

Candidate name: Mohammad Faraj

Ward: 7

1. In 2024, more than 600 people walking or biking in the city were struck by drivers. In 2022, the City adopted Vision Zero, committing to eliminate traffic fatalities by 2032—yet there is still no dedicated annual budget for traffic calming. During budget season, would you advocate for increased funding for street safety improvements?

Yes. One of the most impactful conversations I've had while canvassing in the new Ward 7 came from a young woman who is blind who discussed with me her fear of walking the streets because of how reckless some drivers are in the area. I have walked all over ward 7 while during this campaign and have seen myself how dangerous it can be to walk some of these streets. I've seen people race over speed tables, drive over roundabouts, cut corners, run red lights, and just generally create an unsafe environment to walk in. It needs to be a priority of the City to create not only a City that is walkable but one that can be done safely so for all residents, and to be done so by keeping in mind those with disabilities or impairments to truly create a walkable city for every single one of its residents.

2. Last year, the City adopted Cleveland Moves (our city's new Mobility Plan) and, with that, committed to building 50 miles of low-stress bike facilities over the next 3 years. Protected bike lanes are a proven safety countermeasure for not just bike riders, but people walking and driving as well. Will you support upgrading existing bike lanes in your ward to be physically separated from car lanes?

Yes, like stated in the previous question there are many safety issues in this city when it comes to walking or biking and members of City Council and City employees need to prioritize helping to build Cleveland into an accessible place where one can bike without fear. I was thrilled to see the adoption of Cleveland Moves and I think there are many incredible ideas listed in that plan, but the important part is not the ideas but their implementation. As Councilor I would push for the continual funding and implementation of Cleveland Moves in its entirety.

3. In 2022, City Council changed the name of its Transportation Committee to the Transportation and Mobility Committee. Still, the vast majority of legislation that this committee sees is related to the airports and the Port of Cleveland. What role do you see this committee playing going forward?

While the airports and Port of Cleveland are important parts of our city, the Transportation and Mobility Committee is responsible for all forms of transportation which includes public transit as well as taxi and limo services, lake and river travel, and city owned bridges. This Committee directly oversees the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) meaning that any members of this Committee should be intimately familiar with how GCRTA operates and all of its services.

A top priority of my campaign has been small business outreach and one of the main concerns I've heard from small business owners is how the City does not inform them when construction is being done of the streets or sidewalks in front of their establishments. This directly affects their businesses and their customers and should be the City's responsibility to inform them with fair notice of when any form of construction or City services will affect their business. I would like to see this Committee play a more proactive role so that the City's actions pertaining to public transit improvement can be better well-received by those who feel left out of this conversation. This is not to interfere with public transit-oriented development but instead to improve the negative feedback channels and mitigate blow-backs, something that I feel strongly the councilperson should play a constructive role in improving.

4. Last summer, the city upgraded coin-operated parking meters to accept online payments and has continued adding new on-street paid parking zones in Ohio City, Downtown, University Circle, and Detroit-Shoreway—creating a new revenue stream for the city. Surface parking lots in Downtown and other neighborhoods are also taxed, with much of that revenue currently directed toward stadium funding. Would you support dedicating this money to mobility and safety improvements instead? Why or why not?

Yes, especially with the new Browns stadium being built in Brook Park, the City's funding does not need to be going towards these stadiums with billionaire owners but to services that directly benefit the residents, who are the majority of the folks paying for parking. The state gave the Haslam Sports Group \$600 million of Ohioan's hard earned money from the state's unclaimed funds, and the gouging of funds from tax payers and residents must end. The money collected by parking in the city should go towards making roads and transportation more accessible and better run. It only makes sense to use funds collected from drivers through parking to create better streets, it's only fair, just like it would only be fair for the owners and operators of the teams to fund their own stadiums and not ask the residents of the city to do it for them. I would say undoubtedly that no money whatsoever from the City of Cleveland should go to any stadium or sports team that does not reside in Cleveland.

5. Historically, community engagement around street projects starts after design is well underway, leaving little room for meaningful feedback. Even now, public meetings often happen on short notice and promotion for these meetings is limited. How do you plan to collect feedback from constituents and ensure they know about opportunities for input on projects?

It has been a major priority throughout my campaign and will continue to be once elected to center the voices in the Ward in my work as Councilor and the only way to do so is to ensure that I am hearing the voices of residents. I have worked very hard over the course of my campaign to listen to all of the voices of the Ward, and not just those who regularly engage in local politics, but instead to focus on those who don't. It has been my philosophy to work to meet people where they are at instead of assuming that they will find their way to me. I've done this by showing up to as many block clubs as I can, attending block parties and community events throughout the ward, but most notably by creating spaces and

events in neighborhoods and areas that are historically left behind. I have made it a priority to spend a lot of my time in the public housing spaces in Ward 7, specifically Lakeview Terrace and Riverview Tower. I've seen firsthand now the impact of talking to folks directly and how important it is to include every voice in decisions that this city makes.

