

MOUNT AIRY WATER TOWERS

BUILDING FROM THE *GROUND UP.*

A plan & repurpose study to shape Cincinnati's highest point.

Acknowledgments

This plan reflects the work of many people who care deeply about Mount Airy and the future of the water towers. The project team is grateful to the partners, steering committee, and residents who shared their time, stories, and ideas throughout this process.

Project Leadership

- Greater Cincinnati Water Works
 - Andrea Yang, Executive Director
 - Andy Orth, Deputy Director
 - Haishan Piao, Chief Engineer
 - Rick Riess, Supervising Engineer
- City of Cincinnati
 - Robert Bertsch, Neighborhood Development Division Manager
 - Gerald Fortson, Senior Development Analyst
- Yard & Company
 - Kevin Wright, Principal & Operations Team Lead
 - Daniella Beltran, Planning Team Lead

Steering Committee

Thank you to the Steering Committee for guiding this effort and connecting the work to neighborhood priorities.

- Dwaine Bates, Mt. Airy Town Council
- Nicholas Dietrich, Mt. Airy CURE
- Scott Hand, Mt. Airy CURE
- Mark Menkhaus, Mt. Airy CURE & Town Council
- TJ Smith, Mt. Airy Town Council
- Tom Wurzelbacher, Mt. Airy Town Council
- Lisa Gerton, Resident
- Tony Gerton, Resident
- William Henry Holodnak, Resident
- Anita Killian, Resident
- Sandy Keller, Resident
- John Suer, Resident

Technical and design team

- Greater Cincinnati Water Works staff
- City of Cincinnati staff and agency partners, including those in DCED, DOTE, CRC, & DCPE
- Yard & Company planning and design team
- Dugan & Meyers design team

Community hosts and venues

- Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly
- Mount Airy School
- Local businesses and organizations who helped share information and host conversations

Residents and stakeholders

Thank you to the Mount Airy residents, adjacent neighbors, and regional community members who completed surveys, attended meetings, and contributed to the project. Your input shaped the three paths for the towers and the broader vision in this plan.



BACKGROUND

Project overview, introduction to the study area sites, key opportunities & challenges, and community engagement summary.

Project Intent

The intent of this Planning & Repurposing Study is to determine a preferred set of viable design, use, and development concepts appropriate for the Mount Airy Water Towers site. The study also looks at how investment could be leveraged to support redevelopment on additional adjacent sites. The study is intended to resolve how the towers and site will be used once Greater Cincinnati Water Works decommissions the towers for water storage. This decommissioning will likely occur in about 5 years, around 2030.

The pages ahead help to clarify which decisions must be made now and which decisions can evolve over time. They outline the opportunities, constraints, and investment requirements associated with the Water Towers and three long-term reinvestment paths. The study also lays out potential redevelopment concepts for two additional sites owned by Mount Airy CURE (Community Urban Redevelopment Enterprise) and the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. Considerations related to streets, trails, and public spaces are also considered as investments occur over the next decade.



Partners & Project Team

This work has been led collaboratively by:



GCWW is the owner and steward of the Mount Airy Water Tower structures and property. They also assisted with the technical and engineering aspects of the towers and their maintenance/restoration needs.



The Cincinnati Department of Community and Economic Development is the Project Manager and partner related to development finance tools available for project implementation. The departments of City Planning & Engagement, Transportation & Engineering, Parks, and Recreation have also been involved with the project.



Yard & Co. is the lead consultant managing the vision, planning, design, and community engagement.

The Steering Committee

A project steering committee helped guide this study from start to finish. The group met regularly to react to findings, test early ideas, and make sure the work stayed rooted in Mount Airy's needs and priorities.

The committee included representatives from:

- Greater Cincinnati Water Works
- Cincinnati Parks
- City of Cincinnati departments
- Mount Airy neighborhood and community groups
- Business district and CURE partners
- Recreation and youth-serving organizations

The same mix of partners, or a similar group, will be needed going forward to track progress and help the neighborhood move through key decisions.

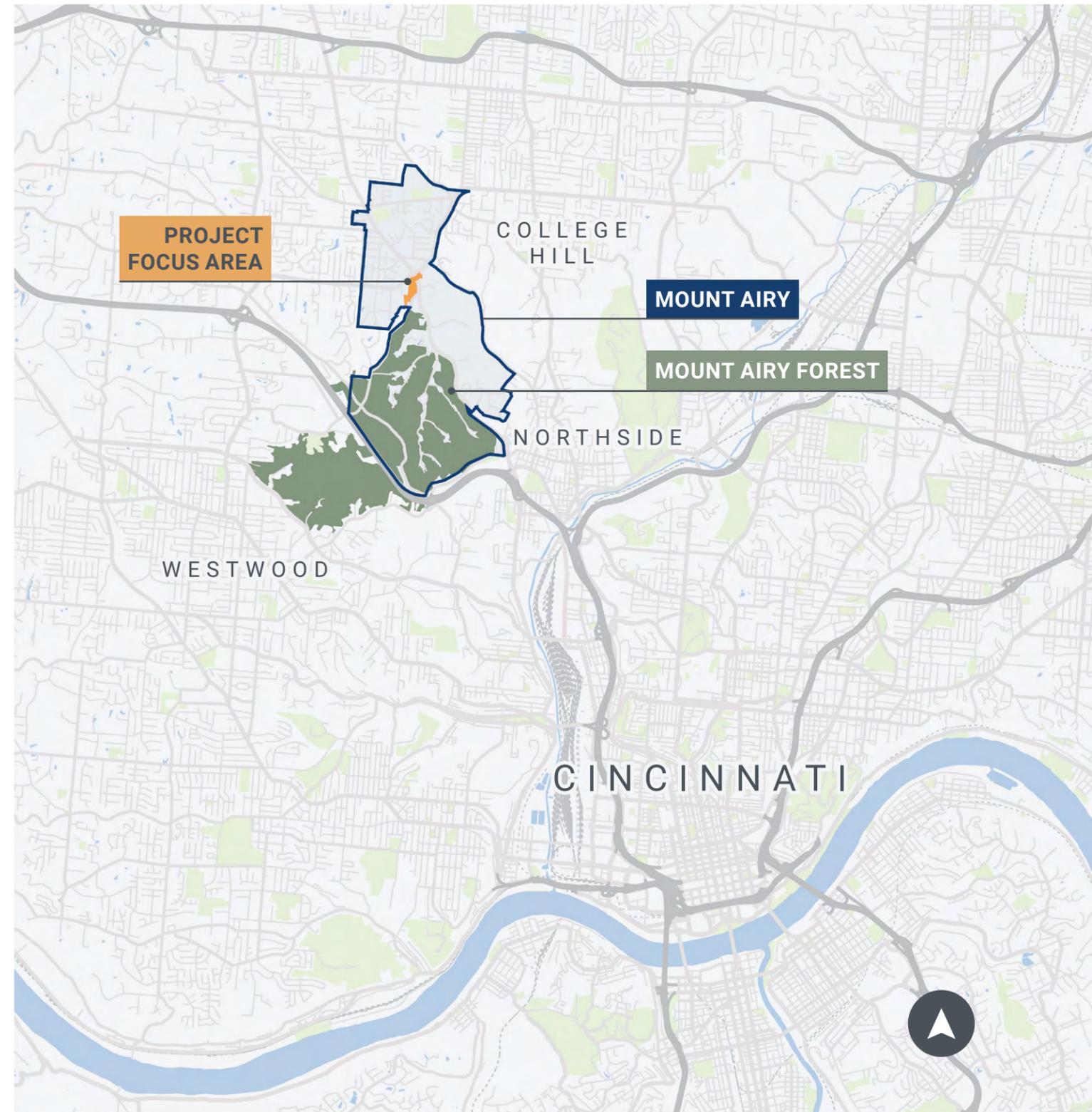
Mount Airy

Mount Airy is one of Cincinnati's western hilltop neighborhoods, known for its quiet residential character, rolling topography, and proximity to nature. The community is framed by Mount Airy Forest, the largest municipal forest in the city, which shapes the neighborhood's identity and provides residents with extensive trails, recreation, and ecological beauty.

