceeded deaths by more than 26,000. There was a net out-migration of 15,329 African Americans during the decade, which partially offset the increase in population.

Housing values in Cleveland Metroparks' East Planning Zone ranked the highest; the average property value in 2009 is $340,797 (see Table 1: Property Values). The Central, West, Southeast, and Southwest Planning Zones housing values are comparable with a range of $136,632 to $194,573 (see Figure 1: Property Value Map).

The overall trend for housing within the Cleveland Metroparks region is one of continued spreading of the population.

As the region's population remains static, new housing construction at the periphery of the housing market region creates pressure on existing housing stock. The result has been that the older housing stock of the central city and inner-ring suburbs has become surplus to the region's housing needs. This effect is especially evident in neighborhoods originally constructed as industrial worker housing. As these neighborhoods decline in population, the remaining surplus in housing will remain vacant and subsequently abandoned, thus negatively impacting housing values in the Central Planning Region and specific areas within the Eastern Region which tends to have older pre World War Two developments.

Another manifestation of the decrease in competitiveness of older urban neighborhoods has been the number of foreclosures on obsolete homes. While 1990 data on sheriff sales within Cuyahoga County shows that this problem has been affecting Cleveland neighborhoods for the past twenty years, an increase in foreclosures has spread from the inner city out to the suburbs. The greatest affect occurred in Cleveland Metroparks' Southeast and West Planning Zones (see Figure 2: Foreclosure Map). The Southeast Zone reached a high of 17.24 percent (29,163 housing units), whereas, the West Zone trailed at 12.60 percent (3,758 housing units) in foreclosures (see Table 2: Foreclosures). According to RealtyTrac, in 2008, Cleveland ranked 24th in the nation with foreclosures. Foreclosures in the county remain elevated, with officials noting that foreclosure rates actually began to increase during 2003 and 2004, ahead of the nationwide trend, triggered by predatory lending practices throughout the city and inner ring suburbs. It is expected that continued weakness in the local housing market with a significant excess supply of housing will continue.

Population, housing and demographic information for areas surrounding existing Cleveland Metropark reservations compare changes over time

The population, housing, and demographic data were analyzed relative to the proximity to Cleveland Metropoarks reservations. The results of the analysis varied in strength, with certain data variables that contrasted significantly relative to distance, while others appeared less affected by the relative proximity to the Cleveland Metroparks. The most compelling data was that of average home value, which showed a significant correlation between the distance of a property from Metroparks land and the value of that property (see Figure 3: Home Value Relative to Distance). Looking at data at the block group level, those properties within two hundred feet of the Metroparks' boundaries had an average home value of about $277,000. At the next buffer layer, between two hundred and four hundred feet, the average home value was about $276,000. At the third buffer distance of six hundred feet the decrease in average home value becomes more significant. As the distance from the Metroparks continues to increase, the value of the property steadily decreases to an average of about $263,000 at a distance of between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred feet. This result indicates that homebuyers may be willing to pay more to live within close proximity of Metroparks (see Tables 3 & 4: Home Value Relative to Distance).

The data also suggests that the income of residents is greater the closer they live to the Metroparks. In analyzing three categories of income, median household income, median family income, and median discretionary income, all three categories of income decrease as distance from the Metroparks increases. In looking at these results in graphical form (see Figure 4: Income Relative to Distance), the lines gradually drop over time. However, a significant drop occurs beyond the four hundred foot buffer mark, after which the decrease in income remains relatively steady. These results indicate a desire to live near the Me-

troparks, and after a certain distance the benefit is essentially lost; represented by the significant drop in income categories after the four hundred foot buffer zone. This same pattern exists for average home value, where a significant drop in home values occurred at the same buffer distance.

While distance appears to positively impact home values and income levels, the relationship between distance and education appears less significant. Figure 5 shows slight variations in education levels relative to distance, but there is not a significant change as seen for home value and income.

Other demographic data relative to distance from the Metroparks was gathered and is displayed in Table 5 (also see Figures 6 and 7).