

# **Akron Phase 0: Presentation of Findings**

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### Introduction. What is Phase 0?

ioby directly supports residents rebuilding and strengthening healthy and sustainable neighborhoods. We blend resource organizing and crowd-funding to help leaders of local projects find the resources they need within their own communities. Our vision is to create a future in which our neighborhoods are shaped by the powerful good ideas of our own neighbors. Our mission is to mobilize neighbors who have good ideas to become powerful citizen leaders who plan, fund and make positive change in their own neighborhoods.

Before we begin a deliberate phase of work in a new city, ioby strives to learn as much as possible about the civic landscape from the very people that we will eventually be supporting. We do not make any assumptions at the outset about the skills, needs and resources of the neighborhood leaders whom we hope will eventually be using our platform and services. We aim to support and contribute to, rather than supplant or duplicate, the services of existing local technical assistance providers. The Phase 0 research reveals residents' goals for their community and helps us develop a strategy to best position our services toward those goals.

#### Components of Phase 0 in Akron:

1. **Research:** ioby began researching Akron's neighborhoods by examining a variety of materials, including local organizations' reports on the local civic landscape as well as macro-level data from the United States Census Bureau and The Chronicle of Philanthropy. Synthesizing these data clarified our understanding of the social and economic structures that are at work in Akron. A complete list of works consulted can be found in the appendix of this report.
2. **Interviews:** By conducting 24 interviews with resident leaders—including leaders in West Akron, Summit Lake, South Akron, East Akron, University Park, Middlebury, Cascade Valley, and North Hill —and across the city helped ioby to identify the context, opportunities and challenges involved in working in Akron.
3. **Scope partnerships and finalize plan for Phase 1:** Informed by our successes in New York, Memphis, Detroit, and Cleveland, ioby looks for partners who have a strong reputation of meaningfully engaging with community and experience working with asset-based community development. Conversations with these early partners have played an important role in informing ioby's Phase 1 strategy for serving Akron's leaders.
4. **Presentation of Initial Findings:** Applying a set of minimum criteria and predictors of success that we have developed based on our previous work in cities, ioby has begun to craft a two-year plan for working in Akron's most vulnerable communities and neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment. In this report, we identify the most challenging characteristics of the city's civic landscape and use the insights of local leaders to devise strategies for overcoming them. We also lay out our rationale and strategies for working in a set of priority neighborhoods, including South Akron, East Akron, West Akron, North Hill, University Park, Middlebury, Summit Lake, Cascade Valley, and North Hill.

## Interviews

To date, we have spoken to a sample of 24 leaders in Akron and conducted extensive research around the nonprofit sector, local philanthropy and existing similar initiatives. While these leaders provided ioby with a tremendous

amount of insight, we are deeply committed to engaging with and learning from more leaders of color as we begin our work.

Name	Affiliation
Patrick Bravo	• Summit County Land Bank
Roger Riddle	• Arts Now (at time of interview: Unbox Akron)
Heather Roszczyk	• Fund for Our Economic Future
Marissa Little	• Neighborhood Network
Katie Carver Reed	• Highland Square Neighborhood Association
Kyle Julien	• East Akron Neighborhood Development Corporation
John Ughrin	• North Hill Better Block
Tina Ughrin	• North Hill Better Block
Nicole Mullet	• Arts Now
Liz Walters	• International Institute of Akron
Joe Tucker	• South Street Ministries
Jeremy Lile	• City Hope
Jason Segedy	• City of Akron
Anonymous	• Neighborhood leader, Kenmore
Jacqui Flaherty	• Keep Akron Beautiful
Lisa Nunn	• Let's Grow Akron
Dan Rice	• Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition
Anonymous	• Neighborhood leader
Bruce Danfer	• Retired (at time of interview: West Hill Neighborhood Organization)
Dreama Mason Whitfield, with Traci Buckner	• Co-Founders, DTVision dreamUP ( <a href="https://www.ioby.org/project/dreamup-project">https://www.ioby.org/project/dreamup-project</a> )
Anonymous	• Citywide nonprofit
Christel Silas	• Neighborhood leader, West Akron
Bryson Davis	• Generation Akron

## Why Akron?

From land-use planning to investments in capital and infrastructure, decisions in Akron have historically been handed down from the top. Where major players in the rubber industry once dominated the civic landscape, investment decisions affecting Akronites’ quality of life and security are now made by a robust philanthropic community in partnership with a city government led by a strong mayor. The processes driving these decisions are often opaque, and residents in neighborhoods that have historically been overlooked in planning do not expect to be engaged in the redistribution of resources.

At the same time, the loss of close to a third of Akron’s population since its peak in 1960 has left long-time residents with a profound sense of loss. Blocks that once made up vibrant, middle-class communities are now punctured by vacant and neglected properties. From the outside, Akron’s story may appear to be a classic case of a legacy city. Like

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other cities in its region, Akron's economy, once inflated by a single industry, has been devastated by industrial flight and population loss.

This narrative of a legacy city in decline, though common, does not account for the resilience and fortitude of its people. Citizen leaders in Akron, with the support of some forward-thinking institutions and a new, progressive mayoral administration, are making strides toward rebuilding, repopulating, and rethinking their city. ioby is proud and excited to be partnering with innovative Akronites who are dismantling barriers to civic participation, emboldening and inspiring residents to take on new projects in public spaces, bringing new voices into decision-making processes, and reimagining power structures in ways that lift up communities of color and low-income residents to take control of their own neighborhoods.

Akron meets each of the minimum criteria that we use to evaluate whether a city is the right fit for ioby's platform and services:

- History of neighborhood disinvestment (e.g. redlining, long-term population loss, mid-century urban renewal projects that contributed to social upheaval, or concentrations of high structural unemployment)
- People of color make up more than a third of the population
- Civic leaders—in government, philanthropy and the social sector—have a demonstrated interest in taking an innovative approach to supporting community-led and place-based projects
- Civic leaders value authentic civic engagement, and are interested in building leadership capacity within communities
- Civic leaders are interested in achieving and measuring social, economic and public health outcomes as components of a long-term vision for sustainability; We are particularly interested in working with cities that have stated goals of fighting public health epidemics like obesity and asthma, strengthening sharing economies, and promoting social and environmental justice.