The commercial corridor along Colerain Avenue serves as the primary business district, with local services and civic uses. Residents consistently value Mount Airy's sense of community, affordability, and natural setting, while also voicing a desire for safer streets, improved walkability, a vibrant business district, and more gathering spaces. Community organizations like Mount Airy CURE and the Town Council play an active role in neighborhood connectivity and development.

Anchoring the neighborhood visually at one of the busiest intersections in the city are the Mount Airy Water Towers.

A hilltop neighborhood defined by Mount Airy Forest.



Project Sites

In addition to the 4.2-acre Water Tower property located at 2631 W. North Bend Road, the study area also includes the following opportunities:

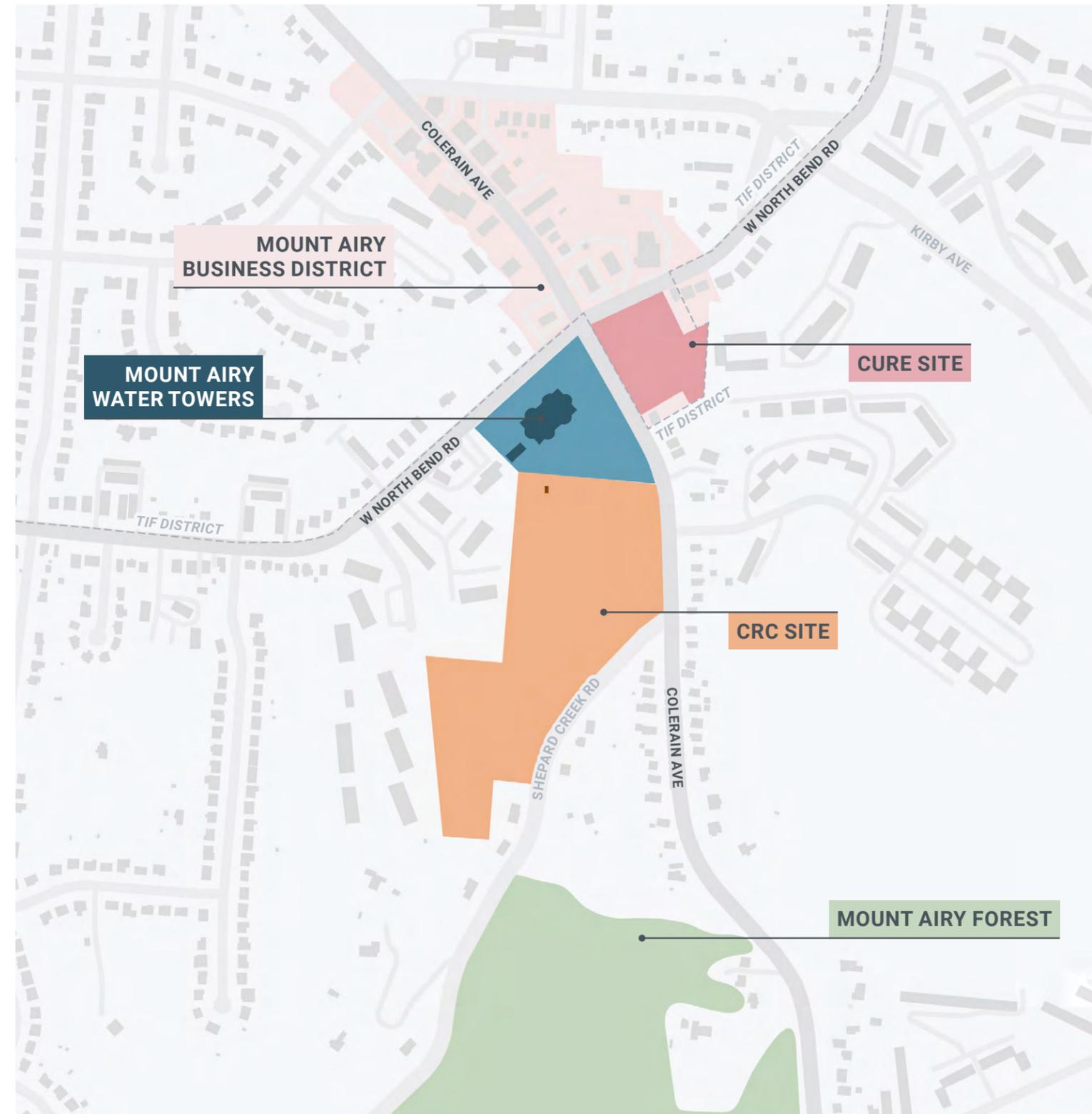
CRC Site

The Cincinnati Recreation Commission (CRC) Site is approximately 13.5-acres, and is located at 5277 Shepherd Road. It includes a small playground and parking lot with a large underutilized green space that could be reimaged to better support recreation, community programming, or development. Its location along West North Bend Road gives it strong visibility but also exposes it to challenging pedestrian and connectivity conditions that limit access today.

Coordinated redevelopment of all three sites, with considerations made for public realm and street enhancements, is critical to turning this community gateway into a vibrant destination and gathering place.

CURE Site

The roughly 2.5-acre collection of Mount Airy Community Urban Redevelopment Enterprise (CURE) owned properties includes 2559-2565 North Bend Road and 5430-5460 Colerian Avenue. This site occupies a prominent position along the Colerain and North Bend intersection, centrally located in the heart of Mount Airy. The site was recently cleared of aging structures, creating an opportunity for new mixed-use reinvestment. The site is challenged by its hilly topography, which restricts development potential of about one acre at its southeastern corner.



The Mount Airy Water Towers

The Mount Airy Water Towers sit at the highest point in Cincinnati and have served as a visual anchor for the neighborhood for nearly a century. Their location at the edge of Mount Airy Forest creates a unique juxtaposition of historic infrastructure and natural landscape. There is a total of 14 steel tanks within the structure. There are seven large tanks that have a 50-foot diameter and seven small tanks that have a 22- or 25-foot diameter. One of the large tanks and two of the small tanks are interior to the facility. Six large tanks are clad with brick masonry around the exterior perimeter. These brick masonry towers are over 70 feet tall and have brick castellations along the roofline. There are fluted concrete towers that are nearly 95 feet tall with castellated parapets and arched window openings. Five of these concrete towers each contain one small tank, while one contains a stairway that provides roof access from ground level. The 14 tanks have a combined capacity of 8.5 million gallons and with their construction, helped enable 20th century residential development in surrounding neighborhoods.

The towers were officially designated through a City of Cincinnati ordinance as a historic landmark in 2019 in recognition of their architectural and historical significance. The historic designation included the adoption of specific "Mount Airy Water Towers Historic Conservation Guidelines" to provide a process and standards for preservation, rehabilitation, or modifications to the towers.

The towers are deeply meaningful to community members across the Mount Airy neighborhood and city of Cincinnati. GCWW has invested in the maintenance of the structures throughout its lifespan. In preparation for the next round of capital investment in the towers, GCWW conducted an engineering study to develop a project to rehabilitate the water towers, preserve historical appearance, and improve functionality to optimize water storage and quality. Given the size and age of the towers, restoration and rehabilitation costs are significant. Each of the 14 tanks is a concrete-encased 70-foot tall steel cylinder without any openings other than a pipe at the bottom of the tank for filling and draining water, and a hatch in the roof for inspection. As such, adaptive reuse that makes use of the interior spaces of the tanks is cost-prohibitive.

