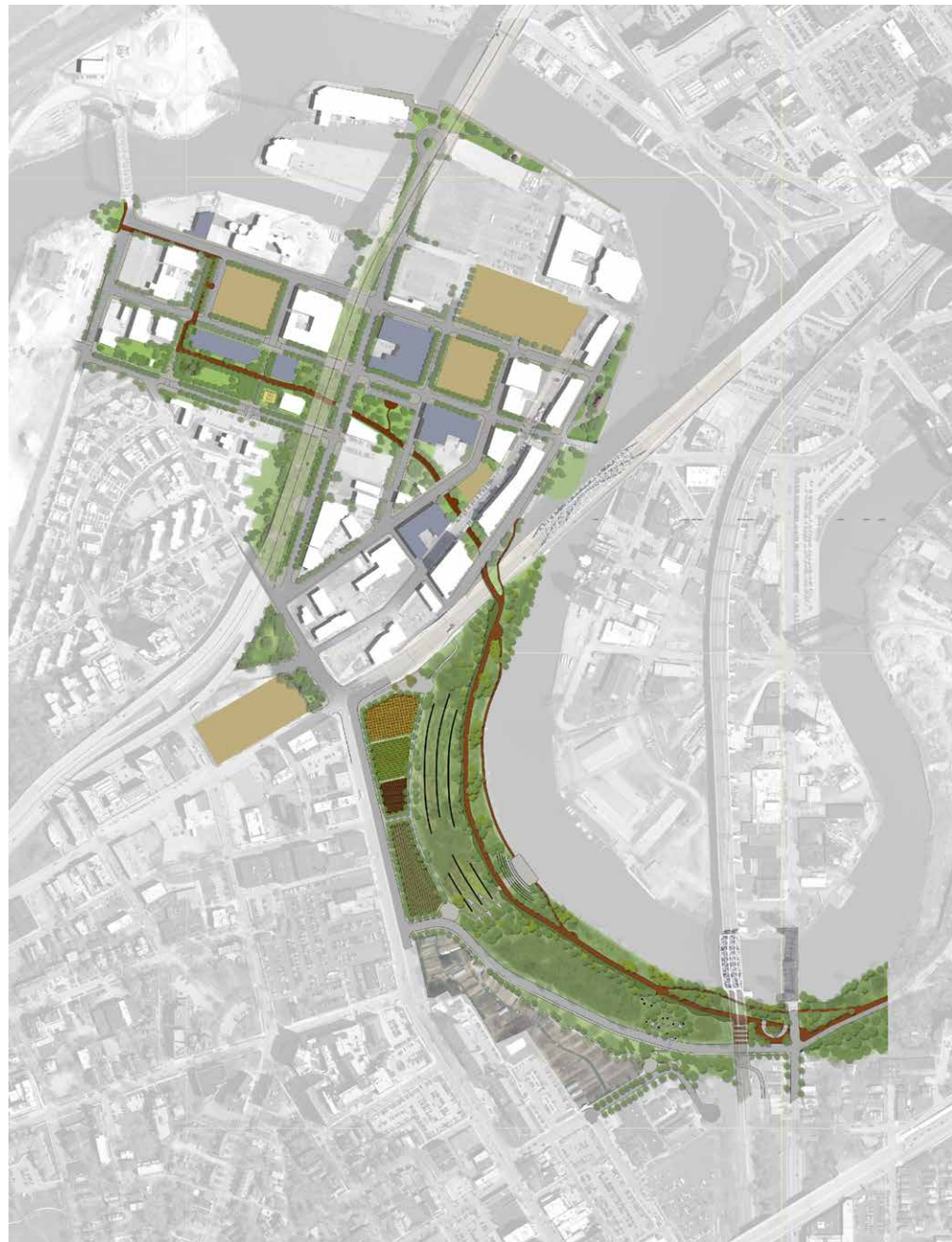


# Executive Summary



IRISHTOWN GREENWAY CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

## IRISHTOWN GREENWAY – A Strategic Plan for the Flats West Bank

The 86 acre West Bank of the Flats in Cleveland has had a storied past from the founding of the City in 1796. The Flats have grown as a center of industry and river activity, creating the context surrounding Northeast Ohio's major waterway – the Cuyahoga River. Through the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Flats were the medium of Cleveland's industrial growth – home to steel mills and forges, rail lines, and a host of supporting industries. Immigrants eventually called this place home, many of whom were of Irish descent. Thus, the large swath of green east of Ohio City along the Cuyahoga is known as Irishtown Bend due to the early Irish settlements in the area. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Flats emerged as an entertainment district that unfortunately was short lived due to crime and a waning population. Now, as the surrounding neighborhoods revive themselves, the West Bank is poised to do the same.

To the southwest, the Flats West Bank and Irishtown Bend (known here on as the Study Area) are bordered by the Ohio City neighborhood. To the east across the river is Downtown. North beyond the rail lines lies Whiskey Island and Lake Erie. It is in these three directions that the connections must be made in order to initiate the regrowth of the Study Area. With its proximity to the lake, potential connections to major transportation routes and the pre-eminent Lake Link Trail, an area that remains stuck in a slump has the potential to become the next attractive neighborhood in Cleveland. The Lake Link Trail as an idea has perhaps been around long enough for it to be described as having a history. As part of a larger trail network that includes the recognizable Towpath Trail and traverses terrain that includes the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, it also has an ability to attract attention from trail enthusiasts, public officials, concerned residents, and perhaps even those who may have never walked a Northeast Ohio trail before. What is not unique about trails in Northeast Ohio, and by their nature trails across the country is that they can always be said to exist in some context. Trails can be a part of national parks, a part of nature