

## Cleveland's revitalized historic neighborhoods should make RNC delegates believers in the power of urban policy: Jenny Spencer (Opinion)



Detroit Avenue, shown here in November, 2014, looking east from the roof of the Gordon Square Arcade at West 65th Street, is seen in a new master plan as the culture spine of Cleveland's West Side, based on growth generated by earlier investments in neighborhood cultural attractions and streetscapes. (Steven Litt/Plain Dealer)



By [Guest Columnist/cleveland.com](#)

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First-time visitors to Cleveland for the Republican National Convention are in for a pleasant surprise. They will be amazed by a thriving downtown, the local dining scene and revitalized neighborhoods.

I live and work in one of Cleveland's emerging neighborhoods: Detroit Shoreway, home of the Gordon Square Arts District. I'm accustomed to the surprise and delight of visitors unfamiliar with recent changes. As they take in Near West Theatre's \$7.3 million new home or our new lakefront access via West 73rd Street, it's common to hear "Wow!" and "I had no idea this was here."

As an urban developer, this is music to my ears. At the same time, there is an important story behind our success.

Much of Cleveland's revitalization would not have been possible without robust urban policy and public funding. A story that should not be left untold to the 50,000 RNC visitors is the imprint that government has had on our city's rebirth.

**Cleveland waterfront development is paying off for Detroit Shoreway, elsewhere**



### Revitalization in the Gordon Square Arts District

The impact of public policy on Gordon Square dates back to the early 1970s, when the Gerald Ford administration created the Community Development Block Grant program. CDBG provides funding for activities such as code enforcement, demolition and home repair assistance.

CDBG is also a key source of operating funds for Community Development Corporations. You may be familiar with CDCs doing catalytic work across Cleveland, including St. Clair-Superior Development Corporation, Ohio City Inc., and Burten, Bell, Carr in Central and Kinsman.



### 2014: Happy Dog, Mediterranean grocer, Detroit Shoreway food businesses to benefit from \$25,000 in grants

My organization, Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization (DSCDO), secured one of the government's first Urban Development Action Grants -- a now-defunct program -- in 1981 to stabilize the Gordon Square Arcade, a prominent building at West 65th Street and Detroit Avenue that is home to the Capitol movie theater.

The preservation of these buildings provides the neighborhood with its distinct historic look.

After Congress passed the Tax Reform Act of 1986, DSCDO was able to use Low Income Housing Tax Credits to revitalize the upper two floors of the Arcade into 64 apartments. DSCDO went on to renovate 14 more buildings, the majority of which are located in the heart of Gordon Square. Certainly, the emergence of the **Gordon Square Arts District** would not have been possible without the preservation of these buildings, which provide the neighborhood its distinct historic look.

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After the Gordon Square Arts District capital campaign took off in 2006, both Cleveland Public Theatre and the Capitol Theatre used Historic Tax Credits to finance their renovations, and Capitol Theatre utilized New Markets Tax Credits, as well.

The return on investment of public funds has been undeniable. Eighty new businesses have opened in Gordon Square since 2006, and more than half a billion dollars in development is underway.

### Funds at risk

Those of us in community development are painfully aware of the vulnerability of the funds that support our quiet but transformational work. Cleveland's CDBG allocation declined by 24 percent from 2010 to 2016.

HOME, a federal program which has been a funding source for nearly all of DSCDO's housing projects, is also at risk. The HOME Coalition estimates that the government's \$26.3 billion invested since 1992 has generated \$94.2 billion in local income, yet Congress proposed cutting HOME funding in Ohio from \$36 million to \$2.7 million in fiscal year 2016.

Effective urban policy must emanate from statehouses, too -- especially when state and federal policy can be layered.

The Ohio General Assembly is currently scrutinizing the Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit, which has a conservative return on investment of \$6.20 for every \$1 in credits. In Cleveland alone, 36 projects have utilized a combination of state and federal Historic Tax Credits, including some of downtown's gems, like the Schofield Building at 2000 East Ninth Street, now the Kimpton Hotel, and the former Cleveland Trust Company's bank rotunda, restored as the centerpiece of Heinen's Market.



### 2015: Senate wisely back-pedals on sidelining of Ohio historic preservation tax credit: editorial

For all that has been accomplished in Cleveland, much remains to be done. The government will remain a critically important partner in accomplishing that work. So let's be sure to tell the true story of our city to the RNC this July. We need our political leaders to be not only believers in the city of Cleveland, but believers in the power of urban policy.

Jenny Spencer is managing director of the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization.

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