While GCWW had envisioned ongoing use of the facility for water storage, due to the high estimated cost of the rehabilitation and the other capital needs of GCWW for ongoing water quality and asset improvements, a decommissioning of the towers is now a necessary scenario. With that, GCWW is committed to helping to find a solution for the property that benefits the vitality of the Mount Airy neighborhood.





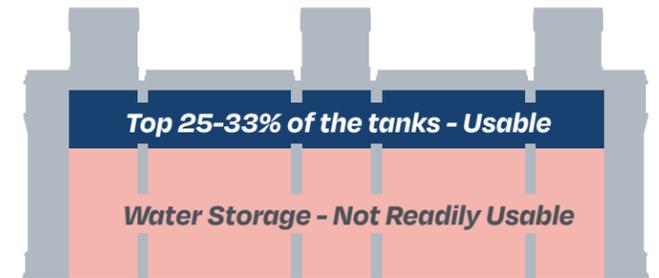
Tower Facts

Inefficient Configuration for Today's Needs

To accommodate today's standards for water pressure, only roughly the top 25-33% of the water being stored in the Mount Airy Water Towers contribute to the practical capacity. New, modern towers have a much different design for this purpose. GCWW could more effectively meet their mission to provide water services to this geographic area by decommissioning use of these towers and building a new storage facility somewhere else in this vicinity.

Preliminary Restoration Costs (July 2025)

- Site work: \$940,000
- Foundation: \$2,500,000
- Masonry: \$11,000,000
- Towers: \$9,400,000
- Stairs: \$370,000
- Roof / tank covers: \$5,800,000 (*potential for reduced cost if towers are no longer used for water storage*)
- Operational improvements: \$6,000,000 (*not needed if future use is not water storage*)
- **Total preliminary restoration cost: \$36,010,000**



Mount Airy Tanks Normal Operating Range

Maintenance to Date

- 1926–1927: Towers constructed.
- 1958-1962: Tank covers installed.
- 1962: Significant concrete repairs. All masonry tuckpointed and isolated brick replacement.
- 1978: Concrete surface repairs of towers. Replace concrete and brick masonry castellations.
- 1984: Tank covers rehabilitation.
- 1992: Complete tuckpointing and isolated brick replacement. Extensive concrete repairs. Roof coating application and repair CMU walls associated with large tank covers.
- 2002: Replaced roofing system on large tank covers.
- 2005: Condition assessment and rehab study.
- 2013: Structural and operation assessment; preliminary engineering report of long-term rehabilitation needs.
- 2018: Updated cost estimate.
- 2019: Designated a local historic landmark; conservation guidelines adopted.
- 2024–2025: Design-build team engaged for restoration project; assessment of existing conditions; develop basis for rehabilitation design and cost estimate.

Opportunities

FOREST NEXT DOOR

The site's location next to Mount Airy Forest provides a unique opportunity for integrating nature and recreation into the development.

STRONGER PARK LINK

Underutilized CRC property presents a chance to create stronger connections to Mount Airy Forest.

CORNER MAIN STREET

Redevelopment of CURE-owned sites at the intersection can enhance the area's appeal and functionality.

TOP OF THE CITY

Being the highest point in Cincinnati, the site could offer unique views and a distinct identity.

ICONIC SKYLINE

The iconic Mount Airy Water Towers have historical significance and broad intrigue, which can make it a central feature and destination.

LINKED NEIGHBORS

The proximity to neighborhoods like Northside, College Hill, and Westwood offers potential for collaboration and attracting diverse audiences.

TRANSIT AT THE DOOR

Existing bus lines (41 and 19) provide strong public transportation access.

Challenges

HARD TO GET AROUND

Streets not being well-designed for connections makes the area less walkable and accessible.

FAST, HEAVY TRAFFIC

High traffic and high speeds around the site hinder pedestrian safety and sense of place.

Colerain Ave: 22k daily vehicles

North Bend Ave: 13k daily vehicles

LIMITS ON CHANGE

The historic designation of the water towers could present limitations on potential modifications.

WHO OWNS AND PAYS

Determining future ownership and revenue streams for ongoing maintenance of the water towers is a significant concern.

TOUGH MARKET CONDITIONS

Economic challenges in the Mount Airy community require consideration of market demand difficulties.



Audiences to Attract

Defining specific user groups for whom the Mt. Airy neighborhood should seek to attract as these sites redevelop was another important finding that influenced design considerations and feasibility recommendations.

Here is a market snapshot and glance at the target audiences. A detailed overview of the market analysis, audience investigation, and place personality study is compiled in a Research Summary document provided in the

Mt Airy Snapshot

Mt. Airy has a relatively young and diverse population with moderate to low median household income. This suggests a market that is price-sensitive and values community-oriented offerings.

- Population: 8,924
- Median Age: 32.7
- Median Household Income: \$28,367
- Median Home Value: \$177,899
- Employment Sectors: 46% white collar, 34% blue collar, and 20% services
- Total Businesses: 92
- Total Employees: 586

Sources: American Community Survey (2018-2022), ESRI 2024 Consumer Reports, ESRI 2024-2025 Demographic Reports

Existing Mt. Airy Audiences



Young Families
Active, Community-Focused, Park-loving

These households will be drawn to developments with family-sized units, outdoor spaces, safe streets, and school proximity.



First-Time Homeowners
Aspiring, Local, Value-Driven

There is strong latent demand for affordable starter homes that allow renters to transition to homeownership in the neighborhood they already know.



Downsizing Seniors
Familiar, Established, Independent

This audience is seeking walkable, mixed-use developments offering 1-2 bedroom units near amenities including outdoor space, cultural venues, and dine-in establishments.

Groups In Nearby Neighborhoods



Urban Creatives
Trendy, Artistic, Social

Value areas with cultural vibrancy and amenities within walking distance.



Stable Families
Traditional, School-Focused

Improved schools, safety, and community programming are important offerings.



Affordable Renters
Budget-conscious, urban-preference

Require income-aligned residential options, mid-to-high density format.

Regionally Located



Outdoor Enthusiasts
Prioritize sustainability, outdoor recreation, and health. Active base for Mt. Airy Forest.



Remote Workers
Access to high-speed broadband and quiet, green environments is a priority.

Community Engagement

Working closely with the Steering Committee and convening regular technical meetings played a critical role in shaping our approach to both community engagement and the public-facing communication strategy for this project. The Steering Committee provided on-the-ground insight into neighborhood priorities, historic context, and community concerns, helping us tailor outreach to be more inclusive and responsive. Technical partners helped clarify feasibility constraints early, ensuring that engagement discussions were rooted in what is truly possible. Together, these conversations informed a marketing and engagement approach that emphasized transparency, accessibility, and storytelling grounded in Mount Airy's identity. This collaboration ensured that the project message resonated with residents, aligned with City goals, and accurately reflected community values. Ultimately, this structure allowed engagement to be both technically informed and authentically community-driven.

What We Did

- Met regularly with the 14-member Steering Committee to review findings, refine concepts, and shape messaging.
- Conducted technical coordination meetings with City departments and other relevant groups.
- Developed a shared understanding of what was feasible as a way to ensure productive community conversations.
- Created engagement and marketing materials that reflected Mount Airy's identity and responded to feedback from committee members.
- Developed a printed and digital survey.
- Held a two-day design and engagement charrette in the heart of the community.
- Send out over 1,800 direct emails to residents.
- Hung 100 door hangers across the neighborhood.
- Mailed 500 post cards to Mount Airy residents.
- Developed a media and public relations campaign that led to substantial social media engagement and three news stories with regional news outlets.





