



March 16, 2009

The Honorable Martin Sweeney, President  
Cleveland City Council  
Cleveland City Hall, Rm. 210  
601 Lakeside Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44114

***Re: Plan for Redistricting the Brooklyn Center and Old Brooklyn Neighborhoods***

Dear Council President Sweeney,

The Board of Directors ("Board") of the Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation ("OBCDC") held a special meeting the evening of March 12, 2009 to discuss the impact of the planned redistricting (depicted on the attached map and referred to herein as the "Redistricting Plan") on the Brooklyn Center and Old Brooklyn neighborhoods. As a result of that discussion, I was authorized and directed by the Board to prepare this letter outlining the Board's concerns arising from the Redistricting Plan and recommending some steps the City of Cleveland can take to address our concerns. And, with leave of the Board, I will relay a personal perspective arising from my role as a member of the 2008 City of Cleveland Charter Review Commission.

**Concerns**

OBCDC has worked diligently over that last several years to merge the resources of two Council members and now represents neighborhoods that have historically been two of Cleveland's strongest and most stable. Although we are still young as a merged organization we have, by fully engaging the community in our master-planning process, made great strides toward unifying the Brooklyn Center and Old Brooklyn neighborhoods. As a result of our inclusive process, both Councilman Cummins and Councilman Kelley have been fully supportive of both the process and result. The Redistricting Plan will, however, have the effect of fracturing the work done to date. Our efforts to unify as a single neighborhood over two wards have been only somewhat challenging. Following the Redistricting Plan, we will be challenged to unify over four wards; a challenge that this redistricting, as I will describe later in this letter, was to avoid.

While some may say ward boundaries are only lines on a map, the unfortunate reality in Cleveland is that ward lines also dictate how funds flow out of City Hall. When combined with the Redistricting Plan, the present funding model results in another significant challenge for OBCDC. As you know, one of the primary roles of community development corporations is the delivery of services such as code enforcement and economic development assistance to the neighborhoods. OBCDC today, as a merged organization, relies heavily on funding from two councilmen to provide these services. Under the Redistricting Plan, if approved, OBCDC will be forced to cobble together a budget from four different ward councilmen, each representing a different constituency and with a different strategy for his ward. A "worst case scenario" is easy to see: OBCDC being forced to craft a budget from four different pots of money that can only be used in one of four different geographic areas. This would not only effectively halt our efforts to capitalize on the unity we've developed to date, but would make any single project of scale in Brooklyn Center and Old Brooklyn virtually impossible.

The Board is also concerned that the Redistricting Plan does not follow the charter requirement that wards be "composed of contiguous and compact territory, and bounded by natural boundaries or street lines." A ward boundary that wraps around a suburb and jumps the Cuyahoga River valley doesn't following natural boundaries. While I am confident that Councilman Brancatelli will eventually master what can only be described as a geographically challenged ward, the residents of Old Brooklyn, and particularly the South Hills neighborhood, may be forced to travel several miles to interact with their Council representative. The new ward boundary line that encompasses the southeast corner of what is now Ward 15 is not a "compact territory" as required by the Charter.

Because we believe that the Council is truly interested in working with the people it represents to resolve the issues described above, and the many other issues presented by the Redistricting Plan that are too numerous to cover in this letter, the Board asks that any vote on the Redistricting Plan be delayed as long as possible. Delaying a vote will allow Councilmen Brancatelli, Cimperman, Cummins, Kelley, and Santiago to work more directly with Council's consultant, Robert Dykes, to develop a plan that does not so severely divide the Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Center neighborhoods, and the OBCDC service area.

### **Addressing Our Concerns**

In the event the Redistricting Plan becomes final, the following are only some of the steps the City should take to alleviate potential problems going forward:

The City must address how major funding sources such as HUD CDBG funds are allocated. In order for OBCDC and other similarly fragmented community development corporations to continue to serve the neighborhoods, the City must change its thinking on how such resources are distributed. Rather than distributing such funds on a ward basis, these funds should be allocated to neighborhoods. A neighborhood-based system of fund allocation will better preserve the continuity of Cleveland's neighborhoods and better position the neighborhoods to tackle large-scale projects for the direct benefit of the neighborhoods. Obviously, this approach will be ever more important as ward lines are redrawn yet again only four years from now, and every ten years following each federal census.

To accomplish this neighborhood-based goal, the City should work toward developing neighborhood planning and service districts, as proposed by Bill Callahan, another member of the 2008 City of Cleveland Charter Review Commission. These districts would help the City properly target its resources.

And, if the only option is that what is now Ward 12 must "wrap around" Newburg Heights, Council must allocate the resources necessary for that ward to support both an east- and west- side office. Old Brooklyn residents of that ward, on the west side of the Cuyahoga River valley, must have equal access to their Council representative.

### **A Personal Observation**

As you know, I served as a member of the 2008 City of Cleveland Charter Review Commission. As a member of the Commission, I served on the subcommittee that discussed the issue of "right-sizing" and, consequently, redistricting council. Robert Dykes was hired by Council to advise the

*The Honorable Martin Sweeney*

*March 16, 2009*

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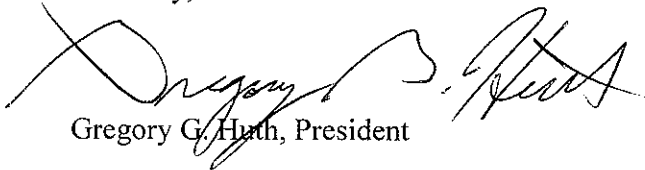
subcommittee and the Commission on the issue of redistricting. My understanding is that Mr. Dykes is also currently advising Council on where to draw the new ward lines and is, to my understanding, the primary author of the Redistricting Plan.

At the time of his service to the Charter Review Commission, Mr. Dykes lamented the fact that several Cleveland neighborhoods were divided by ward boundaries and cautioned against such divisions going forward; he particularly noted his concern over at least one Cleveland neighborhood that was divided over three wards. It was Mr. Dykes' opinion at that time that a redistricting resulting from the proposed reduction in the size of council could be accomplished while dividing any one Cleveland neighborhood over only two wards. When the Commission made its recommendation on redistricting to Council, it reflected Mr. Dykes' concern and asked that Council work diligently to avoid division of Cleveland neighborhoods by ward boundaries.

Consequently, I was more than a bit surprised by the Redistricting Plan. The Redistricting Plan divides Old Brooklyn over three wards and Brooklyn Center, now covered by a single ward, over two. And even more alarming, as noted above, the OBCDC service area is divided over four wards. The Redistricting Plan runs counter to the Charter Review Commission's intent in recommending a plan to right-size Cleveland City Council.

A City is only as strong as its neighborhoods, and the fabric of a neighborhood is knit from the spirit of its residents. History has shown that the fabric of the Brooklyn Center and Old Brooklyn neighborhoods is some of Cleveland's strongest. The Redistricting Plan has the potential to rend that fabric, weakening the neighborhood and putting the strength of the City of Cleveland at risk.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory G. Huith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "H".

Gregory G. Huith, President

Attachment

cc: The Honorable Anthony Brancatelli, Councilman, Ward 12  
The Honorable Joe Cimperman, Councilman, Ward 13  
The Honorable Joe Santiago, Councilman, Ward 14  
The Honorable Brian Cummins, Councilman, Ward 15  
The Honorable Kevin Kelley, Councilman, Ward 16  
Robyn Sandys, Executive Director  
Brooklyn Center Community Association  
South Hills Neighborhood Association  
Southwest Citizens Area Council  
Cleveland Neighborhood Development Coalition