

# Our Power, Our Future: A Blueprint for Cleveland Public Power Reform



Ohio Environmental Council  
[ Action Fund ]

DATE FINALIZED: JULY 11, 2025



## Introduction

Cleveland has an uncommon and valuable asset: a municipally owned electric utility. Cleveland Public Power (CPP) is controlled directly by the people of Cleveland through the Mayor and City Council. As a locally owned utility, it is not driven by the profit demands of other investor-owned utilities, and it is not subject to the regulation of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

This municipal ownership provides Cleveland with a unique lever that most cities lack – the ability to align its local electric utility’s policies and practices directly with resident needs and climate goals. CPP has the potential to become a national leader in delivering affordable, reliable, and clean renewable energy, while demonstrating how public ownership can drive both community benefits and environmental progress.

The purpose of this document is to outline the specific policy improvements needed to meet this moment. These proposals are designed to be attainable and actionable, falling within the authority of Cleveland’s elected leaders to legislate and influence CPP operations. By implementing these reforms, Cleveland can transform CPP into a powerful tool to combat climate change, increase economic development, and provide equitable access for all Cleveland residents.

## Background

Cleveland Public Power (CPP) is the largest municipally owned electric utility in the State of Ohio and one of the largest in the United States. CPP’s 300-megawatt system provides service to nearly 74,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers.<sup>1</sup>

Founded in 1907 by Cleveland Mayor Tom L. Johnson, his goal was to “give City residents the choice of reliable power at an affordable cost.”<sup>2</sup> Today, as it was then, CPP is controlled directly by the people of Cleveland through their elected Mayor and City Council. This means CPP operates free from regulation by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and is not subject to the profit demands of private utilities such as FirstEnergy. It also gives CPP the flexibility to pursue clean energy solutions such as community energy and virtual net metering.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

Today, Cleveland Public Power faces significant challenges. The utility is locked into a costly 50-year contract with American Municipal Power (AMP), with one of its largest contracts for power being a coal-burning power plant in Illinois. This contract forces ratepayers to pay premium prices for climate-polluting coal energy.

Cleveland residents have some of the highest energy burdens in the country. The utility has a significant backlog of maintenance and outdated equipment, which threatens grid reliability and increases costs. CPP has struggled with community responsiveness, operating with limited transparency and minimal resident input on major decisions.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

CPP is a powerful tool for the Mayor and City Council to use in supporting both Cleveland residents and the climate in ways that most cities cannot. With the right reforms, CPP has the potential to become a national leader in delivering affordable, reliable, and clean power. This represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transition to affordable clean energy without leaving anyone behind.

We believe CPP can transform into a powerful tool for making Cleveland more economically and environmentally resilient by acting on four key principles:

- **AFFORDABLE:** CPP should enable residents and businesses to meet their other needs while keeping the lights on.
- **CLEAN AND GREEN:** CPP should lead Cleveland's transition to clean, renewable energy, good jobs, and a healthy future, meeting the goal of 100% clean energy supply by 2050.
- **COMMUNITY-LED:** CPP should listen to us, plan with us, and work with us.
- **RELIABLE:** CPP should invest in a modern, resilient distribution system and a capable, dedicated staff so we always have power when we need it.

Many policies detailed throughout this platform intersect, providing many options to help achieve our goals of an equitable transition to clean energy. For instance, investing in local renewable energy development, such as community solar, supports efforts to reach a fully clean energy supply, while also creating local well-paying jobs, making CPP's rates more competitive, and giving Cleveland more direct control over its energy future.

# Affordable

## CPP should enable residents and businesses to meet their needs while keeping the lights on.

Cleveland residents face some of the highest energy burdens in the country.<sup>3</sup> Energy costs average well over 6% of residents' annual income, with some census tracts over 20% of annual income.<sup>4</sup> Cleveland Public Power is the largest municipal utility in Ohio, and a majority of residential customers qualify as Low to Moderate Income (LMI).<sup>5</sup> CPP is also in a unique situation, having to compete directly with an investor-owned utility, FirstEnergy.

### **CURRENT POWER PURCHASE CONTRACTS ARE A BURDEN ON RATEPAYERS**

Cleveland Public Power purchases power through [American Municipal Power \(AMP\)](#), a nonprofit wholesale power supplier and services provider serving more than 130 communities. CPP is the largest member of AMP and has a 50-year power purchase contract with them. A misguided attempt to lock in cost savings for customers, this contract has been subject to scrutiny in recent years due to the increasing cost competitiveness of natural gas and clean energy.<sup>6</sup>

An analysis by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) found that the contract is a “financial disaster” for CPP customers.<sup>7</sup> They found that “two of the contracts have cost CPP ratepayers \$106 million more for power than customers would have paid if CPP instead had bought the electricity from regional wholesale markets.” Additionally, one of those contracts is for power from a coal-fired plant. CPP should invest in locally generated renewable energy and support a long-term decrease in carbon pollution.

