2030 Strategic Plan

CUYAHOGA LAND BANK

Land is about more than what's on it. It's about what happens because of it.

Every piece of land holds the potential to create a home, grow a business, strengthen a neighborhood, or connect a community. Vacant, neglected, or underutilized land is an asset waiting to be realized. **Cuyahoga Land Bank** enables our community to transform land into opportunity. This is our blueprint for how we do that.

The Planning Process

This plan was built through a structured process designed to bring in a wide range of voices. A cross-functional working group of staff members guided a phased approach, pressure-testing ideas and helping build consensus along the way.

Planning began in March 2026 with an all-staff SOAR session. SOAR is a structured planning framework that asks an organization to reflect on its Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results. Every member of the Cuyahoga Land Bank team participated, generating the foundational themes that shaped everything that followed. From there, the process moved through a dedicated working session with the board, led by a committee of members who helped shape and test the mission, vision, and values. This was followed by two staff leadership sessions to further refine ideas.

What We Heard from the Outside

Alongside the internal process, ColemanWick conducted in-depth interviews with approximately 12 civic, philanthropic, public sector, real estate, and community development leaders across the region. The purpose of the interviews was straightforward: to get the perspective of Cuyahoga Land Bank's closest partners and most informed observers on how they view the organization, where it has the most to offer, and where it has room to grow. Their input was candid, specific, and enormously useful in shaping the direction of this plan.

Several themes emerged from these conversations that guided the development of this plan, greatly influencing our strategies and decision-making framework:

We are a valued civic redevelopment tool: We serve a unique role in regional redevelopment. We have the legal authority, expertise, and partnerships to intervene and remove barriers, making redevelopment faster, less risky, and more cost effective for municipalities, developers, and community partners. Our ability to steward land and bring it under local control is central to our value.

Our role has evolved and is expanding: Our original foreclosure-era role has matured. Housing production and neighborhood growth are major future opportunities, along with industrial, commercial and large-site redevelopment. Financing and capital-stack support are emerging areas of opportunity. Geographic focus and scale are necessary for meaningful impact. Our future role should be broad enough to meet the moment but focused enough to avoid dilution.

We have an opportunity to strengthen organizational effectiveness: While our leadership is trusted, there is room to improve how we operate to succeed. In particular, partners identified an opportunity to pursue more sustainable funding, strengthen outcomes measurement, and bring greater clarity to our brand and messaging.

Vision

Every piece of land contributes to a stronger Cuyahoga County.

Mission

We transform underutilized land into thriving community assets that expand opportunity for Cuyahoga County residents.

Core Values

We move with the mission. We're people people. We ask good questions. We get things done.

Our Evolution

Cuyahoga Land Bank was built for a crisis. When the foreclosure wave hit Cuyahoga County in the late 2000s, it left behind thousands of vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties that the private market could not absorb and local governments lacked the tools to address. Our Founder Gus Frangos worked with Cuyahoga County leadership to draft state legislation to fill that gap. The legislation enabled the establishment of county land banks to acquire distressed properties, clear titles and other barriers, and return land to productive use.

That work has made a measurable difference across Cuyahoga County, resulting in more than $3.6 billion in economic impact over 15 years. During that time, our work has evolved into new construction, environmental remediation, and commercial corridor development. Our work has grown in both scope and scale, and the results speak for themselves.

The crisis that created Cuyahoga Land Bank is no longer the defining challenge. The region has moved into a different moment, one defined not by collapse but by uneven recovery. Some neighborhoods are seeing real investment and growing demand. Others remain stuck, held back by vacancies, aging housing stock, limited municipal capacity, and a shortage of the kind of patient, mission-driven capital that private developers rarely provide.

Across the board, the supply of quality housing is insufficient, construction costs are rising, and the gap between what the market will do on its own and what communities actually need continues to widen. This is where Cuyahoga Land Bank's role becomes more important, not less.

We exist because markets alone do not produce the outcomes communities need. We keep land and property from falling into the hands of speculators and absentee owners, holding strategic assets until the right moment and the right partners are in place. We do the unglamorous, yet essential work of making difficult development projects possible.

This plan is our commitment to doing that work with greater focus, greater discipline, and greater impact through 2030.

What is a land bank?

Land banks are entities with special state-granted authority to strategically acquire underutilized properties and return them to productive use. While the concept of land-banking first emerged in the 1970s, the modern-day land bank was pioneered right here in Cuyahoga County. In 2009, our Founder Gus Frangos worked with Cuyahoga County leadership to draft the Ohio land banking legislation that has since informed legislation in other states.

