

# PD

## THE PLAIN DEALER

### GAME SEVEN

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COMMENTARY

## Four years in, curbside recycling program is still a dumpster fire

*Cleveland's recycling program has become a symbol of City Hall paralysis, with more than 100,000 blue bins still being used as free second trash cans while officials endlessly delay enforcing their own rules.*



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The city of Cleveland has a blue bin problem. Actually, it has many.

There are roughly 175,000 blue recycling bins sitting at the curbs of Cleveland households on collection days. About 70,000 of them are doing what they were designed to do. The other 105,000 are doing what Clevelanders, bless them, have apparently decided they were also designed to do: holding trash.

This has been going on for years. And last week, for the fourth consecutive year, the people responsible for fixing it sat down with city council and essentially said: we know, we know, we're going to fix it, we just need a little more time.

A consultant is on the way. If you are a Clevelander who has been following this saga, you may need a moment. Take your time.

Here is the brief, almost poetic history of Cleveland recycling, for the uninitiated.

In 2020, the city stopped recycling entirely because two-thirds of what residents were putting in their blue bins was trash. Contamination had become so severe that the city let its contract expire and just began sending the contents of the blue bins to a landfill.

It was, in a way, Cleveland's most honest recycling policy.

In 2022, Mayor Justin Bibb brought the program back with a new approach: opt-in recycling. Residents who actually wanted to recycle would register with the city and receive stickers to place on their blue bins. The sticker would signal the recycling truck. No sticker, no recycling. Simple, elegant, and — the city was very clear about this — temporary. Because once the city figured out who was recycling and who wasn't, it was going to come take the unstickered blue bins back.

That was going to happen in the fall of 2022. Then in 2024.

Then, when a reporter asked in January 2025, the Public Works director said they'd revisit it in 2026.

Reader, it is 2026. Last week, the city's newly promoted Public Works director, John Laird, appeared before city council and delivered an assessment so refreshingly candid it almost made you root for him.

SEE COMMENTARY, A2

CLEVELAND MARATHON

## Thousands bare their soles



Thousands of runners swarmed downtown on Sunday for the Cleveland Marathon and half-marathon. Ashton Swinford, 36, of Hudson won the women's division for the fifth straight year, completing the course in 2 hours, 44 minutes and 36 seconds. Jacob Kocis, 25, of Kentucky, won the men's division in 2:21:50 and Tyler Polman, of Independence, finished second in 2:32:03. *Joshua Gunter, cleveland.com*

THE READERS WRITE

## Clevelanders say RTA is failing the region at a crucial time

*Readers cited missed buses, broken ticket machines and poor event planning as signs of deeper management and funding problems.*

**Chris Quinn** [cquinn@cleveland.com](mailto:cquinn@cleveland.com) and *Advance Local Express Desk*

Northeast Ohioans see the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority as essential, frustrating, underfunded and, at times, dangerously unreliable, according to nearly 300 of our readers.

The conversation began with a text I sent last week to subscribers of our free From the Editor texting program, which now reaches more 4,000 people each week-day. Subscribers receive notes about stories in the works, questions reporters are pursuing and opportunities to shape coverage through their responses. People can join free at [joinsubtext.com/chrisquinn](http://joinsubtext.com/chrisquinn)

Most people did not call for abandoning the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. Instead, they described a system stuck in a downward spiral of declining service, aging infrastructure, staffing shortages and eroding public confidence — one that many believe Cleveland cannot afford to lose.

My prompt centered on a chaotic night downtown on May 9, when Cleveland hosted a Cavaliers playoff game, a Guardians game and a Zach Bryan concert that drew more than 60,000 people to the Browns stadium. One reader described "no trains, broken ticket machines ... one overwhelmed guy 'trying to find a driver to work overtime to bring another train' ... and hundreds of people stuck trying to find ride shares."

The question posed to readers was simple: "We hear this a lot about RTA. People find it unreliable. What's your experience? Should we rethink public transit?"

**Reliability failures have shattered trust**

The dominant theme was reliability — or the lack of it. Readers described missed buses, broken trains, long waits and systems that seem unable to adapt when downtown crowds swell.

"My family still refuses to take an RTA train for fear of being stranded," one reader wrote after recalling a breakdown following an event at the downtown arena.

Another reader wrote: "If a ball game goes into extra innings, forget the Rapid."

A woman who tried to use Paratransit for a medical appointment described being picked up far too early, rerouted across the East Side to collect another rider and arriving barely on time. "I got to my appointment at 12:25, still on time but beyond frustrated and in dire need of the rest room," she wrote. "There has to be an answer somewhere."

SEE THE READERS WRITE, A2

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