THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY

STORIES BY STEVEN LITT / ARCHITECTURE CRITIC
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY HAMEL-LAMBERT

We launched the series you are about to read for one reason: we wanted the Forgotten Valley to be remembered, remembered for the crowded river that runs through it, the booming industry that lines it, the history that defines it.

But mostly, we wanted it to be remembered by the region’s planners and policy makers and we wanted the people of Northeast Ohio to recognize the valley’s recreational, residential and economic potential.

That was a potential seen by the creators and backers of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor who won Congressional approval for a massive preservation project four years ago.

Aided by the valley’s unique place in history and in the ecology, architecture critic Steve Litt set out to tell its story and explain how its future hangs in the balance. This series is the work of Litt, photographer Larry Hamel-Lambert and graphics reporter James Owens.

Douglas Clifton
Editor
Newcomers and visitors often are surprised by all of the things to see and do in Northeast Ohio. But one thing is off limits to them and many others, and that’s the awe-inspiring view of the Cuyahoga River, now cordoned by buildings, chain-link fences and concrete walls.

That’s a great shame and a huge missed opportunity. As shown by Plain Dealer architecture critic Steven Litt’s recent series, “The Forgotten Valley,” this region could enjoy — and perhaps even profit from — the river that helped make Cleveland an industrial giant.

It is time for the leaders and citizens in this community to discuss the possibility of making the river valley as vital an asset as it was 100 or 200 years ago.

Now it is used as a dumping ground or simply ignored, but a walk through the historic Ohio and Erie Canal Reservation, built recently by the Cleveland Metroparks system, provides a startling example of how the river and land around it can be more than just a rubbish heap.

Thanks to the Ohio Canal Corridor, the Akron-based Ohio & Erie Canal Corridor Coalition, and U.S. Rep. Ralph Regula, this region can take advantage of its designation as a 110-mile federal National Heritage Corridor. The corridor, for now more a plan on paper than a reality, is highway speech for a scenic towpath trail for bikers and hikers. This plan will be funded with $10 million from the federal government, spread out over 12 years.

Currently, the trail begins in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, then extends between Akron and Akron. Five years from now, planners hope to bring it to Cleveland by way of a new park under the Detroit-Superior Bridge.

But more than trail building is required. This region needs a new attitude if it hopes to acquire a river-view.

That means trying to save the decaying buildings and bridges of Cleveland’s industrial heritage and turning them into tourist attractions. It also means pitching in on a master plan to reclaim the river and the northern part of the valley, now a dumping ground for shall.

Spurring interest in mainstreaming the river, a ribbon of water that once Clevelanders seldom see, has not been easy. Cleveland Mayor Michael White seems bored with the whole idea. Corporate leaders meet quietly from their downtown offices.

Yet Cuyahoga County officials, including Commissioner Tim McCormack, express great interest. That’s a good start. Area political leaders and community leaders must move to make the corridor a place where the best of Greater Cleveland’s past and future flow together for all to see.

Steven Litt has been the Art and Architecture Critic of The Plain Dealer for nine-and-a-half years. Before moving to Cleveland, he held the same position at The News and Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina, from 1984 to 1993.

Litt earned a bachelor’s degree in art from Brown University and a master’s degree in journalism from Columbia University. His honors and awards include fellowships at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he studied at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

Larry Hamel-Lambert served as The Plain Dealer’s Night Picture Editor from 1991 to 1996. After taking time off to be with his family, he rejoined the staff as a photographer in 1998. He previously worked as a picture editor at the Associated Press in Washington, D.C.

Hamel-Lambert holds a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism from Bowling Green State University and a Master of Arts degree in photography from Ohio University. He has also worked at The Cleveland Press, The Providence (R.I.) Journal, The Washington Times and The Cincinnati Post.

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY — DAY ONE

An innovative initiative to revive the Cuyahoga Valley could transform our region and its economy. Here’s how it would work.

A trail following the Ohio & Erie Canal, extending toward the downtown skyscrapers, forms the centerpiece of a new kind of national park — the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor. In about five years, trail advocates hope to bring the trail to downtown Cleveland.