# Primary Predictors of Success in Akron

With our Phase 0 work in Akron, ioby set out to understand how our model would add value to the citizen leader's experience. Indeed, we found that this area meets seven of the eight following criteria that we use to predict a successful roll-out of ioby's platform and services.

1. **STRONG ATTACHMENT TO PLACE.** Residents' demonstrable sense of ownership of and belonging to their city. Some of the following was informed by the Knight Foundation's 2010 "Soul of the Community" report in Akron.<sup>1</sup>

ioby uses five indicators to measure attachment:

1. **Knowledge of place:** the degree to which residents know how and where to access basic services and are familiar with the histories of their neighborhoods.
2. **Social ties:** the extent of residents' local social networks, accounting for both strong and weak ties to neighbors.
3. **Security:** residents' sense of security, or the feeling that they are protected from any threats to their safety or quality of life. These may include: the threat of displacement, the threat of crime, the threat of natural disaster, and the threat of economic shock.
4. **Hope:** the availability of opportunities for residents to better their lives and to identify with people who have similar lived experiences and aspirations.
5. **Pride:** the extent to which residents feel proud to live in their neighborhood or city.

## Example: The value of attachment to ioby's work in New York:

We have found that many New Yorkers have a strong attachment to their city, and connect their personal identities to their borough. Our leaders in New York City are willing to spend time working with neighbors to fundraise for and implement an ioby project because they have a long-term interest in making their neighborhoods stronger and more sustainable.

Overall finding in Akron: **Generally weak**

As shown below, ioby has found that attachment among residents in Akron is generally weak. Despite our findings, we are encouraged and inspired by the sizable number of organizations and leaders who have been working diligently and effectively to cultivate pride in communities and reverse decades-long trends of disinvestment and depopulation. Many of the factors influencing detachment that are discussed below are indeed mutable. Specifically, ioby is well positioned to increase the number and strength of social bonds and the neighborhood level, improve residents' sense of hope, and bolster pride in communities where neighbors create and fund ioby projects.

1. **Strong knowledge of place:** Many residents in the area have lived locally for many years, and are extremely familiar with the layout, character, and history of their neighborhoods. Many told us that residents of neighborhoods like Kenmore and Ellet are keenly aware that their neighborhoods were once distinct

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municipalities (i.e. before they were annexed to the City of Akron up to 100 years ago) and that older residents are often prouder to be from their neighborhood than from Akron itself. As Director of Planning and Urban Development Jason Segedy told us, “Residents in Kenmore are more likely to tell you that they’re from Kenmore than that they’re from Akron.”

2. **Strong social ties within sub-communities, weak ties at the level of the neighborhood:** Social connections between Akronites are made and sustained through what Joe Tucker calls “their own respective tribes -- the faith communities, families, the recovery community” and not necessarily through informal interactions between neighbors. Many Akronites use online tools to communicate with people whom they already know, and a decline in the number of leagues and neighborhood-scale social clubs have weakened bonds between people across churches and families.
3. **Weak sense of security:** Residents often report that their neighbors feel unsafe using public spaces in and around their neighborhoods, and many older residents are especially conscious and afraid of crime. The rate of violent deaths in 2015--28 homicides in a city of 197,542 people-- was Akron’s second highest in a decade.<sup>2</sup> Although this perception of crime seems to be widespread, we heard from a number of our interviewees that the threat of violent crime is especially harmful to civic life in University Park, South Akron, and Summit Lake. In these areas, grassroots leaders working in the public realm have needed to focus their early-stage efforts on making existing residents feel safe to travel their neighborhoods without a car. As perceptions of crime begin to decline, grassroots organizers then shift their attention to mobilizing residents around public spaces and supporting longer-term neighborhood initiatives.
4. **Weakened sense of hope:** New data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that poverty rates in the city are increasing and median household income is falling.<sup>3</sup> This is out of step with national trends and may suggest that Akron’s economic hardships are not over.<sup>4</sup> When asked about Akron’s greatest needs going forward, most of ioby’s interviewees cited the continued strain of Akron’s troubled economy on everything from education and infrastructure to the arts and civic life. As the availability of economic opportunity has suffered, residents’ sense of hope for the city’s future has weakened as well. At the same time, an abundance of vacant properties that remain neglected for extended periods of time has cultivated a sense of hopelessness among residents in neighborhoods across the city.

Still, several engaged citizen leaders and institutions hold on to a strong sense of hope that conditions--both physical and social--will improve. Neighborhood organizations and coalitions continue to form, and the successes of Better Block initiatives, City Hope Akron, Neighborhood Network, and the grantees of the Knight Arts Challenge are beginning to change Akronites’ perception of what is achievable in their communities.

5. **Varied sense of pride:** Measuring Akronites’ pride in their neighborhoods is a challenge, largely because many neighborhoods’ boundaries are not widely agreed upon. Civic pride seems to be strongest in neighborhoods whose boundaries have been clearly defined either by topography (e.g. Merriman Hills) or by their history as a separate municipality (e.g. Kenmore). In these areas, community-based organizations serve residents and businesses within firm boundaries. A heavy concentration of organizations delivering services and organizing events within a common boundary seems to correspond to a strong neighborhood identity. In an effort to bolster civic pride, the Department of Planning and Urban Development is working with communities to create a popularly accepted set of firm neighborhood boundaries.
2. **COOPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT.** An atmosphere of collaboration among organizations, where collaboration is born out of a mutually enforced creative or strategic ethos rather than from a funder. **Example:** Memphis non-profits have deeply interwoven staff, board and members, that are reinforced by social

connections. Because Memphis boasts this supremely collaborative environment for non-profits, our local partner has had great success encouraging other organizations in the city to work with ioby.

Finding in Akron: ✓

- Cooperative environment overall: We have heard from neighborhood leaders that a general spirit of good underpins every collaboration between nonprofit organizations. Mission-aligned groups turn to each other as strategic partners, but limited staff-time and resources to commit to a partnership can often limit what these collaborations are able to achieve.