Ratepayers are shouldering the burden of AMP's shortcomings, leading to higher-than-average electricity prices.

### **LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND FLEXIBILITY HARMS CUSTOMERS**

For residents struggling to pay their bills, it is currently difficult to learn about and apply for available assistance programs and to navigate the disconnection (and reconnection) process. The loss of power to one's residence can be devastating, increasing economic instability and creating potentially unsafe situations.

As a municipally owned utility, CPP is not driven by the profit demands of other investor-owned utilities. Because of this, CPP has the opportunity to be nimbler and more responsive in supporting Cleveland residents.



## AFFORDABILITY PROPOSALS:

- **Reduce power purchase costs by renegotiating CPP's long-term contract with American Municipal Power.** Through smart new contracts and legal challenges to costly old contracts, the City can once again make CPP the low-cost power provider in Cleveland.
- **Evaluate electric rates** to ensure that residential and small business customers are not unfairly subsidizing large commercial and industrial users.
- **Reform the disconnection process**
  - **Create a clear process** that is posted on the CPP website and explained by customer service staff, with clear information on customer rights and options.
  - **Adopt a 14-10-1 day notice rule**, similar to the Public Utility Commission of Ohio's (PUCO) 14-10-1 day disconnection notice rule. Under this rule, utilities must send customers a shut-off notice at least 14 days before the disconnection. During the winter heating season, utilities must provide an extra 10-day shut-off notice in addition to the 14-day notice, and utilities must reconnect service within one day.
  - **Attempt personal contact prior to disconnections.** CPP must attempt to make contact with the customer or adult on the premises prior to disconnection. This can be in person, via phone, or by hand-delivered written notice.
  - **Expand disconnection protections and exemptions**, including a grace period for people applying for payment assistance programs and an expansion of vulnerability-based exceptions to include households with senior citizens, young children, and pregnant women, and during periods of dangerous heat and cold.
  - **Review the threshold of unpaid amounts** and delinquent payment periods that trigger a disconnection and ensure they follow best practices among municipal utilities.
  - **Forgive past tenant debt** when renters start service at a new address (known as a "new tenant liability"). Renters should not be held responsible for a prior tenant's debt.
  - **Simplify the reconnection process** to make it less burdensome for low-income customers and renters, such as reducing reconnection fees and providing an easy-to-find, clear process for reconnecting service.
- **Expand bill payment assistance program eligibility and transparency**
  - **Create a percentage-of-income-payment plan option**, so low-income customers are not overburdened by energy bills. The program should be modeled after [PUCO's PIPP Plus program](#) and cap bills at 10% of annual income for low-income customers.
  - **Create a CPP Homestead Discount Program** modeled after the [Cleveland Water and Northeast Ohio Sewer District Homestead Discount Program](#), with a 40% discount for income-qualified seniors or disabled residents, with eligibility for homeowners and renters.

- **Clarify and expand access to all forms of Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) assistance**, including one-time arrears payments. Ratepayers at risk of disconnection should automatically be referred to HEAP or similar services. CPP should identify a plan for maintaining services for low-income ratepayers in response to federal threats to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- **Eliminate late payment fees, reduce connection deposits, and provide transparent, easy-to-understand information about them.** Currently, CPP customers may be required to provide a security deposit of 130% of their estimated bill if they have a history of late or missed payments or have had their service disconnected for non-payment. These fees and deposits are often cost-prohibitive for many ratepayers struggling to get out of arrears.

CPP should make information about fees and deposits readily available and easy to understand for customers, including on the website. Currently, CPP is not transparent with this information.

- **Suspend shutoffs for those applying for assistance**, mirroring PUCO policy. Customers should not be penalized with power shutoffs while applying for assistance programs.



# Clean and Green

## CPP should lead Cleveland's transition to clean, renewable energy, good jobs, and a healthy future.

### MORE INVESTMENT NEEDED IN RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Record-setting heat, frigid polar blasts, and extreme storms are just some of the climate impacts experienced by Cleveland residents in recent years. These climate events stress Cleveland's electrical grid and increase costs for ratepayers. CPP has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build climate resilience and transition to clean energy in a way that is equitable. CPP should meet or exceed [Cleveland's Climate Action Plan's](#) goal to source at least 75% of its electricity from clean energy by 2035, 85% by 2040, and 100% by 2050.<sup>8</sup>

Clean energy technologies like solar and wind power continue to drop in price, replacing traditional coal and gas power as the lowest-cost energy across our grid. CPP can use this cost advantage to build local assets while lowering bills and reducing the utility's carbon footprint. Investing in locally produced renewable energy projects creates local, living-wage, clean-energy jobs in partnership with unions, such as IBEW, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Greater Cleveland Works, and Cleveland Builds.

