



## The Innerbelt:

# Redirecting Akron's Road to Nowhere

Kyle Julien, City of Akron Planning Director  
October 24, 2024

## The Innerbelt

- The combined impacts of freeway building and urban renewal
- Earlier plans to reimagine the space taken up by the freeway
- Current plans: Reconnecting, healing, and repair

# The Innerbelt

- 2+ mile freeway 'connecting' I-76/77 to Downtown
- Conceived in the 1960s for convenience of drivers from outlying areas
- Designed for 120,000+ vehicles
- Current load is 22,000

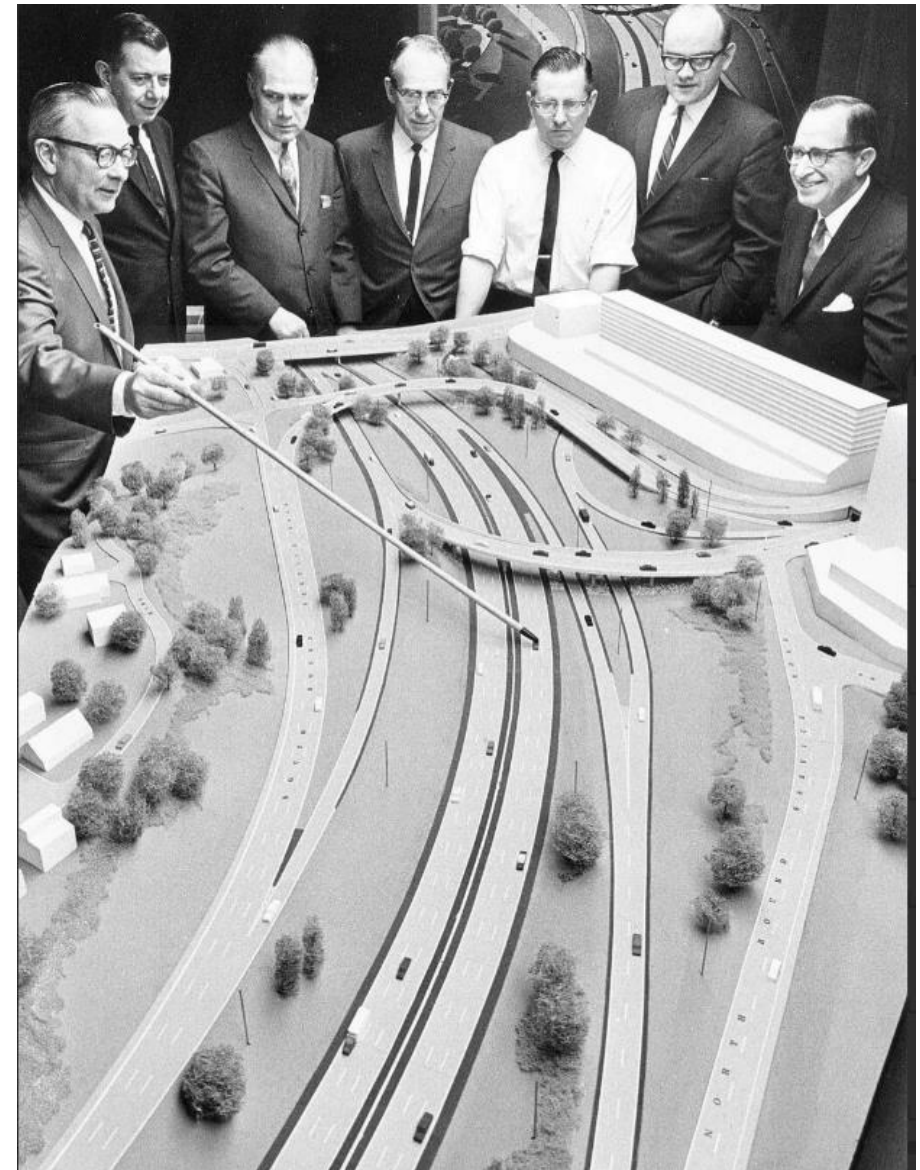


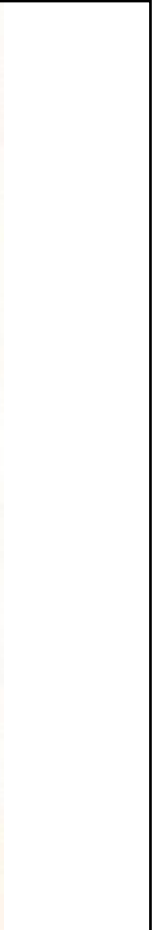
# The Innerbelt: Timeline

1963	Plans for Innerbelt freeway released
1960s	Opportunity Park and Cascade urban renewal programs initiated
1970	Innerbelt construction begins
1980s	Connection to I-76 finalized
1990s	Suggestion to decommission the Innerbelt first aired
2021	Innerbelt Advisory Group formed
2022 held	Innerbelt Oral History project launched, on-site Rubber City Jazz Festival
2023	City of Akron receives DOT Reconnecting Communities planning grant
August 2024	Planning firm selected
September 2025	Final master plan report to be issued



