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Shaker Square planning kicks off Nov. 16-17 with public asked to weigh in and think big

By Steven Litt, The Plain Dealer | Posted November 11, 2018 at 06:05 AM | Updated November 11, 2018 at 09:14 AM

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Shaker Square from above. Courtesy LAND Studio, Aerial Agents



CLEVELAND, Ohio – Designers leading a major rethink of public spaces at the historic but aging Shaker Square shopping center will kick off their work next week with one big question: What does the public want?

Specifically, how should the beloved, 5.5-acre square, located at Moreland and Shaker boulevards on Cleveland's East Side, be improved after decades of physical decline and patchwork repairs?

"What we want to hear from people is what the space should look like and feel like and how it should be used," said Mary Margaret Jones, a senior principal at Hargreaves Associates, based in Cambridge, Mass., one of the lead firms working on the project.



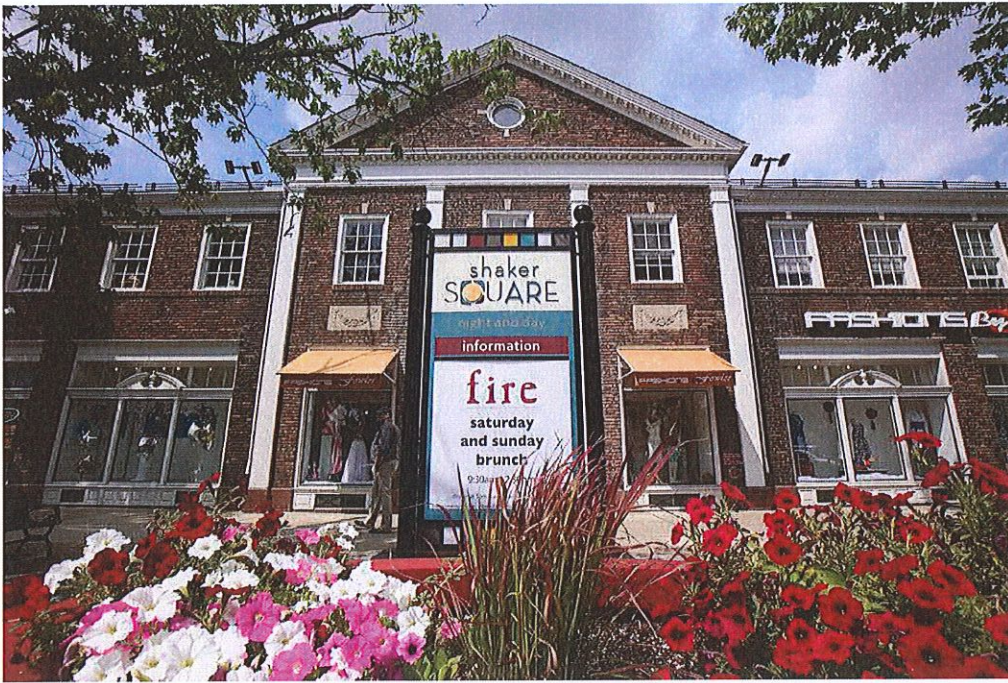
Shaker Square from above. Courtesy LAND Studio, Aerial Agents

Project sponsors LAND Studio and Cleveland Neighborhood Progress will use public events on Friday, Nov. 16 and Saturday Nov. 17 to introduce Hargreaves and other members of the design team to Clevelanders, and to launch a discussion about Shaker Square.

Designers will serve cider and donuts at "street team" tables on Buckeye Road and Larchmere Blvd. on the 16th while asking passersby to fill out survey questionnaires about the square.

The surveys will also be available online at a website that will go live that weekend.





Outside Fire Food and Drink, Shaker Square. Lisa DeJong, The Plain Dealer

On Saturday, the designers will also conduct similar surveys on the north and south aisles of the North Union Farmers Market at Shaker Square from 8 a.m. to noon.

At the same, the designers will also host a public brainstorming session at the Shaker Square Indoor Winter Market, located on the northeast quadrant of the square.

They'll ask participants to use photographs of other public spaces around the U.S. to help articulate changes needed at Shaker Square.



