

Leveraging the Lakefront

Spurring Inclusive Growth in Cleveland, Ohio
Through Urban Redevelopment

Leading Economic Development in Cities

- Help city leaders think critically and comprehensively about economic development in cities with a focus on innovation, equity, and sustainability.
- Build data-analytic and collaborative capabilities to diagnose challenges and evaluate strategies and interventions.
- Support and challenge teams to develop and implement strategic actions to spur inclusive and sustainable growth in their cities.

Goals for this Session

- Reflect on the challenges of **diagnosing problems** before **embracing solutions**.
- Introduce the **Five Lenses Framework** to diagnose economic challenges.
- Apply the concept of **Theory of Change** to strengthen strategic thinking and action.



Mayor Bibb's Vision

“For generations, the river and the lake have been the **dividing line** between the East side and the West side, black and white, rich and poor.

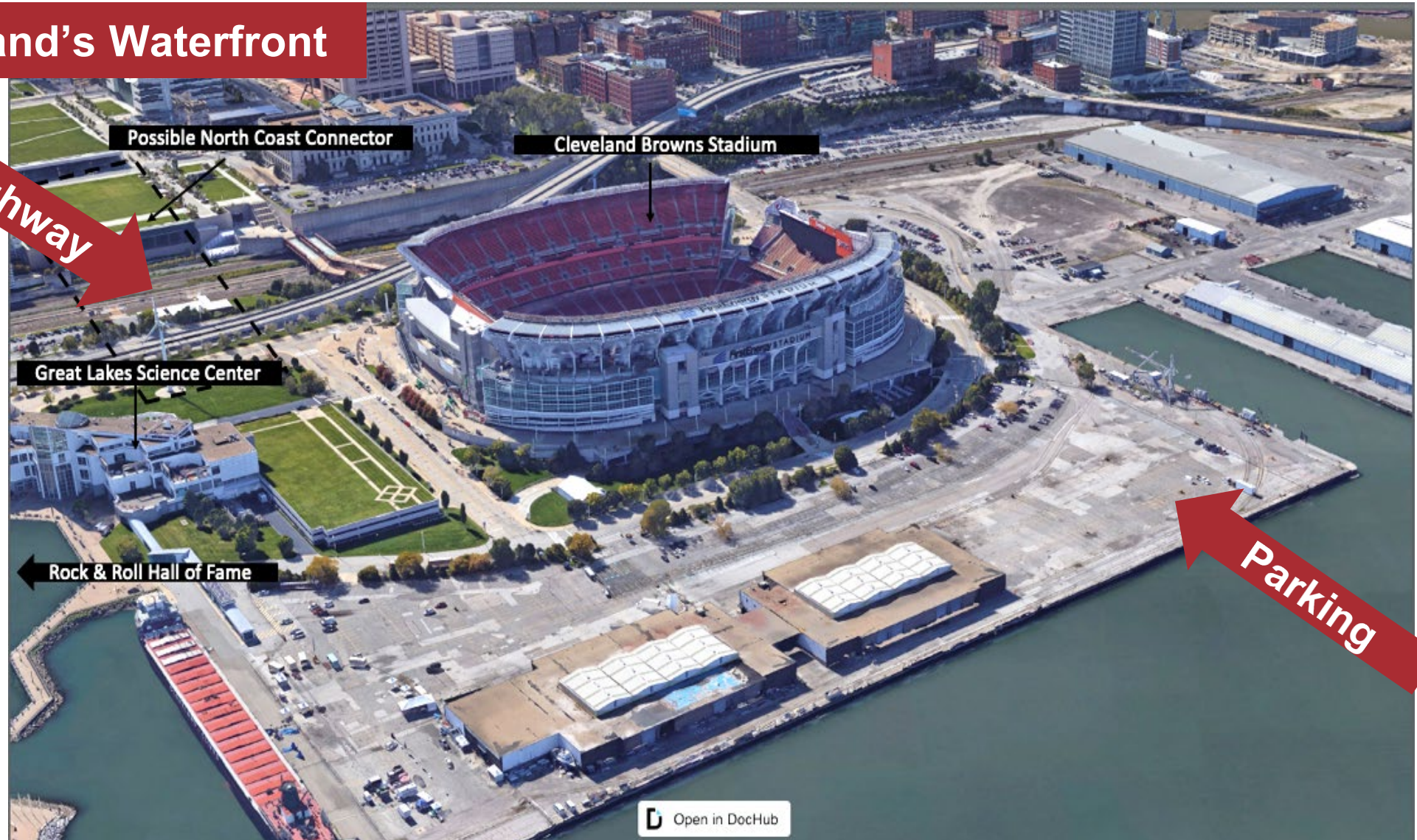
Lakefront redevelopment is a way to **heal our community**, literally making parts of the city accessible, **bringing people together...**