3. WELL-CONNECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT. A local government that has strong ties to the social sector, either through interpersonal relationships or formal partnerships. **Example: When the Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team invited ioby to work in Memphis, they introduced ioby to civically engaged individuals who helped us jumpstart our Phase 0 research. Having a government partner with a strong reputation on the ground helped ioby build trust with Memphians much more quickly than would have been possible on our own.**

Finding in Akron: ✓

- After 28 years of working with a mayor with a strong-handed approach to promoting community and economic development from the top down, grassroots groups have been pleased to find an eager and helpful partner in Mayor Horrigan's still-new administration. While the City does not often have capital available to commit to grassroots initiatives, many leaders told us that there is a new openness in City Hall to projects and ideas from residents. We heard stories of the City recently providing grassroots leaders with expedited permits and approvals, granting community groups access to in-kind sanitation services for events, and even championing zoning variances for projects that have community support.
- Patrick Bravo told us that, as he begins to develop long-term plans that will support neighborhood revitalization, he is working with the City of Akron and its mayor, who are working to address the issue of how to support and strengthen neighborhoods, while building on the dynamics that already exist. From the start of his administration, the mayor has reportedly asked his team questions such as, "How do we empower neighborhoods to be the harbingers of their own success?" and "How do we put the right tools at their fingertips?"
- Under the leadership of Jason Segedy, the Department of Planning and Urban Development has thrown its weight behind the Better Block Projects sprouting up around the city. By investing in neighborhood amenities like bike infrastructure and enhanced street lighting on Better Block corridors, the agency is ensuring that the work that communities are doing to reimagine their commercial downtowns translates to long-term reinvestment.

4. DEMAND FOR SERVICES. Unincorporated or informal networks of leaders who could benefit from ioby's fiscal sponsorship services and capacity-building trainings and support modules. **Example: During ioby's early growth in New York, we learned that neighborhood leaders were as excited about our offline services—**

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fiscal sponsorship, grassroots fundraising trainings, and one-on-one project support—as they were about our online crowd-resourcing platform. Our success in every city hinges on leaders' demand for these services.

### Finding in Akron: ✓

- **Fiscal sponsorship:** Some leaders told us that early-stage community groups are increasingly looking at using backbone institutions like United Way to fiscally sponsor projects and manage their operations. In fact, some funders have actively discouraged groups with limited capacity from filing as 501(c)3 organizations, encouraging them instead to work with fiscal sponsors who can manage back-end support, employee benefits, and insurance.
- **Trainings:** At a training that we gave for neighborhood leaders at City Hope Akron in August 2016, we learned that a large share of Akron's grassroots leaders are afraid to ask their neighbors to donate to their projects. ioby's grassroots fundraising trainings and our system of one-on-one support are designed to help leaders overcome these fears and dismantle common myths about fundraising.

5. **PROJECT AREA ALIGNMENT.** Leaders in the social sector are engaging in areas of work that ioby supports (e.g. leaders take on projects dealing with placemaking, tactical urbanism, food, safer streets, etc.). **Example: Memphians' varied interests and approaches to neighborhood change have resulted in a rich assortment of projects on ioby. Because there are communities of leaders working on projects that fall into each of our common project types, we have been able to cast a wide net as we find new leaders in Memphis.**

### Finding in Akron: ✓

- ioby spoke to a number of leaders who are involved in or support “deep roots” activities—small-scale, hyper-local, relatively informal community efforts—at the block and neighborhood scale. A typical ioby project is place-based, costs an average \$5,000 or less (but can range \$100-\$100,000) and has a measurable or tangible positive impact on the surrounding community. As in Memphis (see example above), Akron's neighborhood leaders understand the collective value of small, place-based projects that are varied in scope and deeply rooted in the communities that they serve.

Through our research, we found neighborhood leaders in Akron working on projects that fall neatly within each of our types:

- Placemaking
- Food
- Safer streets and transit
- Neighborhood greening and environment
- Education
- Public art
- Public health



6. **STRONG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INTERMEDIARIES.** Community development corporations or analogous entities that act as intermediaries for directing funds from city government to the neighborhoods. CDCs often also serve as the first stop for informal networks of neighbors looking to start a public space project or to receive information about planned changes coming to the neighborhood. **Example: Livable Memphis is a program within the Community Development Council of Greater Memphis, a consortium of CDCs, civically engaged individuals and community-based organizations. Because they work closely with both CDCs and residents and understand the obstacles to civic participation better than most other organizations in the city, Livable Memphis has been an invaluable resource to our leader recruitment and support teams.**

Finding in Akron: ✓

- While most community development corporations in Akron focus heavily on financial empowerment for low-income residents, a few organizations--including the East Akron Neighborhood Development Corporation (EANDC) and The Well CDC--effectively raise and redistribute capital to benefit grassroots neighborhood improvement efforts. These organizations are very intentional about bringing residents and partners into their work, and are adept at pooling resources for resident-led, neighborhood-scale projects that align with their strategic plans.

7. **CULTURE OF GIVING.** Higher than average participation in charitable giving. **Example: The average household in Memphis donates about 5.58% of adjusted gross income to charity, a figure considerably higher than the national average of about three percent. Coming from Memphis' culture of giving, most ioby leaders have felt comfortable making asks of donors and have had great successes in their grassroots fundraising campaigns.**

Finding in Akron: ✓

- Culture of giving is very strong: As in all of Ohio, the culture of giving in Akron is particularly strong among residents who earn less than \$25,000 annually, who reported giving an average of about 7.11% of their income to charity.<sup>5</sup> According to The Chronicle of Philanthropy, residents in the Akron metropolitan area gave 2.63% of their adjusted gross income to charity in 2012. This figure is only slightly lower than the giving ratio in the State of Ohio, where residents gave an average of about 2.82% of their adjusted gross income in the same year.
- In the State of Ohio, individual giving accounts for the majority of all charitable donations.<sup>6</sup> According to a report by Philanthropy Ohio in 2012, individual giving in the state amounts to about \$6.1 billion, or about 78% of all charitable giving. By comparison, foundation giving amounts to \$1.26 billion, or about 16% of all foundation giving.<sup>7</sup>
- Despite this strong culture of individual giving across Ohio, ioby's conversations with Akronites revealed that residents with good ideas tend to rely on the philanthropic community for seed capital before turning to the community for support. It will be important for ioby to be mindful of this tendency, and to work closely with those organizations that are accustomed to receiving large gifts from funders to bolster their grassroots fundraising capacities.

