

# zero threshold

a design competition for barrier-free living

Created by North Coast Community Homes  
funded by the Cleveland Foundation

## DESIGN COMPETITION BRIEF



### ABOUT THE COMPETITION

The Zero Threshold design competition was inspired by (dis)ABLED Beauty, an exhibition at the Kent State University Museum in 2016-17. The exhibition presented beautifully designed prostheses, hearing aids, and mobility devices for people living with disabilities, (dis)ABLED Beauty aimed to change the negative stigma associated with disability by presenting fashion-forward adaptive devices that make a virtue of necessity.

Zero Threshold applies a similar approach to the design of accessible housing. Instead of making accessible features as functional and invisible as possible, this competition challenges designers to celebrate the aesthetics of accessibility. The competition encompasses new residential construction, accessory dwelling units, interior design and retrofit of existing housing, accessible public space and landscape design, and holistic urban design strategies aimed at eliminating physical and social barriers in urban neighborhoods.

Zero Threshold uses a real neighborhood—Old Brooklyn in Cleveland, Ohio—as a stand-in for traditional urban neighborhoods throughout the United States and in other parts of the world. Competition entries are expected to respond to the local context while also expanding ideas about accessibility in ways that translate to other places..

The competition is open to students and professionals, working individually or in teams. Winning entries will receive monetary awards and be featured in an exhibition and publication. The most compelling and innovative projects may be constructed in a future second phase of the competition.

Join us in envisioning and building a barrier-free future.

### BACKGROUND

**Cleveland, Ohio:** In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Cleveland was a booming metropolis. The city's central location on the Great Lakes played an important role in its emergence as a commercial hub and transportation center. By 1940, Cleveland was the sixth largest city in the country. The city's population peaked in 1950 at 914,808 residents. But in the 1960s, industrial restructuring, economic decline, and growing racial tensions triggered the city's ensuing struggles with population loss, abandonment, and blight. Cleveland's current population stands at 388,072.

The city's revival began in the late 1980s, fueled by the development of a downtown shopping mall and major league sports stadiums. Downtown investments were complemented by a neighborhood-focused initiative to build 1,500 housing units every year in an effort to restore the city's lost population. Housing starts were incentivized by a 15-year, 100% property tax abatement on new residential construction.

Infill residential development was widespread throughout the city until the sub-prime mortgage foreclosure crisis undermined the city's housing market. 2006-2012 were the worst years of the foreclosure crisis. Over 46,000 foreclosures occurred within city limits during this time period, affecting more than 25% of Cleveland's housing stock. Mortgage foreclosures led to housing abandonment and this, in turn, resulted in the demolition of thousands of properties and the creation of a large inventory of vacant municipally-owned lots.

Cleveland in 2019 is a mixture of thriving neighborhoods, distressed neighborhoods, and middle neighborhoods that are caught in between the two extremes.

**Old Brooklyn Neighborhood:** Old Brooklyn is an affordable, family-friendly neighborhood where business and people come to grow. At 6.2 square miles, over 12,000 buildings and 30,000 residents, Old Brooklyn is the largest neighborhood in Cleveland.

In 2017, The Brookings Institution published a book entitled *On the Edge: Americas Middle Neighborhoods*, edited by Paul Brophy. Middle neighborhoods are neither healthy and thriving, nor overtly distressed. On the edge between growth and decline, middle neighborhoods are generally affordable, stable, and safe. Middle neighborhoods tend to have weak market demand for existing housing, often because the housing stock is out of step with the preferences and priorities of contemporary home buyers. Middle neighborhoods have played an important role building opportunity and prosperity, and yet they are often overlooked.

Old Brooklyn is a textbook example of a middle neighborhood. The neighborhood has many long-term residents who are aging in place. It also has an abundance of families with children. The neighborhood did experience mortgage foreclosures and housing abandonment, but at a modest level compared to other Cleveland neighborhoods. The focus area for the competition has some vacant houses and vacant land, but not to the point where the neighborhood appears blighted or abandoned.

By expanding accessibility and eliminating barriers in housing and public spaces in Old Brooklyn, the Zero Threshold competition aims to stimulate reinvestment and expand market demand in a neighborhood. The competition will create a new model for regenerating urban neighborhoods by eliminating barriers and diversifying the housing stock.

**Barrier-Free Cleveland:** Barrier-Free Cleveland is a new initiative of The Cleveland Foundation that aims to eliminate physical, social, and economic barriers and promote the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities throughout the Cleveland area. The Zero Threshold Design Competition is the first project of Barrier-Free Cleveland.

