

*WARD 12*

# CONSTITUENT SERVICES REPORT

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Building city services and  
constituent services that  
work for Cleveland.



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**JULY 2022**



*Dedicated to the workers of the City of  
Cleveland. The systems within the city  
are what have to change, not you. Thank  
you for all you do to keep our city moving  
forward.*

# Dear Ward 12,

Before being sworn into City Council in January 2022 I hadn't thought much about the idea of "Constituent Services." If anything, I understood it as a way that elected officials sometimes helped their constituents navigate government: a congressman helping a resident with Social Security or a state senator responding to a call on an unemployment claim.

But since being sworn in to Council, I've thought about constituent services all the time. Responding to resident calls takes up most of the day for me and my staff. I do love hearing from you all. But unlike what I had known about constituent services from Congress or the statehouse, we aren't just troubleshooting existing problems or handling tricky situations. Instead we are residents' first call. We see it all. from initiating requests at city departments like Public Works to mediating disputes between neighbors that are wrapped in years of poverty and trauma.

**Our high volume of constituent calls has some good aspects: it gives members of City Council like me a front seat to the problems at City Hall and in our communities. But from my short time serving Ward 12, I can already see that it causes significant problems.** It's not working for Council members, who are so inundated with calls that we do not have time to work on policy and community projects. It's not working for the Administration, whose departments have to manage council requests on top of existing workflows. And it's not working for you, the residents, who are still not receiving the benefit of an efficient, well-run city.

**No one person will solve this problem alone. But I hope this report shares the view from Ward 12 -- what we are seeing, and where we could go from here.** I will always want to be available as a resource to Ward 12. But we need to find ways to move some of the basic city services off of Council's plate. That change will allow us all to serve our entire city better.

Sincerely,



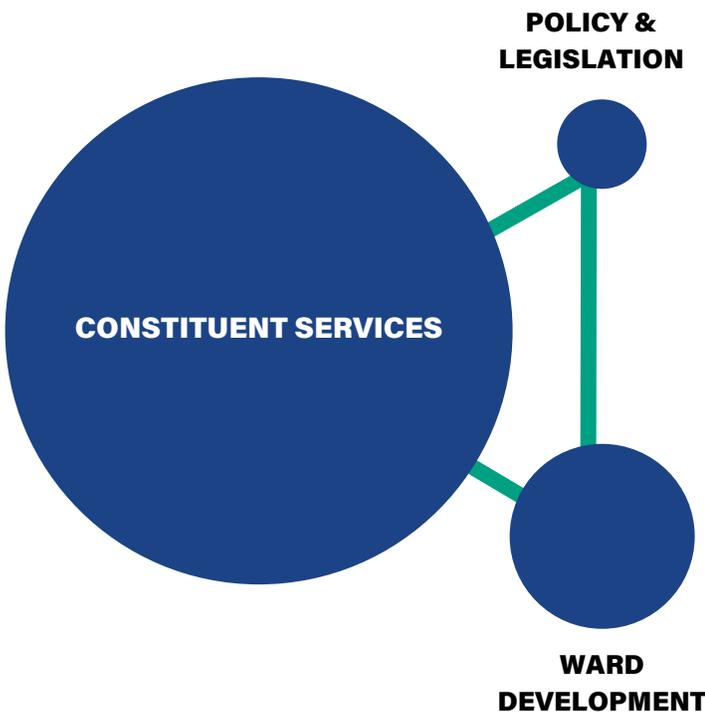
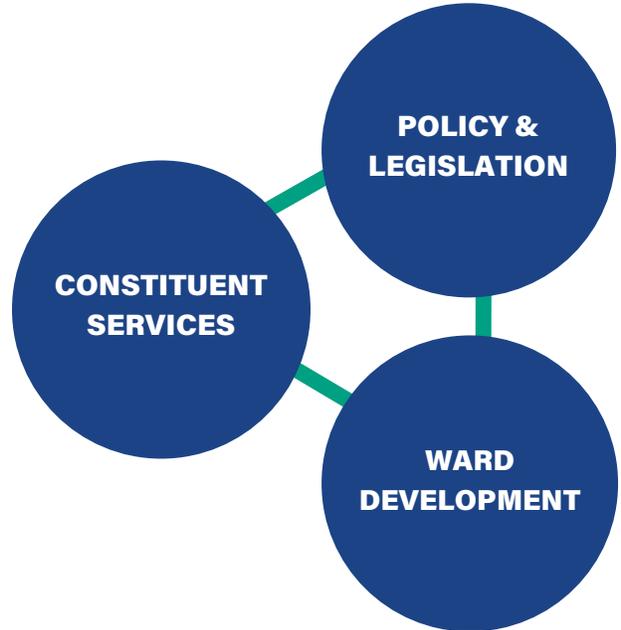
Councilwoman Rebecca Maurer  
Ward 12