Once elected I plan to continue this effort in working to center every single voice in the community especially when it comes to decisions and projects that will directly affect them. I want to work to be as transparent with the residents as possible, and inform the community of information that is pertinent to them as soon as it's available. And in doing so, I want to work to hold events and create spaces that allow for that. I would vow to host town halls and attend block clubs or events as frequently as I can to both share with residents what work is being done as well as to hear from them about what is going on in the community.

Neighbors of the new Ward 7 recognize that the city councilor is the elected representative of closest proximity to the community, and therefore must remain physically and emotionally connected to those being served. As the city councilor, my accessibility to the people is crucial for my ability to understand the problems that need solutions. I intend to designate reliable office hours, host regular town halls designed to reach the Ward's most disenfranchised, and fight to protect & enhance public comment.

6. Cleveland's ability to deliver safer streets is limited by staffing levels that fall short of many peer cities. Would you commit to support funding additional mobility positions – including a dedicated crew for installing traffic-calming measures like speed tables and more engineers – to bring Cleveland in line with similar cities and accelerate street safety improvements?

Yes. As City Councilor I believe my job is to help to work to make this a better city for all residents, and safety is a major part of that. One of my 5 campaign priorities includes Public Safety. My approach to Reliable Public Safety strives to prevent the type of desperation that often leads to crime. Ensuring people have stable housing does, in fact, make us all safer. The ability to roam your block freely without being struck by a speeding car is an achievement that benefits all of us and opportunities for neighbors to get to know each other recognizes that celebrating community ultimately builds safety.

Through walking the neighborhood and knocking on doors, I've experienced every block, street, corner, and intersection in the new Ward 7. I've directly witnessed the reckless speeding down streets with young families, the danger of the neighborhood's low visibility areas, and the challenges of navigating broken sidewalks. How we build and maintain our neighborhoods is a matter of public safety that has to be addressed in our rapidly growing Ward, and I look forward to working with the administration and local groups to ensure pedestrian well-being remains a priority. A key point of this would be to support additions positions and proposals for safer streets in Cleveland.

7. What is your experience with public transit? Do you ride the RTA?

Living next to the EcoVillage Rapid Station, I do rely on public transit, particular when navigating the ward.

8. The 2025 Cleveland Health Survey found that unreliable transportation prevented 20% of residents citywide from getting to medical appointments, work, or other essential needs over the past year – with even higher rates in some wards. What role should public transit play in ensuring residents can meet their daily needs, and how would you support RTA in making that happen?

Oversight and advocacy are the two roles city council has when it comes to GCRTA, one of many unelected boards in our city. I believe the lack of thorough planning when it comes to how traffic flows in the city, where people live, where it is that they tend to go, etc., has resulted in a city that is largely unreliable--and that includes things like transportation. Fighting for a comprehensive RTA budget is imperative, but I am particularly interested in exploring ways to support the update and improvement of bus stops, as many residents of the new Ward 7 have pointed out how they've adopted some of these to maintain improvements. I view this is an important part of the negative experience many riders may have, including how this contributes to feeling like the RTA is unreliable.

9. GCRTA will be broke in a couple years once they run out of federal COVID relief dollars. If that happens without finding new sources of operating funds, the transit authority will be forced to drastically cut service and raise fares. We are already seeing this happen across the country. As a legislator in a city where 20% of the population doesn't have access to a car, how will you ensure we don't face the same fate? Do you support a countywide sales or property tax levy to fund public transit? What other local funding opportunities would you explore to fund transit?

Cities like Cleveland are the ones most impacted by our hostile state and federal governments. Affordable housing, first-time homeownership, public transit, effective workforce development are all areas where Council must pass legislation. But I also believe that the City Council should play a role in identifying and advocating for revenue streams that the city needs in order to provide more comprehensive services.

First, I intend to lead coordinated efforts for Cleveland city council to better advocate at the state level. There is revenue that we as a city don't have access to because of Ohio's hostile state legislature. One example is the over \$20 million, or 35% of Ohio's marijuana sales since recreation sales began, that cities that host dispensaries are supposed to receive. It is time we get our money that was approved by the citizens.

