

Policy plan for detroit



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DETROIT: A PLAN OF ITS OWN Over the past several decades, Detroit has been the target of constant scrutiny and criticism from the rest of the nation. A once thriving city, alive in jazz, techno, swing, and hip-hop, is now facing rapidly rising numbers of vacant and abandoned homes and businesses. This abandonment of properties in general, along with an increase in ??? white flight??? and industrial blight following the end of World War II, has slowly but surely labeled Detroit with its current, damaging reputation. In an interview with Susan Mosey, President of the University Cultural Center Association, she stressed that land usage is the biggest issue currently facing Detroit, the Midtown area in particular.

In ten years from now, Mosey hopes that ??? more buildings will have been built in some of the vacant land and parking areas [and there will be] more commercial and retail for people who are here.??? This is a vision necessary for the advancement and future of Detroit, and with the help of several House bills passed in recent years, we may be on the right track to the economic development and diversification of this great city. The University Cultural Center Association (UCCA) is a non-profit organization based in Midtown Detroit that focuses on supporting the physical maintenance and development of the area to enhance public awareness, appreciation, and use of Midtown Detroit.

They represent the area??™s cultural, academic, medical and service institutions, corporations, businesses, and community organizations (UCCA). The organization is well aware of the current state and availability of property in Midtown, which is why people frequent the UCCA offices in search of aid in opening small businesses and the steps that go along with it,

mainly finding an area in which to open their business. However, with so many abandoned establishments still standing, rotting away in what they could have been, Detroit's land available for commercial businesses is growing scarcer and scarcer by the day. Detroit is a fairly large city, covering over one hundred thirty eight square miles (U. S.

Census). This city was once the powerhouse of the nation; home of the great lakes and the Big Three automakers, it was unstoppable. Production of the automobile began in 1900 and by 1940 Detroit, Dearborn, Pontiac, and Flint produced more than 75 percent of all cars made in the world (Hudgins). Growth of the city progressed rapidly outward and soon Detroit was taking in municipalities like Highland Park and Hamtramck.

The growth of any city brings about a change in land use, but Detroit's growth was so rapid that it presented far more problems than that of a normal city. Following the end of World War II, industries in the city found themselves cramped for space, which led to industrial blight and by the next decade, the number of new industries settling in Detroit decreased by almost fifty percent (Black). Automobile expansion eventually contributed to the construction of highways, during which African Americans were displaced from their neighborhoods and the phenomena of "white flight" was introduced.

Detroit shows scars of a long painful past, but with the help of recent House bills and various proposals, a brighter future may lie ahead. An organization called The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) believes that they have found the solution to the economic distress of Michigan. They

proposed a plan back in 2007 that they believed would transform Michigan's economy. The MEDC was founded in 1999 by the State of Michigan and local communities to help businesses that wanted to grow in Michigan. The corporation today assists with everything that new businesses would need, from job training grants to permits for tax abatements. With access to financing through Michigan's \$2 billion 21st Century Jobs Fund, the MEDC holds a great deal of potential for improving Michigan's business climate (Towner). They initiated a three-year solution outline that they termed the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's 2007-2010 Strategy Plan. This six part plan included 1.

1.) Bringing together a variety of partners 2.) Attracting, retaining, and promoting Michigan businesses 3.) Leading the diversification of Michigan's economy 4.) Promoting Michigan's economy globally but sharing the successes locally 5.) Advocating for a favorable climate for small business and 6.) Being accountable for the success of the economic development strategy. (Towner). The MEDC has been fairly successful in recent years in assisting companies, both big and small, throughout Michigan and there is no doubt that the corporation intends to continue to strengthen and diversify Michigan's economy, but their strategic plan was not so easily effective in Detroit.

This plan, approved by Governor Granholm herself, was a statewide project for the economy of Michigan overall. Detroit's economy, however, was in far greater need than any of the other cities in Michigan. Detroit has fallen so far behind in advancement of commercial business and economic development that it is in need of a plan specific to itself. A general plan for

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the rest of Michigan is not one that Detroit can handle, or even keep up with. This plan left Detroit in the dust and in need of new more localized strategy for advancement. Solutions, however, may be hard to come by because what might be the best plan of action for the city may not always be in the best interest of all the parties involved with the proposed solution. For instance, House Bill 4142, introduced on February 4th, 2009 would alter different pieces of the Michigan Housing Code and establish standards in determining buildings that were dangerous and needed to be repaired or demolished.

This bill outlined a step-by-step plan in dealing with various vacant and abandoned properties throughout the city. First, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) would be required to keep a record of all abandoned and vacant properties. Second, the MSHDA would now accept information from citizens calling in to a toll-free hotline that would be specifically designated to deal with dangerous buildings in “urban core cities” that represent a safety hazard. Third, the MSHDA has the option of enforcing that the owner of the properties who is in violation of the new law repair the structure. This proposal would give broad powers to the MSHDA in determining whether or not a building is “dangerous” enough to be in violation with Michigan law. ??? Many property owners can now be held responsible for dilapidated or decaying structures and forced to improve them in accordance with the standards set forth in this proposal??? (Saxas). If they choose not to comply, ??? MSHDA can take these properties and either improve them or demolish them??? (Saxas).

Although this bill would certainly be the key to helping clean up many urban core areas like Detroit, it has not been yet been tried or passed because

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some say that it infringes somewhat on the rights of property owners. Owners may complain that the MSHDA does not have the right to take over property that is not theirs. If the owners have such a strong aversion towards the proposal though, one cannot help but ask why they have allowed their property to become so decrepit in the first place. If their vacant and/or abandoned property brings them no source of income nor does it provide housing for them, then what could they possibly be benefiting from by maintaining ownership of such a property. The solution seems like it would be effective overall for the city of Detroit, but the issues over the rights of the property owners seem to hold back any sort of initiative in passing the proposal. When people look at Detroit, at the abandoned buildings and the vacant, rundown houses, some see a city with an unsure future, while others, if they look hard enough, see a bustling, successful, beautiful past. Those who look into Detroit with a view like this, their minds are consumed in images of the roaring 20s, the swinging 50s, the mellowed 70s, the Millennium, and the future; what??™s next Ruminants of a past Detroit surround us, constantly reminding us of what Detroit was, and what it could have been today. As times have changed however, Detroit has had a difficult time keeping up.

We??™ve found ourselves so far behind in development and diversification that any possible advancement seems like a godsend in this frantic game of catch-up we??™ve engaged in. We have lost precious time, we have fallen into a pit of bleak hope so deep it seems almost as though there is no escaping our said fate, but there are those out there who believe in light for Detroit. With the right policies in place, a greater, brighter city could be in

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