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8. **SUSTAINABILITY PLAN.** A citywide sustainability plan with which ioby can align citizen-led projects. **Example:** In each city, we have benefitted from connecting ioby's block level projects as implementation opportunities for citywide or regional sustainability plans. ioby has worked with the NYC Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, the Miami-Dade County Office of Sustainability, the City of Memphis Mayors Innovation Delivery Team, and the Shelby County Office of Sustainability, serving as a flexible facilitator between citizens and municipalities or counties.
- Finding in Akron: ✓
  - Under the leadership of Mayor Plusquellic, the City of Akron released "Greenprint Akron" in 2009, which set long-term targets for: reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions, promoting smart growth and transit, identifying sustainable funding mechanisms for city services, creating green jobs, and conserving land and water.<sup>8</sup> Mayor Horrigan has not yet announced an intention to update or replace this plan. Still, several organizations continue to mobilize resources for long-term sustainability, including the Greater Akron Innovation Network for Sustainability (GAINS), Let's Grow Akron, and the Summit of Sustainability.

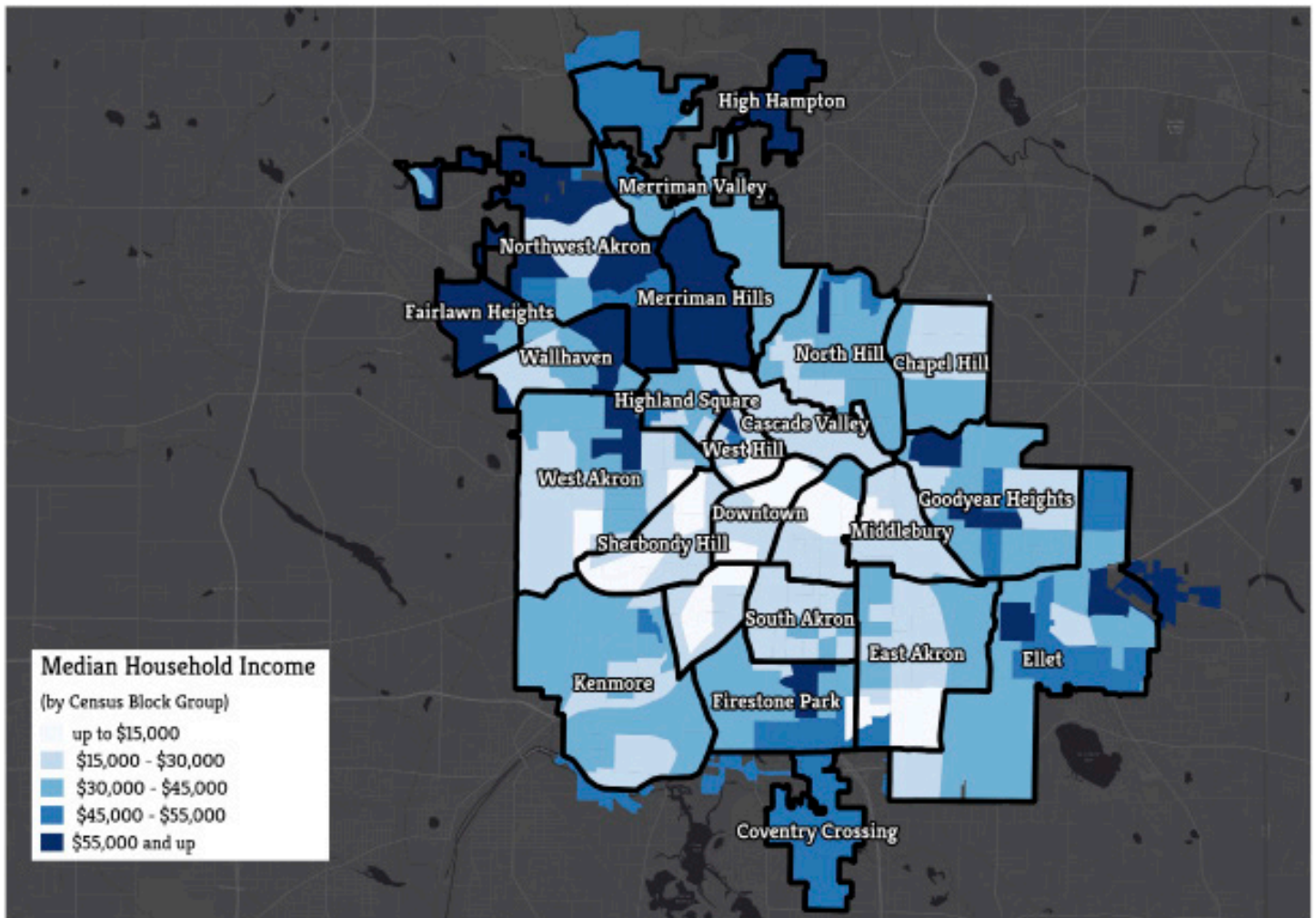
## Identifying Areas of Opportunity

From our conversations with Akronites, we learned how resident leaders in each neighborhood perceive government, overcome barriers to civic participation, and mobilize their neighbors to create projects in public spaces. As we uncovered the variability of the conditions and histories of each neighborhood in Akron, it became clear to us that we would need to craft unique strategies for working in each of the city's neighborhoods.

To help us prioritize our efforts, we decided to identify a small number of neighborhoods where ioby's services would add the most value to citizen leaders' work. We did this by assembling layers of data pertaining to equity, charitable giving, and existing grassroots initiatives. Learning from our work in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, and cities around the country, we know that ioby's services are most helpful to grassroots leaders working in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment. To be most impactful, we aim to work in low-income communities and communities of color.