# Role of the Council Office

The Ward 12 office is trying to balance three key priorities

Local government is the most influential level of government for day-to-day issues that impact quality of life. We work on critical matters from garbage pick up to potholes, from schools to policing.

Each Council member finds their own stride and balance among the many demands of the job. Here in Ward 12, I am looking to balance three key areas: (1) policy & legislation, (2) ward-level development and (3) constituent services.



From the first days of being sworn in, it felt like that three-legged stool was unbalanced. Between myself and my two allowed staff (one full time, one part time), we didn't have enough hours in the day to get through everything. We found ourselves responding to the urgent demands of constituent services first, just barely squeezing in ward-development meetings on the side, and not fitting in enough time for long-term work on policy and legislation.

I had moments where I wondered if I was bad or uniquely slow at responding to calls. Then we looked at the data and realized just how high the call volume is.

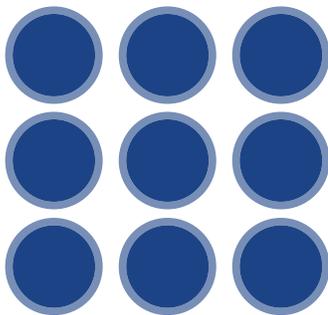
# Councilmembers Get a Lot of Calls

In our first 110 days in office, Ward 12 received more than 1000 requests for constituent services.

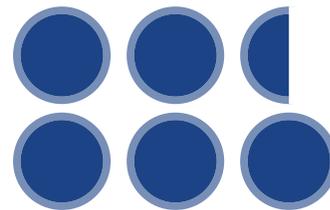
The Ward 12 office responded to more than 1000 requests in our first 110 days. In this report, we label them "calls" for simplicity, since most were by phone. But we also got emails and even letters. Some requests could be resolved quickly. Others took weeks. We had about 100 open tickets at any given time. This volume is particularly high when you compare our office to the city's 311 system, which was created to try to centralize request intake after years of complaints about inadequate city services.

Many of the individualized phone numbers to departments currently route to 311. For example, 216-664-DUMP (to report illegal dumping), 216-664-2000 (the old Mayor's Action Center), or 216-664-3030 (the new recycling program) all currently route to the 311 system. The Ward 12 council office still receives more constituent service requests than 311. We average about 9 new requests each day. The 311 system averages 5.5 new requests within Ward 12 each day.

## AVERAGE REQUESTS FOR SERVICE IN WARD 12 RECEIVED DAILY



**WARD 12 OFFICE**



**THE CITY'S 311 SYSTEM\***

\*Based on the total number of closed tickets associated with a Ward 12 address through 311's Cityworks system from March 2021 to March 2022, averaged by the number of business days.