as a separate place, and a part of an urban fabric. While trails can be justified by their virtue alone, it is in their context that our clients, The Trust for Public Land, and we as planners see the exciting potential of the Lake Link Trail. It is the context of Cleveland's historic industrial past and promising renaissance. It is the context of one of the region's largest asset: Lake Erie. It is in the context of inequitable access to such assets and a vision of a more connected, alternative transportation network. It is in this context that we were tasked with developing a plan not just for the Lake Link Trail, but also for the neighborhood it exists in and the context it can create.

With this in mind, we began the various tasks of literature review, primary research, due diligence, interviews, surveys, making intuitive judgments and careful hypotheses. This plan concerns not just the Lake Link Trail, but also the area that we have dubbed the Irishtown Greenway. What follows is a plan that reviews existing plans, relevant academic literature and existing data from socioeconomic to physical attributes to create a plan to market, develop, and enhance an area that has potential for a greater use than what currently exists. We recommend programs that take advantage of the trail and the access it provides to the lake and Cleveland's neighborhoods. We also recommend trail design and greenway planning that best utilizes the space and existing assets while creating new ones that residents and visitors can enjoy. Finally, we propose a development plan that conforms to market trends while capitalizing on the trail as an amenity and community asset.

The impetus for this plan comes from the development of the Lake Link Trail – a vital connector that will allow Towpath users and Cleveland residents to connect with Lake Erie at Wendy Park. The following summary relates the highlights of a plan developed by the K2 Collaboration. The plan was developed with the following mission and objectives in mind:

### EMBRACE

*the Historic Character of the Flats  
the Future Potential of the Area  
the Flat's Existing and New Stakeholders*

### RESTORE

*and Unite a Diverse Local Community  
the Vitality of the Neighborhood  
use to the Old Corridors*

### ENHANCE

*and Promote a Healthy Ecology and Healthy Lifestyles  
and Educate on the Historic Significance of the Flats  
and Develop a Distinct Experience*