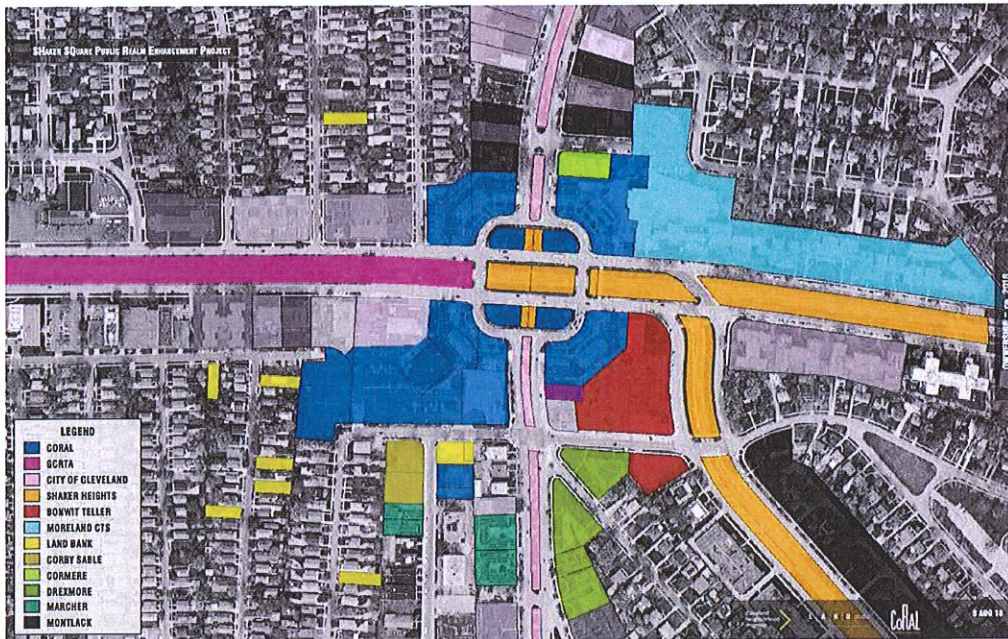
Shaker Square from above. Courtesy LAND Studio, Aerial Agents

The team is planning other sessions in February and April to consult Clevelanders on evolving versions of a new plan for the square, before presenting a final vision in June.

Everyone should think big at the start, Jones said in an interview Wednesday.

"We want to open up aspirations, not shut them down," she said. "There's no "no" at this stage."





An ownership map of Shaker Square and adjacent properties, courtesy LAND Studio and Cleveland Neighborhood Progress.

Completed in 1929, Shaker Square is widely regarded as one of the most innovative open-air shopping centers of its time.

Despite its name, the square is shaped like an octagon and is framed by low-rise brick buildings with white trim, designed in the Colonial Revival style by Cleveland architects Philip Small and Charles Bacon Rowley.

The square is bisected by the Blue and Green rapid transit lines of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority and by east- and westbound lanes of Shaker Boulevard.





Shaker Square from above. Courtesy LAND Studio, Aerial Agents

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress and LAND Studio raised \$400,000, mostly in private and philanthropic donations, to pay for the new plan for the square.

Peter Rubin, president of The Coral Co., which has owned the square for 14 years, said he's thrilled by the project. He's open to considering any options for the future of the square's public spaces, including transferring ownership to a non-profit management entity.

He said revenues earned through rents at the square aren't enough to support more than basic maintenance of the shopping center and its buildings.

"Commercial activity is experiential in America today," he said. "It's not just about visiting a business. The civic arena that we have at the square doesn't really add a lot to that experience now."





Shaker Square, in gray, is a crossroads between rich and poor, white and black. Courtesy LAND Studio, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress.

Neighborhoods around the square include well-to-do, racially mixed Shaker Heights to the east, and Buckeye to the west and south, a low-income, predominantly African-American neighborhood.

Analyses of the square that led up to the current project selection showed that Buckeye residents feel the square treats them as second-class citizens by requiring them to enter buildings from the rear, or by walking across parking lots. The square faces Shaker Heights in a more gracious manner.

Jones said that those and other deficits would be addressed by the plan. At the early stage, designers would explore everything from potentially removing all parking in the square to reimagining how the rapid transit lines interact with pedestrian spaces around them.



Shaker Square from above. Courtesy LAND Studio, Aerial Agents

Financial planning is also part of the process. The design team will consider how potentially expensive changes could be funded and accomplished a little bit at a time through various phases of construction.

The team will also consider how management and maintenance of the square's public spaces could be supported financially.



"Our funding community is very much aware that they do not want to be making investments in beautiful things that don't have a plan for staying that way," said Tiffany Graham Charkosky, senior project director at LAND Studio. "We are building that into the process on the very front end."



Shaker Square from above. Courtesy LAND Studio, Aerial Agents

Hargreaves designed the master plan for the 2000 Olympics in Sidney, Australia, and a widely praised revamp of the University of Cincinnati campus.

Also on the design team is Mass Design Group of Boston, which earned strong reviews for the recently completed National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, AL.