The Charrette

The charrette was held at Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, located in the heart of the Mount Airy business district, creating an accessible and welcoming setting for community participation. The project team maintained an open-door policy throughout the session, allowing anyone to stop in at any time to observe the work, share ideas, or engage directly with the design team. Over the course of the charrette, participants reviewed reinvestment scenarios and discussed neighborhood priorities. This open, collaborative environment enabled rapid iteration and fostered candid dialogue about the future of the towers. The week culminated in a larger final presentation at Mount Airy School, where the refined concepts were shared with residents, partners, and stakeholders. These insights directly shaped the development options and overall direction of the plan.

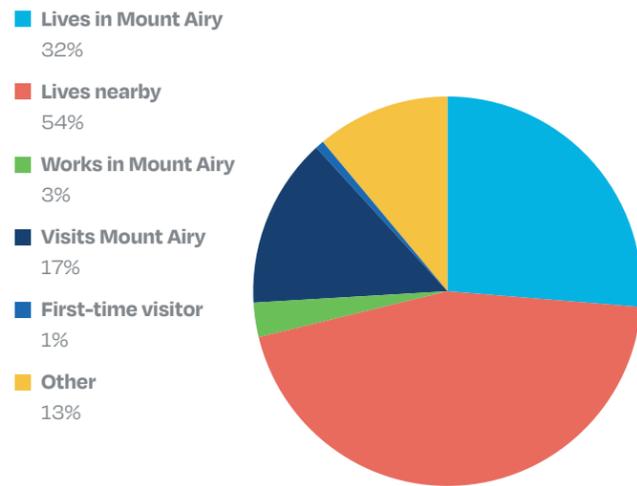
Emerging themes from the charrette included:

- **Keep the towers as a landmark.** People favored concepts that keep three towers or key facades; full demo and rebuild ideas drew the weakest support and “need more info” comments.
- **Lead with park and open space at the towers and CRC.** Flexible fields, play areas, simple paths, shade, and clear links into Mount Airy Forest rose to the top in dot voting.
- **Keep housing small and neighborly.** Participants were open to lower-density homes around shared greens, but strongly resisted large or blocky apartment buildings.
- **Make the CURE corner a small main street.** Small-scale retail with outdoor space tested well, alongside concerns that big buildings could block views or compete with the towers.
- **Fix streets, safety, and Shepherd Creek.** There was strong support for calmer traffic, safer crossings, better trail connections, and addressing turning movements, trash, and drainage at Shepherd Creek.
- **Layer in markets, food, light, art, and views.** People responded positively to ideas like markets, food and drink, music, lighting, water play, rooftop/on-site views toward the forest/city, and local history or art.

The Survey

In December 2025, **465 people** completed a survey about the future of the Mount Airy Water Towers and nearby sites. Most respondents live in or near Mount Airy, with a smaller share who work in the area or visit often. The results reinforce what we heard in meetings and the design charrette: people want to keep the towers as a landmark, open the hill to the public, and layer in food, culture, and recreation.

Who we heard from



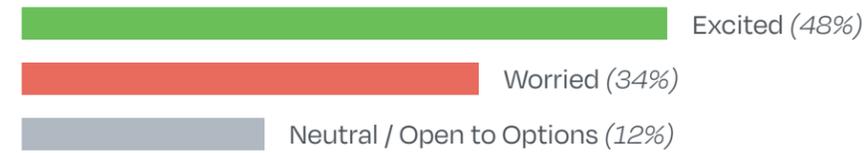
The survey is grounded in local voices. One hundred forty seven respondents live in Mount Airy and 251 live nearby, with additional input from people who work in the area, visit often, or are first time visitors. (465 respondents, multi select.)

How important are the towers?



On a 0 to 100 scale, people gave the Mount Airy Water Towers an average importance score of 68, and more than half of respondents rated them 80 or higher while about one in five scored them 20 or lower.

Tone of comments about the towers and their future



Roughly half of the final comments are clearly excited about preserving and activating the towers, about one third are worried or opposed, and the rest share ideas or questions without a strong tone either way.

How people describe the towers

Landmark
Historic Iconic
Beautiful Unique
Castle Majestic Grand

People most often used words like landmark, historic, beautiful, iconic, and unique, which shows that the towers are seen as a proud symbol of Mount Airy and Cincinnati.

What people want on the hill



Responses point clearly toward food, culture, and recreation, backed by regular public activity like farmers markets, festivals, music, and outdoor recreation, rather than conventional retail or office space.



Keep the landmark.

Most respondents describe the towers with positive words like landmark, historic, and beautiful. Many comments explicitly call for preservation rather than demolition.



Lead with open space and views.

About four out of five people say it is important that the area around the towers stays open, connected to trails, and easy to access, which backs the "park-first" moves in this plan.



Add food, culture, and recreation.

The strongest support is for food and drink, arts and culture, and outdoor recreation, plus markets and festivals, which matches the charrette themes. Conventional retail and office uses are a lower priority.



Address traffic, safety, and equity.

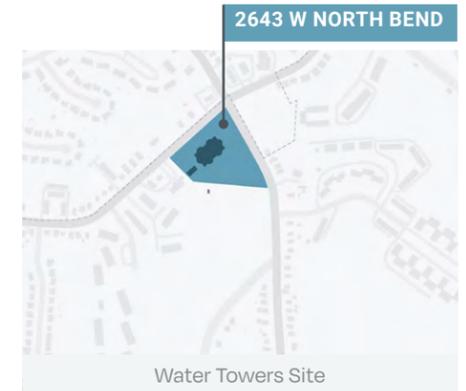
Open comments raise worries about speeding traffic, parking spillover, and the risk of overbuilding. Several also ask that new jobs and spaces benefit Mount Airy residents and local entrepreneurs.

THE THREE PATHS

Recommended scenarios to pursue for the water towers, from full restoration to a new destination on the hill.

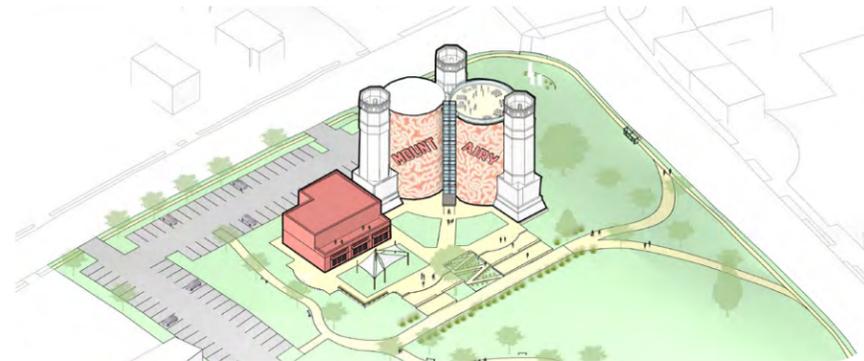
Three Paths for the Towers

The future of the Mount Airy Water Towers centers on three distinct paths, each reflecting a different balance of preservation, investment, feasibility, and long-term community impact. These paths were developed through technical analysis, community engagement and extensive conversations with GCWW, City departments, and the Steering Committee. Together, they outline the full spectrum of choices available to the City and the community as funding, operational needs, and stakeholder priorities evolve.



Path A: Full Restoration

Full restoration preserves the towers as a long-term historic asset. This option requires significant capital investment to fully rehabilitate the masonry exterior and carefully reconstruct the concrete towers. Full restoration maintains all of the structures, but does not leave much space for new development with the exception that the 2,000 sq. ft. pump station could be converted to a new use if the towers are decommissioned as water storage. This path also will need to include a substantial fund for long-term maintenance.