## SCHEDULE

Release of Competition Brief	7 January 2019
Question & Answer Period	7 January - 31 May 2019
Early Registration Deadline	8 March 2019
Standard Registration Deadline	31 May 2019
Late Registration Deadline	28 June 2019
Submission Deadline	28 June 2019
Awards Announcement	TBD
Awards Event	19 September 2019

## AWARDS + RECOGNITION

Prizes of total USD 11000, as follows:

- **Grand Prize** USD 4000 + Certificate + Publication + One category prize below
- **New Residential Construction Prize** USD 1000 + Certificate + Publication
- **Accessory Dwelling Prize** USD 1000 + Certificate + Publication
- **Housing Retrofit/Remodel** (Colonial and/or Duplex) Prize USD 2000 + Certificate + Publication
- **Community Gathering Place Prize** USD 1000 + Certificate + Publication
- **Neighborhood-wide/Holistic Approach to Accessibility** USD 1000 + Certificate + Publication
- **Student Submission Prize** USD 1000 + Certificate + Publication
- **10 Honorable mentions** Certificate + Publication

The jury reserves the right to issue multiple awards for a category, combine categories, and make additional awards for hybrid proposals that address more than one category.

## DEADLINES + FEES

EARLY REGISTRATION	March 8, 2019 5:00 PM EST
Student	\$0
Studio	\$150
Professional	\$100
STANDARD REGISTRATION	May 31, 2019 5:00 PM EST
Student	\$50
Studio	\$250
Professional	\$200
LATE REGISTRATION	June 28, 2019 5:00 PM EST
Student	\$75
Studio	\$300
Professional	\$300
SUBMISSION PRINTING + SHIPPING (ALL)	\$100

## ELIGIBILITY

- The competition is open to design students and professionals, working individually or on teams.
- Student submissions may be the product of work in a design studio or related class.
- Judging of competition entries will occur anonymously. Submissions must designate a primary contact person for communication purposes only.
- Staff and Board members of North Coast Community Homes, and all competition partners and advisors are prohibited from participating in the competition.
- No jury member or competition partner may advise or assist a competitor in any way. Entrants assisted by any competition partner or jury member will be disqualified.

## COMPETITION STRUCTURE

Zero Threshold is an ideas competition for a real-world problem. In this first phase of the competition, entrants are encouraged to envision bold and innovative ideas for housing, public spaces, and neighborhoods that expand the practice of accessible design and barrier-free living. A second phase of the competition will advance the strongest ideas into implementation.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

Competition entries will be evaluated based on:

- **Accessibility** Readily usable by people with varying degrees of physical ability.
- **Responsiveness** Understanding the needs of people with disabilities and addressing those needs in an innovative and design-forward manner.
- **Innovation** Bold new ideas or insightful variations on established best practices in accessible design that reframe accessible elements as something to be celebrated, rather than hidden or downplayed.
- **Transferability** Concepts that apply to the specific physical, social, and economic context of Cleveland's Old Brooklyn neighborhood, but can also be readily adapted to other places.
- **Affordability** Housing solutions that are economically accessible to middle-income households and aligned with housing values in middle neighborhoods.

## COMPETITION PROGRAM + CATEGORIES

Entrants are invited to submit conceptual designs for one or a combination of these categories:

- 1) **New Residential Construction for an infill site in an urban neighborhood:** Design for a new, fully accessible house on an infill lot that fits into the context of a traditional neighborhood (using the Old Brooklyn neighborhood for context) while advancing new ideas about the aesthetics of accessibility. We do not expect full house plans, just conceptual designs. See the attached map for examples of infill sites in the target neighborhood for the competition.
- 2) **Accessory Dwelling:** An accessory dwelling unit is a fully accessible, independent living unit that is detached from the primary structure. It can be on the same lot as the primary structure or on an adjacent lot. The accessory dwelling should be compatible with the primary structure while also presenting new ideas about accessibility, adjacencies, and interdependencies.
- 3) **Housing Retrofit/Remodel:** Design ideas that transform existing urban housing for maximum accessibility, beauty, and design innovation. Two housing types—a single-family colonial and a two-family up/down duplex are the focus of the retrofit category. These housing types are prevalent in the Old Brooklyn neighborhood, throughout Cleveland, and in other Midwestern cities in the US. See attached photos for representative examples of these housing types. Floor plans of typical houses will be provided to entrants in AutoCAD format in February. Entrants can develop design concepts for either housing type, or for both. Please note: it is not necessary to provide detailed construction drawings. Entrants should provide drawings and descriptions that best characterize accessibility improvements through graphics that visually convey innovative aspects of your proposal.
- 4) **Community Gathering Place:** Landscape design/urban design for a vacant lot (or lots) that create an inclusive, barrier-free place for neighborhood residents to interact. In keeping with the goals of Zero Threshold, landscape solutions should be design-forward, celebrating accessibility features rather than concealing or downplaying them,
- 5) **Neighborhood-wide/Holistic Approach to Accessibility:** Urban design strategies that remove barriers and embrace an entire block or neighborhood in a new vision for accessible, barrier-free living.
- 6) **Student Submissions:** Students can submit in any of the previous five categories. Student submissions will be juried separately from professional submissions.