From a scar to a star

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nce it gave us our identity, fueled our economy and helped launch America’s industrial revolution.

Then it became a burden, a symbol of environmental neglect, a civil rights struggle in our river burned.

Today, the historic industrialized northern section of the Cuyahoga Valley and the river that gives its name to the valley remains a remnant of the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire.

We’re trying to reverse at least 100 years of land-use patterns in the Cuyahoga Valley, said John Dolan, superintendent of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The 33,000-acre national park, between Cleveland and Akron, is the only example of the type of conservation in the nation.

If this vision becomes reality, the Plain Dealers’ “ Forgotten Valley” project would grow south along the wind-

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ing Cuyahoga with new promenades, museums, hotels, restaurants, shops and cultural attractions. Landfill areas in Garfield Heights would sport sky-

line offices towers and hotels.

Families in Parma and Stow will be able to use trail facilities near the site of the legendary 1969 fire, along West Creek and the Cuyahoga River, and enjoy baseball games at Jacobs Field.

The Plain Dealer’s “Forgotten Valley” project would build on the recent creation of a national park along the river, the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which includes a 22-mile trail that begins in the park near Cleveland and ends near Akron.

A plan, to be unveiled today, would extend the national park to downtown Cleveland, creating the first national park in a crown jewel of the United States.

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"I was flabbergasted. In the middle of the county, here was this area with bass and deer and herons and every animal known to man, but no one knew about it."

- Thomas Tyrrell, former president of American Steel & Wire, now Birmingham Steel

A revitalized valley would connect poor black, white and Hispanic neighborhoods at the center of the city to a vast regional park sys-
tem. It would bridge the east-west chasm that cuts Cleveland in half. And it would create an appreciation for the area's rich industrial heritage. In a half-century, the valley could become to Cleveland what the Seine Valley became to Paris in the 1980s.

But a renewal is far from guaranteed. It requires higher stan-
dards of architecture and urban design. It requires a degree of coop-
eration among municipalities instead of the Cuyahoga County, where local control of land use is painstakingly asserted, and where regional planning is almost non-existent. It requires a strong public voice.

And it requires support from Cleveland Mayor Michael White and the city's corporate leaders, who have shown scant interest in the valley so far.

Most important is a revolution in perception. To imagine what the industrial valley might become, we have to overcome a legacy of planning that has walled it off with railroads and highways, filled creeks and ravines with garbage dumps and landfill, and treated the river as an economic drainage ditch.

A geographic giant

Today, the northern section of the valley is the forgotten geo-
graphic giant in our midst, a vivid, sinuous channel left behind by glaciers. For centuries, it was a trading route, of glacialing.

As a result, Cleveland is adjacent to one of the nation's most attractive landscapes, the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

The Cuyahoga Valley National Park is more than a 10-foot-right-of-way for bikes. It is the most important regional planning concept to hit Northeast Ohio since the creation of the Emerald Necklace of Clevel-

The vision

Vigorous plans from as far back as Federal Law Odum, designer of New York's Central Park, have realized that parks and greenways improve land development patterns around them. They create value. They enhance life. They make stronger, more enduring communities.

The bike-and-hike corridor will introduce hundreds of thousands of visitors to the industrial valley for the first time in decades. This could open up millions of dollars for land and recreational improvements for new parks and development. It could raise land values and spur additional development on either side of the valley.

Along the valley rims, communities could set aside new parks and overpasses that celebrate the grandeur of the valley, instead of allowing buildings to block views as they do today.
The high ground could be connected to the valley floor with parks and greenways along tributaries of the Cuyahoga River and major roads. This could create a ribbon of habitat for wildlife and people for recreation.

Now more than ever, the park needs to be seen as a corridor throughout this landscape. Improved mass transit could reduce the need for walkways and park lots.

But none of this will happen unless Cleveland and Cuyahoga County form the leadership and management of the heritage corridor to ensure its transformation into a living part of the surrounding landscape.

