

Virginia “GiGi” Benjamin

Virginia D. Benjamin – OCI Board Application – April 17, 2021

1. Why do you wish to serve on the Ohio City Incorporated Board of Trustees?

My husband, Phil Woodcock, and I moved to Ohio City in 2014, and have tried to be active in the community from the beginning. In our former community, I served as President of our community association and found that involvement in my neighborhood was the best way to meet our neighbors and contribute to the sense of place. When I moved to Ohio City, I was already aware of the work that OCI had done and felt that my experience in public finance and development projects would be helpful as the neighborhood addresses many challenges arising out of growth. I believe that I have added to the work of the Board during my first term.

2. In what ways do you feel your strengths, knowledge, skills, and experience will help Ohio City Incorporated further its mission?

I have been practicing law with an emphasis on public finance and economic development projects for more than 40 years and have worked with cities and counties, as well developers, bankers and financing organizations such as the Cleveland Port. My focus during that period has been on “getting the deal done,” recognizing that most projects can be a “win-win” for both the community and the private sector. It is that sense of finding the best way to move projects ahead without sacrificing the goals of each party that informs my service on the OCI Board.

In addition, I have been in a leadership role in several nonprofit organizations, including United Way of Greater Cleveland and the Cleveland Zoological Society. Through serving on a committee of United Way that allocated contributions for basic needs, I learned a great deal about the needs of our community and the social service agencies that provide support to so many—and how much more support we need, especially in the face of the pandemic.

3. Describe your involvement in Ohio City and/or non-Ohio City neighborhood organizations. Include Ohio City Incorporated sponsored committees, projects, or block clubs if applicable.

I have served on the OCI Board as an elected Resident Trustee for the past 3 years, serving on the Advancement and Economic Development Committees. I am also participating in a review of the OCI By-laws. When we could meet in person, I was actively involved in the Randall-Whitman-John Woodbine Block Club. As mentioned above, I was President of our neighborhood association in our former home of Shaker Heights.

In addition, I have provided *pro bono* legal services to the Ohio City Improvement Corporation, the special improvement district providing services to businesses in Ohio City. I assisted OCIC in renewing the approval by the property owners and the City of Cleveland necessary to continue the SID.

We had the opportunity to toast many of our neighbors last summer as they walked past our home in the early evening, a welcome break from pandemic isolation. I love living in Ohio City!