# Low-Income Communities in Neighborhoods Across Akron

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates." <https://factfinder.census.gov>

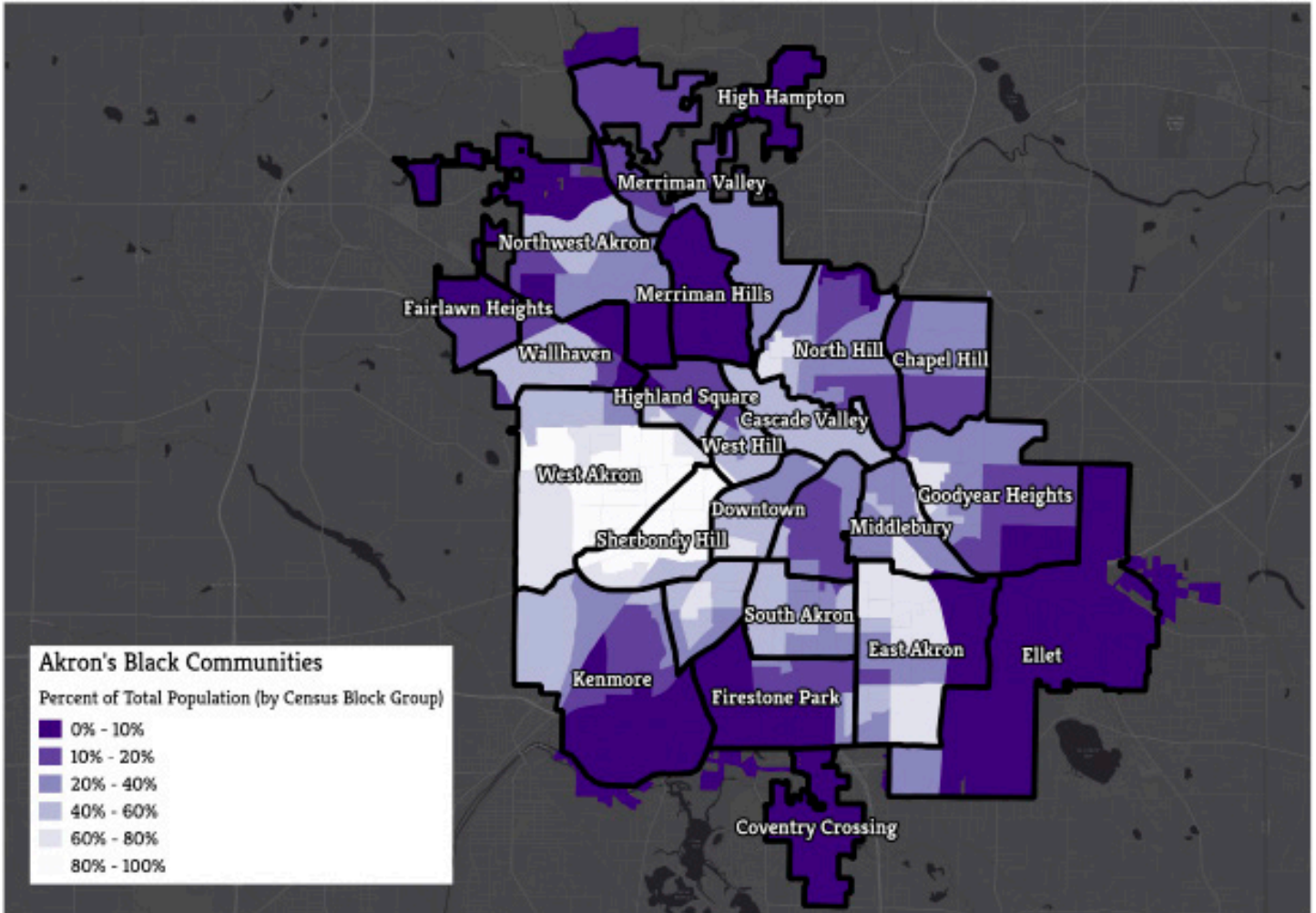


Neighborhoods where median household income is significantly below the citywide MHI (\$34,389):

- Cascade Valley (\$19,968)
- Sherbondy Hill (\$19,989)
- Middlebury (\$22,297)
- Downtown (\$11,444)
- South Akron (\$25,626)
- East Akron (\$25,887)
- Summit Lake (\$19,075)
- University Park (\$19,369)

## Akron's Black Communities

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates." <https://factfinder.census.gov>



