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## Sustainability summit should help Cleveland work greener

by [The editors](#)

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Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson will be on the primary ballot next month -- and the general election ballot in November, he hopes -- asking city voters for another four years in office.

But this week, he is devoting three days to asking roughly 500 business, political and civic leaders from around the metropolitan area to think about where they want this region to be 10 years from now -- and what they are willing to do *beginning right now* to get there.

Sustainability may seem a squishy concept. The term sounds more like a strategy for hanging on than for making progress.

But properly understood, it's about encouraging individual corporations and entire regions to think about how to become more resilient and resource-efficient -- and yes, more attractive to eco-minded consumers.

Jackson touted this Sustainable Cleveland 2019 summit in his annual State of the City address as an effort to help the region develop a "green economy." That's good.

Even better: The idea is to foster job growth -- and perhaps shuck Cleveland's corrosive rust-belt image -- by getting the region to embrace environmentally friendly business practices favored by both the Obama administration and a growing number of firms, including many here. Companies including Cleveland's Sherwin-Williams and retail giant Wal-Mart have bought in, as have cities such as Chicago.

To assist in Cleveland's effort, Jackson has enlisted **David Cooperrider**, the Case Western Reserve University management professor best known for his "**appreciative inquiry**" approach to helping corporations improve their bottom lines. Cooperrider typically brings together a cross-section of employees, from CEOs on down, to discuss what their companies do well and how they can use those strengths to capitalize on market opportunities. In recent years, he has woven sustainability concepts into these sessions, challenging clients to develop profitable initiatives that also protect the environment, enrich human capital and increase civic involvement.

So what can be expected beginning Wednesday? At the very least, stakeholders whose paths rarely cross will learn from one another. If all goes well, they'll then commit to actions.

They'll need to be frank about the area's assets and obstacles. How to tap Greater Cleveland's residual wells of innovation and manufacturing know-how? Which skills need updating? What kinds of taxes and regulations deter or foster progress? What are realistic new markets?

Over three days, ideas should emerge and strategic alliances form to advance the most promising concepts. In fact, Cooperrider says, the real test of the summit's worth comes when it's over. A small office will monitor and assist with follow-up, but most responsibility will fall to the participants.

Jackson is not someone who sees planning as an end in itself. The task for him -- and other regional leaders -- will be to make sure that whatever vision emerges from the summit truly becomes the basis of a more prosperous and sustainable future for the city and region.