Cuyahoga Valley

Cleveland, Ohio, and Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor could transform the northern 8.5 miles of the Cuyahoga River Valley into an engine of economic redevelopment.

2. Tracks and trails

Over the last 15 years, the country has been building small rail-trails and bike-bvariants along the park.

The Cuyahoga River Valley, Mill Creek, Mill Creek Park, Westview, and Nine-Mile Run are all part of the proposed Erie Canal Scenic Trail, which could turn the valley into a walking and exercise route.

3. Towpath trail

The Erie Canal, once built, became the most important waterway in the country. By the 1850s, it was carrying more than 90% of the nation’s goods.

The Erie Canal was once the main waterway for transporting goods, but the Ohio-Erie Canal Heritage Corridor could also be used for a new waterway to transport goods.

4. 35-mile multiuse project

For 10 to 15 years, federal, state, and local governments will spend hundreds of millions of dollars on roads and in the industrial valley.

Even if Mayor Filly and corporate leaders in Cleveland are as yet uninterested in the heritage corridor, completion of the towpath trail will create a new corridor to connect neighborhoods.

Along Big Creek, community activists dream of running a trail from the Cuyahoga Valley Metro Park to the river, past 800-foot cliffs carved by the creek. In the Broadway-Savick area, community advocates Rob Bosnich and Underground Rail Roaders think of a trail that could extend from the Ohio-Erie Canal Reservation up to Mill Creek Falls, where white water cascades down terraces 75 feet high.

"This is the future of our neighborhood," said Ed Rybka, councilman in Cleveland's 5th Ward. "It just passes right through. If it runs right, it's great. If not, we're going nowhere."

The ultimate test

To imagine how the heritage corridor could improve life in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, all you have to do is visit the new Metro Parks visitors center.

The park is a revelation. It has given the public access to a forested, hidden landscape where fields and forests intersect with industrial hardware such as a 94-year-old railroad trestle and the Southwest Connector - a huge, light-green sewer pipe that slices dramatically across the valley bottom.

Designed by the Cleveland Trust for Urban Discovery Park Rovers and the park is a masterpiece of landscape design. In its first year it attracted 300,000 visitors. And on Aug. 5, it passed the ultimate test for any public space.

A young couple decided to get married there.

As Bach organ music pumped from loudspeakers, Naida Koons made her grand entrance, striding with her father, Mark Koons, through a grassy field called Morgan's Harbor. Her father, Jim Armit, stood waiting with a minister in front of the altar.

"The park was gorgeous," Naida Armit said. "It was a wonderful place to get married.

Stunning views for a long-forgotten piece of Cuyahoga County. Until now, the history of the valley has been a case of either jobs or natural resources, industry or residential development. At the new Metro Parks reservation, there's that false choice. To thrive in the future, the city and county have to make the most of the gifts of nature, the legacy of history and the power of place.

That means overcoming geographic and redlining the biggest geographic features in the region relative to the lake Erie the Cuyahoga Valley.
THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY — DAY TWO

Parks, promenades, restaurants and shops could spring up on miles of riverbank south of the Flats, but obstacles are many

Paul Almenas, director of the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, caused the northern section of the Cuyahoga River last June. Public officials discourage recreational use of the river today, but say the public might be able to cause and kayak in the future if water quality improves.

Rocking the boat to rescue the river

O n a warm summer night in the Flats entertainment district, the Cuyahoga River is a blur of orange with lights reflected from kayaks and house boaters. The burst and white of electric neon add to the rave feel of the Main Avenue (Burton Memorial Bridge) bridge. Speedboats cruise by at low throttle, their engines rumbling with a party feel. Peaks of laughter burst from passengers on the Italy Moses wannabe.

The river is alive again — at least a small piece of it.

Thirty years ago, the Cuyahoga was so polluted it burned. Today, the Flats is a dramatic proof that improvements in water quality have improved a part of Cleveland downtown. Cuyahoga County has found a better place to live and boosted the local economy.

But the Flats account for less than 1.5 miles of waterfront on both sides of the Cuyahoga in downtown Cleveland. For most of its journey through the county, the Cuyahoga is a secret river running through a private landscape.