CROSS SECTION OF TYPICAL LAKE LINK TRAIL AND AMENITIES



PROPOSED LAKE LINK TRAIL AND REDEVELOPED ARTISTS STUDIOS

## Plan Summary and Recommendations

### Greenway Improvements

The Greenway improvements focused on connections and access to the proposed Lake Link Trail route. This trail is the first connecting Cleveland to the lakefront. So every effort was made to give the local neighborhood residents and greater Cleveland community easy and direct access to the trail and ultimately the lakefront. To achieve these goals the team proposed better pedestrian links and bike trails, along with increased RTA access and the addition of a proposed water taxi service. Expanding connections was only part of the Greenway teams overall goals. Enhancing, the existing open-space system, natural environment, as well as improved riverfront access along with green infrastructure methods were also proposed to increase the areas resiliency and promote long term sustainable growth. Finally the greenway team wanted to embrace the history of the area, connecting past uses with the current uses highlighting the transformation the Flats area has undergone in the last two centuries. The greenway design also emphasizes diversity through its acknowledgment of the many different types of users who will frequent the trail. From diversity in modes of transportation, to income backgrounds and physical ability, we wanted everyone to feel safe as if the Lake Link Trail belongs to and can be used at all times by the entire Cleveland community.



VIEW OF LAKE LINK TRAIL AND IMPROVEMENTS

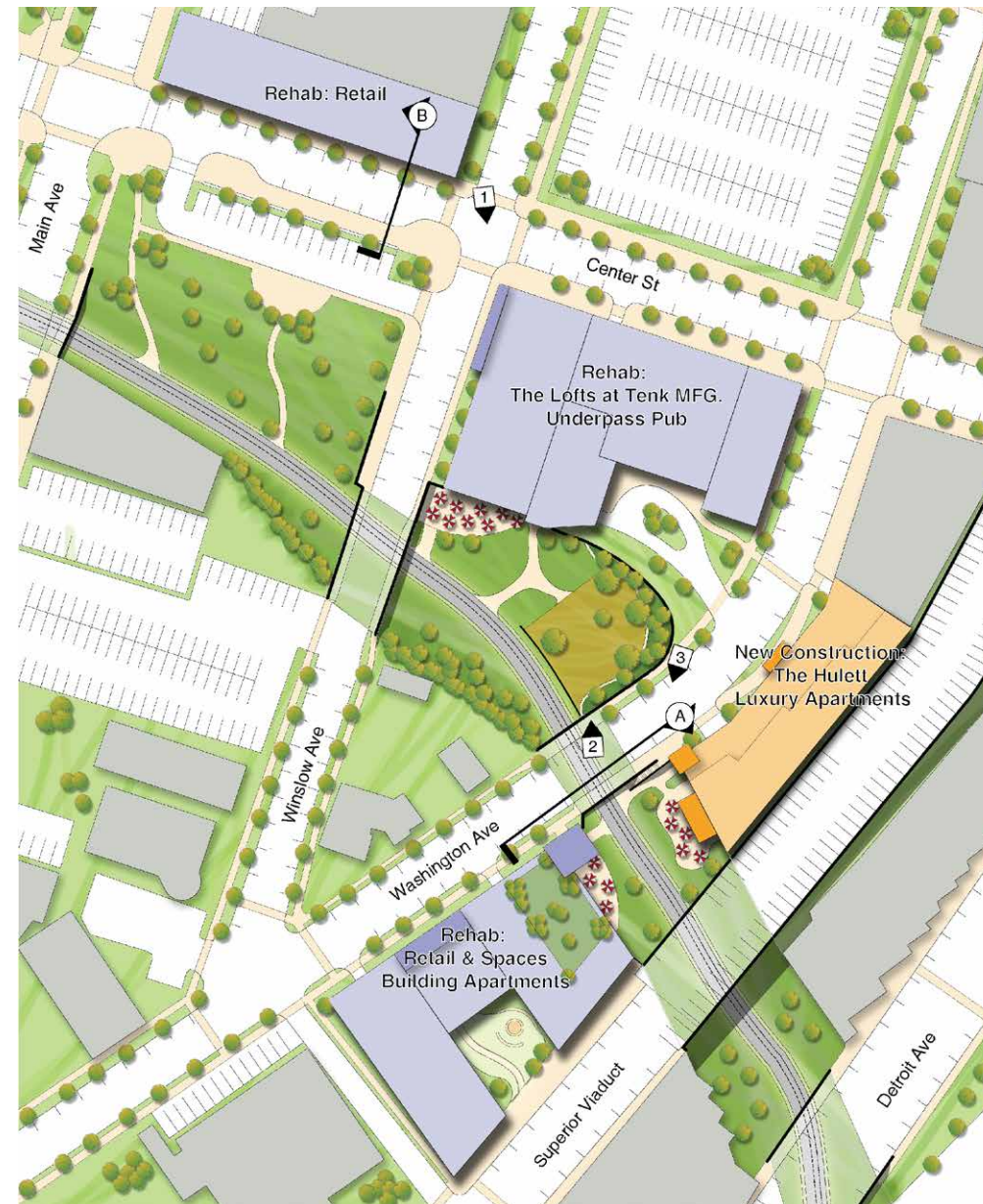




PROPOSED LOGO FOR LAKE LINK TRAIL



MARKETING FLYER FOR CONCERTS AT LANDSLIDE AMPHITHEATER



SITE PLAN OF REDEVELOPMENT SITES ALONG LAKE LINK TRAIL

### Development Proposals

The K2 Collaboration was tasked with conducting a highest and best use analysis of the physical space within the study area with the goal of creating a vision for redevelopment in the flats along the Lake Link Trail route. In the 86 acres of the study area, 15 are directly adjacent to the trail right-of-way. The development team analyzed the market conditions of the area and Cleveland as a whole, and found potential demand for housing units in the study area adjacent to Downtown and Ohio City. Five sites were selected with immediate and specific recommendations, while seven were reserved for future potential if demand in the area were to take off. The immediate proposals recommend a total of 223 