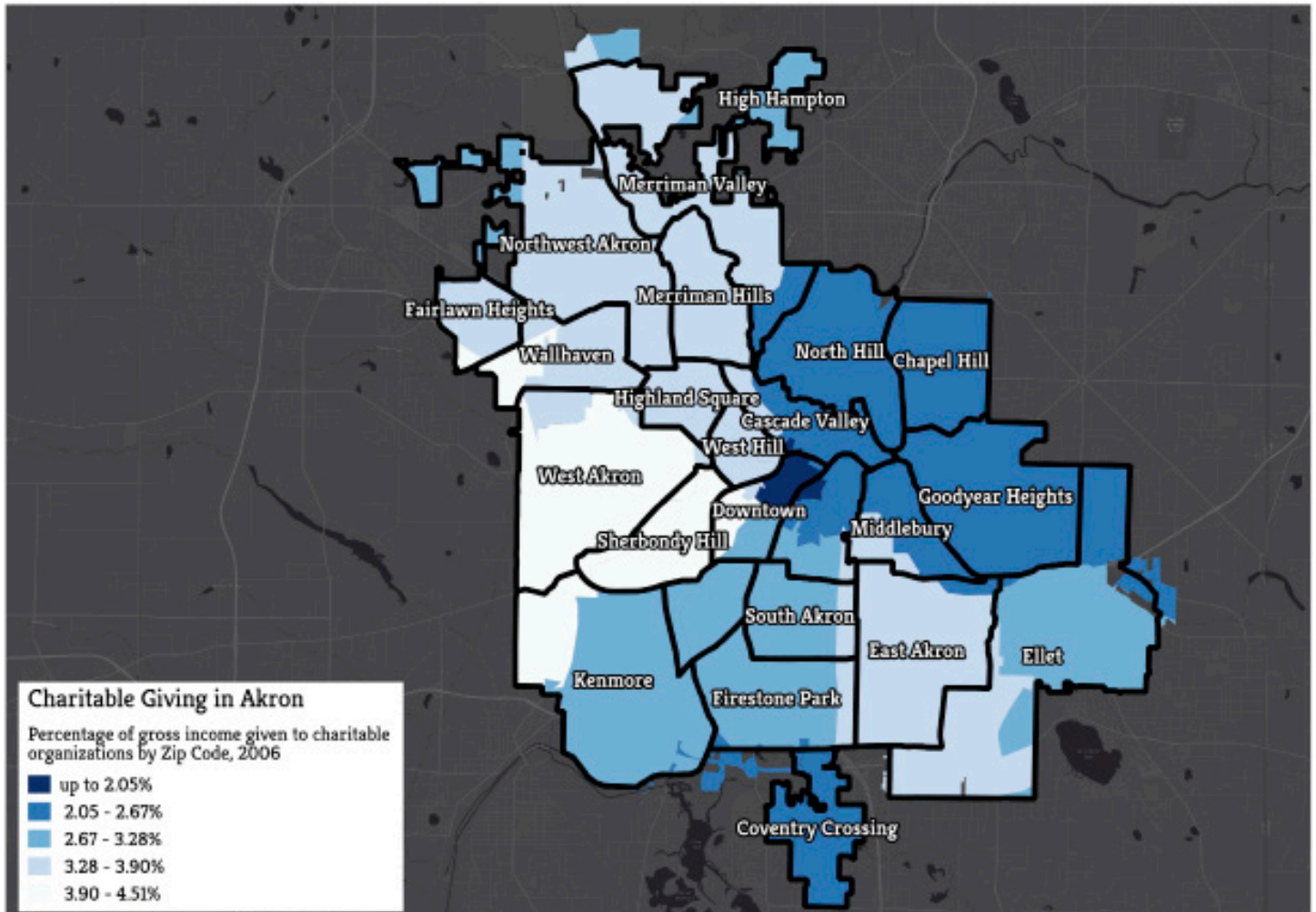
Neighborhoods with the largest concentrations of Black residents:

- West Akron and Sherbondy Hill
- Cascade Valley
- North Hill
- Middlebury
- South Akron
- Summit Lake
- Goodyear Heights



# Akron's Most Charitable Neighborhoods

Source: Chronicle of Philanthropy. "2012 Chronicle of Philanthropy Study - How America Gives." <https://philanthropy.com/interactives/how-america-gives#searchcensus.gov>

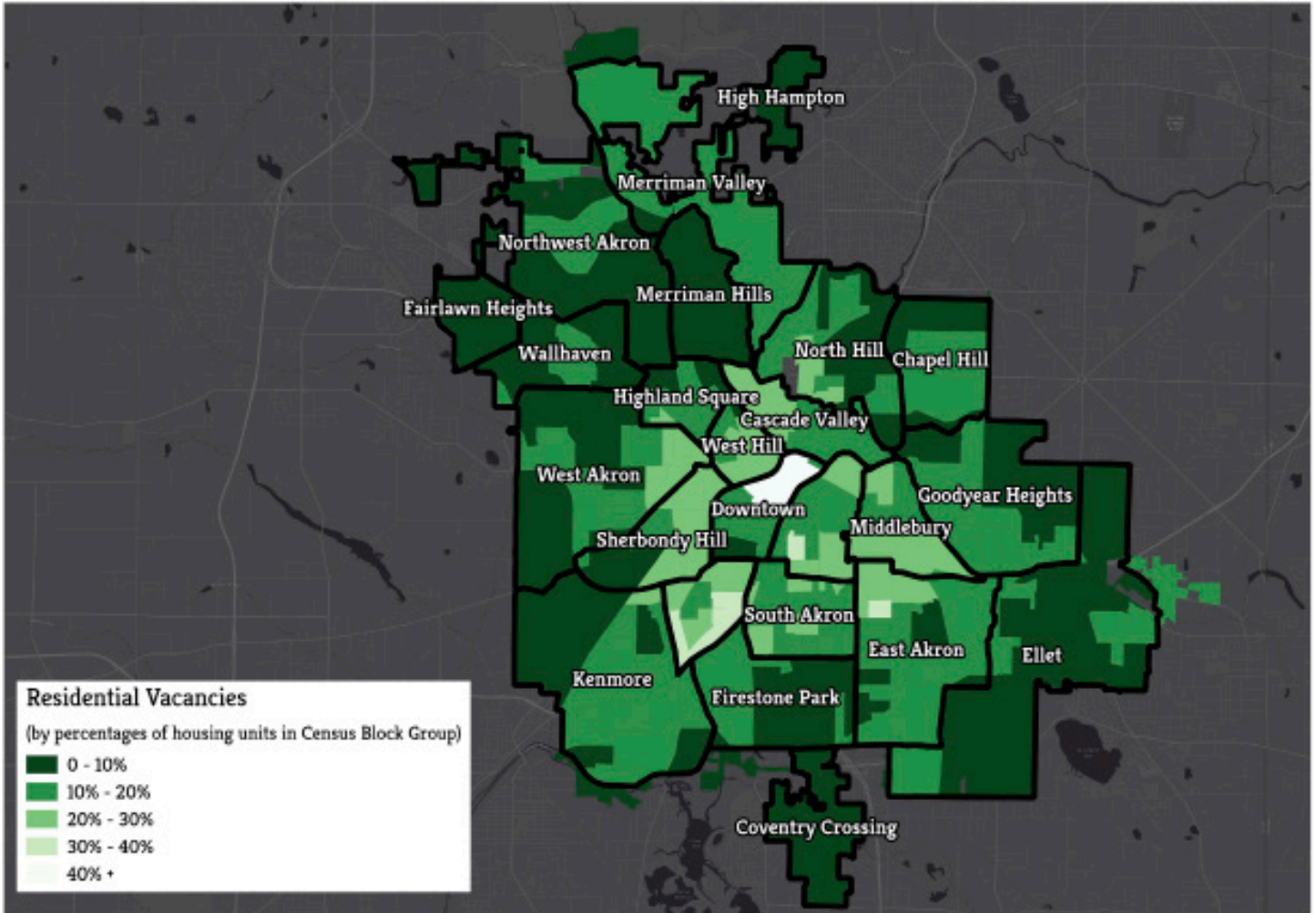


Neighborhoods with the largest percentage of gross income given to charitable organizations (in 2006):