There is little public demand, economic pressure or political support for opening up more of the riverfront for recreation and development.

But that could change. The Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, a regional park system growing north toward Cleveland along the old route of the canal, could spark a wholesale rediscovery of the northern part of the valley.

The biggest benefit of the park system could be fish along the banks of the river, which roughly parallels remaining sections of the canal.

by threading bike-and-bike trails through the valley, the heritage corridor could boost property values, upgrade land uses and transform forgotten parts of the river into a scenic wonder.

That transformation could begin in Cleveland at the rugged edge of the Flats on the east bank of the river, just south of the Detroit Superior (Vreeland Memorial) Bridge.

The site is a 300-foot-long trench, filled with stagnant water, surrounded by weeds, half-buried by silt and edged by a section of abandoned railroad.

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Trail advocates want to run a public promenade along the edge of the Shoreline-Williams campus on the Cuyahoga River downtown. The company has said no, citing security concerns.
THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY

For 20 years, Cleveland has focused primarily on turning a small patch of downtown lakefront between the Port of Cleveland and Burke Lakefront Airport into a sports and museum district. By design and neglect, much of the riverfront has languished.

The Columbus Road Peninsula, left, and the Scranton Road Peninsula, right, account for roughly four miles of frontage on the Cuyahoga River in downtown Cleveland. Most of it is off-limits to the public.

A family of Canada geese cruise the east bank of the Cuyahoga River in Valley View, where stones and concrete have been dumped to prevent erosion.

A glimpse of the future on a serene canoe trip

Step into a canoe on the lower Cuyahoga River, push off from the muddy bank, and set the rest of the world and worries away.

The current takes you past a small, second stream that flows into the river. It’s a cool, refreshing break from the summer heat.

In the distance, you can see the tops of trees peeking above the water.

The BetsyRoute 588

Bright green algae float on the water, whose surface is broken by slow ripples. Plastic bags, beer cans, and bottles break the tranquil water growth for a better look on a warm fall day, and you start counting the trash.

This is not a drainage ditch. It’s what remains of Lock 44 of the Ohio & Erie Canal, the 1820s engineering triumph that launched a century of commercial and industrial prosperity in Cleveland.

A park south of the Flats

Today, Lock 44 is a study in decay. But if an organization called Ohio Canal Corridor succeeds, it will be restored in about five years as Cleveland’s first official park, or new waterfront park that could transform the river.

The park would be a sort of canal, westward extending 50 miles to the National Park Service recommends creating the same type of park near the Ohio & Erie Canal.

But in Cuyahoga Heights, inside the new Ohio & Erie Canal Reservation of Cleveland Metropolitan, the river meanders naturally around curbs and sandbars. In places, the current has piled up bricks and other heavy debris on sandbars—a reminder of the river’s power to change the landscape. Sandbars have accumulated a fine, smooth silt, soft enough to walk on.

But for all its problems, the Cuyahoga has many moments of serenity and beauty as it flows through the heart of the city that was named after it. It’s enough to make you long for the day, perhaps many years from now, when further improvements in river quality will make it safe for swimming.

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Canal Basin Park

A 1998 proposal for Canal Basin Park shows how the neglected area between the two ends of the Cuyahoga River in Columbus, Ohio, could be transformed into a vibrant, accessible open space for the city. The park would include a pedestrian walkway along the riverfront, a bike path, and a variety of recreational and educational facilities.

Cuyahoga River

- 1. Possible site for two buildings with retail platforms and riverfronts.
- 2. Cleveland International Heritage Center and possible waterfront center for Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor.
- 3. Recorded ears.
- 4. Canal basin with period boats and tour boat center.

Comparing waterfronts

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By focusing attention on the industrial valley, the heritage corridor could instill fresh appreciation for the working landscape that made the city what it is today. Industrial sites may actually become magnets for tourists.