Source: Ohio Land Bank Association

Our Strategic Priorities

Our strategic priorities reflect both what we do best today and where we see potential to make a greater impact tomorrow. The strategies that follow are intentionally at different stages. Some are **foundational**—the core work we were built to do and must continue to do well. Others represent areas where we are **growing** our role, building on our experience and capabilities to meet evolving community needs. And some are **exploratory**—emerging opportunities where we will test, learn, and determine where we can add the greatest value. Importantly, we won't necessarily end up doing everything in the third category but we are committed to investigating where we should play a larger role.

Together, these priorities form a continuum: **reclaiming** neglected land through our foundational work, **revitalizing** communities by expanding how we put land back to productive use, and **reimagining** what is possible by exploring new tools, partnerships, and approaches.

FOUNDATIONAL

Reclaim

GOAL

Increase the amount of strategically-controlled, development-ready land in targeted geographies across Cuyahoga County.

STRATEGY 1

Acquire, demolish, and steward distressed residential properties, holding land responsibly and transferring it to owners who will put it to productive use.

Why This Matters

In Cuyahoga County, more than 30,000 residential properties—or 6.8% of the total housing stock—are distressed or underutilized. Left unchecked, these properties become targets for speculation, absentee ownership, and disinvestment, making future redevelopment more difficult and eroding community confidence.

Our Unique Advantage

For more than 15 years, we've built deep expertise in reclaiming land that communities cannot afford to lose and restoring it to productive use. This work is strengthened by longstanding partnerships with Cuyahoga County, municipalities, and the state of Ohio. These partnerships are essential to Cuyahoga Land Bank's ability to intervene early and effectively across the county. We've also developed a proprietary property management and tracking system, PPS, that we continue to invest in and improve in support of our own and partner organizations.

STRATEGY 2

Support the environmental remediation of challenging industrial sites in coordination with broader economic development initiatives to unlock opportunities for employment-generating redevelopment across the region.

Why This Matters

Environmental contamination is one of the greatest barriers to redevelopment across Cuyahoga County. Many industrial sites remain vacant because cleanup costs make private investment financially unfeasible. There are approximately 3,500 to 4,000 acres of disinvested industrial property in the city of Cleveland alone—roughly a third of all industrial property in the city.

Our Unique Advantage

Under Ohio law, Cuyahoga Land Bank is indemnified from environmental liability, a protection that allows us to acquire and remediate contaminated properties that private and nonprofit developers cannot. Combined with deep expertise in securing and managing state and federal remediation funding and strong partnerships with local governments and economic development organizations, we're more than capable of taking on challenging environmental remediation work.

Revitalize

GOAL

Accelerate the redevelopment of reclaimed land in the communities where it can have the greatest impact.

GROWING

STRATEGY 1

Prepare sites for redevelopment through land assembly, environmental due diligence, and legal, financial, and administrative support, keeping sites viable until the right development partner is in place.

Why This Matters

In their early stages, development projects frequently encounter barriers, including title complications, environmental unknowns, financing gaps, and regulatory complexity. These challenges require a trusted intermediary to absorb early-stage risk and complexity so projects can advance.

Our Unique Advantage

Predevelopment support is where our unique combination of legal authority, transaction expertise, and patient capital is most clearly on display. This work extends across project types and scales. From single-family infill to large commercial and industrial sites, our work to assemble and hold land, clear barriers, and structure transactions is often the difference between a project that happens and one that does not.

STRATEGY 2

Expand housing opportunities by renovating existing and building new residential units, focusing on historically disinvested communities where the need is greatest and where market-rate development is least likely to happen on its own.

Why This Matters

Cuyahoga County faces a significant shortage of quality housing that the private market alone cannot resolve. In many communities across Cuyahoga County, the appraisal gap—the difference between what it costs to build or renovate a home and what the market will support in price—is a barrier to development.

Our Unique Advantage

Our deep construction expertise, our understanding of the permitting process, and our ability to absorb the appraisal gap through creative financing, philanthropic capital, and public subsidy position us well to expand the supply of quality housing across the county. We often make development possible where it would otherwise not happen.

What is the appraisal gap?

In communities without enough recent, comparable home sales, appraisals come in far below what it actually costs to build a new house. Most homebuyers rely on bank financing, and banks will only lend based on the appraised value, not the cost of construction. As a result, even well built, quality homes in certain areas may not appraise high enough to support financing that covers what it costs to renovate or build them.