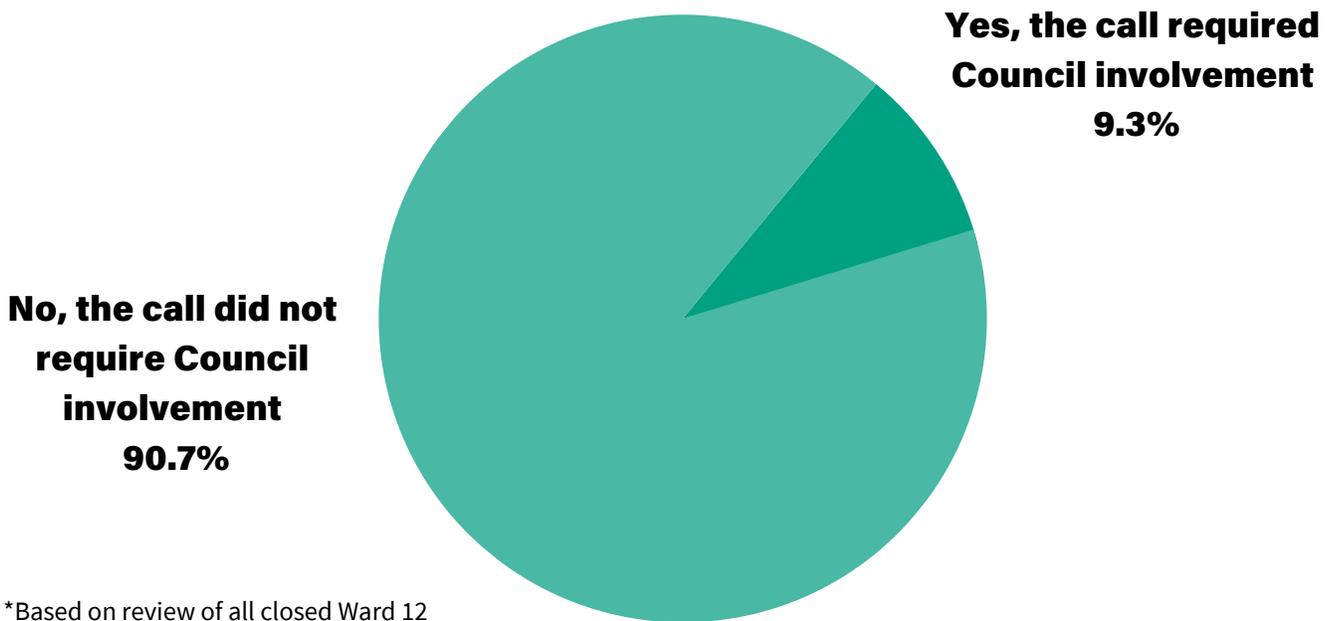
# Three Ways to Slice the Call Data

As we collected and analyzed this data, we found ourselves wondering what to make of the volume of calls we were getting. **In reviewing the data, we found three ways to analyze it that gave us insight into what was going on.** First, we looked at whether Council was involved at all in the resolution of their question. Then, we looked at Departmental referrals within City Hall. And finally, we reviewed the data looking at the level of response residents needed. In the following pages we will look at each analysis each in turn.

**First, the simplest way to slice the data is to ask the question: are residents calling in about an issue related to City Council?**

For instance, are they calling about a permit that needs to be approved by City Council, a side lot application that goes across the Council Member's desk, or a piece of legislation? When you look at the data that way, the answer is "no." Less than 10% of our calls are related to activities that the Council office has direct control over.