## JURY

To be announced.

## REGISTRATION

Registrations are done digitally on the ZeroThreshold.org website. Participants should complete the entirety of the form by entering the relevant contact and other information. Participants will then select which registration category there are in (i.e. professional, studio, individual student). They will then select how many categories they would like to submit an entry for and pay the corresponding registration fee by credit card or PayPal. Upon receipt of the registration form and fee, each registering individual or team will be issued a unique registration ID number by email. This registration number should be referenced in all correspondence with the competition managers and included on all entry materials.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions must be digital and are complete by a SlideRoom portal. Entrants must upload their submissions no later than 5pm, Eastern Standard Time, on the **Competition Deadline, Friday, June 28, 2019.**

Entrants may visit <https://zerothreshold.slideroom.com> to submit.

Entrants must create a unique sign-in before submitting. They will then select the appropriate category from the list of programs available:

- Professional Entry - Accessory Dwelling
- Professional Entry - Community Gathering Space
- Professional Entry - Holistic or Neighborhood Approach
- Professional Entry - Retrofit of Colonial and/or Duplex
- Professional Entry - Single Family New Construction
- Student Entry - One Category
- Student Second Entry - One Category

Upon selecting the category, entrants will complete the form, including name, organization (or school) name, email address, phone number, and if they are entering as an individual or as a team. Teams should identify a single person to complete the entry form and submission. All team member names and email must also be listed in the appropriate field on the submission form.

Please note that there are specific requirements related to the file types and naming conventions as outlined below:

## SUBMISSION FILES

- 1) Maximum 500-word submission design summary in PDF format, describing the project and providing any additional information that entrant(s) want the jury to understand about their project. The file must be labeled: RegistrationID.pdf (using your unique 10-digit ID issued at registration).

For team submissions, please use the first and last name of a designated team leader, in each place a first and last name is requested.

- 2) 200dpi 24"x 36" PDF or PNG of each of **two** submission boards (**portrait orientation**).

Files must be labeled using the following protocol:

RegistrationID-LEFT.pdf OR RegistrationID-LEFT.png  
RegistrationID.pdf OR LRegistrationID.png

- 3) Three (3) feature images in JPG or PNG format- 200dpi at 700x524 pixels (these can be renderings, plans, sections, etc.) named accordingly:

- RegistrationID-IMAGE1.jpg
- RegistrationID-IMAGE2.jpg
- RegistrationID-IMAGE3.jpg

- 4) If files are larger than 10 MB, we have included a field where entrants can link to a Google Drive or DropBox.  
Note: all files should still follow the above listed naming convention.

Upon submission, entrants will pay a \$100 fee to cover printing and administration of the entries. We are handling all printing of the submissions in order keep the competition sustainable, professional, and for the ease of competitors. Payments will be made online as part of the submission process with a credit card or via PayPal.

Once your submission has been completed, you will not be able to edit it or make changes unless and until you email us to "un-accept" your submission. At which point you can make any changes and resubmit.

Please note, physical models will not be accepted. At the conclusion of the Zero Threshold Competition, select entries will be on public display as part of an exhibit and closing reception where the winners will be announced. Materials submitted will not be returned to the owners at the conclusion of the competition.



## ANONYMITY OF PRESENTATION BOARDS

Other than the registration number, submitted materials will bear no identification, name, symbol, insignia, logo or mark that might serve to reveal the identity of their authors. Submissions will be examined by competition managers, and those not in compliance with anonymity rules will be disqualified. No entrant may directly or indirectly reveal the authorship of a submission to any juror, competition sponsor, competition manager or member of the press. Doing so prior to the announcement of awards will be grounds for disqualification.