At a macro level, this ambitious plan will allow us to **grow our population, attract new talent and investment**, which gives the city more **resources to invest** in historically disenfranchised communities.”

– Mayor Justin Bibb, October 2023

Cleveland's Waterfront

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Source: Cleveland North Coast Master Plan Update: 60% Draft, Cleveland North Coast Website, October 20, 2023, https://clevelandnorthcoast.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CLMP_Comm-Eng-3_Presentation_1020.pdf. Used with permission. Text and arrows are authors' overlay.

Cleveland's Master Plan Site



Source: Cleveland North Coast Master Plan Update: Community Conversation, Cleveland North Coast Website, July, 27, 2023, <https://clevelandnorthcoast.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Community-Conversation-Slides-230727.pdf>.

Open questions...

What role will the Browns Stadium negotiations play?

How will residents feel?



What will it cost?

Who will benefit and how?

How will it be funded?

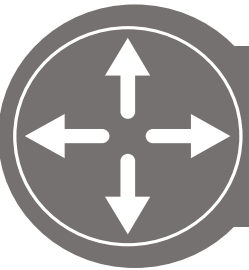
What is the return on investment? When?

What will it take to heal racial wounds?

**What problem(s) is Mayor Bibb
trying to solve?**



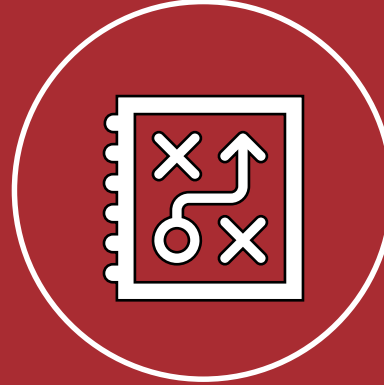
Low incomes, especially
among communities
of color



High levels of
segregation



Racial disparity in
health, education and
economic outcomes



Some of Cleveland's challenges in 2022

Poor overall public
education outcomes



Lack of attractive
downtown amenities



Increased crime and
public safety concerns



Theory of change

“An explicit presentation of the **assumptions** about how **changes** are expected to happen within a particular **context** and in relation to particular **interventions**,” ideally based on a strong empirical **foundation**.

If...



...then

Source: Keystone. *Developing a Theory of Change*. London: Keystone Accountability for Social Change, 2008.

What assumptions is Cleveland making regarding the waterfronts project?

Theory of change cont.

IF

- Cleveland invests in a world class waterfront that connects downtown and creates space for leisure and commercial activity; and
- Design of the space includes all Clevelanders, especially those from historically marginalized communities.

THEN

- The city can attract and retain more people and businesses.
- Redevelopment can address longstanding racial inequities.
- Redevelopment will attract private investment.
- More tourists will visit, spending more time and money downtown.
- Leisure and commerce will attract more foot traffic.
- Increased commercial activity will increase tax revenues.
- Increased tax revenues can be reinvested in neglected city neighborhoods used to address other structural challenges.

“We are positing that the quality and accessibility that we can create along our waterfronts will make it more desirable for people to live, work, and visit here . . . we can reverse those growth metrics and drive more money toward those neighborhood issues, enhance quality of life, and make us more attractive for business.”



Jeff Epstein
chief of
integrated
development

**What needs to be true?
What could go wrong?**

“The thing that keeps me up at night is worrying if someone is going to pull the rug out from under us to say we’re actually going to prioritize something else or compete with you. Political will is so fragile. I believe in the mayor's political will, but I wonder when it comes to regional leaders, can we actually work together?”



Joyce Huang
director of city
planning



Jeff Epstein
chief of integrated
development

“There’s a heck of a lot of pressure right now to say, ‘We've got huge, immediate needs. We've got downtown office buildings that are heading towards receivership; we've got crime issues; we've got neighborhood issues. Why are you focusing on this development that is five to 10 years off right now?’ But we can’t just be reacting to the immediate crises of the day.”