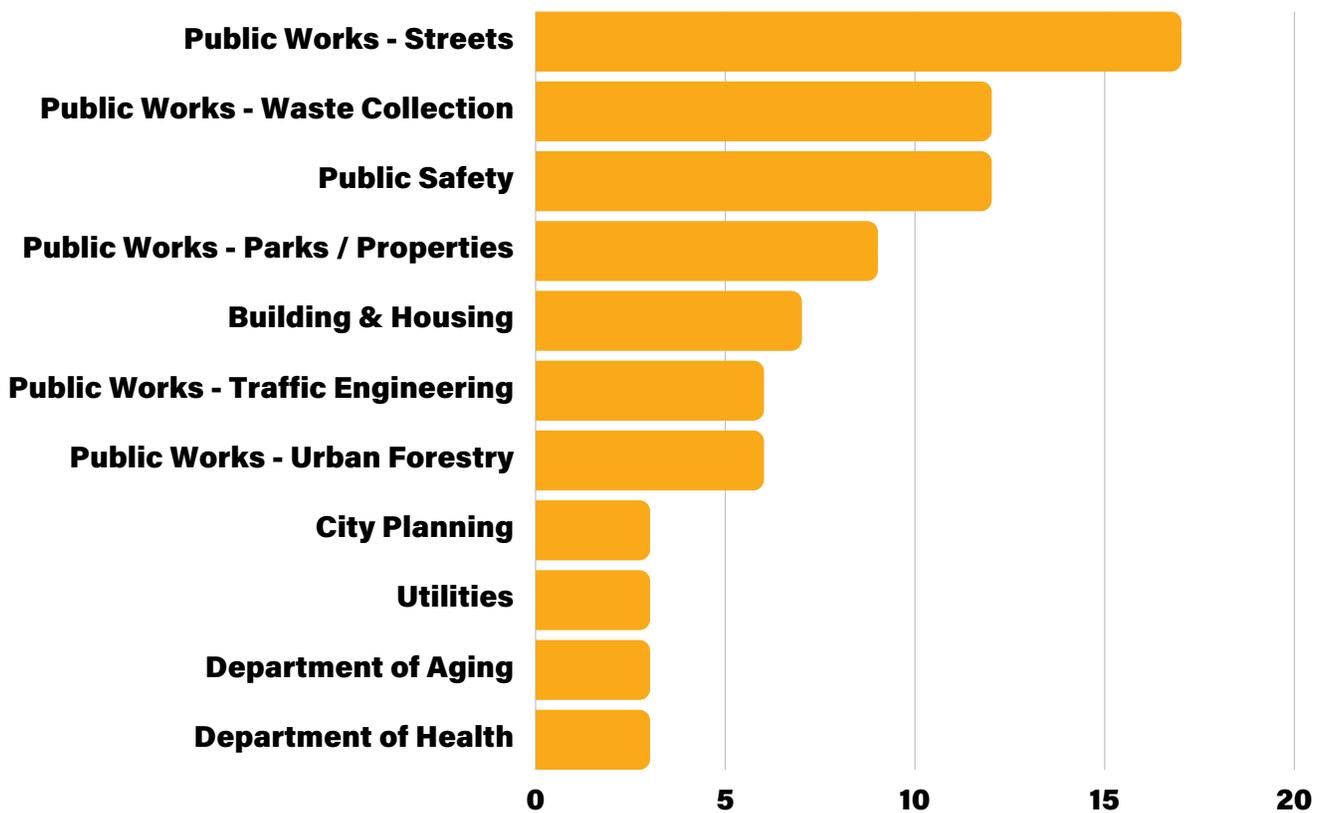
## 1. DID COUNCIL NEED TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE CALL?



\*Based on review of all closed Ward 12 office tickets as of June 2022

If residents are not calling about issues that Council handles, what are these calls about? It was clear that a large part of our constituent services work involved interacting with city departments. **Our second way to slice the data was to look at which department was involved.**

## 2. WHAT DEPARTMENT COULD BEST ADDRESS THE CALL?



\*Based on a random sample of 100 calls that we reviewed and coded. This chart shows the departments that were most commonly involved with the resident's concern.

This analysis was helpful, but it still felt like we needed one more layer. It was very rare for us to just send somebody to a department like Public Safety or Health and never hear from them again.

Even when a request wasn't Council-related, we still had multiple touch points with the department or outside resources to try to make a difference in the resident's request.

