September 2024

MIDTOWN CLEVELAND, INC.

# Black Avenue Cultural District RFP

Prepared by MidTown Cleveland, Inc. + Hough Community Leaders

# Table of Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Introduction |
| 4 | About MTC |
| 5 | Black Ave Background |
| 6 | Leo’s Casino History |
| 7 | Scope of Work |
| 8 | Application Information |
| 9 | Project Timeline |
| 10 | Contact Information |

# Introduction

MidTown Cleveland, Inc. (MTC) is excited to invite teams to submit proposals for the Black Avenue Cultural District Initiative. Black Avenue is a joyful celebration of Black culture, art, and history that has been created and championed by residents of the MidTown + Hough neighborhoods for the better part of a decade.

The primary purpose of this RFP is to undergo a master planning process with current stakeholders and the broader community for a comprehensive and cohesive plan for three nodes; E 55th, E 66th, and E 75th. This process would include community engagement, a feasibility study for the E 75th Street development project, and the creation of a master plan that ties all three nodes together, which the neighborhood and MTC will work to implement over time.

MTC is looking for teams experienced in planning and public art, community engagement, real estate, and architecture. The contract for this initiative will last up to a year starting in January 2025. See more details about our timeline below.



# About MTC + Black Avenue

## Mission

MidTown Cleveland leads equitable community and economic development strategies to realize a future where all people thrive.

## Vision

MidTown is a place for connection, belonging, and the joyful celebration of culture, where stakeholders reinvest prosperity in the community, equity and inclusion are fundamental expectations, and innovation helps families realize long-promised dreams.

Learn more about MTC by visiting www.midtowncleveland.org.





# Black Avenue Background

The vision for Black Avenue Cultural District is all about centering and celebrating Black art and life - past, present and future. This vision was birthed by community members living in the Hough neighborhood and has been championed by these leaders ever since. In recent years, recalling this history has included vision trips to the Soulsville neighborhood in Memphis, backyard concerts memorializing the legacy of Leo's Casino on Euclid Avenue, and community dialogues that have kept this vision alive for the better part of a decade. The hope of Black Avenue has always been to create a creative, honest, and soul-filled space where stories can be told, art can be made, and our east side neighborhoods are impacted equitably. The neighborhood is ready for a master plan to take this vision to the next step.

This vision began with one street and has grown into a vision of a district. E 55th, E 66th, and E 75th streets have all had their own individual momentum, but Black Avenue is all about developing a comprehensive cultural vision for each of these nodes, which will express Black life, art, and entrepreneurship in their own unique ways given the role they already play in our neighborhood. These three nodes are threads from the same fabric. A master plan that approaches each node uniquely while also maintaining a cohesive approach will be paramount as we engage the neighbors, stories, and histories that have shaped our neighborhoods.





# Leo’s Casino History

In 1963, business partners Leo Frank and Jules Berger opened Leo's Casino in the lounge of the old Quad Hall Hotel at 7500 Euclid Avenue. The club could host 700 people and regularly booked the top jazz and R&B acts of its era. The Supremes, Marvin Gaye, John Coltrane, Ray Charles and The Temptations all performed at Leo's Casino, as did comedians Richard Pryor and Flip Wilson. In addition to being known for major acts, Leo’s was also known to welcome black and white audiences together under the same roof. In a time of racial turmoil, this was no small thing. Leo's Casino closed in 1972 and was later torn down. In 1999, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame named it a historic landmark, with plans to place a plaque on the site where Leo's Casino once stood. Continued population decline and disinvestment in Cleveland's east side after the Hough Uprising further hurt the club's fortunes.

The proposed Leo’s Casino Arts and Music Collaboratory on E 75th Street is a resident-led initiative in MidTown and Hough aiming to honor the legacy of Leo’s Casino and its impact on Cleveland by keeping this history alive and creating space for artists of all ages and background to collaborate once again. The Collaboratory aims to become a cultural hub and platform in the city for artists and musicians through spaces dedicated to musicians, facilitating new collaborations, and hosting a museum dedicated to telling the story of music and culture fostered by Black artists in Cleveland.






# Scope Of Work

The scope of work for Black Avenue will be focused on three main areas including 1) community engagement, 2) a feasibility study for future development on E 75th Street, and 3) the development of a master plan for the proposed cultural district, cohesively tying together all three nodes while understanding and building off the current momentum that each street carries.