residential units ranging in size from affordable studios to luxury multi-bedroom units. Recommendations also include the adaptive reuse of several industrial buildings that engage trail users as they connect to the lake. Future phase 2 envisions the redevelopment of the many parking lots that constitute a majority of the land use in the Flats West Bank into uses that complement the growing neighborhood – apartments, retail, and recreational amenities that leverage the trail.

### Marketing Recommendations

The goal of the marketing team was to create a dynamic that melds inclusivity, equal involvement, and benefit across all walks of life, including all social and economic barriers. The team’s plan deliberately highlights access, involvement, and engagement in its forefront. Phase 1 of the marketing plan calls for rallying stakeholders to collaborate on the future programming plans in the Irishtown greenway, including how to market the area to developers. Phase 2 focuses on restoring an identity to the area. This includes a logo and creating a social media presence. Phase 3 calls for enhancing the development of the area by tying in existing businesses and connecting to the surrounding areas, particularly Downtown and Ohio City. Furthermore, the goal is to program for the area that takes advantage of the greenway and development proposals. Programs include bike rides, concerts, fairs, and other events that draw in residents and visitors to the Irishtown Greenway.



## Data Gathering and Principal Findings

### Historical Background

The Flats of Cleveland, both East and West Bank, have been settled and developing since the beginning of Cleveland's history. Cleveland changed its name by 1831 to Cleveland, and by now was seeing growth that was fueled by the ability to run a vast amount of trade through the Flats. The Cuyahoga River was a barrier to goods coming to the city from the West, and so Cleveland City Council erected a "floating" bridge at Center Street. Because of this, goods from the west were funneled through Ohio City, which began to rival Cleveland for prominence. This prompted the building of the first permanent bridge at Columbus Street in 1836. The Flats continued to develop, despite being marshy, humid and mosquito-infested in the summer and bitterly cold and exposed to the winds off Lake Erie in the winter. Eventually the Flats would become synonymous with the Steel Industry, and as that industry waxed and waned, so did the fortunes of the flats.