With this framing in mind, we reviewed the data from our third perspective: analyzing what the Council office actually did. In other words, what was the response that best addressed this resident's need. We broke it down into three main buckets:

### 3. HOW IS THE COUNCIL OFFICE RESPONDING TO THE CALL?

**Engaging in social services work driven by poverty and trauma.** Poverty and trauma manifest in our office on a daily basis. From neighbor disputes about garbage that escalate to violence to desperate seniors looking for home repair, we are on the front line of Clevelanders trying to survive.

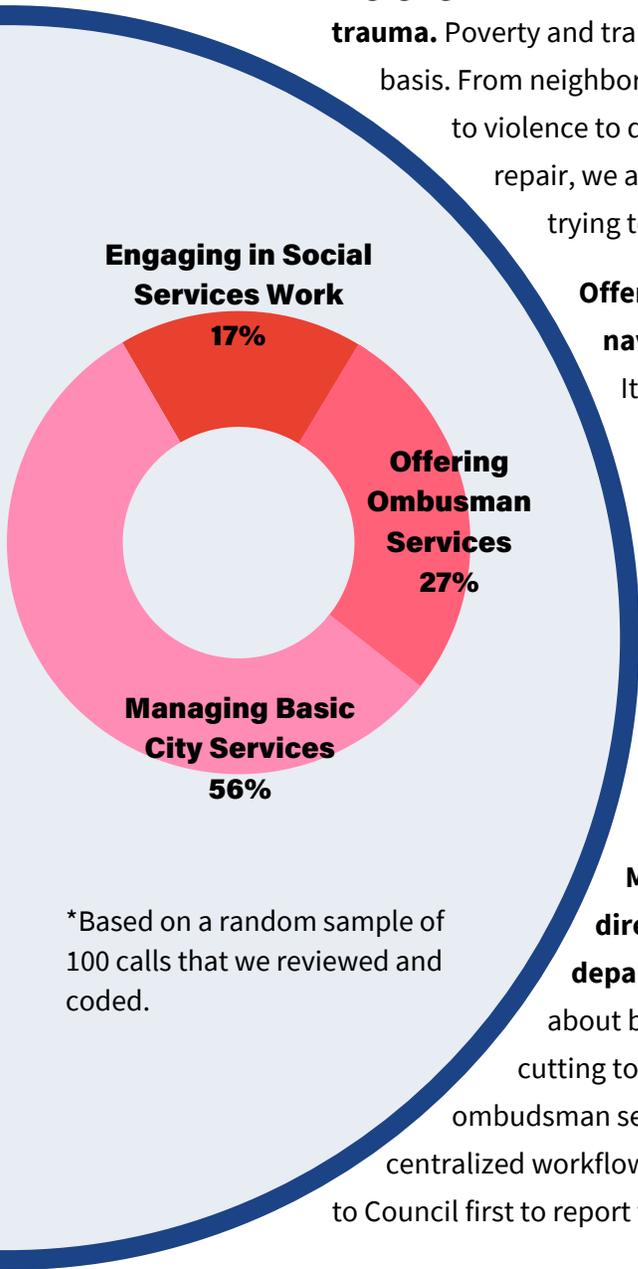


**Offering ombudsman services to navigate tricky issues at the city.**

It took 26 emails, 6 different responsive offices and more than 4 months to get the city to replace this lamppost. Given how challenging it was for the Council office to get it replaced, I do not think a resident could have done it. Offering ombudsman help to navigate City Hall is a typical request we receive.



**Managing basic city services directly with resident and departments.** Finally, we have questions about basic city service delivery. From grass cutting to brick repair, these are different from ombudsman services because there is an existing, centralized workflow. Nevertheless, residents are coming to Council first to report the issue and request follow up.



\*Based on a random sample of 100 calls that we reviewed and coded.

# Why Are There So Many Calls for Basic City Services?

After reviewing the data, rebalancing the role of City Council in the delivery of basic city services is where we can see the most improvement in the near-term. In the rest of this report, we focus on this challenge, which corresponds in large part to the Bibb Administration's shared goal of creating a modern City Hall.