## QUESTIONS

Please email any questions to the competition organizers at [questions@zerethreshold.org](mailto:questions@zerethreshold.org).

- Answers will be posted on the website ([www.zerethreshold.org](http://www.zerethreshold.org)) throughout the competition. Please check the website Q+A page regularly. Under no circumstances should there be any communication regarding the competition other than through this email address.
- The competition organizers reserve the right to edit submitted questions before posting them to the website. The competition organizers also reserve the right not to answer all questions and not to post redundant questions or remarks deemed to be inappropriate or irrelevant.
- No phone calls to North Coast Community Housing, any of the competition partners, The Cleveland Foundation, or the jurors are allowed. Individuals or teams who contact any of these entities will be disqualified.

## OWNERSHIP & COPYRIGHT

By participating in the competition, each entrant certifies that his or her submission was created by the entrant and that it is free of any copyright trademark or patent rights or other intellectual property held by any other party.

Materials submitted for the competition become the property of North Coast Community Homes (NCCH) and may be retained for exhibition, publication, and promotional purposes. NCCH reserves the right in its retention of ownership of all competition materials to utilize submissions in any exhibition, publication or promotional endeavor and without compensation to the entrants. Each competitor will retain full copyright of all materials submitted unless otherwise stated.

## COMPETITION PARTNERS

**North Coast Community Homes** North Coast Community Homes (NCCH) provides high quality, community-based homes throughout Northeast Ohio for people with developmental disabilities, severe mental illness, and other disabilities. With the support of many donors, volunteers, and professionals, we have developed and manage more than 220 community-based homes serving more than 1,000 men and women since 1984. In keeping with our mission, homes developed by NCCH are safe, comfortable, and affordable, and are designed to empower persons with disabilities to live fuller, more independent lives. Working with County Boards of Developmental Disabilities and local mental Health agencies, North Coast Community Homes has homes in more than 60 cities across Northeast Ohio.

**The Cleveland Foundation** The Cleveland Foundation's mission is to enhance the lives of all residents of Greater Cleveland, now and for generations to come, by working together with donors to build community endowment, address needs through grantmaking, and provide leadership on key community issues. The foundation sees the Zero Threshold design challenge as an opportunity to begin the journey towards transforming Cleveland into the world's best barrier-free city. As such, the organization is proud to provide the financial support to such a forward-thinking initiative.

**Kent State University Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative** The Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC) is the combined home of the urban design graduate program at Kent State University and the public service activities of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. The CUDC's professional staff of designers are committed to improving the quality of urban spaces through technical design assistance, research and advocacy. Supported by the university and private philanthropy, the CUDC offers architectural and urban design expertise in the service of urban communities, design professionals, and non-profit and academic partners in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.

**Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation** Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation is a non-profit in the Cleveland community with the mission to develop and revitalize the community by uniting and empowering residents, business leaders, and government around plans and initiatives to achieve social, economic and civic improvement. Old Brooklyn and Cleveland are changing, and that change is the result of many factors. Many of these factors: demographics, the regional economy, and market sensitivities, lie outside the control of individual organizations. We hope the Zero Threshold competition will be a launching point for additional growth, development, and opportunity for Old Brooklyn, Cleveland, and beyond.