# The Innerbelt







# The Innerbelt





## The Innerbelt





# The Innerbelt

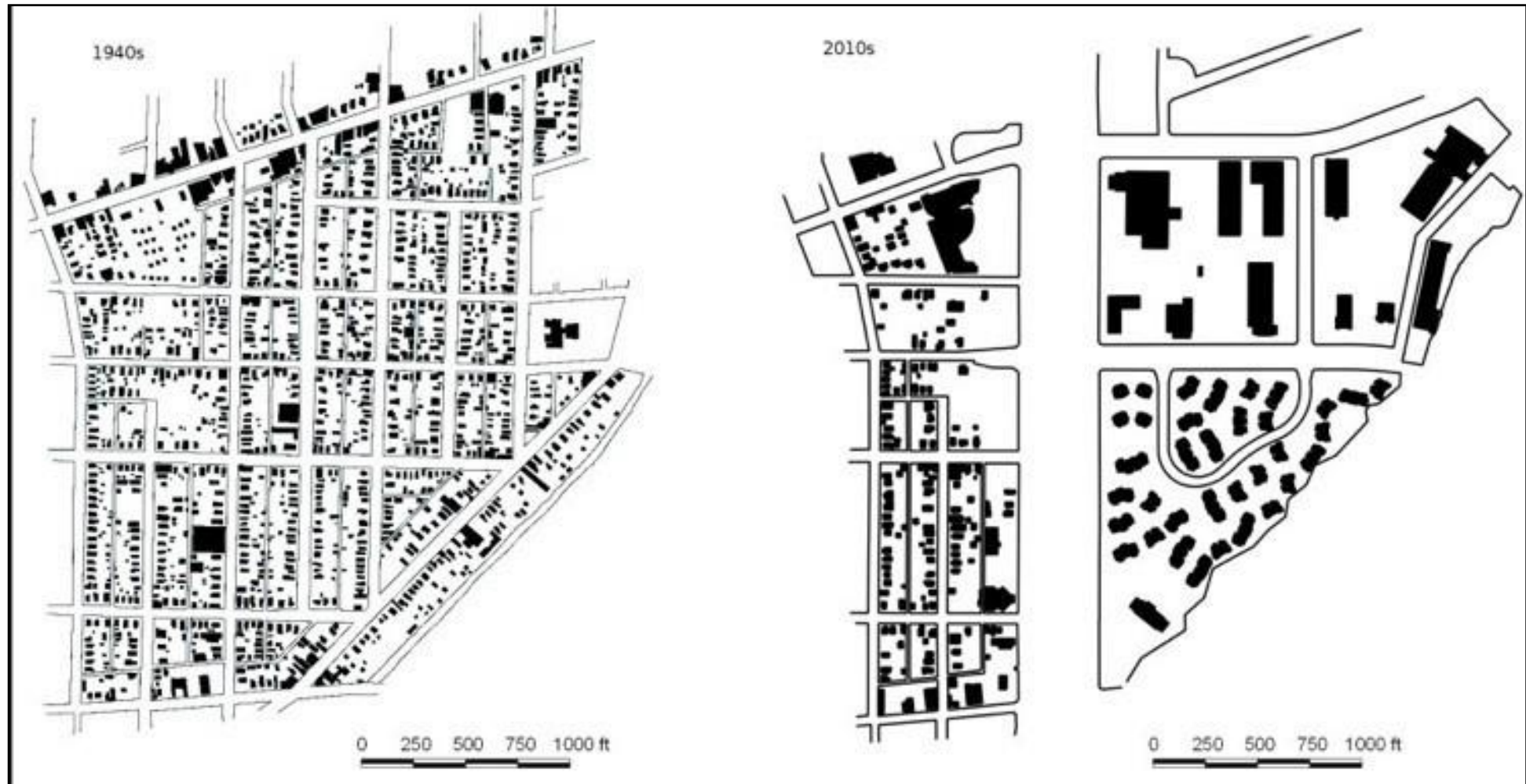


# The Innerbelt

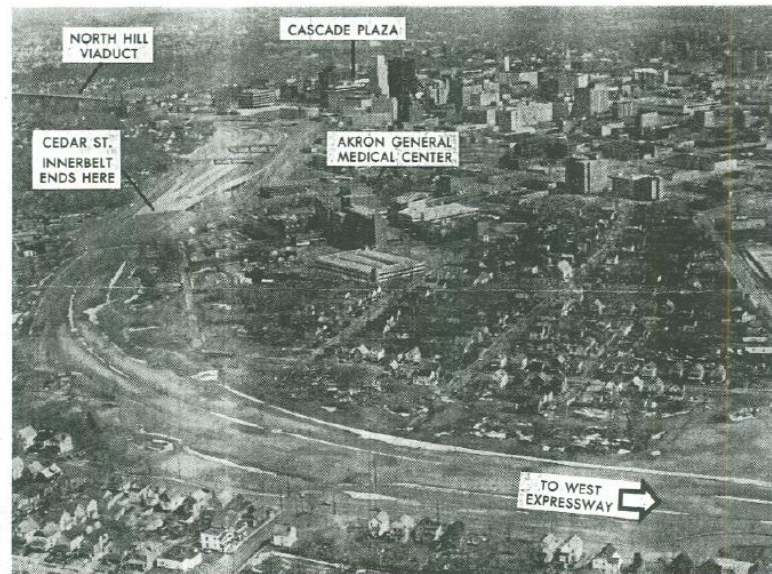




# The Innerbelt



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The Innerbelt as it exists today, including its terminus at Cedar Street. Will it ever be finished?

## End of Innerbelt not yet in sight

BJ 3-20-78

By WILLIAM HERSHEY  
Akron Journal Staff Writer

Perhaps in the '80s  
a need will be felt  
to finish construction  
of the great Innerbelt

"An Ode to John Ballard," by Ralph  
Gillman.

The words were to the tune of "On Top of  
Old Smoky" and the occasion was a good-  
natured ribbing of Akron Mayor John Ballard  
earlier this year by the Downtown Kiwanis  
Club.

The humor has a bite.  
Sixteen years and \$43 million after the  
innerbelt was conceived in 1962, nobody

### Monday Special

knows if it ever will be finished.  
It was supposed to be a 21.5-mile high-  
speed link from Ohio 21 in southwest Summit  
County to Ohio 59 near Kent in Portage  
County. It was to be the miracle road provid-  
ing quick and easy access to downtown AK-

ron, B.F. Goodrich and the Opportunity Park  
urban renewal area. It would, the advocates  
said, help spark downtown's revival and  
boost the economic well-being of the whole  
area.