And last, it's time we start talking about how our city of nonprofits is falling to meet our residents' needs. Records indicate that there are approximately 511 community foundations in the city of Cleveland with an estimated \$25 billion – yes, that's billion with a 'B' – in total assets. For context, that's 30 times larger than the city of Cleveland current General Fund budget. Many of these organizations are on the front line providing services, and it's important that these community assets translate into improving our everyday lives. One such area is reliable transit for everyday Clevelanders.

10. Public transit infrastructure, from shelters to bus lanes, can conflict with the desires of motorists and real estate and business owners. How will you approach the needs of public transit riders to conveniently get where they need to go in the face of opposition to new or existing public transit infrastructure?

The role I see as the councilperson is a commitment to ensuring matters that involve taxpayers' money (so basically everything) occur within a public setting where HEALTHY conflict is actually encouraged. There is always going to be conflict, but I see the commitment to ensuring conflict can play out productively as one of the most important responsibilities of serving as a public representative. First, the city needs to consider the larger impacts of development, especially as it relates to traffic flows. One example I heard from residents is how the traffic circles on Franklin Blvd actually led to increased speeding on the vertical side streets between W 65th and W 25th. Residents had shared that they pointed this out early on during community discussions about the traffic circles -- not for the purpose of opposing them but instead calling for speed bumps to be put on the side streets -- but their observation was largely ignored. Several years later, speed bumps are now going in, but residents wonder why this wasn't something that couldn't occur in tandem. Second, my Flexible Development priority seeks to increase oversight over TIFs, or a type of public subsidy largely reserved for mega-developers, and equitably negotiated community benefits, which I see as two areas of negotiation that council can utilize to advocate for improvement to existing public transit infrastructure.

11. What does being a good partner with GCRTA look like to you as a city councilor?

Oversight and advocacy. Again, since GCRTA is another unelected board, who has had members that arguably have little connection or experience in improving public transit for the everyday resident, the work becomes ensuring the board is behaving in a way that sees the taxpayer as the stakeholder, as opposed to whomever helped them get appointed.

12. How would you ensure that the needs of all citizens are represented on the city council?

Input and feedback from residents is so important to me that I've built it into my campaign priorities and commitments. Being available and accessible for residents is how I can ensure I am aware of the problems they are experiencing, which includes a direct understanding of how those problems are making them feel. I commit to hosting consistent and far-reaching town halls but also hosting regularly

scheduled office hours with purposeful outreach to connect with the Ward's most disenfranchised. I also intend on serving as a guardian of Cleveland's public comment, which includes both protecting and enhancing it.

In Cleveland, leadership often operates on the illusion of inclusion, which has unfortunately eviscerated trust between elected officials and the public. I consider how one responds to resident feedback (especially when it's negative), including what follow-up and follow-through looks like, incredibly important when discussing how to remain connected to the voices of Cleveland's Ward 7. Seeking feedback doesn't mean anything if that feedback isn't then used for productive change.

And last, I feel very fortunate to be running in a ward that has a long tradition of Block Clubs and community organizing. In Cleveland's Ward 7, progress is driven by the residents, and I intend to respect and nurture that grassroots spirit, as it complements my ability to serve the ward successfully. There will be many problems that I cannot solve alone on city council, and when that happens the work then becomes leveraging the relationships and resources available to address the real problem.

13. How do you stay informed about current events and issues affecting the city?

After knocking over 6,000 doors, I know that being available for residents helps you understand what problems exist. A true leader then uses those experiences to inform their legislative priorities. But access to the residents' feedback is what allows for city council to center the actual problems the residents are experiencing, as opposed to just throwing solutions to see what sticks.

Every dollar our government spends is a dollar that you — the taxpayer — provided, and so therefore every dollar must have a clear and direct connection to improving the everyday lives of every resident. Without that connection to the residents, there is no legislative purpose. Without that accountability to the voices of Ward 7, the budget is no longer a reflection of our values.

14. What will you do to increase the availability of affordable, integrated, safe, and accessible housing for people with disabilities?

The absence of Cleveland's lack of quality, affordable housing, especially for seniors or those with disabilities, is very apparent in Cleveland's new Ward 7, despite being one of the wards that has received the most private and public investment over the last decade. The topics that come up the most frequently for residents with disabilities is the lack of safe and well-kept housing that is close to groceries and healthcare, which includes connection to public transit. Access to groceries, healthcare, and public transit should be the main drivers behind development that is both for residents with disabilities and affordable housing that includes residences specifically for those with disabilities.

Ensuring seniors and residents with disabilities can remain in their homes must be a priority for the city. That requires expanding accessible and affordable housing while addressing the speculative investment practices that make our neighborhoods unaffordable. While the approval and construction of affordable and age-in-place housing is imperative in order for our city's seniors and residents with disabilities to have housing, my campaign is much more focused on addressing the economic conditions that allow development in our city to be dictated by Wall Street investors. Why the emphasis on predatory investing and development is so imperative is that we can't fool ourselves into thinking out-of-state LLCs with their never-ending liquid capital won't also gobble up development that would ideally benefit our own residents.