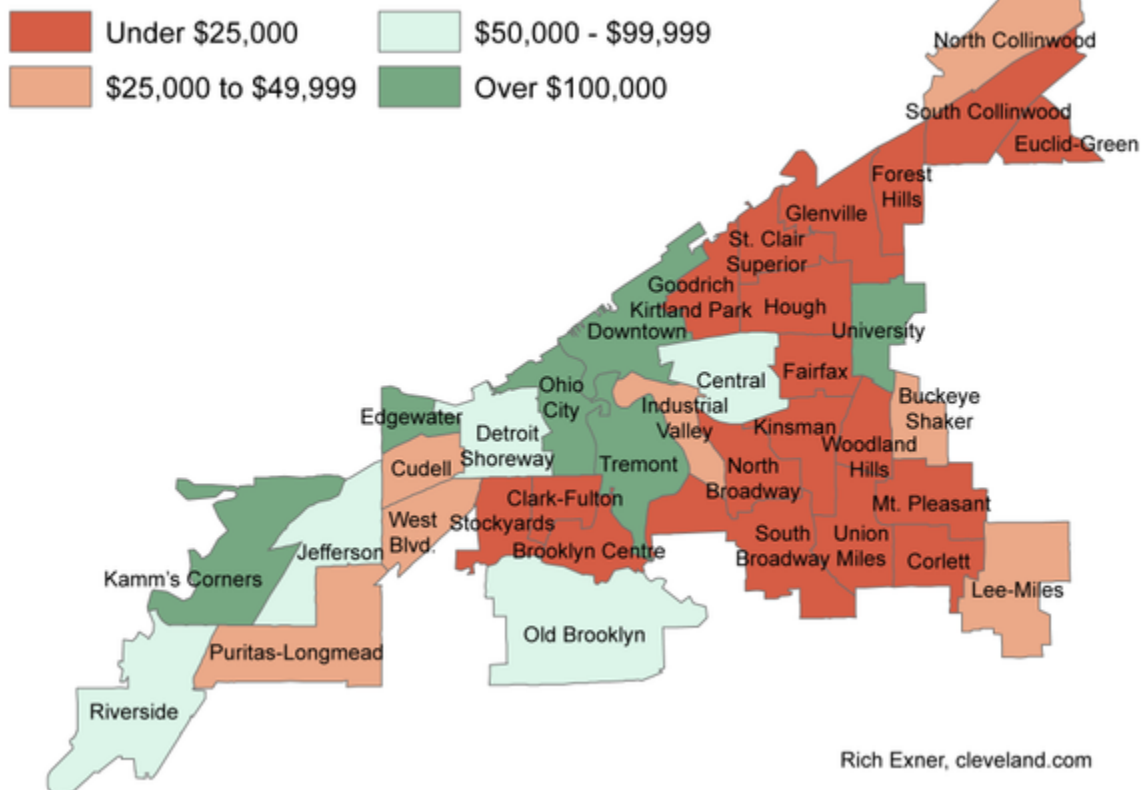
**C C Hodgson Architectural Group** C C Hodgson Architectural Group is an architectural firm providing wellness-based design services to visionary clients who are passionate about creating healing environments. Driven by an unwavering belief that environments affect behavior and well-being – that design matters – they apply fresh thinking and innovation. Pioneering wellness design for more than 40 years, many of the concepts they helped bring forward, such as the first research study to track wellness in senior living communities, are now embraced by senior living communities across the nation.

**Maximum Accessible Housing of Ohio** Maximum Accessible Housing of Ohio (MAHO) provides and promotes accessibility for all people, at home and in the community. The extensive accessibility features in our Vistas Apartment Communities provide over 150 people with disabilities with the opportunity to live more independently. Our Anderson Center for Accessible Living promotes accessible housing and inclusive communities through education and outreach. We are acutely aware of the need for accessible housing and hope that the Zero Threshold Design Competition will provide inspiration and impetus for development of more accessible housing.

**Cleveland Neighborhood Progress** Cleveland Neighborhood Progress was founded in 1988 by philanthropic, civic, and corporate leaders. It serves as the only local community development intermediary in the region. Cleveland Neighborhood Progress is leading the revitalization of Cleveland's neighborhoods. It impacts the community by providing financial support, training and capacity building efforts to community development corporations (CDCs), supporting and performing placemaking activities to improve residential, commercial and green space properties, and delivering economic opportunity programming to ensure city residents can thrive where they live.

