

EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT RUBRIC



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many Cincinnatians have been noticing development in their neighborhoods—new apartments, restaurants, condos, etc. These new projects are often aimed mainly at attracting new residents who can afford to pay high housing and living costs. This trend usually causes harm to residents who don't make much money, because it makes neighborhood rents and prices rise. Without offering low price points, this kind of development leaves lower income folks behind, often forcing them to leave the areas they have long called home.

While new developments are mostly private investments, developers in Cincinnati can usually count on tax breaks and other bonuses from the City, so they are publicly subsidized. **If our tax dollars are going to pay for private development, we want it to make our city better, not just some people wealthier.**

As of now, we're not asking developers for anything in return for public subsidies. We need to create standards for equitable development and urge our city to apply them. So, we've developed a scoring system. We hope it will be supported and used by communities across Cincinnati so we can build the collective power needed to make change at City Hall.

THE WAY IT IS

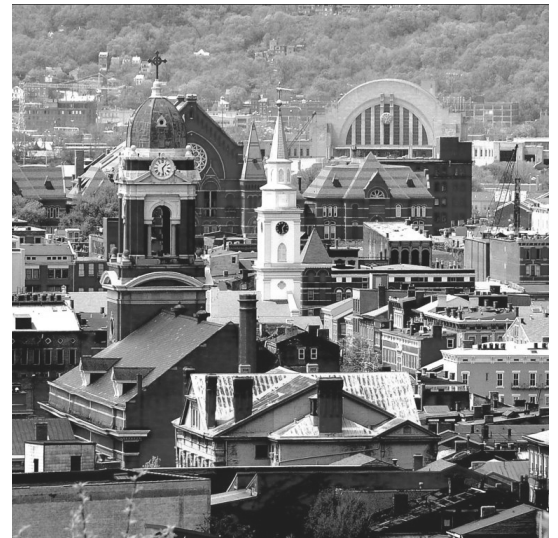
For decades, private investment neglected many city neighborhoods. Now, **our city government is offering big incentives**-- tax abatements, zoning changes, public land, etc.-- to developers based on the following assumptions:

- 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 have enough power to meet its development needs
- If we ask too much of private development, it will go somewhere else, and we will lose out

But we know that new development has come mostly in the form of gentrification that hasn't helped us solve our city's poverty, segregation, or inequality. Instead, it has added to our problems by displacing people, decreasing affordable housing, and privatizing public space. Also, the resulting development doesn't happen in a balanced way-- some neighborhoods are still ignored while many incentives get doled out to projects in hot market areas long after private investment has come back. **A rethinking of our assumptions is long overdue.**

A BETTER WAY

Taxes, zoning, and public land belong to the taxpayers and exist for the public good; it's our responsibility to make sure that they benefit us collectively! That means that, if and when public subsidies are used, we need to carefully evaluate the kind of return we are getting, and hold to high standards. As citizens, we can together set the terms for how our resources are used.



RAISING THE BAR

Public-private partnerships are tricky. Private industry has money that could help our city, but by itself, it has proven that it's not good at creating communities that are fair, inclusive, or ethical. Whole populations have been left out of the successes and opportunities of our economy. If we care about the public good, we have to confront and work against inequality and injustice. **Building more equity across class and race in Cincinnati must be the top priority when we think about collaborating with private development.** We can't just assume that this is a shared goal; we have to make it a requirement.

POINTS SYSTEM

The Equitable Development Rubric is designed to score development projects on their contribution to equity across class and race. **By scoring projects, we can figure out if they help us achieve our public goals around equity.** If they do, and if a joint effort can help us achieve better results than what we can do alone, then offering incentives could be a good thing. If they don't help us achieve our public goals for equity, then offering these incentives is a waste of our resources. The private market is already able to take care of itself.

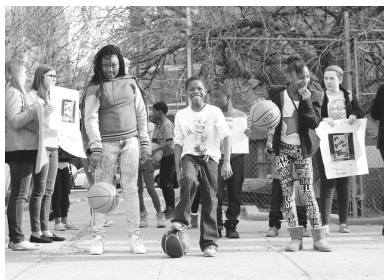
The Rubric has four main categories for scoring, and five "bonus" categories for projects that score well in all of the main ones. When possible, projects are scored according to standards for development that already exist and have a system for reporting.