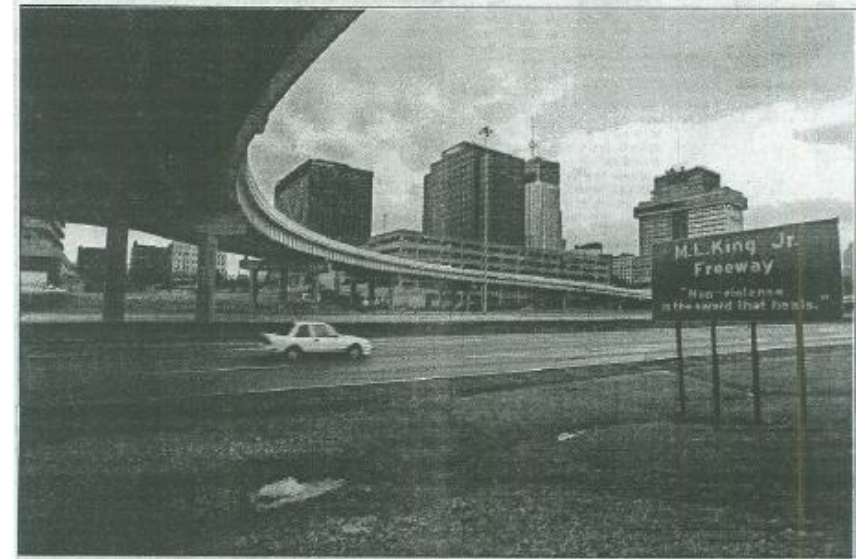
TODAY the Innerbelt is a .75-mile stretch  
linking N. Howard and W. Cedar streets in  
Akron and 2.37 miles between Ohio 43 and  
Ohio 59 in Portage County.  
Grading has been completed on the second  
phase from W. Cedar to Thornton streets.  
Paving that stretch has been held up pending  
approval of an environmental impact state-  
ment by federal highway officials.

David Chapman, the city's transportation  
coordinator, is optimistic the approval will

See AKRON'S, page A-1



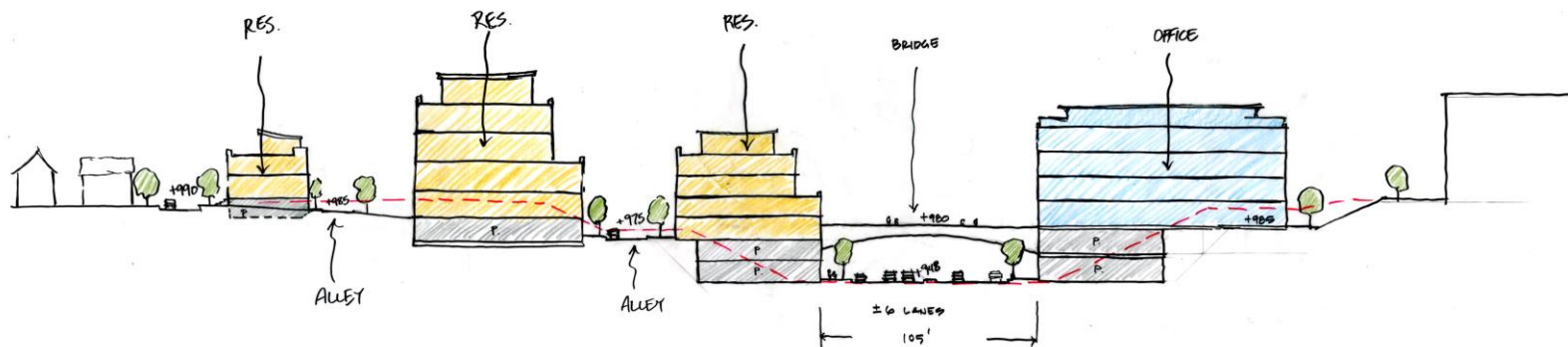
## Innerbelt to exit?



The Akron Innerbelt, which was renamed to honor the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1993, was designed to carry more than 100,000 cars a day, but now handles only 22,000 on its busiest section. The rarely used highway offers one of the best views of downtown Akron's skyline.



# The Innerbelt:



# The Innerbelt

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: PRIOR STUDIES



## KEY FEATURES

- CENTER STREET BRIDGE WIDENED TO 4 LANES
- STATE STREET BRIDGE REMOVED
- NEW PARKING DECK ON OLD STATE STREET BRIDGE LOCATION
- LOCUST STREET EXTENDS TO RAND AVE.