### INFORMATION AND TOOLS NEEDED TO EMPOWER CUSTOMERS' ENERGY USE DECISIONS

Energy efficiency can decrease carbon emissions and energy costs for governments, residents, and private businesses. By empowering customers with easy-to-understand information and tools, such as smart meters and usage dashboards, Cleveland residents can take control to regulate their energy use and behavior to save money.

CPP can do more to help customers minimize energy costs while making Cleveland more economically and environmentally resilient.

### CLEAN AND GREEN PROPOSALS:

- **Update the 50-year contract with AMP to include more renewable energy.** Currently, one of the biggest suppliers is a coal-fired power plant in Illinois. CPP should be investing in renewable energy and supporting a long-term decrease in carbon pollution, not subsidizing coal. CPP should meet or exceed Cleveland's Climate Action Plan Goal to source at least 75% of its electricity from clean energy by 2035, 85% by 2040, and 100% by 2050.
- **Quickly finalize and execute remaining federally funded projects,** including the current U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Climate Pollution Reduction Grant funding local solar energy generation of over 60 MW across the NE Ohio region, and Solar For All projects.
- **Expand solar and storage networks** to support the just and rapid transition to clean energy, while investing in Cleveland jobs and infrastructure.

- **Deploy 100 MW of local solar via the “Site Readiness Fund,”** which funds work to prepare sites for solar energy, prioritizing projects on underutilized land in low-income and disadvantaged communities. The fund supports site assessment, permitting, and upgrades to ensure a site is ready for solar development.
- **Launch a city-owned solar and storage network,** with the first site at the 7000 Central campus.
- **Create and implement a Community Solar program through a virtual net metering policy.** Virtual net metering allows customers to subscribe directly to distributed generation projects, allowing residents or businesses without the means or space to install their own solar arrays to still purchase from projects in their community. This allows all CPP customers to benefit from cost savings provided by solar.
- **Empower and inform CPP ratepayers**
  - **Launch smart meter and smart thermostat programs** to empower customers to track and regulate power consumption by time of day. This incentivizes customers to use power at cheaper, off-peak times to reduce grid strain and reduce overall energy costs for CPP, and create customer rate savings.
  - **Develop smart billing tools and customer dashboards** to provide customers with data and information about their energy usage, which helps customers make informed decisions about their usage and costs.
  - **Create citywide energy savings programs** to reduce bills and generate revenue (e.g., virtual power plant pilot using city-owned assets). CPP should work with community partners to provide low-cost energy audits and incentives for home weatherization and the purchase of energy-efficient appliances.
- **Develop 5 new local clean energy generation projects** by 2026 via a “Local Clean Energy Generation Accelerator” with public-private finance. Distributed generation power projects are small-scale electricity generation projects located close to the point of energy consumption, rather than at a centralized power plant. These projects create public wealth, keep energy local, improve electric grid resiliency, and increase renewable energy sources.



# Community-Led

**CPP should listen to us, plan with us, and work with us.**

## **INCREASED TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NEEDED**

CPP is controlled directly by the people of Cleveland through the Mayor and City Council. This presents an opportunity and an obligation to be more responsive to and connected with the community. Unfortunately, CPP is not meeting this obligation and is not sufficiently transparent with ratepayers. Information about outages, system performance, and planned maintenance and upgrades is not easily available or reliable. Additionally, community members have limited ways to provide feedback to CPP or input on future plans.

## **LOCALLY OWNED AND OPERATED POWER NEEDED**

CPP must ensure equitable access to economic development opportunities for all Cleveland neighborhoods. By creating small-scale power projects, CPP can increase renewable energy supplies, build public wealth, and keep energy production local. Listening to, planning with, and working for the community should be core operating principles for CPP.

## **COMMUNITY-LED PROPOSALS:**

- **Create a resident advisory board** to give CPP customers a formal role in the direction of CPP.
- **Develop a bold CPP Vision Plan** in collaboration with Our CPP and Ohio Environmental Council and the new advisory board with public-facing benchmarks that are tied to economic development goals.
- **Increase public engagement**
  - **Hold regular public meetings and “Know Your Bill” workshops** to demystify CPP operations and rates.
  - **Create a formal customer engagement department** to handle disconnection cases and track equity metrics.
  - **Include the community in grid planning and siting decisions**, especially for solar projects, which are substantially impacted by grid capacity.
  - **Involve the community in developing responsive resilience hub network plans** for extreme weather emergency preparedness.
- **Improve transparency and accountability**
  - **Regularly provide public information about performance and service quality**, including system reliability, disconnections, utility cost burdens, and plans for grid improvements.
  - **Create an interactive power outage dashboard** to provide real-time information about outage locations and repair time estimates and to provide information about infrastructure upgrade projects.