Creating a future for our industrial past

With the barren skin of wood, tar paper and corrugated metal, the old factory occupied by Farrey Steel Fabricators in Cuyahoga hardly looks like the stuff of industrial romance. But look again. The timber-framed building is nothing short of a miracle. It was built in 1857 and has been in continuous use since before John D. Rockefeller started refining oil in a few blocks away along the cow paths that used to line Kingsbury Run.

Back then, the building was home to the E.I. DuPont de Nemours Works, a maker of "oil tacks, stits, ligatures, condensers and brass binaries," according to a vintage advertisement.

Five years ago, the building was due to be razed.

"We were in line to be torn down," said Paul Henschen, president of Farrey. "I had to feel the same way. But you change your thinking. I don’t think I’ll tear it down now."

Henschen’s mixed emotions about his building could be applied to much of the industrial landscape south of downtown Cleveland. Scattered amid the highways, railroads, steel furnaces and ore piles along the Cuyahoga River lies a collection of overlooked industrial-era structures that might get a little more attention in the future.

The Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, a regional park system emerging along the old canal towpath between Cleveland and Youngstown, now sees visitors by the hundreds of thousands.

Within five years, advocates of the corridor project hope to extend a regional bike-and-hike trail north from Barberton across the west side of the LTV Steel Co. plant, and into downtown Cleveland. They also want to run excursions on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad through the heart of LTV Steel’s former steel mill.

Tourist magnets

By focusing attention on the industrial valley, the heritage corridor could instill fresh appreciation for the working landscape that made the city what it is today. Industrial sites may actually become magnets for tourists.

This is not far-fetched. In the Ruhr Valley of Germany, landscape architect Peter Latz has turned an abandoned steel mill into a popular outdoor park with executive settings including a festival square, garden and dock climbing mill.

The ship Myron C. Taylor uses a conveyor boom to unload crushed stone, an ingredient in concrete, on the east bank of the Cuyahoga River. In Cuyahoga County, about half of the land fronting the river is dominated by industry.
Treasurer's resources include: 

The late 19th-century grain silo off Merwin Rd., next to the Detroit-Superior (Veterans Memorial) Bridge. It's one of the oldest surviving structures of its kind in the nation.

The Center Street Swing Bridge, the oldest bridge of its kind in the river, dating to 1865.

Four 19th-century brick offices and storage facilities at the former Grumman & Knapp's, where Cleveland Creamery Co. made butter, ice cream, and cheese.

The Central Vindicator Building, off Commercial Rd., at the edge of the old Central Vindicator, a newspaper from the late 19th-century with some of the best brickwork in the valley.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad roundhouse off W. 3rd St., built around 1891.

The late 19th-century locomotive operated by Northern Ohio Lumber & Timber Co. on Scramble Road Peninsula. 

Much has been lost. Most notably, little remains of the old Standard Oil works other than a modest brick office building and a fenced plaque along Rockside Boulevard, marking the birthplace of one of the nation's largest oil companies.

Other sites are endangered. The Irishman's Bend, a circular, formed along the west side of the river, the burned remains of an Irish immigrant village could be destroyed by a proposed truck route. The site, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, of is threatened by the project.

Historic preservationists see a clear mission here and in other places throughout the valley. The city needs to be surveyed and documented before more of Cleveland's heritage slides into oblivion. If not, the city's future will be lost.

But the city's historic sites are in peril and are not being protected.

Terry Fowler uses an overhead crane to guide a curved piece of steel at Farney Steel Fabricators. The company operates a timber-frame building in the industrial section of the valley that has been in continuous use for 122 years.

No matter how compelling it is as a museum, the Crawford will lack a direct physical connection to the industrial valley. It makes it especially significant that advocates for the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor want to locate an interpretive center at the Canal Basin, a proposed park on Columbus Road Peninsula between two onlooker banks of the Cuyahoga River. In five years, Canal Basin could become the northern gateway to a bike-and-hike trail that would run from Cleveland to New Philadelphia.

The industrial heritage happened last year, when activists saved two of the four Harriett one-contains at Whiskey Island from demolition by the Port of Cleveland. The Harriet is a rare determining where to move the two gigantic steel eddies for public display. The park or Canal Basin is one possible site.