- West Akron
- Sherbondy Hill
- East Akron

## Areas with Heavy Concentrations of Residential Vacancies

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates." <https://factfinder.census.gov>



Neighborhoods with the highest shares of residential vacancies :

- Cascade Valley (21%)
- Summit Lake (24%)
- Middlebury (29%)
- University Park (23%)

## Neighborhood Strategies

Guided by the data laid out above, we identified the following neighborhoods as priority areas for our growth:

- East Akron
- South Akron and Summit Lake
- Cascade Valley and Downtown
- Middlebury
- University Park
- North Hill
- West Akron and Sherbondy Hill

What follows is a high-level overview of ioby's strategies for working in each of these neighborhoods, including:

- Basic characteristics of the neighborhood: relevant notes about the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of each community.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all figures in this section come from data provided to us by the City of Akron's Department of Planning and Urban Development and are taken from a combination of the United States Census Bureau's 2010 Census and the 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. (<https://factfinder.census.gov>).

- Challenges: some of the challenges that we expect to face when working in each neighborhood.
- Possible strategy: a glimpse of the strategy that ioby is developing to serve leaders in each neighborhood. Each strategy is a work in progress.
- Potential partners: partners whom ioby hopes to connect to neighborhood leaders. Potential partners are broken down by the stage of a typical ioby leader's engagement with us. For instance, a partner who may be able to help an ioby leader develop and implement a project would be listed under "Project Development and Implementation."
- Most common project types we expect to support in the neighborhood: these are based on a combination of existing project types in the neighborhood and conversations with potential partners about their priorities and plans for the area.

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### EAST AKRON

#### Basic Characteristics

- Population estimate (2014): 13,517
- Population density: 2,198 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$25,887 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 49% (above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate (percentage of housing units reported vacant): 15%
- There are more than 400 vacant lots in East Akron, mostly on residential streets.<sup>9</sup>

#### Possible Strategy

ioby may partner with the East Akron Neighborhood Development Corporation (EANDC) to seed resident-led projects in vacant and public spaces that align with the East Akron Revitalization Plan. Many of the projects proposed in the Plan will cost less than \$5,000 to implement and require significant community buy-in and long-term stewardship.<sup>10</sup> ioby's platform would accelerate and deepen the impact of many of these projects, including:

- Vacant lot activations
- Neighborhood pathways
- Rain gardens
- Orchards and community gardens
- Street edge improvements

#### Potential Partners

##### Leader identification:

- **EANDC** is well-connected to and well-respected by the East Akron community, and would be an ideal partner to reach motivated residents with ideas to improve their neighborhood.

##### Project development and implementation:

- Guides and materials by the **Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative**, an organization that has been close to ioby's work in Cleveland, might aid leaders in scoping their project plans and crafting strategies for implementation.



## CASCADE VALLEY / DOWNTOWN

### Basic Characteristics: Cascade Valley

- Population estimate (2014): 2,218
- Population density: 977 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$19,968 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 69% (well above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 21%

### Basic Characteristics: Downtown

- Population estimate (2014): 3,439
- Population density: 1,773 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$11,444 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 89% (well above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 13%

### Possible Strategy

In these two neighborhoods, ioby hopes to work with the City of Akron, Gehl Institute, Street Plans Collaborative, and Better Block Project to inspire and support citizen-led projects along the Innerbelt corridor. This work would build on the ideation process that began with Hunter Franks' "500 Plates" project, which brought 500 Akronites out to reimagine what the Innerbelt could be.<sup>11</sup> Through this project, we expect to find and support ideas for:

- Tactical urbanism projects
- Community-building events
- Vacant lot transformations and open space improvements
- Safer streets and transit

### Potential Partners

#### Leader identification:

- **The City of Akron** is well-connected to local groups in the area and may be able to convene organizations with large constituencies in the area.

#### Project development and implementation:

- **Street Plans Collaborative** and **Better Block Project** are well-equipped to inspire citizen leaders to take on tactical urbanism projects and provide frameworks for implementation.
- **Gehl Institute** is developing a framework to measure the social impacts of a creative placemaking project on a community, and can train Akronites to collect data and apply their metrics.

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### SOUTH AKRON AND SUMMIT LAKE

#### Basic Characteristics: South Akron

- Population estimate (2014): 8,852
- Population density: 3,219 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$25,626 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 57% (well above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 17%

#### Basic Characteristics: Summit Lake

- Population estimate (2014): 3,981
- Population density: 2,140 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$19,075 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 63% (well above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 24%

#### Possible Strategies

ioby hopes to:

- Leverage matching funds to seed new green infrastructure projects led by residents in the Summit Lake watershed.
- Inspire fledgling citizen scientists to participate in measuring the toxicity of Summit Lake and surrounding land.
- Engage tactical urbanists to seed tactical urbanism and public art projects along the Towpath, building on the precedents of Let's Grow Akron's urban agriculture projects, Hunter Franks's tactical urbanism interventions, and the Akron Art Museum's Inside|Out project.

#### Potential Partners

Leader identification:

- **The Big Love Network, Let's Grow Akron, and South Street Ministries** hold trusting relationships with neighborhood leaders who might be interested in leading campaigns with ioby.

Project development and implementation:

- We will connect leaders with green infrastructure and citizen science projects to decision-makers involved in the **Akron Waterways Renewed** program. This is to ensure that each citizen-led project aligns with the City's stormwater management goals.
- Where appropriate, ioby will connect leaders to the community of stewardship organizations that are investing in improvements to the Towpath. We expect to support several citizen-led projects along the Towpath that intersect with and complement the work of **Summit Metro Parks, the Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition, and the Trust for Public Land.**

## MIDDLEBURY AND UNIVERSITY PARK

### Basic Characteristics: Middlebury

- Population estimate (2014): 5,405
- Population density: 2,197 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$22,297 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 70% (well above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 29%

### Basic Characteristics: University Park

- Population estimate (2014): 8,329 (University students make up the majority of the population)
- Population density: 3,485 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$19,369 (below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 91% (well above 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 23%

### Possible Strategy

ioby plans to build on the momentum from the Middlebury Better Block and Neighborhood Network's "Neighborhood Reborn" event. We expect to identify neighborhood leaders with ideas for:

- creative placemaking
- vacant lot transformations
- safer streets and transit
- pop-up projects in vacant storefronts

### Potential Partners

Leader identification:

- **Neighborhood Network** and the leaders and organizations behind **Middlebury Better Block** maintain close, trusting relationships with community members.