## State Route 59 CONCEPT PLAN





# The Innerbelt: Studio O

## Reconnecting Our Community - Phase 1 Report

A community engaged initiative to reckon with the  
Innerbelt's past and imagine a healed future

By Studio O  
December 2023



# The Innerbelt: Studio O

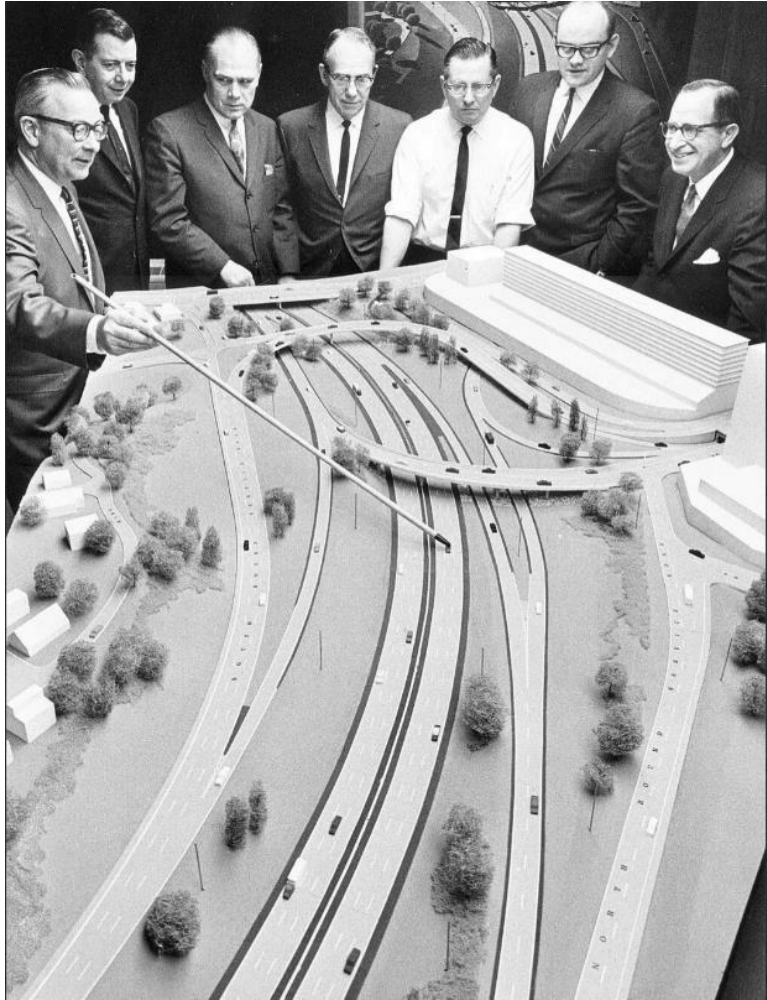
## Key Recommendations

- An apology from the City would advance the healing
- Launch reparative process and develop anti-displacement strategies
- Design a transparent and community-engaged selection process
- Build a long-term accountability structure for the Innerbelt redevelopment
- Create equitable rules and conditions for developer engagement
- Compliment, not compete with adjacent neighborhoods
- “Bring back Wooster Avenue.”

