

# Technical Assistance Panel Report



## Improving the Cuyahoga River Infrastructure: Bulkhead Management Practices

Cleveland, OH

November 3-4, 2021

The **Urban Land Institute** ([uli.org](http://uli.org)) is a global nonprofit education and research institute supported by its members. Its mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Established in 1936, the Institute has nearly 30,000 members representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines.

**ULI Cleveland** ([cleveland.uli.org](http://cleveland.uli.org)), is an organization of practicing land use professionals and community leaders, founded to share information and experience, showcase new projects and examine trends and innovation in the entire region of Northeast Ohio.

**Technical Assistance Panel Process** The ULI Cleveland Technical Assistance Panel program draws upon ULI member expertise to provide creative and practical solutions to land use challenges in communities across the Cleveland region and beyond.

## Bulkhead Management Practices Sponsors:



# Panelists

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# Introduction

The City of Cleveland contains two distinct waterfronts with Lake Erie bordering the northern boundary of the city and the Cuyahoga River winding through the heart of the city. In 1796 General Moses Cleaveland arrived at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River and decided that the land just to the east of it would be the capital of the new territory. His surveyors laid out a town, including a 9-1/2-acre Public Square, on the high bluffs overlooking Lake Erie and the winding Cuyahoga, leading it to be the fifth-largest City within the United States during the 1920s. This rampant growth brought on by the river created a rich history within Cleveland as well as national policies like the birth of the Environmental Protection Act.

Even today the Cuyahoga River continues to serve as one of the region's primary resources. The Port of Cleveland, alongside the industrial businesses housed on the riverfront, generates an economic impact of over \$3.5 billion to the region (source: Port of Cleveland Economic Impact Report). Residential and commercial spaces have grown from the vacant and underutilized properties, revitalizing the communities around the river. Access to public space has also grown along the riverfront with paths, trails, and parks being implemented along the river's edges, spurring more recreational uses for Cleveland's river. Recently, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) kicked off a project to focus on developing the riverfront even further with their Vision for the Valley. This project symbolizes former Mayor Frank Jackson's vision for "One Cleveland", connecting the two sides of Cleveland around this important part of the city. The Vision for the Valley is led by One Team, an organization comprised of the City of Cleveland, the Cleveland City Planning Commission, the Cleveland Metroparks, The Port of Cleveland, and Flats Forward. Together,

they aim to craft One River for all to unite and build One Cleveland.

The partners of One Team requested technical assistance from the Urban Land Institute Cleveland District Council (ULI Cleveland) to target infrastructure related to the Cuyahoga River. ULI Cleveland convened a 10-member volunteer panel for a 2-day Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) on November 3-4, 2021 at Key Tower in Cleveland to address questions posed by the Vision for the Valley partnership. The panel was chaired by Debbie Berry, the Vice President of Community Development for University Circle Inc, a non-profit development, service, and advocacy organization for transforming Cleveland's University Circle neighborhood. The panel included experts from a range of fields including economic development, legal, engineering, real estate development, and architecture. The panelists reviewed detailed background briefing material to prepare for the TAP. During the TAP, they toured the Cuyahoga River, heard from the One Team partners, and interviewed community stakeholders who had worked or resided alongside the river including regional developers, local business owners, regional directors and planners, engineers, and nonprofit entities. Utilizing the information presented to them, the panelist worked together to develop implementation strategies to recommend to the Vision for the Valley partnership that addresses critical infrastructure needs to develop the river's edge within the Cuyahoga River Valley.



## Questions Asked of Panel

**Goal/Theme:** What bulkhead management practices can be adopted to remove barriers to private development, encourage beneficial enhancements to privately-owned riverfront properties, and enhance public access and utilization of the riverfront, while continuing to effectively service the industry in the valley?

1. What economic threats exist with current bulkhead management practices? How can new strategies to bulkhead management alleviate those threats?
2. What tools exist A) under current Ohio law or funding programs and/or B) best practices from other jurisdictions to fund and maintain bulkheads or develop a program that will extend into the future, so in 50 years we don't find ourselves with the same problems?
3. Because the bulkheads are currently a private responsibility of the property owner that provides a public benefit to the users of the river, what's the proper allocation of responsibility between the public sector and the private industry/property owners for installation and maintenance of bulkheads along the Cuyahoga River? What partnership models could be implemented to share responsibility between sectors?
4. What opportunities can be leveraged from better bulkhead management practices that would: A) result in more equitable public access to the river front, natural green space, view sheds, trails, and other recreational amenities? B) improve the ecology, water quality, and climate resilience of the river and surrounding areas?
5. What are examples of case studies or best practices for bulkhead repair, rehabilitation, and maintenance that could be implemented in the Cuyahoga River Valley?





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