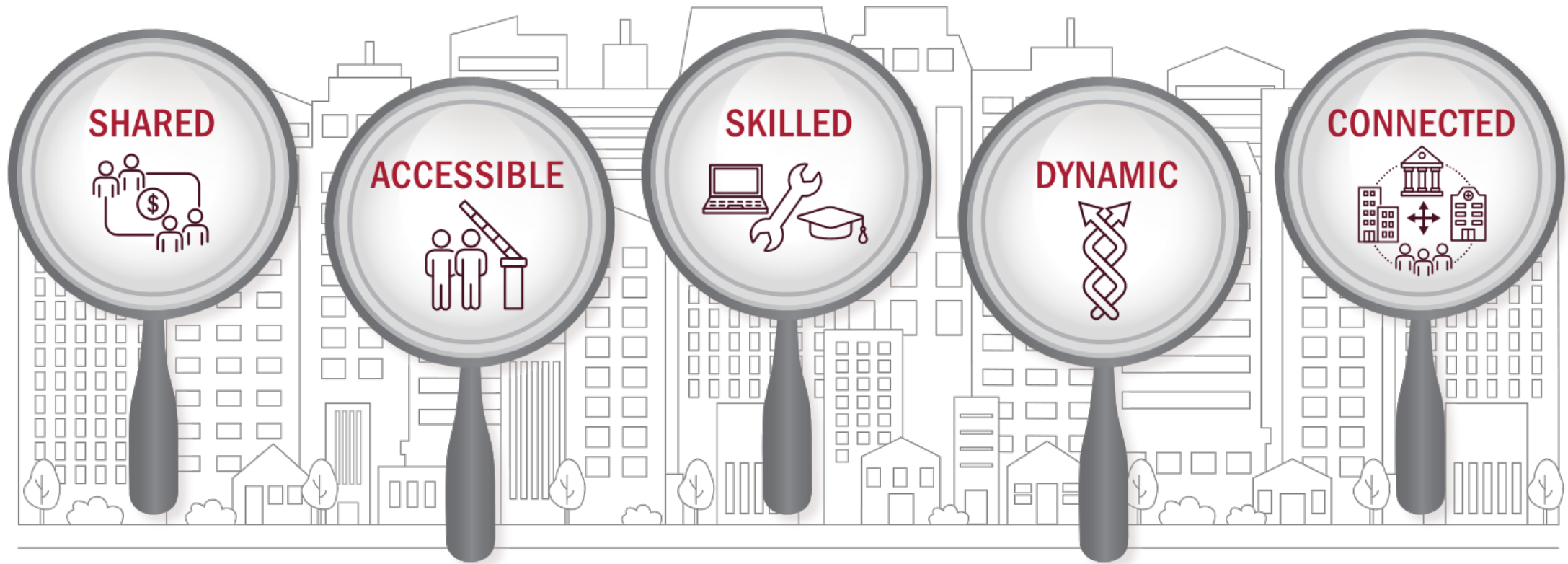
“People are concerned about jobs, about the rise in gun violence. They’re also concerned about some of the side effects of success. One of those being . . . [putting] the residents who have been here for a long time. . . at risk.”



Evelyn Burnett
ThirdSpace Action Lab

Defining and measuring success in inclusive economic development

THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK



Source: "Inclusive Growth for Cities," Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, December 2024,
<https://cityleadership.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/bhcli-inclusive-growth-for-cities-guide.pdf>.

THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK

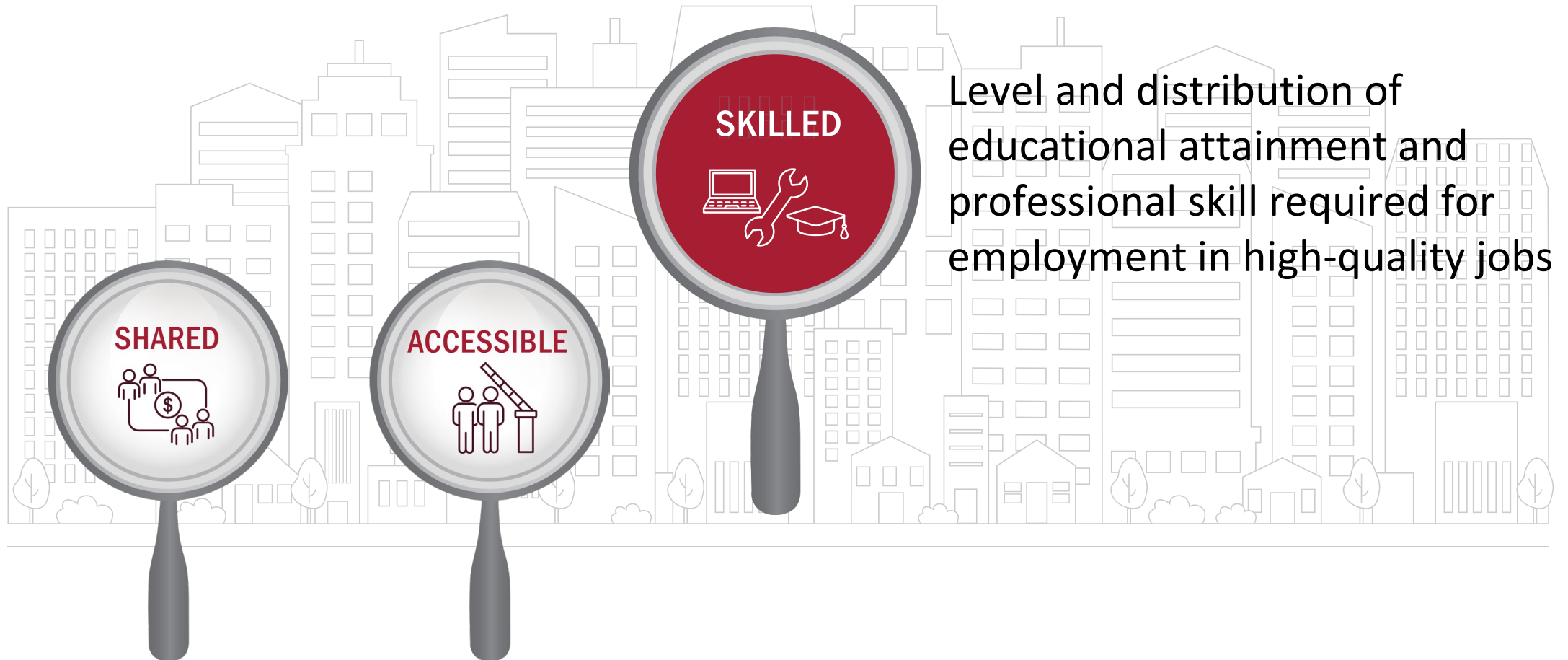


Distribution of economic
opportunity, activity, ownership,
and wealth across demographics

THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK



THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK



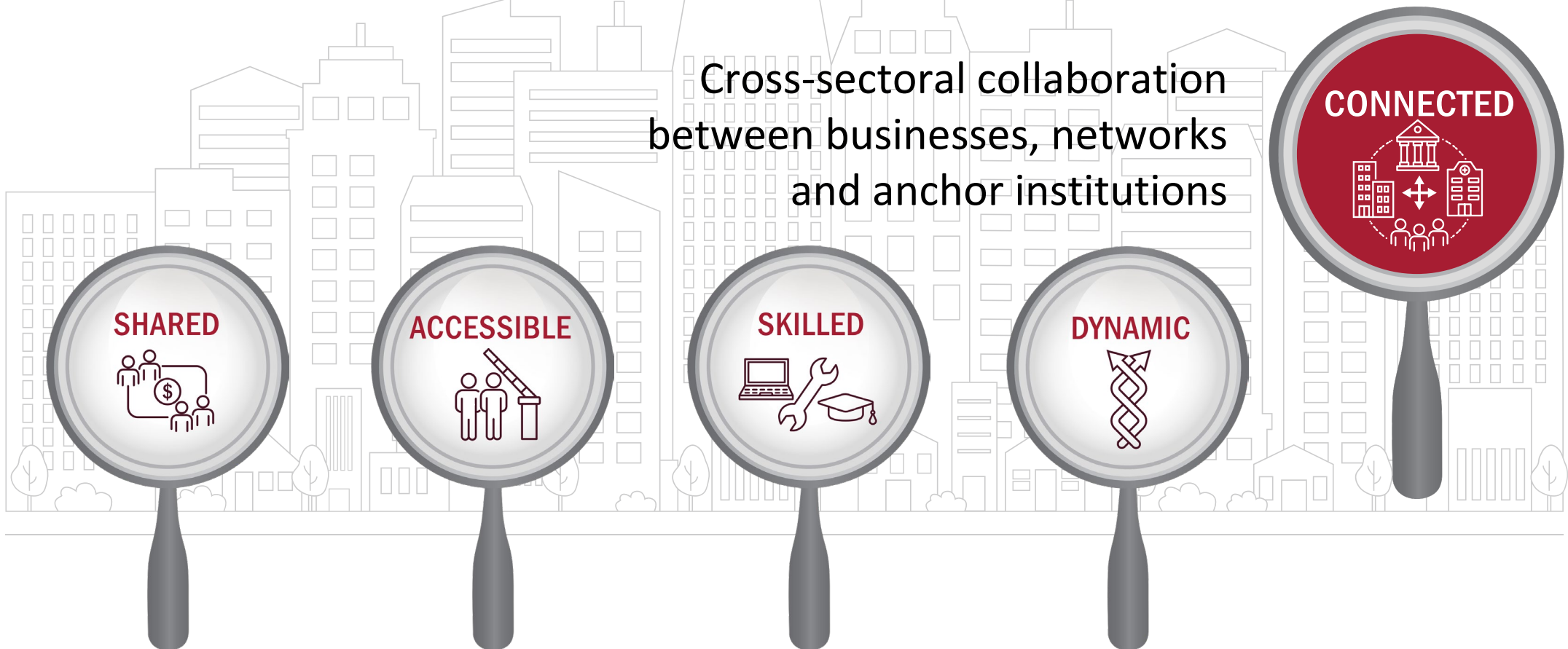
THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK

Level of labor market participation,
innovative entrepreneurship, and
economic complexity