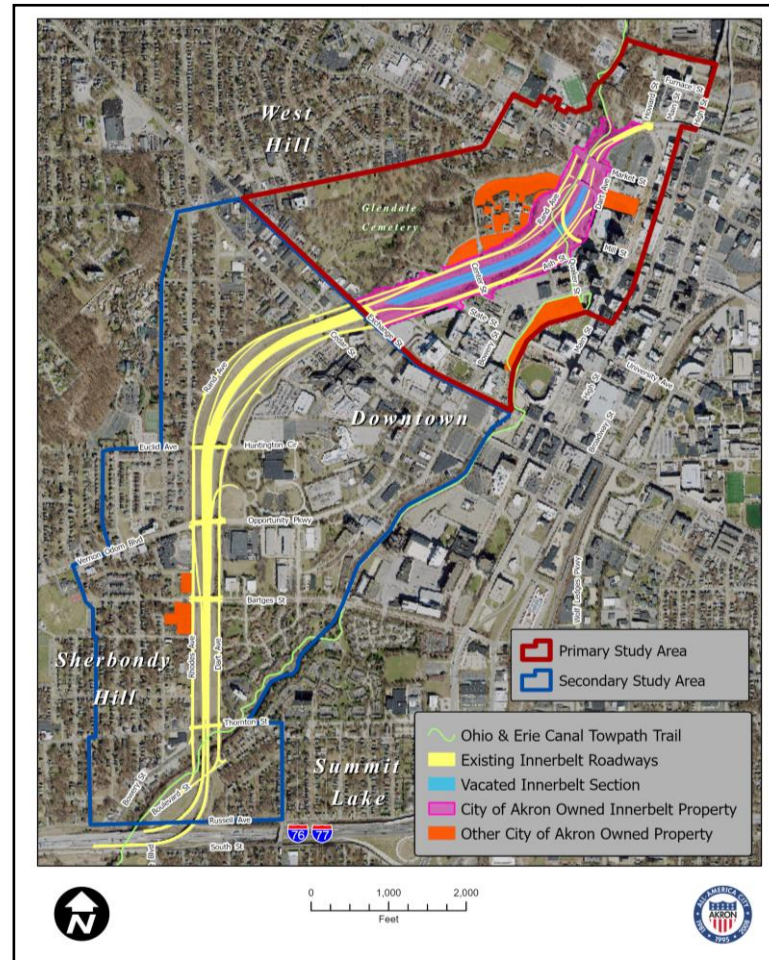
Phase I report: [www.AkronInnerbelt.com](http://www.AkronInnerbelt.com)



## The Innerbelt



# The Innerbelt





# The Innerbelt: Moving Forward







# Project Understanding

Akron's Innerbelt represents an emblematic episode in the tragedy of mid-century American urban planning.

Conceived against a national backdrop of suburban white flight and racialized urban renewal, Akron's "road to nowhere" caused immense destruction in neighborhoods from Summit Lake, Sherbondy Hill, to West Hill, displacing over 700 (many would argue more) households and 100 businesses, exposing countless more to long-term environmental harm, and erecting a lasting barrier that still separates downtown from these communities.



## Team Roles

### Sasaki

Sasaki will serve as the overall project lead, setting project strategy, and will coordinate among various work streams and the city, lead urban design and landscape architecture, and co-lead community and stakeholder engagement strategy with ThirdSpace Action Lab (TSAL).

### WSP | Locally-based

WSP will lead the mobility and infrastructure work stream, and will lead the work in assembling the RCN Capital Construction Grant application. They will also support community engagement.

### ThirdSpace Action Lab (TSAL) | Local, MBE

TSAL will co-lead community and stakeholder engagement strategy with Sasaki, and will support anti-racist community development work.

### Ideas and Action | MBE

Ideas and Action will lead real estate and market analysis, economic development, community development finance, and community wealth building, all through an equity lens.

### City Architecture | Local

City Architecture will support Sasaki in the urban design and landscape architecture work stream and support local community engagement with their extensive ties to the Akron community ecosystem.

### Vista Site Selection (Chris Magill)

Vista Site Selection will act as project advisor, advising on funding and implementation through an Ohio-specific expert lens.

### Local Engagement Coordinators & Stewards | Local, MBE

We've pre-engaged a shortlist of potential engagement coordinators such as Project Ujima, Freedom BLOC, and Robert DeJournett, and will make the final determination in consultation with the city should we be selected.

## Key Questions

At the outset, we've identified the following issues as key to the success of the project. Should we be selected, we look forward to working with project stakeholders and the Akron community to refine our understanding of these issues.

How might we best address the legacies of "infrastructural redlining" and the possible effects of "infrastructural gentrification"?

How might we challenge ourselves to reimagine and deepen "equity"?

What might a new "Made in Akron" urbanism look like?

Infrastructure, housing, jobs, public space...or all of the above?

How might we best position this project for funding and implementation?



## The Innerbelt: Defining Success through Healing and Repair

- Be fiscally sound
- Create value, and ensure that the value created impacts the communities that were impacted by the construction of the Innerbelt
- Create generational value
- Create Black spaces

Thank you.

Kyle Julien

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