We may never know how we got to the point where so many basic services are run through City Council. **In looking for solutions, four key factors jump out as critical to understanding the path forward:**

## COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

### Not Enough Communication

There's not a strong culture of communication at City Hall. Many departments do not respond directly to resident requests.

### Inefficient Communication

Over the years Council has encouraged residents to call Council first and Council became the communication touch stone for residents.

## RESOURCE PROBLEMS

### Not Enough Resources

We are still a poor city. We don't have adequate city resources to address many resident concerns in a timely manner.

### Inefficient Resource Management

Even where resources are available, bureaucracy and outdated systems hamper service delivery

**Here are some **case studies** of how communication and resource problems manifest in some of the city services calls we get at the Ward 12 office:**

# Case Study #1: New Garbage Bins

The current system to replace broken garbage bins is broken. As of this writing, there are thousands of residents on a wait list to receive new garbage bins.

This problem has been on-going, with many residents reporting to me that they used to call a replacement line that was not properly staffed. More recently these calls have been directed to 311. Now there are supply chain issues. The city's recent order of bins has been delayed by months. This delay has caused dozens of people to reach out to our office.



[REDACTED]

**Sent:** Monday, June 6, 2022 6:39 AM  
**To:** Rebecca Maurer  
**Subject:** Re: From the Desk of Councilwoman Maurer

Hi, I messaged you because we need a new black garbage can, ours is cracked in the back of can from the garbage truck when they lift it with the arm of the truck and slam it back down. Now the animals get in and tear my trash all over the place. And no one is getting back to me about this problem. Thanks

On Sat, Jun 4, 2022, 3:58 PM [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]> wrote:  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Subject: New trash cans

Hello Councilwoman  
Foremost I hope all is well with you and your family.  
Im reaching out to you because over a year ago we put in a request for new garbage cans. I the ones we have are busted up through no fault of our own. We contacted someone in that department that deals with this but so far no reply. Will you please reach out to the appropriate party so that we can get new cans or possibly give me a contact number. We don't want rodents to make their way into the yard.  
Thank you and God bless you always.  
Sent from my iPhone

Hey Rebecca,

This is [REDACTED]. I called the trash department a couple months ago to say the lid was broken off on my trash can and she said I would get it in June. Which hasn't happened so I'm wondering if you could possibly make this happen. A raccoon was in there the other night.

[REDACTED] Apr 7  
...

Rebecca,

I am a resident at [REDACTED] in your district and am already impressed by the work you have done so far. With that said, could you provide me with a contact with the city to get my trash can replaced? I have left numerous message and filled out the online form with no response over the last 3 months or so. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,

# PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: NEW GARBAGE BINS

## **Not Enough Communication**

City Hall has not issued a communication to residents about the backlog of garbage bins, leaving residents in the dark.

## **Inefficient Communication**

Over the years, Councilmembers have told residents to use Council to address bin issues and then emailed requests to a Waste Management administrators.

## **Not Enough Resources**

We have not maintained a large supply of replacement garbage bins because of the storage and up-front costs, leaving us to the whim of supply chains and deliveries

## **Inefficient Resource Management**

There is no centralized system to report or check on a garbage bin replacement. The closest option is to call 311 and then re-dial 311 when you want an update.

## **Increase Communication**

City Hall could send a mailer to everybody still waiting for garbage bin replacement explaining the delay. The Administration could begin a campaign explaining to call 311 for new bins.

## **Streamline Communication**

Councilmembers could consistently refer residents to 311 and become available only for "ombudsman" services if the bins are not delivered within a month

## **Increase Capacity**

Council could work with Public Works for more steady appropriations so that Public Works always has a supply of cans on hand.

