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# Cleveland Foundation plans to relocate from Playhouse Square to Midtown, despite legal tussle over s

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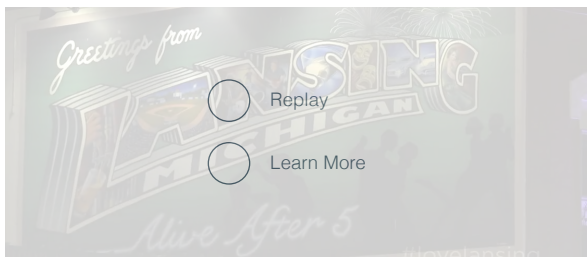
Gallery: Cleveland Foundation announces plan to move to Midtown

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By [Steven Litt, The Plain Dealer](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio – The Cleveland Foundation announced on Friday its intention to move its headquarters from Playhouse Square to Euclid Ave 66th Street in Midtown at the southern edge of [Hough](#), a low-income, majority black neighborhood still scarred by riots in the summer of 1966.



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The foundation's board of trustees voted unanimously Thursday to move from the 12th and 13th floors of the historic Hanna Building to a new building on land it has agreed to buy from the Dunham Tavern Museum.

The move highlights the foundation's [desire to direct new civic energy](#) to low-income minority neighborhoods harmed by decades of disinvestment and structural racism.

"We're very happy and excited," about the move, said Sally Gries, chair of the foundation's 15-member board of directors.

When the foundation moved to Playhouse Square 35 years ago, "the windows were boarded up and buildings were vacant. It was a very bold move in an area of our core city," she said.

Today, she said, the foundation wants to send a signal that it's time to focus on struggling neighborhoods beyond downtown.

"This is a clear, emphatic statement that we want to work on bringing these neighborhoods back," said Ronn Richard, president and CEO of the foundation since 2003.

Gries and Richard said they hoped to complete construction of the new headquarters within three years. But they said the timing of the move was contingent on the resolution of a [lawsuit filed in May](#) in which former Dunham board member Christeen Tuttle and museum members Richard Peterson are seeking to invalidate the sale of 1.2 acres to the foundation.

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The suit alleges that the Dunham board's approval of the sale is invalid due to conflicts of interest and responsibility among board members, that the procedures were violated, and that the defendants breached fiduciary duties.

On Friday, the defendants filed an answer and a counterclaim in which they deny the allegations and seek an injunction against the effort to block the sale, along with an expedited response from Judge Nancy Russo of the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas.

The response defends as proper the Dunham trustees' 12-6 vote taken on May 14 to sell the land to the Cleveland Foundation.

Tim Collins, chairman of the Dunham board, characterized the lawsuit as "just the impulse of people who didn't like the vote and who want to find a way to criticize it. We think the court will find we were absolutely correct."

Fairlawn lawyer Peter Pattakos, who is representing the plaintiffs, said in an email Friday that defendants' filing is an attempt "to rush this conflict through like they tried to do in the first place. It's an abuse of judicial resources that I don't expect the Court will view favorably. We look forward

matter resolved consistent with Ohio law and due process.”

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### Neighborhood support

Gries and Richard described the foundation's planned move as an effort to create a new center of gravity for Midtown, the 4-mile, east-west corridor between Public Square and University Circle, the city's cultural, medical and educational hub.

Together with the 1.2 acres it voted to buy from Dunham, the foundation has assembled 5 acres on both sides of East 66th Street between Euclid and University Circle avenues.

The foundation plans to steward new development along the street, including a future, 100,000-square-foot center on the west side of East 66th Street and Euclid Avenue, which it would guide in collaboration with Midtown Inc. and a private developer.

The foundation sees East 66th Street as a new, north-south gateway to Hough, connecting the Dunham Tavern Museum to League Park, the part of the historic ballpark at 6601 Lexington Ave., seven blocks north of Euclid Avenue.

Neighborhood leaders hailed the concept.

“I'm so excited I want to yell it from the rooftops,” said Ward 7 Councilman Basheer Jones, whose district includes Hough.