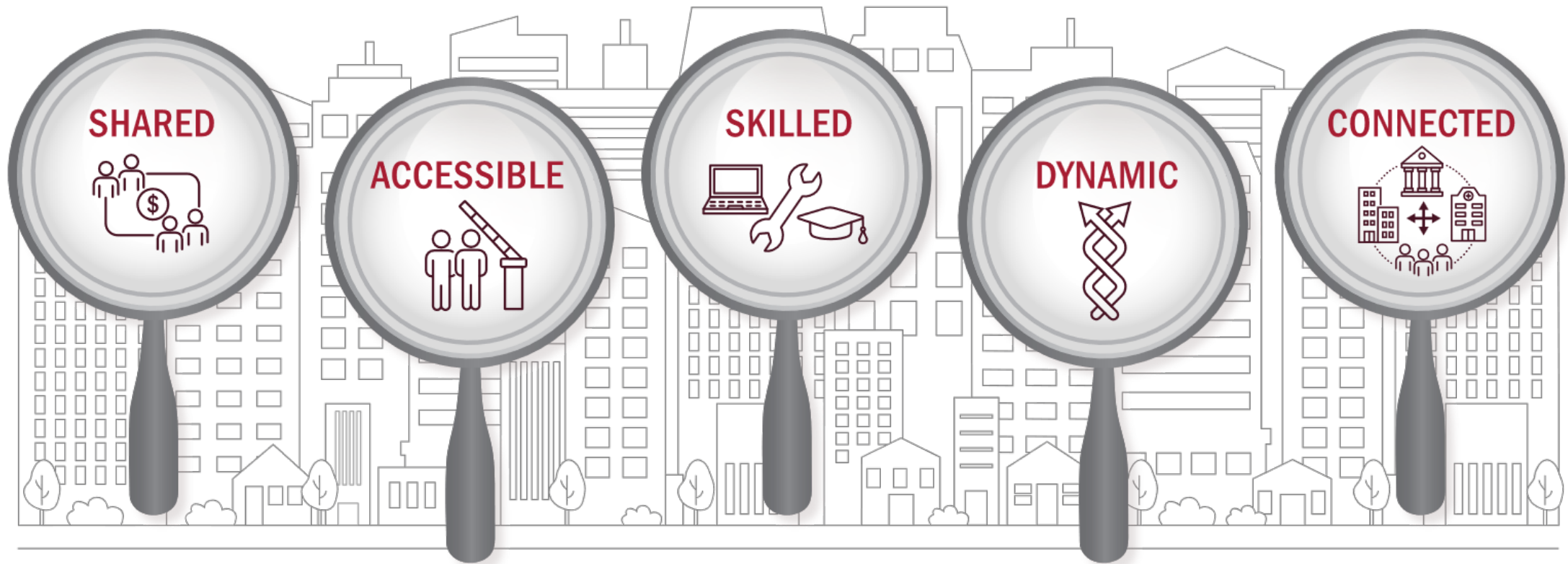


THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK

Cross-sectoral collaboration
between businesses, networks
and anchor institutions



THE FIVE LENSES FRAMEWORK



Group work

Apply the Five Lenses Framework to Cleveland's waterfront redevelopment plan.

Analytic Lens from “City Leader Guide on Economic Development”	How does Cleveland currently perform through each lens?	How would the waterfront project improve outcomes?	What other information would you need to know?	What other actions could improve outcomes?
Shared				
Accessible				
Skilled				
Dynamic				
Connected				

What would *you* do?

1. Double down on waterfront development and work to mitigate uncertainty and risks.

—or—

2. Explore strategies with more certainty and a higher likelihood of accomplishing goals.

Epilogue

A Two-Waterfront City

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Mayor Bibb's "Shore-to-Core-to-Shore" strategy connected the lakefront-to-downtown-to-riverfront.