Meanwhile, a separate nonprofit organization wants to turn a portion of the B&O roundhouse near LTV Steel into a railroad museum. It also faces a struggle.

The Midwest Railway Preservation Society owns three bays of the roundhouse from CSX Corp. on a month-to-month basis. The society has been working to turn the roundhouse into a museum, but the Port of Cleveland recently announced that it would be closed.

The society's president, Port of Cleveland Department of Economic Development wants a for-profit company to operate the Roundhouse as a museum or railroad exhibit. The society's president, Port of Cleveland Department of Economic Development wants a for-profit company to operate the Roundhouse as a museum or railroad exhibit.

City officials did not return calls about the issue. Nor have they responded to a letter from the society that outlines the museum plan.

The roundhouse is a few hundred feet from the proposed right-of-way of the heritage corridor's bike-and-hike trail, making it a logical attraction along the route.

"The city would become a real stop-off," said Quayle.

Every Wednesday and Saturday, volunteers arrive at the old roundhouse to work on restoring a collection of train-related cars.

"We're trying to get this set up so people can come in and see it as a part of a larger effort," said a volunteer, a railfan association member. "We're trying to keep the memory alive of what went on here in the last 130 years.

Real estate developers have expressed interest in the roundhouse, but the city has not received any proposals.

A worker sprays lubricant into the gigantic hydraulic forging presses at the Aksa Forged Products plant on Harvard Ave. in Cuyahoga Heights. The plant is part of the industrial landscape celebrated by the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor.

Margaret Bowles White began her pioneering career as a photographer in the late 1930s, taking pictures of steel mills in the industrial valley, which she called "photographic paradises." Her Cleveland articles were soon also featured in the Flats.

The Cuyahoga River became the name of the valley in June 22, 1809, when Ohio settlers staged an air of the water. The line for the establishment of the E.3 Environmental Protection Agency in 1978 and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency in 1972.

By the 1990s, the Cuyahoga River had returned. Volunteers flocked to the beaches to watch the annual Parade of Lights on the water.
"We're in the midst of an evolution of ethics within communities that are looking to value what little remaining green space there is. That's the epic struggle here."

—Tim Donovan, director of Ohio Canal Corridor

Let's talk trash: the landfill fight

Mayor Louis Bacci of Cuyahoga Heights, Ohio, is shown outside his home overlooking one of the dozens of landfills in the eastern part of Cuyahoga Valley. "If you're there for a while, you should fill it up and make it nice," he says.

That approach to landfill management has been endemic in the area, especially from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park north to Lake Erie. Generations of public officials, developers, industrialists and housewives have viewed the northernmost 8.5 miles of the valley as home turf. "It's where a lot of our trash is gone," says Ray Frost, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. "It used to be more than the share of the burden.

Landfills of all kinds have ravaged parts of the valley, destroyed natural habitat, flooded creeks and rivers and left communities coping with environmental problems that will be around for decades to come.

Landfills have also created touted areas where businesses built factories that employ tens of thousands of valley workers, who in turn have created thriving businesses that have enriched communities such as Cuyahoga Heights.

The question, today, is whether filling of the valley should go on or whether remaining natural areas should be preserved. The issue is becoming more complex daily because of the construction of a new bike-trail link system through the industrial heart of the county.

Last year, Cleveland Metroparks opened 4.2 miles of trail in the Ohio & Erie Canal Reservoir, a park that follows the old route of the Ohio & Erie Canal from Rockside Rd. north to the river into Cuyahoga Heights. The trail is part of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, a vast regional park system that could eventually connect downtown Cleveland to Lake Erie and the Erie Canal.

People using the trail will become familiar with the valley's landfill history, and bikers can create public pressure to close and reclaim landfills.

Already, this influence is being felt.

Trail advocates are fighting to prevent landfill operator Stanley Logep from dumping 260,000 cubic yards of trash on a village-owned land in Cuyahoga Heights. The site is one of the last remaining wooded areas of Mill Creek Valley, just upstream from the Cuyahoga River. Mayor Bacci strongly supports putting the shal on the land, but the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency opposes it, saying it will harm the water.