Path B: Partial Restoration

Partial restoration stabilizes and preserves the tanks/towers most visible from the intersection of Colerain and North Bend, while selectively demolishing the rest of the structures. This path is more cost effective than full restoration and reduces long-term maintenance burdens. It also creates additional opportunities for small-scale development and placemaking around the structures. It retains a portion of the towers' visual presence and historic reference while offering greater flexibility in site planning and public access. Partial restoration may serve as a viable middle-ground path if full funding is not secured within the required timeframe outlined in the following pages.



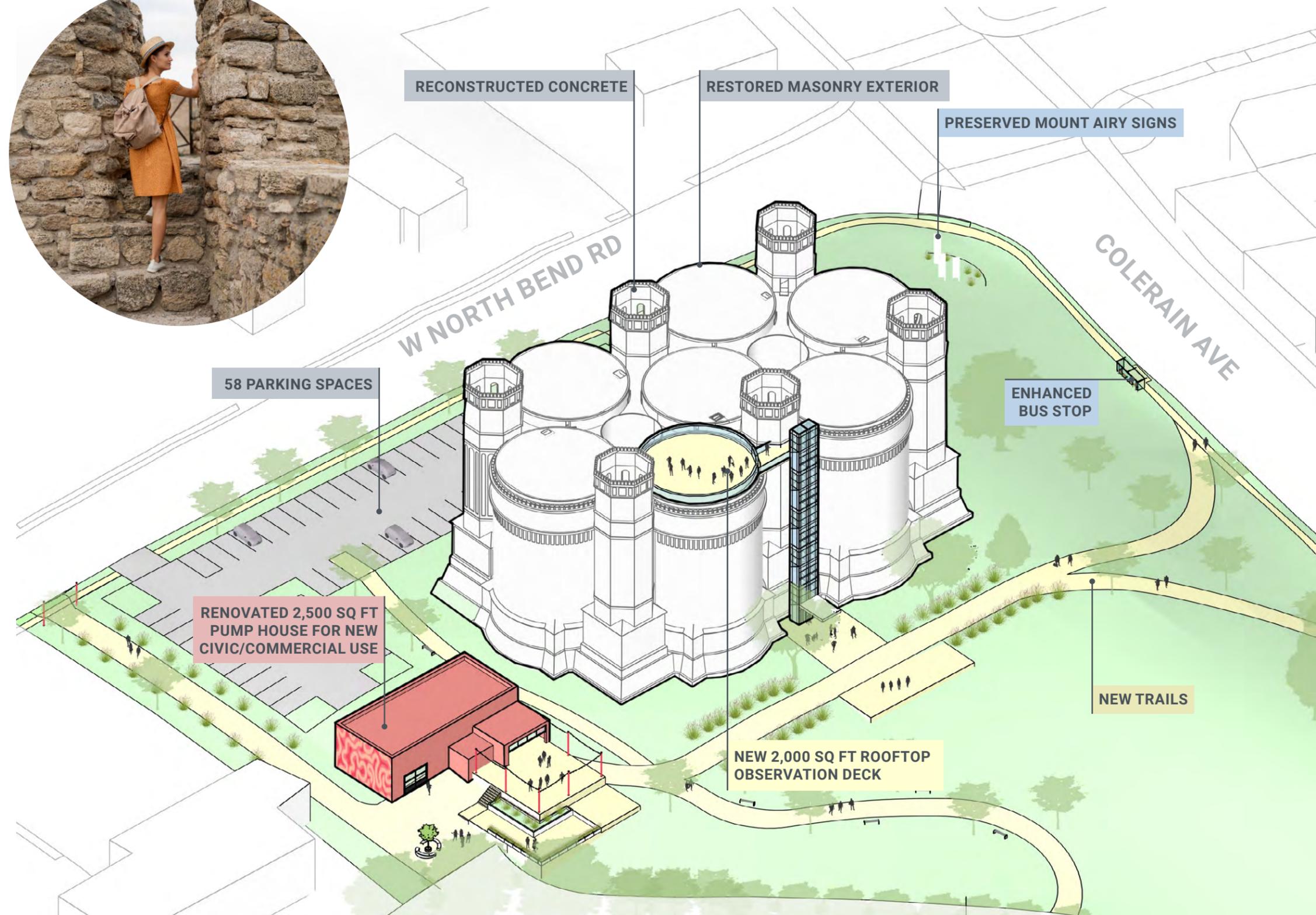
Path C: Demolition & Frame

Full demolition removes the towers entirely and clears the site for new development, open space, civic and/or recreational uses. These new uses could be provided along with a structural homage to the towers. This option reduces long-term maintenance costs and allows maximum flexibility for shaping the site's future form and program. However, it also results in the permanent loss of the historic towers and would require a thorough public process and administrative effort given the towers' protected status. Full demolition represents the lowest-cost path.

Path A Full Restoration

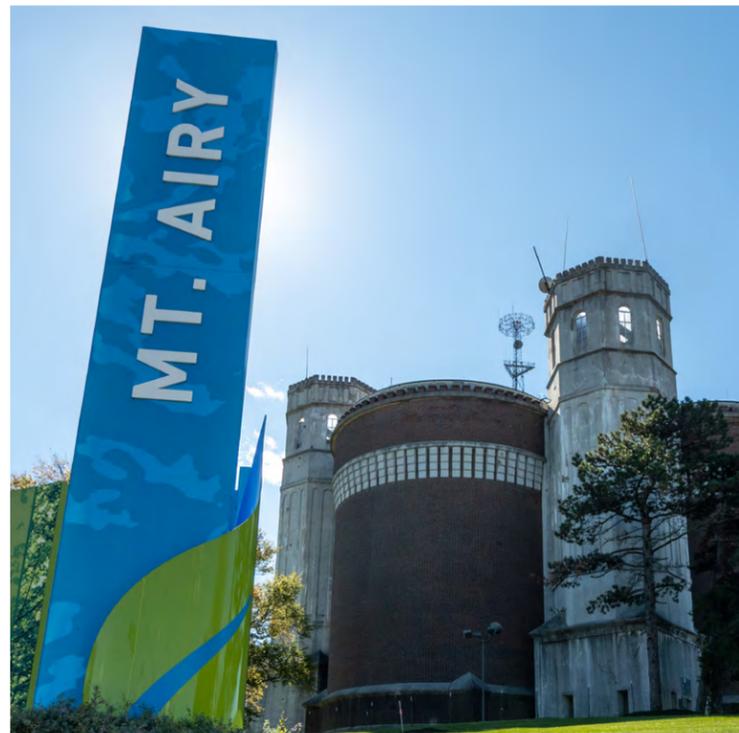
Path A represents the most preservation-forward option, fully restoring the Mount Airy Water Towers and reinvesting in the site as a long-term historic asset, albeit one that no longer provides a utilitarian function.

This path includes a comprehensive rehabilitation of the masonry surrounding the large tanks, reconstructs the tall concrete towers, and structural systems, ensuring they remain structurally sound into the future. Full restoration also creates an opportunity to repurpose the adjacent pump station as a community-oriented destination such as a small Greater Cincinnati WaterWorks and Mount Airy museum, interpretive center, café, or multipurpose gathering space that celebrates both Mount Airy's history and its natural surroundings. The restoration could also incorporate an elevator providing public access to a viewing deck at the top of one of the towers. By preserving the towers in their complete form, this option reinforces the neighborhood's identity and maintains one of Cincinnati's most recognizable landmarks. However, Path A requires the highest level of up-front capital investment and long-term maintenance commitment.