“If I don't achieve anything else, this move with the Cleveland Foundation moving to Ward 7 will be the best accomplishment I could achieve,” said Jones in 2017. “There could be nothing else that's as great. It almost bring tears to my eyes.”

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Jones said the foundation's move would raise investment and visibility in Hough, where 40% of residents and 66% percent of children live in poverty, according to the city's website.

Hough has seen significant reinvestment in recent decades, including a cluster of new single-family houses built in the 1990s along Chester Avenue, a \$6.3 million restoration of [League Park](#), the [Chateau Hough Winery](#) on East 66th Street operated by entrepreneur Mansfield Frazier, and an influx of students and medical residents associated with the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals.

Jones said the foundation's relocation would accelerate opportunities in the neighborhood. He also said he was confident that growth could be achieved without the negative side of gentrification – the displacement of longstanding residents pushed out by rising real estate values.

Jeff Epstein, director of nonprofit Midtown Inc., which leads development efforts in the corridor, said the foundation's move would be "huge, not just Midtown, but for the entire city."

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"This is a really catalytic project in terms of community impact, in terms of placemaking, and in terms of urban planning," he said. "It's going to have a generational positive impact on the city."

### **Midtown's history**

In the 19th- and early 20th centuries, what is now known as Midtown centered in the Millionaire's Row mansions of industrialists including John I. Seelye, founder of Standard Oil.

The corridor transitioned to commercial and industrial development and later fell into decay after the city's grandees decamped for the city's east side and pulled down most of the mansions.

Midtown has been on an upswing over the past two decades, especially following Euclid Avenue's makeover in 2008 as \$200 million bus rapid transit line operated by the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.

Epstein said that since 2008, some \$340 million has been invested in 30 Midtown projects including the new Dave's Market & Eatery at 1929 E. 9th St. and Dealer Tire's renovation of the Victory Center at 7012 Euclid Ave. as its corporate headquarters.

Despite such investments, Midtown has lacked a clear sense of identity and a center of gravity, foundation officials said. They hope their project will bring those qualities by creating a gateway to Hough, a hub for civic activity and higher visibility and visitation at Dunham Tavern.

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### **New design**

The foundation hired New York architect Pascale Sablan a senior associate of the firm S9, to design the new headquarters.

The S9 design, which is in its early, conceptual stage, calls for a three-story building at the western edge of the Dunham property at the northeast corner of 66th Street and Euclid Avenue.

The 50,500-square-foot building would step down from three stories at the corner to one story at the Dunham side, minimizing its mass next to the park-like setting occupied by Dunham Tavern, a historic, early 19th-century inn.

Sablan, the 315th African-American woman to be licensed as an architect in America, has been recognized nationally as rising star and as one of the prominent minority female practitioners in a profession long dominated by white males. Only 2% of the nation's registered architects are black, according to the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards.

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66th Street and Euclid Avenue.

The 50,500-square-foot building would step down from three stories at the corner to one story at the Dunham side, minimizing its mass as it faces the adjacent parklike setting occupied by Dunham Tavern, an historic, early 19th-century inn.

"It's really powerful to not only think about the building, but how it braids and weaves into the context," Sablan said of her design.

The foundation said that a Cleveland architecture firm would collaborate with S9 and function as the architect of record.

### Helping Dunham

For the Dunham Tavern Museum, the foundation's land purchase and development plan comes as something of a rescue according to Collins, the board president.

In 2012, the museum purchased 2.28 acres along East 66th Street on the west side of its property to expand its operations. It demolished a multi-story factory on the site.

But Collins said that with a \$320,000 mortgage on the 2.28 acres, Dunham was hobbled in terms of realizing its goal of creating a new central plaza.

The foundation's purchase of the western 1.2 acres along East 66th Street, and the decision to build the new foundation headquarters there, was transformational for Dunham, he said.

"We shift from being an undercapitalized organization to being an organization that has the wherewithal to really do something on the land and give it life," he said. "It's extraordinarily positive."

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