By the 1970's, with the decline of steel and the loss of economic revenue from the Flats, attempts were made to revive the area as an entertainment district. Centered mostly on bars that appealed to a young crowd and with an "anything goes" mentality, the Flats saw resurgence in the time from the late 70's to the 90's. Several drownings in 2000, plus a series of police raids of establishment on the East Bank coupled with renewed security concerns for the entire area eventually brought the demise of the "bar scene" in the Flats. There remain on the West Bank a few establishments, particularly Christy's Cabaret, The Powerhouse complex, the Nautica Entertainment Complex and Shooters, along with some heavy industrial and light industry, also some residential housing. But, the Flats as an economic, social and cultural engine that drove the city of Cleveland to prominence no longer exists.

### Academic Review & Existing Plans

The main objectives of the academic review & existing plan team included collecting, collating and reviewing a wide variety of reference sources and relevant planning documents and assembling them to be used as a reference material throughout the development of the project. The data gathered in this effort reflect important considerations when conducting a rail to trail revitalization. The literature provided information on types of users of trails, particularly that they tend to be older and educated. Public housing did not appear to have a significant impact on property values, and trails are neutral to positive. We also found research that lent insight to trail users feeling of safety and security, and what users tend to prefer aesthetically.

### Existing Land Regulatory Conditions

An analysis of the existing regulatory conditions found that there are 12 different land use types: Retail, Vacant Land, Commercial Parking, Light Industry, Retail, Single Family, Multi-Family, Office, Institutional, Recreation/Open Space, Heavy Industry, and Commercial Services. The area is divided into 6 different zoning codes, from multi-family to general industry.

### Socioeconomic/Demographic Information

There are 3,291 people in the study area as of 2012. Median household income is approximately \$13,000 a year. Crime statistics reflect about 20 incidents in the study area in the past 90 days. Interestingly, about 30% of the population does not have a vehicle; however driving is the dominant commuting style. Only 6% of the population uses public transportation and 2% walk to work. This suggests poor vehicular availability to the poorer population and a lack of adequate access to suitable public transit in the area.

### Existing Physical Infrastructure

The Lake Link Trail Corridor begins at Scranton Road, where it merges with the recently built Towpath Trail. Using a bridge the pathway will cross Scranton Road and continue along the base of Scranton Peninsula. The trail then passes through the EPIC Steel property, running alongside Carter Road until it reaches the intersection of Columbus Road, just south of the Columbus Peninsula. From Columbus Road the Lake Link Trail continues along the vacated Riverbed street at the base of Irishtown bend, the least urban section of the trail, with large amounts of overgrown and invasive species covering the steep and unstable slope that leads up to west 25th Street. The deterioration of Franklin Road running up the Irishtown Bend hillside, demonstrates how unstable the slope in this area is. The slope continues to slide into the Cuyahoga making this area in need of some major bulkhead repairs and slope stabilization measures. The next section along the proposed Lake Link Trail Corridor is the most urban section near Center Street. This section starts at an elevation of 15 to 20 feet below the existing grade of the Main Peninsula, otherwise known as the flats west bank. The old railroad pathway for the trail in this area tunnels underneath four different roadways, Detroit, Washington, Winslow, and Main Avenue. In this section the trail has a deep trench like feel with overgrown vegetation, and high walls inhibiting views while limiting the appearance of safety. After passing underneath Main Street the trail corridor transitions back to existing grade as it runs past Spruce and Hemlock Streets near the Lakeview Terrace complex. The trail then passes an existing cell tower at the corner of Hemlock and Mulberry Streets. Before it turns right heading down Old River Road as it makes its way to Willow Street Bridge. In this final stage the path travels along the roadway having to deal with sidewalks in poor condition and high volumes of truck traffic due to the industrialized nature of the area, as it is mainly home to the storage of industrial/construction materials. Across the Willow Lift Bridge, lies more industrial material storage and a large number of active train tracks preventing easy and direct access to the trail's final destination, Wendy Park and Lake Erie. Similar to the start of the trail at Scranton Road, a bridge will be needed in this location to allow users access across these existing tracks and Whiskey Island.