Glass elevator – Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid



Mount Airy Water Towers and Gateway Sign



Bus stops in Clifton Heights – Cincinnati, OH

ESTIMATED TOTAL RESTORATION COST

\$23M-\$30M

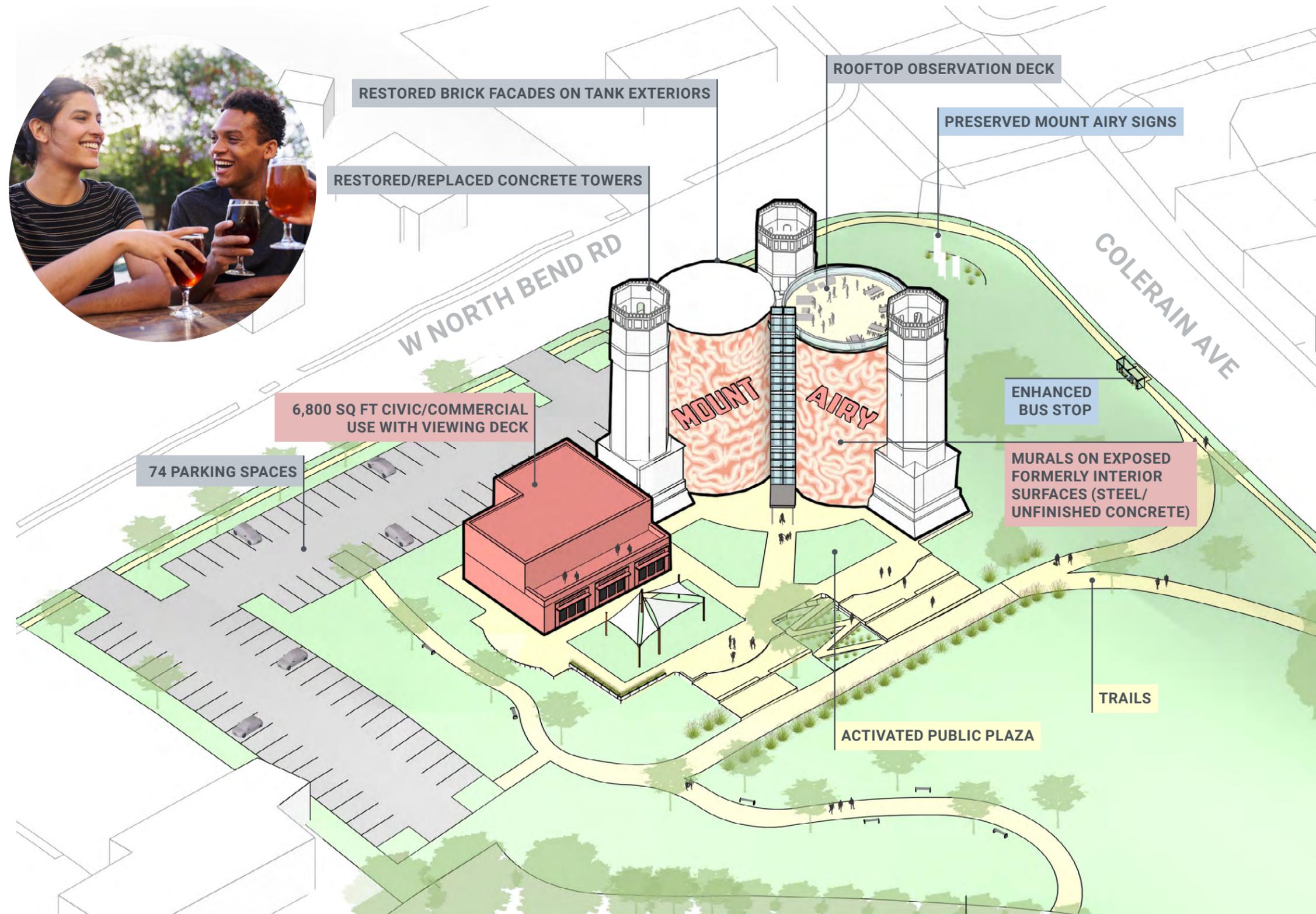
The low end of the range represents potential lower cost options for covering the tanks and replacing the corbels and/or merlons and repairing the lower portions of the existing concrete towers.

- **Scope of work:** site restoration, foundation repair, masonry restoration including tuckpointing and brick and corbel replacement, concrete tower repair of bases and replacement of upper structure, stairway replacement, roof/tank cover replacements.
- **Long-term maintenance cost:** \$350,000 annually (exterior of water towers only).
- **Additional amenities:** Neither restoration nor maintenance costs listed include improvements such as an elevator or roof deck. Those costs will need to be determined.
- **Pump station renovation:** cost to be determined based on reuse as a museum, café or community-serving venue.
- **Historic Conservation compliance:** except for the proposed new exterior elevator, the full restoration option aligns with the 2018 Mount Airy Water Towers Historic Conservation Guidelines, the 1-2019 City Ordinance, and relevant sections of Chapter 1435 Historic Preservation in the City of Cincinnati Code of Ordinances.
- **Community benefit:** preserves an iconic skyline landmark, creates new public-facing spaces, and enables future programming such as tours, events, and educational interpretation.
- **Funding timeline:** full commitments needed within 18 months due to GCWW's planned five-year window for the decommission of the site.
- **Site flexibility:** maintains current tower footprints, limiting new development opportunities but reinforcing the site's heritage.

Path B Partial Restoration

Path B provides a balanced approach that preserves the visual presence and historic character of select towers while creating new amenities, enhancing public access to the site, and reducing financial obligations.

This approach protects a portion of the towers' iconic form and ensures the towers and tanks most visible from the intersection of Colerain and North Bend will be restored, while freeing up portions of the site for new development and enhanced public spaces. Consideration will be given to adding an elevator up to a viewing deck to enhance public access and enjoyment. Path B carries lower capital and maintenance costs than full restoration, yet still reflects a commitment to honoring and incorporating the history of the towers through a new experience of the site.





Fretboard Brewing at Factory 52 - Norwood, Cincinnati, OH



ESTIMATED PARTIAL RESTORATION COST

\$16M-\$20M

Estimated cost to be studied and further refined

- **Scope of work:** selective exterior masonry restoration, partial structural repair and concrete reconstruction, selective demolition, foundation repair, and sealing or modifying newly exposed tank/tower surfaces.
- **Long-term maintenance cost:** \$120,000 annually (estimate to be confirmed)
- **Site development opportunities:** partial demolition allows for expanded open space, new development pads, and trail and landscape improvements.
- **Historic Conservation considerations:** maintains a connected portion of the historic structure but requires a Certificate of Appropriateness, per 1435-09 of the Code of Ordinances, or other legislative action. The standards of review in 1435-09-2, including any evidence of economic hardship, will be reviewed as part of any COA public hearing process.
- **Community benefit:** preserves neighborhood identity while enabling new activities, flexible programming, and reinvestment that has the potential to catalyze additional investments in nearby properties.
- **Funding timeline:** confirm funding and key partnerships within 3 years to stay aligned with GCWW's 5-year decommissioning schedule