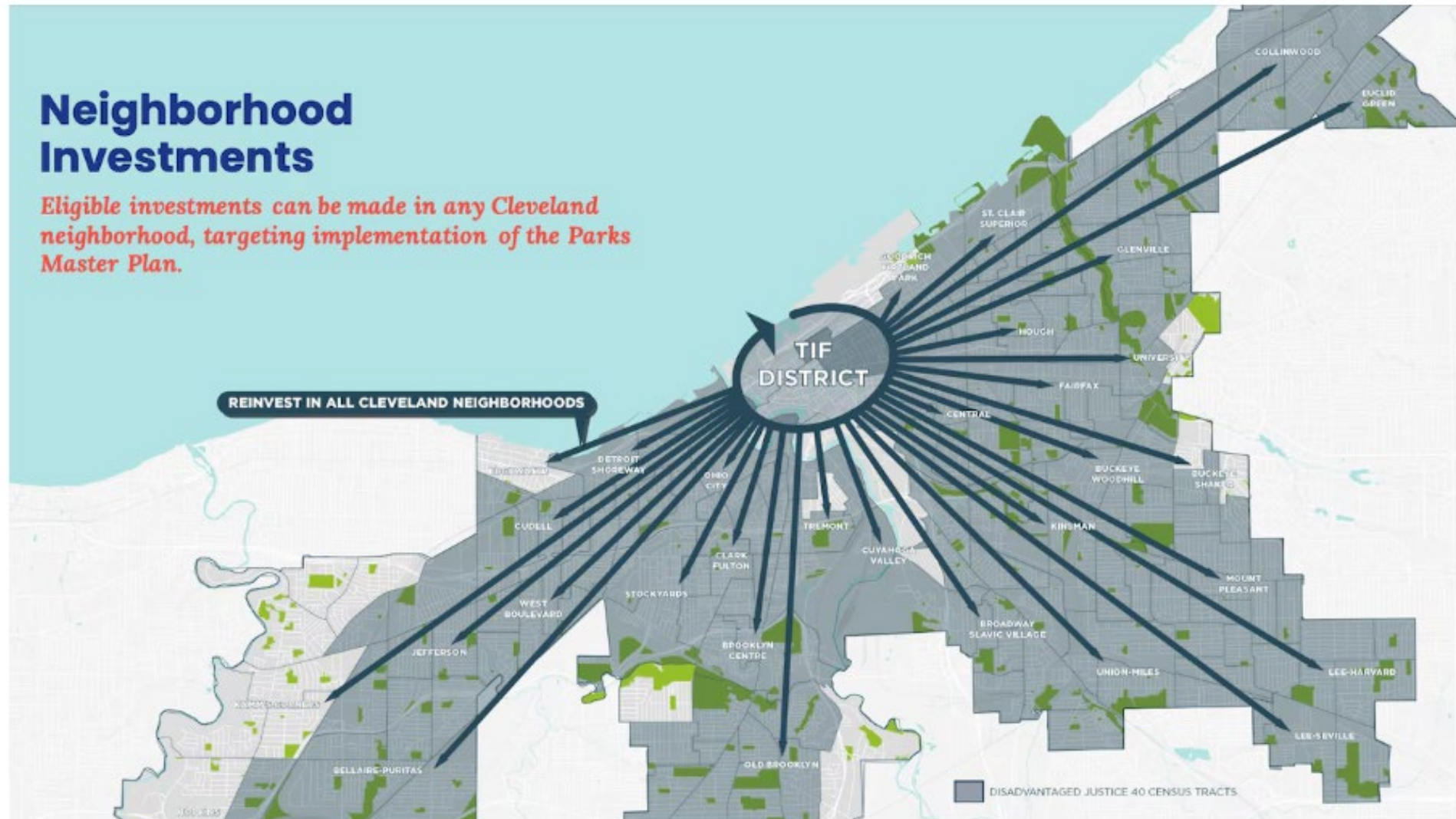


Source: Cleveland.com from the City of Cleveland

TIF District

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A tax increment financing (TIF) district was established to help fund the two-waterfront vision and it was expected to generate \$3.5 - \$7.5 billion over the next 42 years.



Source: Cleveland.com from the City of Cleveland

The Master Planning Effort

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- September 2022: Mayor Bibb released the RFP for the North Coast Master Plan.
- Spring-Oct 2023: Extensive community engagement; Master Plan released in phases
- Oct 2023: North Coast Waterfront Development Corp established to oversee equitable development



Source: Rendering courtesy of the City of Cleveland

Riverfront Redevelopment

Sept 2023: The Cuyahoga Riverfront Masterplan set out to reinvent thirty-five acres of riverfront property, including Tower City Center and nearby areas into a vibrant, inclusive, sustainable district



Financing

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- June 2024: Ohio Legislature approved \$20m for North Coast Connector (NCC).
- June, Oct 2024, Jan 2025: \$150m+ in federal and state grants was secured toward the \$450m NCC project, including: a \$70m Reconnecting Communities Pilot grant, \$20m from the OH State Community Investment Fund, and a \$60m Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grant.
- Oct 2024: The Browns announced their plan to move to Brook Park and build a stadium when their downtown lease expires in 2028.
- July 2025: The Federal Department of Transportation awarded Cleveland a \$960k grant for the NCC project.



Source: City of Cleveland in Shore-to-Core-to-Shore TIF District FAQs; City of Cleveland Press Release
<https://www.clevelandohio.gov/news/cleveland-awarded-nearly-70-million-reconnecting-communities-pilot-program-grant-total-more>

Browns Stadium Resolution & Strategic Possibilities

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October 2025: Browns Stadium Agreement

After months of legal and political conflict, Mayor Bibb and the Haslams announced a final agreement for a new \$2.4 billion Browns stadium in Brook Park. The Haslams agreed to provide \$100 million to the city to:

- Demolish the current lakefront stadium
- Position the property for development
- Fund other city projects

Demolition, projected to cost ~\$30 million, would begin after the 2028 football season, with the new stadium expected to open in 2029.

November 2025: Mayoral Re-election

Mayor Bibb decisively won a second term.

Future Browns Brook Park stadium location



Source: <https://www.clevelandbrowns.com/photos/photos-cleveland-browns-share-renderings-of-a-proposed-stadium-option>

Takeaways

- Inclusive economic development requires a **critical and comprehensive** assessment of challenges and opportunities.
- Testing assumptions of economic development strategies helps **build a stronger theory of change**. There are many **available data-sets** to do so.
- No single strategy will work for all cities. No strategy will work for any city just by itself. Inclusive growth requires **coordination and collaboration across silos**.

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This slide deck, accompanying the case study “Leveraging the Lakefront: Spurring Inclusive Growth in Cleveland, Ohio Through Urban Redevelopment,” was created as an instructional aid by the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, a collaboration between Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard Business School, and Bloomberg Philanthropies. It is not intended to serve as an endorsement, source of primary data, or illustration of effective or ineffective management. Copyright © 2025, 2026 President and Fellows of Harvard College. (Revised 1/2026.)



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