

Mandel Foundation awards \$5M challenge grant to Ohio City park project



Irishtown Bend Park

The Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation has awarded a \$5 million challenge grant to the Irishtown Bend Park project in Cleveland’s Ohio City neighborhood, community development partners LAND studio and Ohio City Incorporated announced Dec. 6.

The grant to the 23-acre park project of shared public green space that connects downtown Cleveland and Cleveland neighborhoods to the Cuyahoga River, Lake Erie and beyond aligns with other awards the foundation has made in the past. That includes the current work in Cleveland’s MidTown and St. Clair Superior neighborhoods through the CDC Learning Lab, engagement with Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, and the growth of leaders through the Neighborhood Leadership Development Program and the CDC Leadership Program, according to a news release from the Mandel Foundation.

The plans prioritize equity through diversity, accessibility and inclusion, and were shaped by the resident-led Committee of Champions, which puts residents of neighboring Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority properties at the center of park planning, the release said. When complete, Irishtown Bend Park will enhance community health and connections, expand the city’s green space, promote economic growth and serve as the “missing

link” between the 101-mile Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and Lake Erie.

“The Mandel Foundation believes in the growth and vitality of Cleveland’s neighborhoods, which ultimately spurred our decision to invest in this project through a significant challenge grant,” Jehuda Reinharz, president and CEO of the Mandel Foundation, said in the release. “The efforts to increase leadership through the involvement of all residents bordering the location of Irishtown Bend Park closely aligns with the foundation’s commitment to investing in community leaders to promote inclusive communities of choice.”

The challenge grant means the Mandel Foundation will match dollar for dollar up to \$5 million total in additional donations collected now through the end of 2024 to help build the park, the release said.

“The Mandel Foundation remains committed to community engagement and the neighborhoods of Cleveland,” Stephen H. Hoffman, Mandel Foundation board chair, said in the release. “The empowerment of community residents to champion and lead efforts in park planning ensures the sustainability of the Irishtown Bend Park project and the long-term economic and community benefits for Cleveland’s near west side.”

Among those working on the park, in addition to LAND studio and Ohio City Incorporated, are the Cleveland Metroparks, West Creek Conservancy, the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority, Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, the city of Cleveland, Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, Cuyahoga County, the state of Ohio, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless.

“Irishtown Bend Park is nationally significant and is being watched by cities across the country,” Greg Peckham, executive director of LAND studio, said in the release. “The park will be a climate-resilient landscape, designed to combat the negative impacts of climate change on people and the environment. We will plant more than 1,000 trees, improve river habitat, and create a natural space in the heart of the city for residents that for generations have been able to see the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie but have never been able to get there.”

Development of the park will begin following the stabilization of the Irishtown Bend hillside, which is a separately funded project led by the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority. Fundraising for the park and its amenities is ongoing.

“Irishtown Bend Park will fundamentally reshape how our neighborhoods interact with our waterfront. This is a space designed with the community, for the community,” Tom McNair, executive director of Ohio City Incorporated, said in the release. “This grant is a huge step towards turning this once-in-a-generation opportunity into reality.”

Those interested in supporting the challenge grant can contact Deanna Palermo, LAND studio director of foundation relations, at dpalermo@LANDstudio.org.