Path C Demolition & Frame

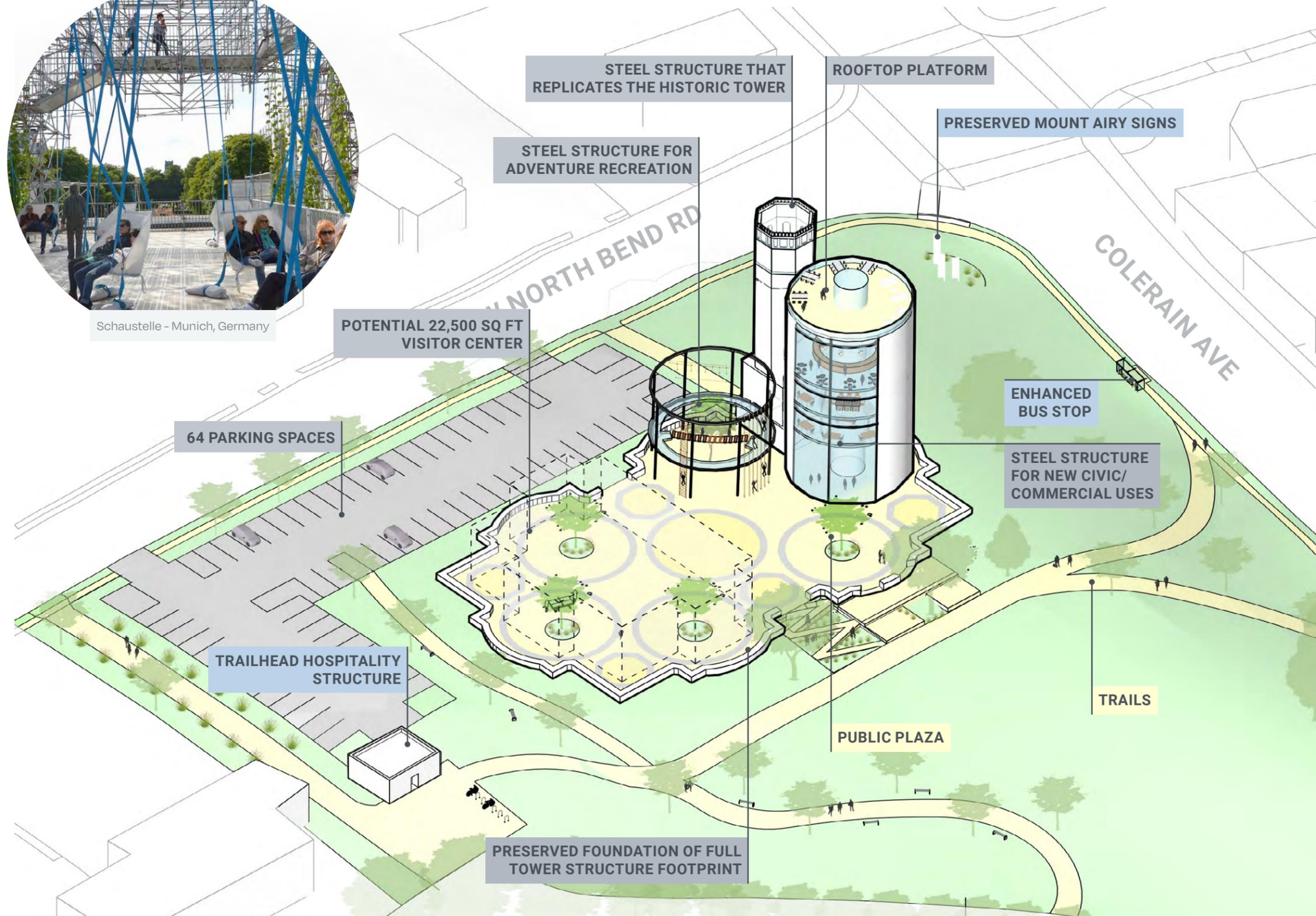
Path C removes the Water Towers entirely but introduces an innovative approach to honoring their historic presence through a contemporary structural reinterpretation.

Under this option, a new steel superstructure is recommended to trace the outline and height of the towers most visible from the intersection of Colerain Avenue and W. North Bend Road. This sculptural framework becomes both a tribute and a signature public space, offering elevated platforms, lookout points, and programmed spaces built within or atop the steel form. The open structure allows for creative uses such as climbing elements, performance spaces, or light installations suspended above the ground.

Additionally, full demolition opens space for a larger, modern building that can support civic, educational, and cultural uses, with potential trailhead amenities or outdoor learning that complements Mount Airy Forest. These suggested uses are intended to attract a regional audience which will be key to success. There is an existing gap in new, signature civic/recreation facilities across Cincinnati's western neighborhoods and this site is well-positioned to provide such a public investment. The flexibility of this scenario also lends itself to a broader list of potential investment partners compared to Paths A and B.



Schaustelle - Munich, Germany





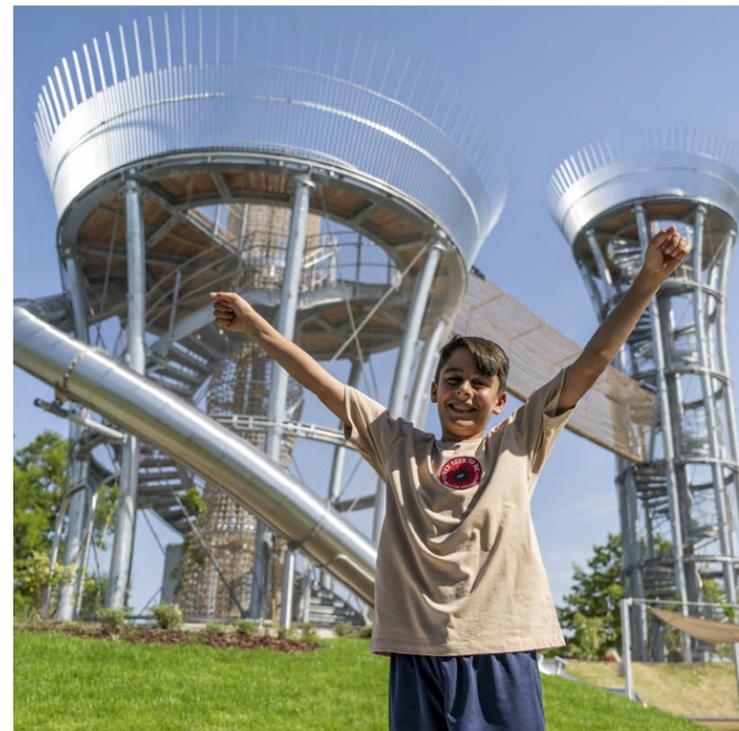
Robinson Nature Center - Columbia, Maryland



Solar-powered benches - Victoria, Australia



City Museum - St. Louis, MO



Robins Horn Spielplatz - Romanshorn, Switzerland

When determining the funding sources appropriate for specific aspects of the preservation and/or redevelopment of the Water Towers Site, it is important to note that the City Charter and state courts limit the use of GCWW ratepayer revenue to water works purposes and no other purposes. As GCWW plans to construct a modern water tower in a new location to more efficiently serve water storage purposes, it may expend rate funds to decommission the towers, but construction or site preparation for non-water works purposes is limited. Precise determination of the eligible use of rate funds for specific plans would require City Law department review.

ESTIMATED DEMOLITION & FRAME COST

To Be Studied

- **Scope of work:** Removal of the towers, steel structure construction, and new public spaces and mixed-use building(s).
- **Interpretive reuse impact:** Preserves the memory of the towers by interpreting the form/ volume of the corner portion while creating a bold public amenity to attract regional visitors.
- **Program opportunities:** Viewing decks, performance and/or event spaces, art installations, active recreation, and structures built into the superstructure.
- **New building potential:** Site can accommodate a building suitable for mixed-use, educational/ cultural facilities, or destination uses.
- **Maintenance:** Lower long-term costs compared to historic restoration; maintenance focused on modern structural systems and mixed-use facilities.
- **Historic Conservation considerations:** Requires a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition, per 1435-09 of the Code of Ordinances, or other legislative action. The standards of review in 1435-09-2, including any evidence of economic hardship, will be reviewed as part of any COA public hearing process. A liable commitment to incorporate an interpretation of the historic structure and provide public amenities on the site should accompany any request for demolition.
- **Community benefit:** Maximizes design flexibility and usable square footage while creating a distinctive, contemporary landmark rooted in the history of the site.

SITES AROUND THE TOWERS

Concepts for properties adjacent to the Water Towers
to be coordinated in conjunction with one another.

CRC Site Near-Term Option Enhanced Green Space

Option 1 focuses on transforming the CRC site into a higher-quality public green space that can be used more often by residents.

This near-term approach could include adding trails, new trees, shaded seating areas, and a variety of small amenities that encourage daily use and provide comfortable places for people to gather.