STRATEGY 3

Strengthen commercial districts within communities to serve residents, create jobs, and improve quality of life.

Why This Matters

Strong communities need more than housing. They need active, functional commercial spaces that serve residents, create jobs, and anchor local economies. Neighborhood asset redevelopment is complex and high-stakes work. It requires deep knowledge of local market conditions, strong municipal partnerships, and the patience to move at the pace that transformative projects demand.

Our Unique Advantage

We acquire and rehabilitate vacant or underused properties within business districts and commercial corridors, in partnership with municipalities and community organizations. Our commercial work is not limited to small-scale retail or storefront rehabilitation. It extends to larger corridor and district-scale opportunities. In many cases, our ability to assemble land, hold title, and absorb early-stage risk is what makes larger opportunities viable for private and nonprofit development partners.

EXPLORING

Reimagine

GOAL

Extend Cuyahoga Land Bank's impact by developing new tools, partnerships, and capabilities that meet tomorrow's redevelopment challenges.

STRATEGY 1

Expand upon a pilot fee-for-service consulting model that extends our expertise to other communities, within the county and beyond.

Why This Matters

We've spent more than 15 years building deep expertise in land acquisition and stewardship, redevelopment, and municipal partnership. Other communities and organizations have expressed a desire to tap into that knowledge and experience.

Our Unique Advantage

Our consulting work draws directly on our core capabilities, grounded in firsthand experience within one of the most complex redevelopment environments in the country. Offerings include market studies, housing needs assessments, economic impact analysis, mapping and data analysis, and strategic planning support for municipalities and similar organizations navigating their own land use and redevelopment challenges.

STRATEGY 2

Explore whether Cuyahoga Land Bank can expand its capacity to support redevelopment through a broader set of financial tools and structures.

Why This Matters

In many neighborhoods, home values have not yet recovered to where they were before the Great Recession, meaning those houses are worth less today than they were almost 20 years ago. Construction costs are at an all-time high, driven by a combination of labor shortages, tariffs, and inflation. Combined, these factors make the cost of building or renovating a house more expensive than its market value. This appraisal gap makes new home construction financially unworkable in many of the communities where there is a shortage of quality housing.

Our Unique Advantage

Our financial credibility, legal authority, and position in the redevelopment ecosystem give us tools and capabilities most organizations do not have. Using those tools and capabilities more creatively could advance projects that would otherwise remain out of reach.

STRATEGY 3

Explore a neighborhood-based development model where Cuyahoga Land Bank concentrates dedicated staff and resources within a single neighborhood.

Why This Matters

Meaningful neighborhood change requires investment across multiple dimensions at once: quality housing, active commercial spaces, safe streets, and economic opportunity. Concentrated, coordinated investment can produce more lasting change than individual projects spread across a large area.

Our Unique Advantage

Cuyahoga Land Bank is well positioned to serve as the connective tissue in a neighborhood-based development model, assembling land, coordinating partners, and deploying resources in a way that is intentional enough and sustained enough to actually shift market conditions rather than simply fill individual lots. We have the ability to put into practice our broad set of unique capabilities all in one place through a coordinated, aligned approach.

STRATEGY 4

Examine whether there is a meaningful role Cuyahoga Land Bank could play in helping address the shortage of builders and developers.

Why This Matters

The shortage of qualified builders and developers in our region directly affects our ability to deliver projects on time and at cost, and limits the broader housing market's ability to produce homes at the scale Cuyahoga County needs. Our region has a number of high-quality construction training programs that help people develop skills to work in the industry. But a gap remains between learning the work and building a viable business around it. Emerging builders and developers need opportunities to apply their skills on actual projects while gaining the experience, mentorship, and support needed to grow their capacity as professionals.

Our Unique Advantage

We can offer access to parcels and structures for development, connections to established builders and developers, and hands-on technical assistance in areas where we have deep expertise, including construction management, project budgeting, scheduling, quality assurance, permitting, zoning, and more. In doing so, we can help strengthen the local development pipeline while accelerating the production of high-quality housing.

What Success Looks Like

2030 Metrics

We will position more land for productive use through:

- 10 catalytic demolitions
- Environmental remediation of 5 industrial sites

We will make communities stronger through:

- 75 renovated or newly constructed homes
- 3 completed commercial corridor projects

We will make redevelopment easier, faster, and more effective through:

- 2 new financial tools
- 4 new consulting clients/projects a year

How We Will Make Decisions

A Disciplined Approach to Growth

One of the clearest messages to emerge from this planning process was the importance of discipline. Staff, partners, and board members alike emphasized that our credibility and effectiveness depend as much on the opportunities we decline as the ones we pursue. As we evolve and take on larger, more complex initiatives, every new commitment represents a choice about where to invest finite time, staff capacity, and financial resources.

