

EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC

A PRIMER

INTRODUCTION



Conversations about equitable development are springing up all around Cincinnati, as citizens recognize that private investment in our communities happens unevenly, and too often at the expense of our most vulnerable neighbors. This project hones in on our city's use of various public subsidies as incentives for private development. At the heart of the project is the belief that public assets should be used for the public good. With this work we hope to:

- Prioritize goals of equity around class and race
- Increase knowledge and transparency of important public processes
- Facilitate creative, empowering work across neighborhoods to establish shared standards that reflect the inclusivity we desire for our Cincinnati community
- Create a framework that equips citizens to organize for meaningful change in our local policies and practices

APPROACH

Our city's robust public support for private development is based on the following assumptions:

- Private development brings jobs, housing, tax base, and economic opportunity to struggling neighborhoods
- Partnering with the private market is the best way for the city to acquire enough power to meet its development needs
- If we ask too much of private development, it will go elsewhere, and we will lose out

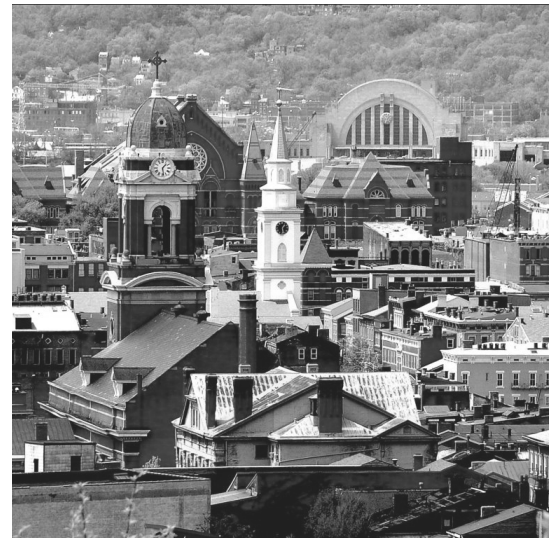
As we witness development trends, gentrification, persistent inequality, displacement, widespread loss of affordable housing, and the privatization of public spaces, we are long overdue for a critical evaluation of these assumptions.

POINTS SYSTEM

Where our city government lacks capital, it has a variety of benefits-- zoning variances, fee waivers, public land, tax abatements, etc.-- that are of value to developers. These are collective, taxpayer-owned assets. If the goal is to leverage these for the public good, we must have a way of evaluating what kind of public good we are getting in return.

The following rubric is intended for scoring a given development project on its overall, measurable contribution to the public good as it relates to equity across class and race. The rubric:

- Assigns points to a series of standards across 4 major categories, as well as 5 secondary, bonus categories
- Wherever possible, uses existing standards with reporting structures for monitoring and accountability



HOW IT COULD BE USED

Part of the problem is that the market develops space unevenly. Cincinnati's current incentives largely subsidize development in already competitive markets in select neighborhoods, while other neighborhoods continue to experience disinvestment. If we create a solid framework for assessing projects, communities could use it to strategically raise the bar according to their needs. For many public subsidies, we are currently asking nothing in return. There is lots of room to be smart about how we raise our standards if we are confident that we can achieve public benefits worth the cost. It's also possible that only some projects will yield a worthwhile return for the community; if so, it makes sense to dramatically reduce the use of public subsidies, reserving them as incentives for equitable projects.

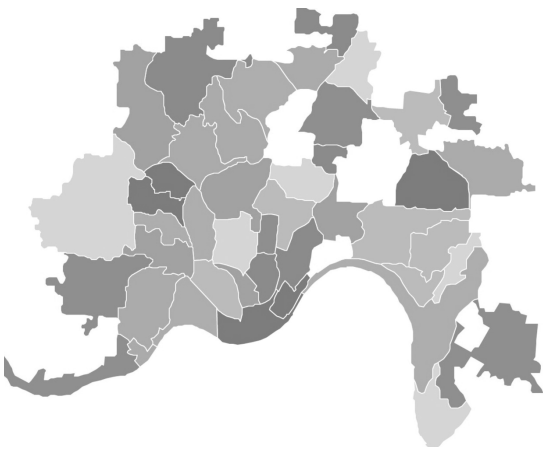
The rubric is designed to be used alongside our Developer Questionnaire, which would prompt developers seeking public subsidy to share relevant information on the proposed project, the project value of public subsidies sought, and the expected public benefits and accompanying commitments. Developers could be asked to complete both documents ahead of interfacing with the public.

COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Our city government recognizes neighborhood community councils as the official democratic bodies of area representation, and are tasked with taking their input into consideration. Currently, developers are only required to seek community council approval if requesting a zoning variance, a liquor license, or a select few other requests. Councils could use this tool to evaluate this limited pool of projects. Councils could also assert more power in development decisions by appealing to the city (through an official vote) for this to be the guiding framework utilized by the Department of Community and Economic Development and City Council when vetting proposed development in their neighborhood. An organized effort to do this across a handful of neighborhoods experiencing gentrification or high levels of development would go a long way in impacting policy and creating more equitable practices in our city.

OTHER ENDORSEMENTS

A standardized metric would enable better city-wide organizing for social justice in community development. For citizens, civic groups, and other community anchors without official membership in community councils, this framework could be endorsed or used as one way to drive critical, grassroots support or opposition in important development decisions in our city. A concerted effort to commit to shared standards could have major policy implications.



Peaslee is a community center dedicated to participatory education in our urban core. Our work on this project reflects our belief in the power of civic engagement and social change. Equitable development is not only possible, but necessary. The collective work of our community people, our city government, and our economy can find a better way forward-- one that is committed to building a fair and inclusive city. As we move forward with this project, we welcome your thoughts, insight, and expertise, as well as your energy and commitment to action!