Because these improvements are relatively low-cost and can be implemented incrementally, Option 1 could begin within the next 1–2 years, well before long-term decisions about the Water Towers are finalized. Enhancing the site in this way creates a more connected and welcoming environment, maximizes existing green space while creating a stronger community hub at the center of Mount Airy.

Extending these trails across Shepherd Creek Road and into Mount Airy Forest should be explored. Engage with the local owner of properties located between this site and the Forest.





Summit Park Nature Play Area- Blue Ash, OH



CRC Site 5-10 Year Option Pocket Neighborhood

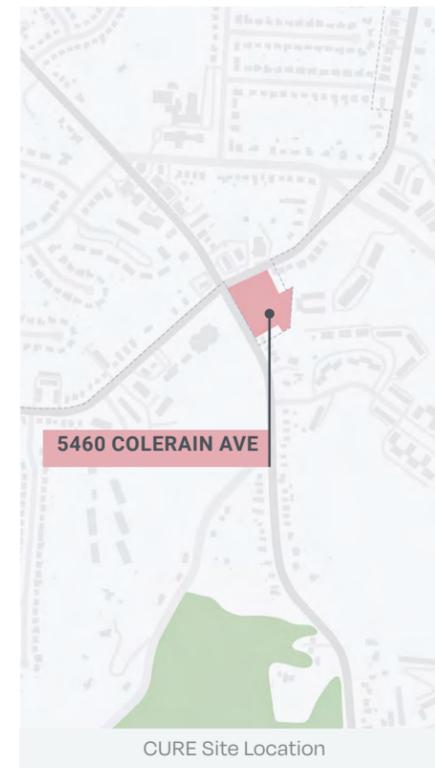
Option 2 envisions a future pocket neighborhood that could be viable if market conditions in Mount Airy improve over the next 5–10 years. This concept introduces a cluster of small, single-family homes organized around shared greens and pedestrian-priority spaces, creating a compact, walkable neighborhood form that complements the area's natural setting.

The home designs shown feature alley-loaded garages and parking, preserving the central green and maintaining a comfortable pedestrian environment. Public trails and open spaces are integral to ensuring that new and existing residents benefit from enhanced connectivity to nearby attractions including the Mt. Airy Forest and neighborhood business district.

This option provides an adaptable long-term path that introduces housing options attractive to audiences looking for a place with nature-based and urban amenities, while retaining meaningful public access, trails, and open spaces.







CURE Site Near-Term Activation Semi-Permanent Retail Activation

If near-term multi-story, mixed-use developer interest is limited, the CURE site can instead be activated through a semi-permanent retail village using modular or shipping-container-style structures.

These small-footprint retail spaces would be arranged around a central courtyard set back from the street, creating a welcoming pedestrian environment and a flexible venue for local businesses, artisans, food vendors, and community events. This approach allows Mount Airy to build foot traffic and regional visitors, demonstrate market demand, and test business concepts over a 3–5 year period. It also gives the neighborhood a new destination that supports entrepreneurs and strengthens the corridor without requiring major up-front investment. As activity grows and demand stabilizes, the site will become more attractive to developers, paving the way for a future transition into a larger mixed-use project. This phased strategy ensures that the site remains active and community-serving regardless of market timing.





CURE Site Long-Term **Mixed-Use** **Development via RFP**

The primary long-term vision for the CURE site is a mixed-use development that brings new housing and neighborhood-serving commercial or retail space to the heart of Mount Airy.

Because of its prominent location along Colerain Avenue, the site is well-positioned to support multi-story development that adds density while strengthening the business district. To pursue this option, CURE will likely need to issue a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) for a developer or multiple developer partners. This strategy ensures that the site remains active and community-serving regardless of market timing.



Previously Proposed Rendering for the CURE Site included in the 2021 Colerain Avenue Corridor Study



Clifton Plaza on Ludlow Avenue - Cincinnati, OH





IMPLEMENTATION

Schedule summary, partnerships and action items to bring the redevelopment concepts to life.

A Vision for the W. North Bend and Colerain Gateway

Example scenario showing supported options for a Towers Gateway / Mt. Airy Forest Trailhead.



Implementation & Operations

Implementation of the Mt. Airy feasibility plan will occur over several years, involving several partners including GCWW, City of Cincinnati leaders and department directors, Mt. Airy CURE, and the Mt. Airy Town Council. Determining the ultimate pathway and redevelopment option will require sustained coordination, advocacy, and oversight.

The Steering Committee that has guided the planning process should continue to meet throughout implementation; however, its role should be formalized to support long-term execution, accountability, and fundraising. A Steering Committee representative should also attend monthly Town Council meetings to share implementation progress and provide regular updates.

To accomplish this, the Steering Committee should be formally embedded within **Mt. Airy CURE**, with the organization’s existing Board of Directors serving as the primary implementation Steering Committee. This structure builds on existing leadership, reflects the overlap between current Steering Committee members and the CURE Board, and positions implementation within a stable, mission-aligned entity capable of managing partnerships, funding, and political engagement over time.

From this Steering Committee, a set of focused subcommittees should be established to advance priority implementation tracks. These subcommittees will allow highly motivated stakeholders to concentrate on specific initiatives while reporting back to the CURE Board of Directors for coordination and alignment.



Proposed Subcommittee Structure

Subcommittee Primary Focus:
Restoration & Advocacy

Pursue funding, partnerships, and political support for full restoration of all towers. If full restoration proves infeasible, lead evaluation and advancement of alternative implementation paths. Ensure the CRC site moves forward consistent with the adopted plan.

Streets & Trails

Lead coordination with the City of Cincinnati on the traffic study and related street improvements. Advance trail connections and improved physical and visual linkages between the business district and Mt. Airy Forest.

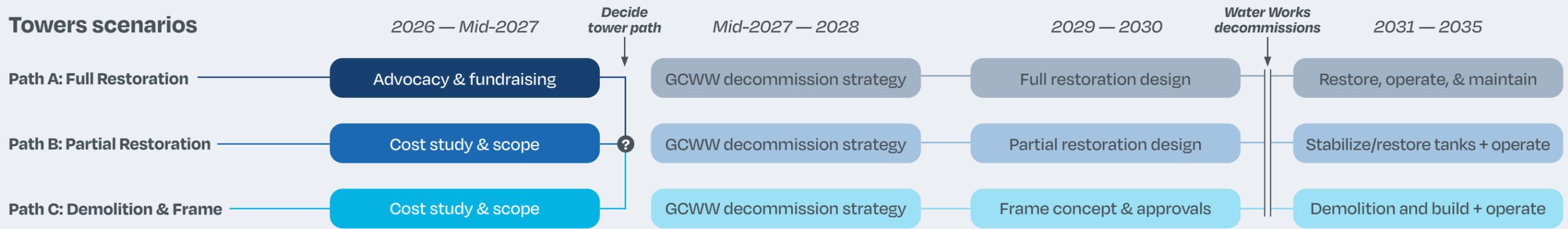
CURE Site Mixed-Use Development

Guide planning, partner selection, and implementation of the mixed-use development envisioned for the CURE site, ensuring alignment with community goals and financial feasibility.

One of the first implementation steps following plan finalization in 2026 should be to formally establish this governance structure within Mt. Airy CURE and initiate a regular meeting cadence for both the Steering Committee and its subcommittees. This approach balances continuity with increased structure, positioning the plan to move from vision to action while remaining adaptable to funding, market, and political conditions over time.

Implementation Schedule 2026–2035

The primary goal of implementation is a long-term sustainable use and dedicated owner for the Mount Airy Towers property.



APPENDIX

Click the button below to see engagement boards, full survey results, and supporting documents behind the plan.



city of
CINCINNATI

YARD & CO.