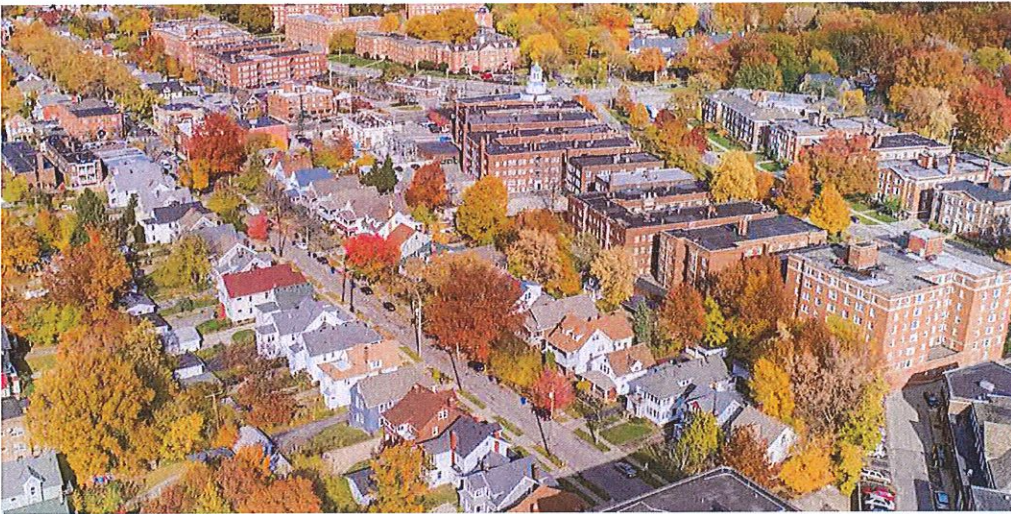
Local practitioners on the team include the Cleveland office of the national traffic consulting firm of Nelson Nygaard, and Osborn Engineering.



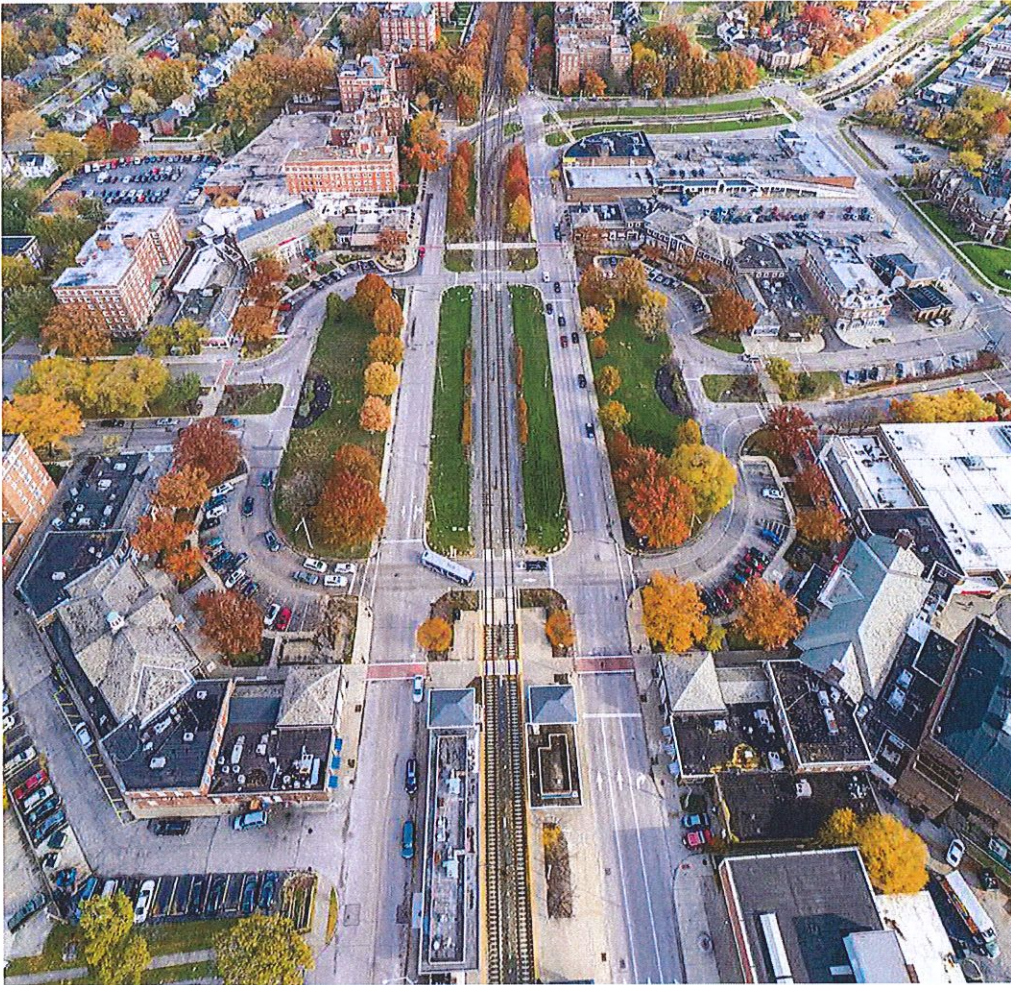


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