Landfill operator John Kurtz has pledged to close two construction and demolition debris landfills next to the river in the Metroparks trail in Cuyahoga Heights. "If we can't lead by example, then shame on us," Kurtz said. One of the landfills will be capped and treated as open space. The other could be developed with a recreation area.

In Garfield Heights and Valley View, developer Peter Boyce has proposed building a 166-acre office and retail complex around closed garbage landfills overlooking the valley. First Energy Corp. plans to build an 18-story building next to the property by burning methane gas collected through pipes from dropping garbage underground. This would be a first for the utility. Boyce and the project will also include parks and trails leading down to the canal trail.

Finding new use for old landfills is the time-honored tradition in Ohio. In Columbus, a 200-acre municipal landfill has been turned into the Phoenix Lake golf course. Along Lake Erie in Cleveland, the Cleveland Browns Stadium and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum sit atop former landfills.

But the process of reclaiming landfills in the Cuyahoga Valley is just beginning.

"We're in the midst of an evolution of ethics within communities that are looking to value what little remaining green space there is," said Tim Donovan, director of Ohio Canal Corridor, a nonprofit organization spearheading the heritage corridor. "That's an epic struggle that needs to be fought." (Plain Dealer/Donna Scharfenberg)

Complicating the struggle is that state laws regarding landfills are in transition. Until 1994, garbage landfills were virtually unregulated in Ohio. Regulation of construction and demolition debris landfills only began in Ohio in 1980. Garbage landfills in the valley have closed, and Cuyahoga County now ships waste to landfills in other counties in Ohio. But a half-dozen construction and demolition debris landfills along the river are grandfathered and could remain in operation for

The RKFID landfill and recycling area, operated by Kurtz Bros. Inc., is part of a landscape along the Cuyahoga River that could be changed for the better in the future by completion of a regional trail following the path of the old Ohio & Erie Canal.

TODAY, it will be difficult to open a new landfill in the Cuyahoga Valley. But some materials, such as shale, certain kinds of slag and foundry sand, are exempt from rules that govern other landfills. They can be dumped virtually anywhere, as long as local law allows it and they pose no threat to water quality.

Mill Creek Valley battle

Nothing illustrates the changing views on landfills better than the battle over Mill Creek Valley in Cuyahoga Heights.

Trail advocates dream of running a two-mile trail from the river up the Hill Creek Valley to a spectacular, 45-foot-high waterfall hidden in a steep valley north of Broadway in Cleveland's Broadway Slavic Village neighborhood. The trail would boost economic revitalization in the neighborhood, and would connect urban neighborhoods upstream to a vast regional park system taking shape downstream along the Ohio & Erie Canal.

But to reach the waterfall, the trail will have to go through 87 acres of landfills along Mill Creek that are owned by Harvey Re- fuse Inc., one of the biggest landfill operators in the county. Stanley Logep, president of Harvey Refuse, wants to dump 260,000 cubic yards of garbage on a village-owned land in the valley, behind Cuyahoga Heights Village Hall.

Eventually, the trail will cross from a deep ravine that the North Coast Regional Sewer District will excavate to improve water quality in the river and an intersection along Mill Creek. Logep is a subcontractor in the sewer district project.

At first, Logep offered residents up to 200,000 spaces to let him dump the shal on their properties, which descends 600 feet from E. 152nd St. to the banks of the river. Some residents said they would help control erosion. But owners of critical pieces of land, including longtime resident Geraldine Schock, turned him down.

"If they bring property the way it is," said Schock, who has lived in E. 152nd St. since 1967, "I just don't want it. There's dirt, there's noise, there's bugs."

Having failed to persuade property owners, Logep accepted an invitation in September from Cuyahoga Heights Mayor Bacci to consider dumping the shale on 10 acres behind Village Hall.

Bacci describes himself as a friend of Logep. He also believes the shale will create a level area where the village might build a police or fire station, that it won't harm water quality, and that eventually an "environmental awareness" project could be developed.

