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City Council

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Agency: [Cleveland City Council](#)

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Summary

- Residents in Cudell and adjacent neighborhoods spoke vehemently against the proposed development/implementation of a gas station. They cited many safety concerns for residents and said this should be an “*inter-ward*” decision considering parts of Cudell are in Ward 11 and parts are in Ward 15.
- With the current charges against Antoine Tolbert, who also goes by the name Chairman Fahiem, for extortion and intimidation, some local activists expressed outrage and concern. Public commenters said the neighborhoods that New Era Cleveland protects would take a heavy blow without the presence of their leader. They demanded that charges against Tolbert be dropped.
- The CMSD school levy has a lot of support from council members. However, some said that CMSD schools can do better. A couple of council members said there is still more work that needs to be done to see substantial progress in students’ overall academic achievement and capabilities, especially post-graduation.

Follow-Up Questions

- Do the [current charges against Tolbert](#) impact the policing of local advocates/activists in the City of Cleveland?
- Are the new charges retaliation for the [\\$85,000 settlement Tolbert and his attorney received](#) in 2023 from a lawsuit he filed against a Cleveland police officer for a wrongful arrest?
- What will it take to really see progress and change within CMSD? Is the current CEO doing enough, and what more can be done? Is the issue with CMSD systemic, and, if so, what can be done to change that? Or is it that CMSD is not documenting and highlighting enough progress at the student, parent and family levels?
- Concerning graduates of CSMD, should we follow them for a long-term survey into adulthood to see how their academic success may/may not have positively impacted their lives (and families) beyond high school?

Notes

Public commenters included four residents who spoke out against [the possible construction of a gas station in the Cudell neighborhood](#). The gas station would be where a former CVS site is located at West Boulevard and Madison Avenue. Some residents in the area have expressed concern that the gas station would bring unwelcome traffic, increase crime/accidents, and cause disruption, especially because of the closeness in proximity to an elementary school and community park. The residents who spoke at this meeting were very clear that they do not want City Council to allow a gas station that sells beer and wine in their neighborhood.

The first commenter, Cudell resident Nikki Hudson, said the potential owner intends to sell alcoholic beverages out of the gas station. Hudson also said gas stations have become huge problems in neighborhoods, providing examples of the Sunoco on Buckeye Road (saying the owner is associated with the proposed Ward 11 gas station under scrutiny) and the gas station in Council Member Joe Jones' Ward 1 that [was recently in the news](#).

Another commenter, Jonathan Steirer, expressed concern about what he referenced as a "Spot Zoning Ordinance" that he said could potentially remove the ability for residents and council to "justify and argue for the future of their neighborhoods." Steirer, who said he lives about 600 feet from the parcel in question, said the [ordinance](#) is an inter-ward issue. Steirer urged council to consider an approach other than just a "quick solution to a problem" and "pump the brakes on this legislation."

Commenter Michael Armstrong spoke about legislation recently passed to pilot [form-based zoning code](#) in the city. Armstrong noted that the zoning's decision was in part determined by the request of City Planning. He spoke against the proposed gas station.

Susan Zimmerman of Ward 15 said that Cudell is a historic district, which makes the proposed gas station "unsuitable." Zimmerman referenced the developer's plans to also have a bank come to the community. Zimmerman said there is zero chance of a bank coming to the community, as many are already moving out.

Two commenters spoke in support of New Era leader Antoine Tolbert (also known as Chairman Fahiem). They both said Tolbert does a great job of helping residents feel safe in Cleveland. Greg Levy, of Cleveland Heights, expressed concern about opposition from those in positions of power to Black leaders. Toward the end of his speech, Levy said,

“Free Fahiem and Free Palestine.”

Next, Tolbert was then called up to speak as a commenter, but he was not physically present. A woman approached the mic on his behalf saying that “Mr. Tolbert couldn’t attend, Council President,” but was quickly dismissed by Council President Blaine Griffin, who said it was not her turn to speak. *[Editor’s note: Tolbert said on [his Instagram account](#) that he was not permitted to enter City Hall to give his public comment because of a protection order relating to his charges.]*

Clevelander James Lamb spoke about the lack of positive change in Cleveland’s East Side neighborhoods. He argued for more accountability and said that residents don’t get answers about what they speak on. Lamb said, “We vote, you get the paycheck.” Lamb also spoke about challenges in trying to get a meeting with Mayor Justin Bibb, a topic he has [mentioned before](#). Lamb continued to speak about issues with getting in touch with Bibb and losing a job with the city, but Griffin interrupted when Lamb reached his allotted time (three minutes) and excused Lamb from the mic. It took several strong urges from Griffin to get Lamb away from the mic. You could still hear Lamb shouting to be heard for a short time while the meeting proceeded.

Council Members Krish Harsh, Richard Starr and Kevin Conwell all spoke of the recent Ohio [state report card](#), which gave CMSD schools an overall three-star rating, the district’s first such rating. Harsh spoke proudly of the school district and in support of the [school levy on the ballot this November](#). His audio was difficult to hear for the first three minutes or so of his commentary. Harsh clearly cited data showing that public schools in Cuyahoga County are doing better than most (if not all) charter Schools.

Starr acknowledged Harsh’s praise for the current CMSD rating but said that kids in CMSD are still not proficient in reading and literacy. Starr specifically said only about 26% of students are ready to successfully participate in college, career, workforce or the military upon graduating. Starr said that the K-8 model is a bad one for CMSD students. Lastly, Starr encouraged everyone to come out for the Boots on the Ground event on Sept. 28 at 11 a.m. at Luke Easter Park/Zelma George to canvas the neighborhood and encourage Black men to get out and vote.

Council Member Kevin Conwell, who also said the K-8 model is no good, spoke out about CMSD needing to do more to engage parents and connect them with teachers. Conwell said he supports the school levy but also said that the levy is not going to do enough and that “it’s more than just the money,” adding that parents need to be engaged. Conwell made a point about alumni of CMSD schools that see success in their careers coming

back to help the schools because CMSD students need to see what success looks like. Conwell mentioned a meeting at GlenVillage on Sept. 24 to discuss more about CMSD related-issues.

Council Member Joe Jones brought up his frustration with trying to address the issue of the congregation of cars and overcrowding that extends over to the gas station directly across from Mr. Mac's bar on Harvard Avenue. Jones said he discussed the issue with several police officials. However, the issue persists almost every weekend there's an event at Mr. Mac's bar, he said. Jones said the bar is a nuisance and he is urging police involvement, especially concerning a more recent incident that occurred in his ward.

Council Member Jenny Spencer spoke of an event that will be happening in Ward 15 that involves the Cleveland Cavs and Bibb, centered around voter registration. She highlighted that the Cudell rec center is a major feature in the Cudell community as seven precincts vote there.

Griffin ended the meeting by saying that Danny Kelly is in a position to make a very tough decision about the Ward 11 gas station and the council body should support him. Griffin said that just because a person has an opinion, it doesn't make them corrupt. He asked all to exercise patience and understanding.

[Editor's note: Check out [meeting coverage by Documenter Tucker Handley](#) for a look at some of the legislation City Council passed and sent to committee for review.

If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at cleddocumenters@gmail.com with "Correction Request" in the subject line.