### Stakeholder Interviews

Our stakeholder interviews suggest many were very aware of the trail proposal and believe it provides a great recreational opportunity. Many believe it will serve as an asset to nearby public housing residents. The potential benefits of the trail described by our stakeholders include the increase of foot traffic in the area and its ability to connect disparate parts of the Flats. Stakeholders believe the trail creates potential for new housing in the area and will bring in more people from outside of Cleveland. They stressed the need for infrastructure improvements in and around the study area. Signage was an important feature they felt needed to be incorporated into the trail. Overall, the perceived economic benefits centered around the trail as a transformative project that can provide the necessary traffic for retail and the desired amenities for housing.

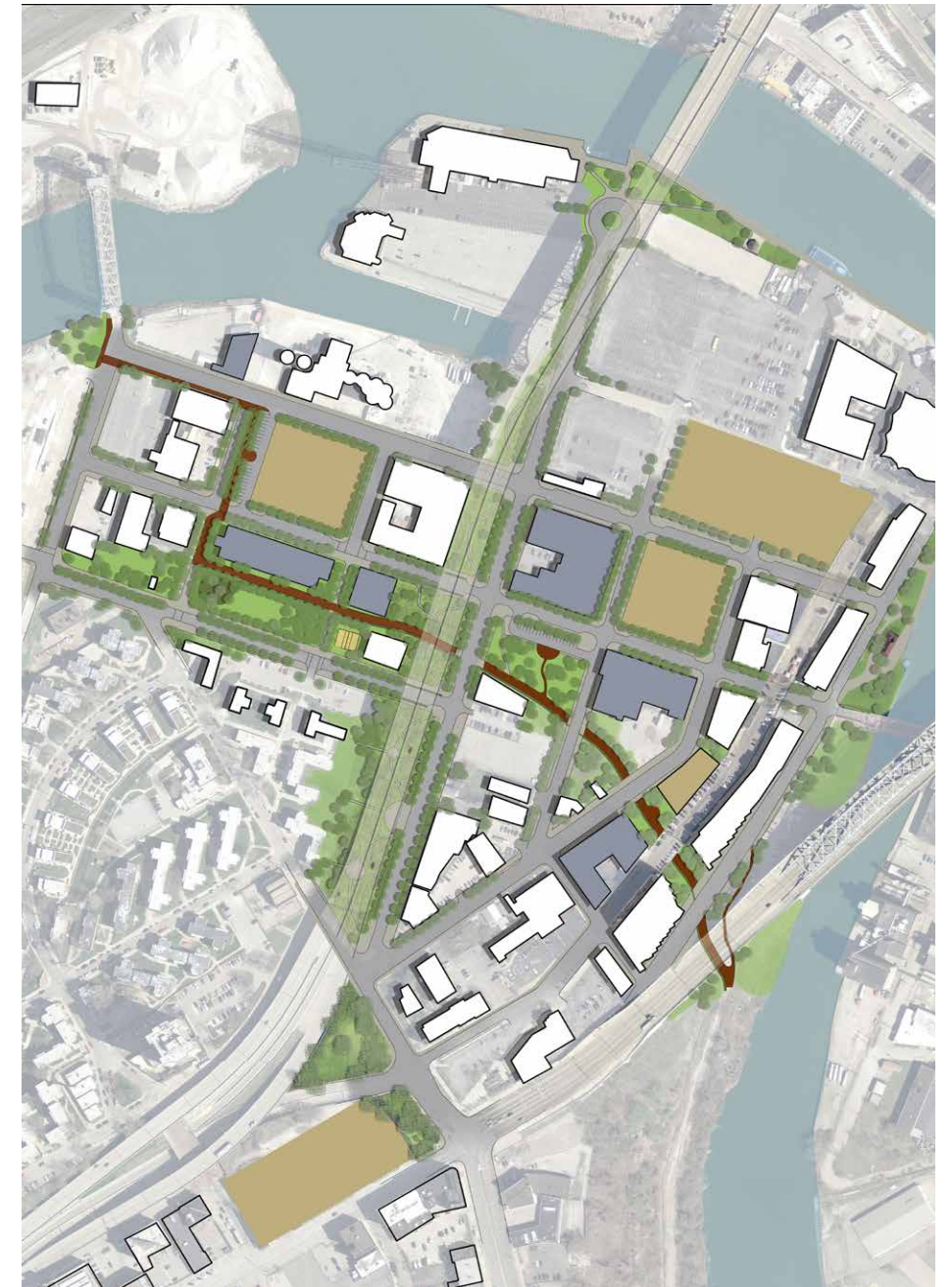
### Survey Results

Our survey had 222 respondents, of which 171 were familiar with the Towpath Trail. 166 were familiar with Whiskey Island and 123 were familiar with Wendy Park. 66% of respondents accessed regional trails by car. Overall, respondents were willing to travel about 11 miles to trails. The most important benefits selected by respondents include the promotion of health and wellness through exercise, and the potential to spur waterfront restoration and clean-up. The two most important trail amenities were restrooms/water fountains and lighting. Fitness stations and kiosks were ranked the lowest. The most important land uses were parks and entertainment uses. Overall, male and female users felt somewhat safe in the Flats West Bank. The most important safety measures respondent's selected included lighting, signage, and emergency phones. 51% of respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher. 51% were between the ages of 18-39. 67% identified as White/Caucasian, 9% as Black/African American, and 15% declined to answer. Overall, the demographics are more comparable to the Cleveland Metropolitan Statistical area than Cleveland City Proper, suggesting that further surveying is necessary to fully represent the Cleveland residents, particularly those in the flats.