MAIN CATEGORIES

Housing Affordability

Having a decent place to live is a basic human right, and is a requirement for financial stability and quality of life. In our city, tens of thousands of households can't afford the rents that the market demands, and only a small fraction of them get assistance. There aren't nearly enough affordable units. The scoring system awards more points to projects that reserve units for residents who qualify for subsidy based on income.



Jobs and Labor

One major reason why people can't afford basic necessities is that the jobs available to them do not pay a living wage. All development projects involve short-term construction labor, and some include long-term work opportunities. How these jobs contribute to equity depends on how well they pay and who they are available to. The scoring system is based on several existing standards for fair employment practices and access for local, low-income residents.

Community Input

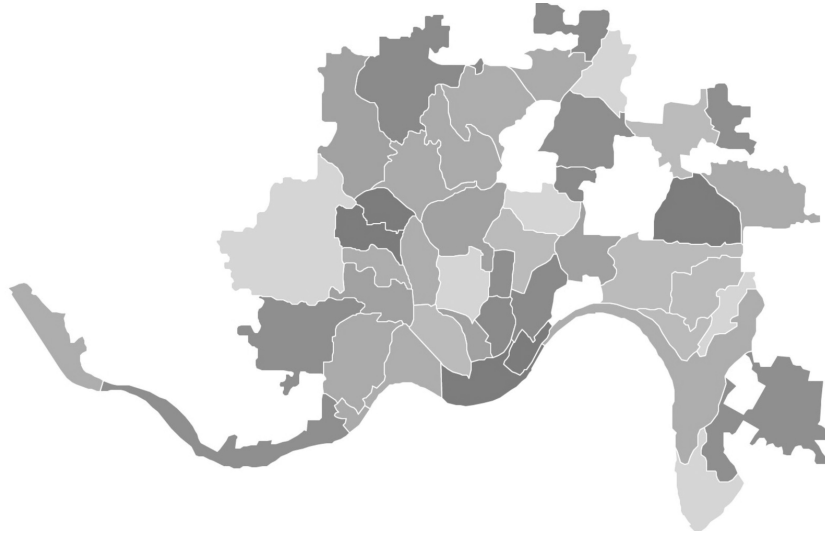
Residents who live near a development site—especially those with limited income—feel the most impact from new development. Many face barriers to civic involvement, and our city offers very few democratic processes within decision-making on development. The scoring system awards points for engaging community members in a way that addresses these barriers, and incorporating the input of those without connections to economic and political power.

Community Footprint

Those who own land and property have the power to change community landscapes, which can leave a deep impact on residents' quality of life. Existing community assets of value to residents are not necessarily valued by developers, who often dis-place and re-place them, instead of making improvements in place. The scoring system is based on how existing assets factor into development plans, awarding points for projects that protect and support them.

LET'S GET TO WORK

With a shared set of standards, our communities can raise the bar together, even while strategically setting score requirements in a way that helps to balance development across our neighborhoods. We should require all incentivized projects to score well, but we can and should require the highest scores in wealthy or gentrifying neighborhoods, because developers are already looking to build there for profit. Projects in these neighborhoods should score at least a 75% on the Rubric in order to merit a major public subsidy like a tax abatement. And if we are choosier about how we offer incentives, the public resources we hold onto can be used for other kinds of creative public investment that our communities desperately need.



COMMUNITY COUNCILS

An organized effort to use the Rubric across neighborhood community councils will create a powerful demand for change at City Hall. Councils can use our Developer Questionnaire to get information from developers asking for their approval, and score the projects via the Rubric to inform their vote. However, these councils are generally only asked for approval when a zoning variance or liquor license is sought, so we'd have to flex a bit more muscle to impact other decisions on incentives. Councils can also vote to endorse the use of the Rubric at the city level. As the official democratic bodies of Cincinnati's neighborhoods, the councils are capable of making a powerful collective statement.

OTHER ENDORSEMENTS

This scoring system can also be helpful to other activists and civic groups. With this common standard, they can join forces and be better organized to advocate for social justice in community development. Together, these groups could drum up the kind of city-wide, grassroots movement that could change our city's bad development habits. Organizations that would like to stand with us in this effort can use our endorsement form to voice their support!

Peaslee is a community center dedicated to participatory education, civic engagement, and social change. We believe that equitable development is not only possible; it is necessary! Through collective work, we can move our people, our government, and our economy forward. If you share our vision for a fair and inclusive Cincinnati, we welcome your thoughts, insights, and expertise, as well as your energy and commitment to action!

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