Council President Robert Conti believes otherwise, saying the shale could destroy one of the last remaining open areas of natural beauty in Mill Creek Valley. Ultimately, he said, preserving the forested land will do far more to boost property values than burying the hillside in shale.

"I firmly believe the landfill is wrong for this community," he said.
A sight to behold, but few can see it

The view from the high ground leading directly to highways, cemeteries, skyscrapers, and the back yards of apartments and houses. Jim Spruce is one of the lucky ones. He lives in the Riverview Apartments on W. 25th St. in Ohio City, across the Cuyahoga River from downtown. From his 12th-floor apartment, Spruce can see the skyline and the great curving curve of the river as it meets Franklinton Bend.

"Just look at this," he says, gazing from an open-air terrace in the building, operated by the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority. "You just come out here and it makes you feel good."

That sense of well-being could be available to everyone if a promising design for new housing complex on the 25th St. site becomes a reality.

Today, you can't see the skyline from street level on W. 25th St. The Riverview Apartments and several other buildings block the view. The proposed $100 million housing complex on W. 25th St. is a project of the Cleveland Housing Authority and the Community Design Collaborative, a network of 100 Greater Cleveland organizations.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

THE FORGOTTEN VALLEY — DAY FIVE

Jim Spruce, who lives in the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority’s Riverview Apartments, enjoys a skyline view that is now blocked at the street level by buildings along W. 25th St. The CHMA has plans to build a park along the street that would make the views available to everyone.
"We want to give people a panoramic view of place and time so you can see how industry and the river and downtown fit together."

—David Dixon, architect of CMHA project

Instead of creating a solid wall along 20th St., we would have the project include a 200-foot gap that opens up sweeping views of the river and downtown. David Dixon, director of planning for Goody Clancy & As sociates in Boston, Mass., the firm that planned the CMHA project, said it would not be a benefit for people to see an area next to the river below that could play a big role in the region’s future.

In about five years, the portion of the valley below the new park could be the northern access to the Ohio & Erie Canal National Historic Corridor, a trail-and-park system going north toward Clevel land along the river and the canal.

Dixon sought the site to be a key place where visitors could see the 1816 Erie Canal and the later trips south along the corridor’s trails and scenic byways.

"Here’s the chance for people to grasp the scope, the essence, the compelling question of the entire heritage corridor. Dixon said.

Visitors to the park on 20th St. could also take a trail from the housing development down into the valley, where they could cross the river on the Creek Towpath Bridge and see the entire length of the route of the Ohio & Erie Canal south to Akron and beyond.

The park’s design is a fine example of how the national heritage corridor could create a link between Cleveland and Cuyahoga County to the importance of the region.

Sacred views

In other cities and regions, views assume sacred importance, "Washington, D.C., protects views of the Capitol; New York City’s Landmarks Preservation Board’s view of the East River from the Village’s Women’s Mountain View Ordinance reviews the views of the Rocky Mountains from public parks," Dixon said. "Here, we have the opportunity to consider that the new federal courthouse under construction in downtown Cleveland is positioned to capture views of the city on the same plane as those enjoyed by the leaders of East-City-State, and there are three other highways on the drawing board.

"For people who are interested, there will be a study of equal money. What does this mean, or do we have a site where the people with equal money views: view. We’re a small man and has covered the horizon. Many phys
tical studies show human beings have standing on ground view. It is a big picture.

The issue is Cuyahoga County is whether local governments should make historical monuments or public open space, or whether the real estate market simply continues to gobble up the best, as it has for the past 50 years. There are indications in which views will be created in the future as the uses of valley rim properties change. Dwindling in summer conditions on how land can be developed, without changing the surrounding zoning.

"We ought to be preserving important views... for the future," Dixon said. "But it could be landscaped with terraces that invite trail users to stop, linger and take in the best view in the region.

"Perhaps the most spectacular of the valley views, Dixon said, is the 20-foot high stone wall along the ridge near the street. That could become the "Great Wall" of Cleveland, where the trail users can sit in the shade and view the river.

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