Project development and implementation:

- The organizations that planned **Middlebury Better Block** may also become important partners in scoping and planning ioby projects in the public realm.
- By investing in and making permanent some of the key elements of Middlebury Better Block, **the City of Akron** has demonstrated that it can be a powerful and helpful partner to citizen leaders in the area.

## ioby's Akron Phase 0: Presentation of Initial Findings

### NORTH HILL

#### Basic Characteristics

- Population estimate (2014): 15,983
- Population density: 3,295 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$32,690 (very close to the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 47% (very close to 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 13%

#### Possible Strategy

- ioby plans to build on the momentum from Better Block North Hill, identifying and supporting leaders with great ideas to reimagine the streetscape at Temple Square and beyond.
- Better Block North Hill demonstrated to residents the neighborhood's wide range of opportunities for commercial and social vibrancy, particularly along North Main Street. We expect to work with neighborhood leaders to stage pop-up demonstrations that improve North Main Street's streetscape, promote walkability, encourage outdoor recreational activity, and attract private investment to the area.
- ioby campaigns help strengthen attachment to a community by emboldening community members to lead their neighbors in making tangible change. For this reason, we believe that the North Hill's growing communities of Bhutanese, Nepalese, Karen, and Burmese immigrants may find ioby's inclusive and participatory approach to creating and funding projects especially beneficial.

#### Potential Partners

##### Leader identification:

- The resident organizers behind **North Hill Better Block** are in talks to form a CDC. They will likely play an important role in helping ioby to identify strong neighborhood leaders with ideas to improve the neighborhood.
- **The International Institute of Akron** may be able to convene residents of various backgrounds and immigrant communities, and identify projects from these communities that might be a good fit for ioby's crowd-resourcing platform.

##### Project development and implementation:

- **Keep Akron Beautiful** and several leaders with the **City of Akron** were valuable partners in planning and carrying out the North Hill Better Block. We hope to engage a similar set of partners in the North Hill as our leaders begin to scope and implement their projects.

## WEST AKRON

### Basic Characteristics: West Akron

- Population estimate (2014): 16,741
- Population density: 2,188 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$31,188 (very close to the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 42% (below 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 13%

### Basic Characteristics: Sherbondy Hill

- Population estimate (2014): 7,954
- Population density: 2,781 people per square mile
- Median household income: \$19,989 (well below the citywide median household income of \$34,389)
- Renter-occupied: 42% (below 45% citywide)
- Residential vacancy rate: 19%

### Possible Strategy

- ioby plans to work with local community-based organizations to connect West Akron's artists to local capital and City services that would allow them to create projects in the public realm.
- ioby can work with neighborhood leaders and the small business community to support projects aimed at encouraging pedestrian, bicycle, and transit activity on the Copley Road business corridor.

### Potential Partners

As of October 2016, ioby does not yet feel comfortable laying out a specific list of partners with whom we expect to collaborate. We are hopeful that future conversations with local organizations will illuminate a clear strategy for our work in the area.

## Next Steps & Deliverables

Over the next two years, ioby will create permanent pathways for leaders to find and take advantage of our platform and services.

In the near term (fall 2016 - winter 2017):

ioby's City Partnerships Director will identify neighborhood leaders and cultivate partnerships remotely, focusing on:

- a collaboration with Gehl Institute, Better Block, Street Plans, 880 Cities, and the City of Akron on seeding/measuring public space projects along the Innerbelt
- targeted leader recruitment in South Akron and Summit Lake for a nationwide match for green infrastructure projects
- building outreach partnerships strategically with community-based organizations and city agencies that have sizable bases in ioby's priority neighborhoods.

In the long-term (January 2017 - December 2018):

ioby will hire an Akron Action Strategist to:

- identify and support citizen-led green infrastructure projects;
- work with partners to seed projects along the Innerbelt corridor; and
- perform intentional project recruitment in our priority neighborhoods.

Using the blended on-the-ground and digital model successfully implemented in NYC, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland and about to be implemented in Pittsburgh, the Akron Action Strategist will use the findings of this Phase 0 Report as a guide and begin to identify neighborhood leaders across Akron with ideas and funding needs. Over the next two years, ioby will create permanent pathways for leaders to find and take advantage of our platform and services.

## Outputs

In the near term, ioby expects that:

1. More Akronites will lead projects at the neighborhood scale that are concerned with making their neighborhoods stronger, safer and more sustainable. These projects will be designed by residents, funded by neighbors, and implemented by the community. Public spaces in neighborhoods will have more stewards invested in positive change.
2. Neighborhood-scale leaders will become better equipped to fundraise, use digital communications, and organize their communities.
3. Leaders will have a network of likeminded people doing similar work around Akron, to whom they can turn for peer support.
4. New, previously untapped sources of citizen philanthropy will become available to civic groups working to make their neighborhoods better.

## Outcomes

Over the longer term, we expect that:

1. Previously disengaged residents will contribute to existing community development initiatives. As a result, membership in neighborhood and citywide community development organizations will expand and diversify, and the civic sector will grow to be more connected.
2. City agencies will be better positioned to make smart decisions and policies for Akron based on authentic input from community leaders, the ingenuity of residents who live closest to the problems in the community and small-scale demonstrations that build community buy-in.
3. Residents will feel more ownership over citywide initiatives that affect their block, and understand citywide impact of their own neighborhood projects.

## End Notes

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## Contact

Please contact ioby's cofounder and Executive Director Erin Barnes for more information.

Erin Barnes  
ioby's Executive Director & CoFounder  
540 President Street, 3rd Floor  
Brooklyn NY 11215  
917-464-4515 x2  
erin@ioby.org