### Conclusion

The K2 Collaboration has major conclusions stemming from our three focus areas: greenway, development, and marketing. The greenway plans for the Irishtown Greenway are extensive and offer a design perspective and design values to The Trust for Public Land and any partners that may undertake the trail revitalization, such as the Metroparks. The greenway plan also calls for adjusting the trail path to run up Hemlock Avenue instead of continuing to the previously proposed River Road. Development plans propose an extensive redevelopment of the land and buildings adjacent to the trail right-of-way as it cuts through the flats. A total of over 200 residential units and trail-oriented retail development is central to the neighborhood revitalization. The proposal also calls for a concerned eye on the adjacent lots and empty buildings further from the trail. As market conditions change, these too may become viable options for redevelopment. Finally, the marketing proposals include a comprehensive plan to engage stakeholders and residents around an array of new programming ideas that take advantage of the trail and the proposed elements, creating a year round amenity for the entire community.

The Flats West Bank and the Irishtown Greenway study area can be said to be stuck in a rut – with the significant elevation changes to the west and the river/east bank to the east, the Irishtown Greenway is juxtaposed to some of the most appealing and developing areas in Cleveland. With the potential to not only provide equitable and innovative access to the Lake in an area that has lacked such access for so long but also be transformed into another premier and healthy neighborhood in Cleveland, the West Bank of the Flats and the Irishtown Greenway is ripe for revival. What is needed is a rally of stakeholders, neighbors (both institutional and individual), and political officials to prioritize this project as one that does not just benefit the immediate area and urbanites but also the greater Cleveland area and all users of the Metroparks and Towpath Trails. The opportunities here are exciting but will take time to grow and must be nurtured properly develop. What has been missing are connections through Cleveland's neighborhoods, and the Irishtown Greenway is a crucial one in the connection it can provide us to our largest asset: Lake Erie.



DETAILED MASTERPLAN OF IRISHTOWN GREENWAY AND FLATS WEST BANK