## **Maximize Existing Data**

Long-term, City Hall could work on an improved request system allowing for digital requests and tracking

# Case Study #2: Board-ups

As a lingering result of the foreclosure crisis, Cleveland has a large number of abandoned homes. Over time, some become "Open, Vacant, and Vandalized." OV homes attract crime and are unsafe in any neighborhood. As a result, the city runs a board-up program to put plywood over entrances to OV homes. Although there have been improvements, it can still take two weeks to get a board up done and there is no way for a resident to check progress without reaching out again. Here is the current process that runs through Council.



**1**

RESIDENT SEES AN OV HOUSE AND SUBMITS REQUEST TO COUNCIL MEMBER

**2**

COUNCIL SENDS TO B&H AND B&H ISSUES A COMPLAINT NUMBER, TYPICALLY SAME DAY

**3**

B&H INSPECTOR IS ASSIGNED TO THE COMPLAINT. INSPECTION IS DONE IN 1-5 DAYS TYPICALLY

**4**

IF NO ISSUES, B&H APPROVES PERMIT; CONTRACTOR HAS 5 DAYS TO BOARD THE HOUSE

**5**

HOUSE IS BOARDED 5-12 DAYS FROM COMPLAINT. NO COMMUNICATION BACK TO COUNCIL OR RESIDENTS

# PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: BOARD UPS

## **Not Enough Communication**

City Hall does not have an awareness campaign about how to call in a board-up directly to 311. Residents and Council members are not updated as the board-up is completed.

## **Increase Communication**

City Hall could create an awareness campaign about how to call in board-ups through 311. Advertise a "Board Up Round Up" day where all B&H inspectors and contractors are on stand-by to complete board ups quickly.

## **Inefficient Communication**

Over the years, Councilmembers encouraged residents to submit complaints through them.

## **Streamline Communication**

Councilmembers could consistently refer residents to 311 and become available only for "ombudsman" services if the board up is not done.

## **Not Enough Resources**

Low staffing at B&H and low pay to contractors slows down the timeline between the Complaint and the board-up.

## **Increase Capacity**

Long-term, City Hall could hire more inspectors to complete inspections more quickly. Renegotiate with contractors to speed up our board-up time from 5 days to 1-2 days.

## **Inefficient Resource Management**

There is no centralized way for a resident to check on a board up request and get an estimate of when it will be complete.

## **Maximize Existing Data**

Long-term, City Hall could work on an improved request system allowing for resident tracking of board ups through the inspection & boardup process.

# Case Study #3: Grass Mowing

You haven't really become a member of Cleveland City Council until you've been yelled at by a senior about the grass not being mowed on a nearby vacant lot. It's a right of passage in a city with 20,000 lots to manage. The system has improved in recent years, with a centralized database in CityWorks of lots that the city cuts and when they were last done. The key issue now is the mismatch between the city's

capacity to mow lots and resident expectations. Despite years of using a 7-week cut cycle and splitting the work into two crews (tractor crews and hand crews for weed whacking), the Council office still gets dozens of calls from residents who believe their lot has been forgotten or not finished. We received so many complaints about these issues, we put together this pamphlet to distribute in the ward.

**How come the grass GROWS SO HIGH in Cleveland?**

Cleveland City Hall, 600 Lakeside Ave, Room 220, Cleveland, Ohio, 44104.

- The City cannot do extra cuts or come back early. The next Ward 12 cut is in mid- to late-June.
- If there is a lot or vacant property that the city misses during the cutting process, please email or call the Council office.
- If there is an occupied house with high grass, reach out to the Council office to let us know. Those houses may be cited.

**Councilwoman Rebecca Maurer**  
216-664-4233  
rmaurer@clevelandcitycouncil.org

**The city has more than 20,000 LOTS TO MOW.**

- Hundreds of Cleveland employees and seasonal workers are out mowing every day. They work their way through all 17 wards in a cycle, mowing from sun-up to sun-down.
- When a lot is cut, the City comes out two different times. First, a tractor crew comes. Then, a few days later, a "hand crew" comes to weed whack and pick up trash.
- The City also has push mower crews that work on vacant houses. These crews also cut lawns at occupied houses that have been cited by the Health Department for high grass.