# Reliable

**CPP should invest in a modern, resilient distribution system and a capable, dedicated staff so we always have power when we need it.**

## **INVESTMENTS AND EXPANSIONS NEEDED TO ENSURE RELIABLE POWER FOR THE CITY**

CPP has lagged in investing in the current infrastructure and in expanding capacity. Investments are needed by CPP to increase grid stability and accommodate growing electrification demands. Expanded power capacity and a well-functioning utility are key to attracting new business and expanding economic opportunities to all Clevelanders.

### **RELIABLE POWER PROPOSALS:**

- **Continue to invest in the system.** CPP must invest in reducing its extensive backlog of deferred maintenance, work across other city agencies proactively to minimize further failures, upgrade substations and lines, and modernize technology.
- **Expand grid capacity** to attract clean tech businesses and serve underserved neighborhoods. With smart investments, CPP can play a vital role in Cleveland's economic development by ensuring new businesses have access to the energy they need. Any new CPP investments must be equitably distributed, ensuring all Cleveland neighborhoods have access to jobs and other economic benefits.
- **Streamline interconnection** for solar and distributed generation through East Side Trail & Midtown Corridor upgrades.

## Project Partners



Our CPP is a coalition of residents, organizations, and technical experts dedicated to directly supporting CPP during this transformation period. Together, we can take advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transition to clean energy without leaving anyone behind. Utilizing our expertise and drawing on our lived experience, we can inform and accelerate CPP reform to ensure maximum equity.

Learn more about Our CPP at [www.ourcpp.org](http://www.ourcpp.org) or contact us at [our.cpp.coalition@gmail.com](mailto:our.cpp.coalition@gmail.com).



**Ohio Environmental Council**  
[ Action Fund ]

Since its creation in 2016, the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund has grown to be a well-recognized political force equipped with solutions to address the state's most pressing environmental and climate issues facing Ohio communities. We continue to increase the political power of Ohio's environmental movement in order to accelerate climate action and the adoption of just environmental policies.

Learn more about Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund at [www.theoecactionfund.org](http://www.theoecactionfund.org). For press inquiries, contact [media@theOEC.org](mailto:media@theOEC.org). For general inquiries, contact [NRutschilling@theOEC.org](mailto:NRutschilling@theOEC.org).

## Endnotes

1. City of Cleveland. (n.d.). Division of Cleveland Public Power. *City of Cleveland Official Website*. Retrieved July 12, 2025, from <https://www.clevelandohio.gov/city-hall/departments/public-utilities/cleveland-public-power>
2. Cleveland Public Power. History. Retrieved July 12, 2025, from <https://www.cpp.org/About/History>
3. U.S. Department of Energy, State, Community, and Environmental Programs. Low-Income Energy Affordability Data (LEAD) Tool. Retrieved July 12, 2025, from <https://www.energy.gov/scep/low-income-energy-affordability-data-lead-tool>
4. City of Cleveland, Mayor's Office of Sustainability. (2021). Cleveland's Clean and Equitable Energy Future (Prepared by Greenlink Analytics). City of Cleveland. <https://www.clevelandohio.gov/sites/clevelandohio/files/sustainability/2021%20Cleveland%27s%20Clean%20and%20Equitable%20Energy%20Future.pdf>
5. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, HUD eGIS Help Desk, *Low to Moderate Income Population by Tract* [dataset] (2018; metadata updated March 1, 2024), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved July 12, 2025, from <https://hudgis-hud.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/HUD::low-to-moderate-income-population-by-tract/about>
6. Taylor Haggerty, "Cleveland City Council Questions CPP Contract With American Municipal Power," *Ideastream Public Media*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.ideastream.org/community/2020-09-29/cleveland-city-council-questions-cpp-contract-with-american-municipal-power>
7. David Schlissel, *Buying power from AMP's Prairie State and combined hydro project has been a financial disaster for Cleveland Public Power and its ratepayers* (Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, September 1, 2020), <https://ieefa.org/resources/buying-power-amps-prairie-state-and-combined-hydro-project-has-been-financial-disaster>
8. City of Cleveland, Mayor's Office of Sustainability, *Cleveland Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2025* [PDF], 2025, City of Cleveland. Retrieved July 12, 2025, from [https://www.clevelandohio.gov/sites/clevelandohio/files/sustainability/Cleveland%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%20\(CAP\)%202025%20-%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.clevelandohio.gov/sites/clevelandohio/files/sustainability/Cleveland%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%20(CAP)%202025%20-%20FINAL.pdf)