## OLD BROOKLYN CLEVELAND, OHIO

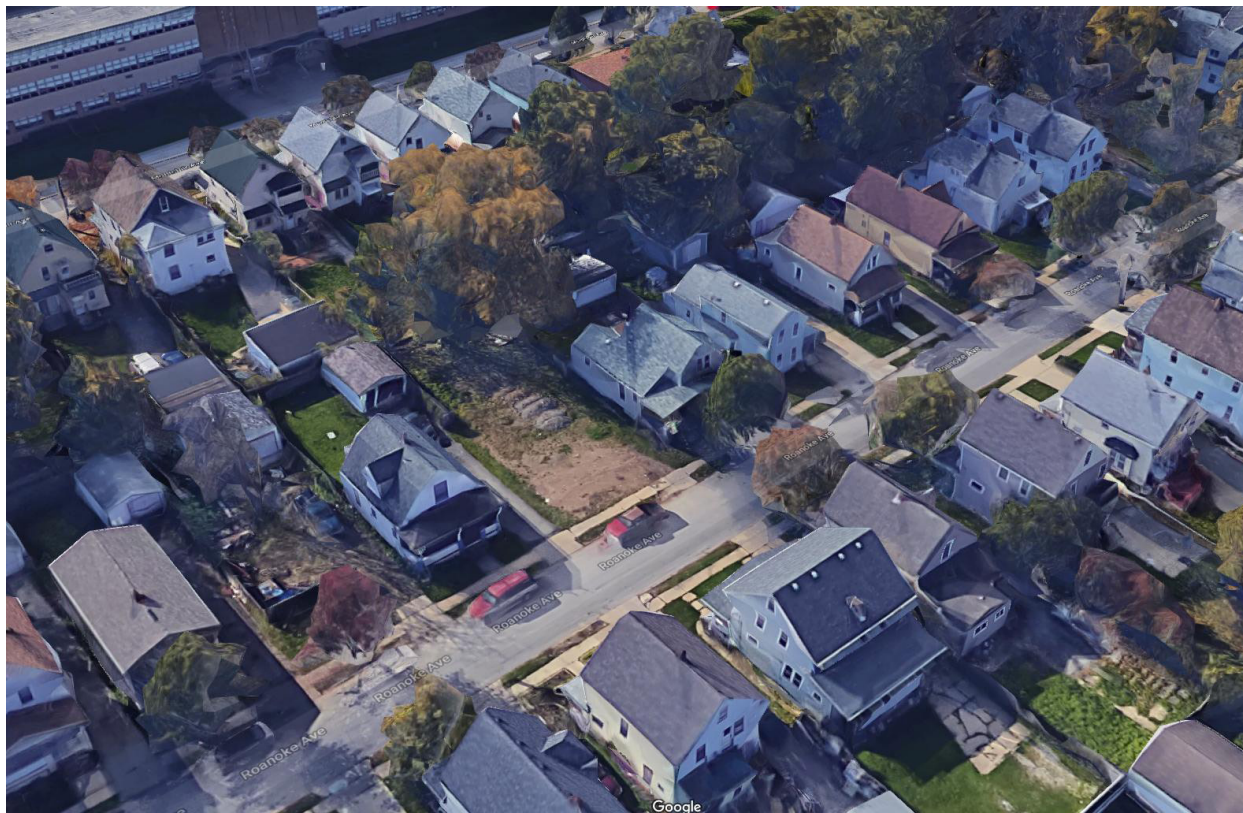
### Cleveland median single-family home sales - 2016



### Roanoke redevelopment opportunities



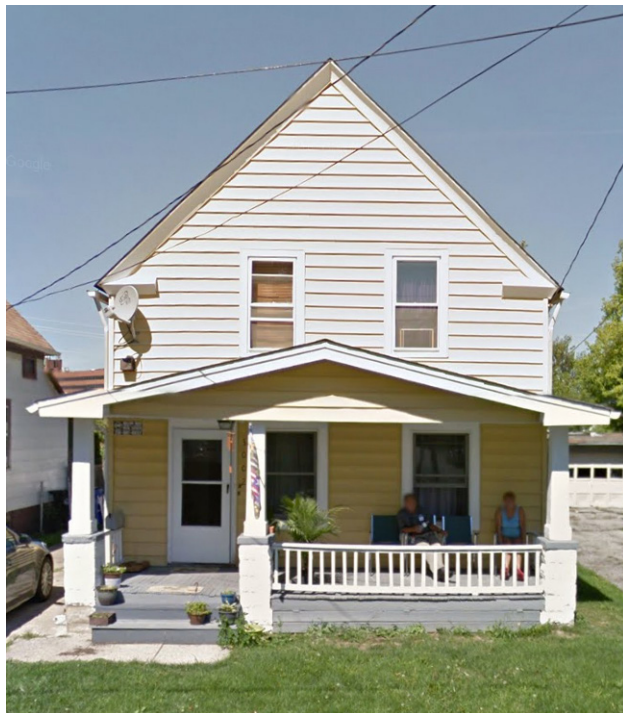




Typical single family colonial house

Typical duplex/two family house





## RESOURCES

[City of Cleveland Online GIS Mapping and Data](#) Cleveland City Planning Commission

[Old Brooklyn Neighborhood Plan Summary](#) Cleveland City Planning Commission

[A short guide to Cleveland's Old Brooklyn Neighborhood.](#) Tripsavvy, 16 January 2018

[Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation](#) website

[\(dis\)ABLED Beauty: The Evolution of Beauty, Disability, and Ability Gallery Guide](#); Kent State University Museum, 2016

[On the Edge: America's Middle Neighborhoods.](#) Paul Brophy, editor. The American Assembly, 2016