**It takes 7 weeks for the City to cycle through all 20,000 lots in the city. That's why the grass grows so high.**

**WE AGREE: letting the grass grow for 7 weeks between cuts is too long.**

- It looks bad and is not safe.
- It invites mice and groundhogs.
- It is frustrating to live next to an overgrown lot when you work hard to maintain your property.

**COUNCILWOMAN MAURER will work with the Mayor and Public Works to get more equipment and crews. But those changes will not happen overnight. This summer, the goal is to get 5 cycles throughout the season rather 4. There will still be times when the grass is high — even if we meet this goal.**

# PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: GRASS MOWING

## **Not Enough Communication**

City Hall does not proactively explain to resident that they are on a 7-week cut cycle or that weed-whacking will happen separately.

## **Increase Communication**

City Hall could create an awareness campaign to explain the mowing system. Additionally, leaving behind yard signs in lots cut by tractor crews would alleviate resident concerns about whether the weed-whacking will occur.

## **Inefficient Communication**

Over the years, Councilmembers have become the centralized way to submit complaints about grass mowing.

## **Streamline Communication**

Councilmembers could consistently refer residents to 311 and become available for "ombudsman" services only if a lot is missed.

## **Not Enough Resources**

At max budgeted capacity, the city only has the crews and equipment to get through all 20,000 lots every 7 weeks.

## **Increase Capacity**

The Director of Public Works is actively looking at ways to improve our mowing capacity within the city. Depending on budget resources, this is an important investment for resident quality of life.

## **Inefficient Resource Management**

Though lots are identified by address and parcel number within CityWorks, there is no resident-facing portal for checking current mowing status

## **Maximize Existing Data**

Long-term, City Hall could work on a resident-facing digital system to allow the public to view which lots are cut by the city and when the next cut is.

# Conclusion

## Where do we go from here?

Beginning to move some basic city services off of Council's plate will begin to improve the balance of time within Council offices and will have positive effects for Council,

the Administration, and residents. How can we begin to tackle this problem? Based on our work in Ward 12, I offer three recommendations for next steps.

## 1. COMMUNICATION

We cannot change our city's resources overnight, but we can begin tackling the communication issues tomorrow. Council and the Administration should partner to create a campaign for 311 that clearly identifies the types of requests that 311 serves. Target advertising and outreach to high-volume issues where residents have questions and 311 already has resources to answer.

## 2. COORDINATION

If Council does not understand changes to the 311 system, we will perpetuate the old, decentralized ways of submitting requests to Commissioners and Directors. In turn, if the Administration is not committed to working with Council, we will add layers of technology and bureaucracy without improving the resident experience.

## 3. STARTING SMALL

We will not solve all of these problems overnight. We need to tackle this problem issue-by-issue rather than looking for a silver bullet. For instance, focus on a handful of high-volume constituent issues where we can make an impact in the next 12 months so we can begin to change our communication culture around measurable, impactful wins.

**To the residents of Ward 12**, please know that I love answering your calls. And I want to be good at responding to you for a long time to come. Right now I don't believe our volume of requests is sustainable. It takes away from the quality of my response and my ability to serve the ward more broadly.

Take, for example, my work load right now. Because I have spent hours each day this week writing this report, I am behind. I have 65 open tickets on my plate, aside from the dozens that are open on the plates of my two staff members.

I just checked and there are 8 new voicemails since yesterday. A senior had his electricity shut off and is asking for help. A grass mowing complaint. A board-up request on Lansing Avenue. And the list keeps going.

As we re-balance the constituent services system in Cleveland, it is my sincere hope that it allows me to serve you better.

You will ultimately be the judge of whether we succeed at this task or not. Everything we do must be to create better city services and a better city for you.

**PREPARED BY**  
**Councilwoman Rebecca Maurer**

Stay in touch with our office:

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