Lasting impact depends not on doing more, but on making disciplined choices about where we can create the greatest value. To protect our priorities, we've developed an internal evaluation tool called SCORE, which stands for Strategic Capacity, Opportunity and Risk Evaluation.

SCORE is not a bureaucratic checklist. It is a disciplined framework that ensures every significant new opportunity is evaluated consistently, transparently, and against the same set of criteria. Every opportunity must first clear three basic questions:

- Does it advance Cuyahoga Land Bank's mission?
- Can Cuyahoga Land Bank execute this without unmanageable financial exposure?
- Does Cuyahoga Land Bank have the administrative infrastructure required?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, the opportunity is declined before further staff time is invested.

Opportunities that clear those questions are scored across six weighted categories that balance strategic value and impact with organizational readiness. It's not enough for an opportunity to be worthwhile; it also has to be executable. The six categories are:

- **Community Impact:** Will this produce meaningful benefit for residents and neighborhoods?
- **Long-term Value:** Will this create lasting value beyond the initial funding?
- **Strategic Fit:** Is this the right work for Cuyahoga Land Bank?
- **Financial Feasibility:** Does it cover its costs without creating undue financial risk?
- **Organizational Capacity:** Do we have the staff and bandwidth to do this well?
- **Partner Readiness:** Are the partners committed, capable, and reliable?

The result is a recommendation to **Pursue**, **Pursue with Conditions**, or **Do Not Pursue**.

The CEO retains final authority. SCORE informs leadership judgment; it does not replace it. The senior leadership team will review the full portfolio of opportunities at least quarterly, giving leadership and the board a clear view into how Cuyahoga Land Bank's priorities are translating into action and ensuring resources remain aligned with our highest-impact work.

What We Need to Be Successful

Building the Capacity to Deliver

Ambitious goals require more than vision; they require the organizational capacity to deliver. As we expand our role and take on increasingly complex redevelopment challenges, we are making deliberate investments in the people, systems, and capabilities that will enable us to execute with greater discipline, transparency, and impact. These investments, outlined below, are foundational to the success of this strategic plan.

Financial Stewardship

We've strengthened our finance team and are implementing a new accounting system that supports fund accounting and increasingly complex funding structures. This is a foundational investment that enables us to take on more sophisticated work, enhancing our ability to responsibly manage public, private, and philanthropic resources while providing the financial rigor, transparency, and accountability that partners expect.

Performance & Accountability

We're building a stronger culture of performance management and accountability. Organization-wide performance dashboards, quarterly progress reviews, and clearly defined individual performance indicators will connect to our strategic priorities and goals, allowing leadership to monitor progress, celebrate success, and course-correct when needed. We're also investing in the infrastructure, practices, and capabilities of our board to ensure strong governance keeps pace with our growth.

Project Management & Execution

We have established a dedicated project management function—led by a Director of Project Management and Operations—to coordinate initiatives, manage timelines, strengthen cross-functional collaboration, and ensure projects move from concept to completion with consistency and efficiency.

Strategic External Engagement

As our role continues to evolve, so must our ability to reach our many stakeholders. We're rebuilding our external engagement and communications functions to better connect with residents, funders, developers, government, and other partners, and more effectively demonstrate the value and impact of our work. Clear communication is essential to building trust, attracting investment, and advancing our mission.

Looking Ahead

Entering Our Next Chapter from a Position of Strength

Over the past 15 years, we've earned the trust of partners, proven our model, and built the expertise, relationships, and infrastructure that make ambitious work possible. That foundation matters. This plan represents a commitment to build on that foundation with purpose and confidence.

We will invest in the places where we can have the greatest impact, pursue new opportunities with discipline and clarity, and tell our story in a way that reflects the scale and significance of what we do. And we will do all of this while continuing to test new ideas and push the boundaries of what a land bank can achieve.

The housing and development challenges facing Cuyahoga County require sustained attention and new approaches. We are better positioned than ever to meet those challenges with a clear sense of direction, a strong team, and a growing set of tools and partnerships to make lasting progress.

The work ahead is hard; it's also exactly the kind of work we were built to do.

CUYAHOGA LAND BANK

812 Huron Rd. E
Suite 800
Cleveland, OH 44115
216.698.8853

cuyahogalandbank.org