While I support accessory dwelling unit construction, more relaxed permitting on seniors and residents with disabilities to be able to alter their homes in order to age in place, and the construction of multi-family housing that is affordable for those on fixed incomes, I firmly believe that if don't level the playing field for our residents – improving their ability to compete with large scale developers – then any programs we create will inevitably be cannibalized by those who don't have our residents' interests first.

15. What do you know about the crisis facing the disabled community in regard to availability of transportation and employment opportunities? And what will you do to mitigate these barriers?

According to recently updated data shared by the Center for Community Solutions, 20% of Ward 7 households receive SNAP, almost 35% of residents rely upon public healthcare, and almost 15% of our ward's residents report unreliable transportation as an obstacle. Qualitatively, the impact of these issues come up quite frequently in my discussions with Ward 7 residents, especially those who live at Lakeview, Riverview, and Fairview Gardens.

First, planning for the Ward must take into consideration transit-oriented development, which means investing in areas next to high-volume transit areas, like the EcoVillage Rapid Station and the W 25th Rapid Station. While development around the W 25th Rapid Station has mainly been for high-income residents, we cannot let these similar development decisions drive the future of development around W 65th.

Additionally, workforce development and union apprenticeships is a key commitment within my Flexible Development priority, and that includes opportunities for residents with disabilities. I also believe that Small Businesses can play an extremely important role in employing residents, many of whom already live within the community. Incentives like employee-retention programs for Small Businesses are already part of my Sustainable Small Business priority, but I would also be happy to incorporate incentives that specifically help our beloved Small Businesses employ more of our residents, especially those with disabilities.

16. How do you see the impending changes to both State and Federal programs impacting your community? And what solutions can you offer in your community to combat the loss of these programs and funding?

The negative impact that our current hostile state and federal governments will be (already is) severe. As I finish this questionnaire, the government is still shut down, which means residents are now facing a November without SNAP benefits, of which 20% of the new Ward 7 relies upon. We have to get agile and creative fast when it comes to making sure we have the ability to fight back against the state and federal governments' incredibly hostile behavior, which includes conversations with local corner shops and gas stations, the West Side Market, local grocery stores, local developers, local foundations, and local hospitals. When it comes to Cleveland's affordability crisis, we certainly have access to the supply but our ability to administer effective and far-reaching solutions is lacking.

It's time to start talking about how our city of nonprofits is falling to meet our residents' needs. Records indicate that there are approximately 511 community foundations in the city of Cleveland with an estimated \$25 billion in total assets. For context, that's 30 times larger than the city of Cleveland current General Fund budget. Many of these organizations are on the front line providing services, and it's important that these community assets translate into improving our everyday lives.

17. Why does Cleveland not currently have contracts with Uber and Lyft to provide wheelchair accessible vans options at a fixed rate like larger cities such as Chicago and New York? Can you assist with this?

I imagine that because of the ways Uber and Lyft have typically undercut workers is why any potential contracts that were submitted aren't active. I am a firm believer in strong labor, as many of the protections organized labor has fought for also help protect workers with disabilities. But it doesn't mean a solution should not be reached in terms of providing wheelchair accessible vans for residents that also doesn't undercut Cleveland workers.

18. Cleveland will be hosting the Special Olympics in 2030, bringing more than 5,500 athletes and coaches and over 125,000 fans and family members to our city. How will you work to ensure Cleveland is a welcoming, accessible place for people with diverse disabilities, not only through trained volunteers, but also by encouraging accessibility across restaurants, stores, rideshares, museums, casinos, theaters, and other public spaces?

With Cleveland having hosted the 2016 Republican National Convention, I think it is important that we review any records and measures of performance for what that experience was like, both for visitors and residents. I imagine there is already a committee dedicated to planning for this, and if not this would be something I would advocate for within my first 100 days of office.

An important role in planning for this will also require securing sponsorships and funding to make this truly a wonderful experience for all, ideally that would include free public transit for the duration of the event and festivities, creative ways to ensure all visitors are able to receive the true Cleveland experience, which means access to our many world-renown cultural institutions, as well as preparation with city EMS services and local hospitals to make sure these other world-renown institutions are capable of supporting residents and the over 125,000 fans and attendees. In addition to soliciting local corporations, it is important for Cleveland to advocate for support at the state level, which is part of my plan to help lead a state advocacy from Cleveland city hall.