This team will work directly with the MTC staff and resident leaders to engage a wider range of residents to gather stories, ideas, and feedback about the outcomes and expression of Black Avenue across the neighborhood. These will include hosting events, creating digital and print engagement methods, as well as gathering stories that paint a picture of Black history, life, and art in Cleveland (with specific emphasis on neighborhoods that intersect with and surround MidTown).

The feasibility study for E 75th Street is a key piece of this plan since it includes renovations of at least one, but possibly multiple, buildings is being considered. This feasibility study would include the development of a shared working vision for E 75th Street that fits into the larger Black Avenue vision, site plan and architectural renderings, and the development of a proforma and financial model.

E. 66th Steet is a significant part of this plan as well, given its roots as a trolley line. From League Park to the Fatima Family Center, Chateau Hough to the Cleveland Foundation, institutions and businesses in this corridor have served the community for years. Learn more about the E 66th Streetscape plan on our website here.

E 55th Street and Euclid Avenue is the geographic center of MidTown, and the connection for multiple surrounding neighborhoods. This is one of the last remaining historic squares in Cleveland yet to be restored. We are working to change that with an ambitious vision for public art, greenspace, and mixed-use development for people to gather. Learn more about our vision for Penn Square on our website.

The master plan will provide a realistic, yet bold, approach to centering black neighbors by honoring and preserving black history amidst changing neighborhood dynamics, employing public art, real estate, and economic empowerment strategies, and deepening community connections throughout the entirety of process.

# More Information

## Review Body

A panel comprised of community members helping to lead Black Avenue and staff members from MidTown Cleveland will convene to screen all eligible applications and determine a selection.

## Application Information

Firms and teams interested in participating in this RFP Process are required to submit the following:

1. Letter of interest that expresses the team's interest in working with MTC and community members, relationship to Cleveland, and past experiences working with people in neighborhood settings.
2. A comprehensive portfolio showcasing previous projects that demonstrate your firm’s expertise in neighborhood planning and cultural spaces (at least 2).
3. Team composition and qualifications, highlighting relevant experience and expertise of key personnel.
4. A detailed project proposal outlining your approach to the community engagement design, master planning process, and feasibility study for the creation of a museum/collaboration space on E 75th Street.
5. A preliminary budget estimate includes projected cost for feasibility study, preliminary engagement design, and the creation of a master plan. *An additional proposal for full design of E 75th may be requested at a later date.
6. A proposed project timeline, including milestones and estimated completed dates, anticipating a January 1, 2025 start of services date.

## Eligibility

Applications are open to design and planning consultant teams working in the realms of planning and public art, equitable community engagement, and architecture/land use. Cleveland-based firms are strongly encouraged to apply. BIPOC-led teams are also strongly encouraged to apply.

## Selection Criteria

Firms and teams with various levels of experience and expertise will be considered. Applications will be evaluated based on the following:

1. Appreciation for MidTown's mission and vision as well as the Black Avenue as a concept
2. Prior experience working in a neighborhood context
3. Creativity and intentionality in approach to community engagement
4. Expertise around public art, land use, and architecture
5. Prior experience developing a master plan
6. Understanding and appreciation for Black history and culture in Cleveland and the importance of creating equity through economic opportunity, ownership, and public representation

## Project Timeline

| | |
|---|---|
| **Phase 1 9.13.24** | RFP Released |
| **Phase 2 10.11.24** | Applications Due |
| **Phase 3 Late October** | Consultant Interview Process |
| **Phase 4 November** | Consultant Selection |
| **Phase 5 December 2024-September 2025** | Master Planning Process |
| **Phase 6 October 2025** | Finalize Plan + Adopt |

*Please email applications to chemans@midtowncleveland.org with the subject line "Black Avenue Cultural District".

MIDTOWN CLEVELAND, INC.

# Contact Us for Inquiries

**www.midtowncleveland.org**
**chemans@midtowncleveland.org**
**216-391-5080**

*"The word belonging has two meanings. First and foremost, to belong is to be related to and part of something. It is membership, the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase. Belonging is created when we join with other people in producing something that makes a place better. It is the opposite of thinking I must do it on my own…To belong is to know, even in the middle of the night, that I am among friends.*

*The second meaning of the word belong has to be with being an owner: something belongs to me. To belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community. What I consider mine, I will build and nurture. The work, then is to seek in our communities a wider and deeper sense of emotional and communal ownership. It means fostering among all of a community's citizens a sense of ownership and accountability, both in their relationship and in what they actually control"*

*-Peter Block,* ***The Importance of Belonging***