Southwest Detroit Brownfield Prioritization Project:
identifying brownfields that threaten public safety

Presented to Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision
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A semester-long volunteer project led by urban and regional planning graduate students at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.
INTRODUCTION

The Southwest Detroit Brownfield Prioritization Project is a report that identifies and prioritizes harmful brownfield sites that pose a threat to neighborhood safety in southwest Detroit. Initiated by Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (SDEV) in December 2009, this volunteer project was organized by the graduate Urban Planning Student Association (UPSA) and Professor Larissa Larsen from the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning (TCAUP) at the University of Michigan.

This report is the final product of a three-phase project spearheaded by a core group of urban planning graduate students.

Phase I, conducted in January and February, involved research and site identification. The volunteer group sifted through several resources including the Environmental Protection Agency’s website and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality’s website to find parcel lists of different types of brownfields. The volunteer group then identified which types of brownfields posed the greatest threat to public and environmental safety, and mapped the most threatening brownfields in the five zipcode area of southwest Detroit. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and advanced Excel spreadsheets were used to sort through the data.

Phase II, conducted in March and April, involved site analysis and field investigations. The core volunteer group studied aerial photographs of every identified brownfield site in southwest Detroit to determine which sites posed the greatest threat to nearby residences. The primary concern was the safety of children playing in the area. The volunteer group created a list of 33 sites to conduct further field investigations.

On April 24th, the core volunteer group was joined by 20 student, faculty, and alum volunteers to conduct thorough field investigations of each individual site. Groups were created, and each tasked with documenting 4-5 sites. A site review checklist was completed and photos were taken for each site.

Phase III, conducted in May, involved reviewing the field investigation checklists and photos to determine what sites should be prioritized. This formed the current list of eight sites that we recommend for further action in this report.

Participating Volunteers:

Core Volunteers:
Andrew Broderick
Koben Calhoun
Amanda Irvine
Hans Fruechtenicht
Professor Larissa Larsen
Kevin McCoy
Katharine Pan
Bre Shell
Tracy Tran

Field Investigation Day Volunteers:
Professor Maria Arquero de Alarcon
Kristin Baja
Maeva Barbosa
Chelsea Burket
Chris Canna
Nick Cilluffo
John Drain
Liz Durfee
Jared Enriquez
Angela Fortino
Joel Howari Heeres (alumn)
Jamie Kidwell
Clair Leighton
Nicole Mangis
Ryan Michael
Spencer Olinek
Scott Parker
Julia Roberts
Jonathan Tarr
BROWNFIELD TYPES AND LIST OF SITES

All of the sites in this report are identified as polluted brownfields by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). The sites surveyed are classified as one of two classifications: Part 201 or Part 213.

Part 201 Sites

These sites are evaluated and scored by MDEQ and have documented contamination exceeding the “residential criteria” and/or the site hasn’t been cleaned up to suit a residential land use. Part 201 sites undergo thorough documentation of hazardous substances, and are held to high standards of remediation.

Part 213 Sites

These sites are leaking underground storage tanks (LUST) that are “open,” or not remediated, and have at least one confirmed toxic release. MDEQ documents all known underground storage tanks sites as “open” when no appropriate action is taken to clean up the site. Once identified as a Part 213 site, the site is assigned a “grade” of severity based on “the current and projected degree of threat to the public and environment.”

The grading system is a numeric scale ranging from 1 to 4 with 1 posing the most immediate threat and 4 posing little to no threat at all.

Source:

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Remediation and Redevelopment Division

www.michigan.gov/deqrrd

List of Sites

SITE 1: 5800 Braden Ave. and 5835 Martin Ave.
SITE 2: 6000 Buchanan St.
SITE 3: 5034 Military St. (site address doesn’t correlate with site of actual documentation)
SITE 4: 4200 23rd St.
SITE 5: 3401 Poplar St.
SITE 6: 162 Morrell St.
SITE 7: 260 S. Crawford St.
SITE 8: 8557 Dearborn St.
SITE 1: 5800 Braden Ave. and 5835 Martin Ave., 48210

**Type:** Part 201 (Braden Ave), Part 213 (Martin Ave.)

**Description:** Currently the site (both addresses are contiguous) is grass-covered open space, part of which is actively used as a soccer field. Trash and miscellaneous debris are scattered around the site. There is no fencing around the site. Adjacent land uses near the site include residential, warehouse industrial, and abandoned buildings.

**Recommendation:** Soil testing should be conducted first. Based on the severity of the soil tests, warning signs and fencing may be necessary.

*Figure 1, 2:* Grass covered open space littered with trash. The soccer field is maintained in the center of the site as evidenced by the manicured lawn.
SITE 2: 6000 Buchanan St, 48210

**Type:** Part 201

**Description:** The surface of the site is littered with an abundance of trash including old automobile parts, broken glass, cinder blocks, and general refuse. Two abandoned, burned-out buildings exist on the site, one is a large four story warehouse and the other is a two story former commercial building.

The site is about five acres and is surrounded by residential and institutional land uses including a church and school.

There is evidence of activity on the site including graffiti, gutted-out cars, and broken bottles.

**Recommendation:** Signs should be installed, fences constructed, and debris removed from the site. This site requires attention at a high level of action as it poses significant dangers.

*Figure 3, 4:* Rubble and trash from illegal dumping clutter the site surrounding a four story abandoned industrial facility (top). A portion of a two-story abandoned building is surrounded by heaps of trash.
SITE 3: 5034 Military St., 48210

**Type:** Part 201

**Description:** The large, former industrial site consists of a large abandoned building, open grass/weed field, and a cracked concrete/asphalt paved area. There is evidence of illegal dumping (despite signs that warn against it). Large sections of fence are missing around the perimeter of the site, and the crumbling building is a visible hazard.

**Recommendation:** Tear down building remnants, add warning signs, and repair/add fencing where necessary in order to enclose site.

*Figure 5, 6:* The abandoned building on site (top) is littered with trash and is accessible from street level (bottom).
SITE 4: 4200 23rd St., 48108

Type: Part 201

Description: The site is covered by grass and overgrown, low-lying vegetation. Trash and evidence of illegal dumping is on the site despite the presence of a series of low, concrete barriers around the site. Broken glass exists on site. Residential and abandoned industrial sites are the adjacent land uses. A railroad track runs along the northern perimeter of the site.

Recommendation: Add warning signs and fencing around the perimeter of the site. Additional soil testing should be conducted to examine extent of pollution.

Figure 7, 8: Trash from illegal dumping litters the site (top) and low concrete barriers line portions of the site (bottom).
SITE 5: 3401 Poplar St., 48108

**Type:** Part 201

**Description:** This site is covered with large weed and grass area. Trash is littered on the site, which appears to have been mowed not too long ago. There are low-concrete barriers around portions of the perimeter. The site is not in active use. Residential land uses are in the immediate vicinity.

**Recommendation:** Add warning signs and fencing around the perimeter of the site. Clean up debris. Additional soil testing should be conducted to examine extent of pollution.

*Figure 9, 10: A grassy field surrounded by concrete barriers (top and bottom).*
SITE 6: 162 Morrell St., 48209

Type: Part 213

Description: This site is a former manufacturing site that is now abandoned. The lot is covered mostly by grass and broken-up asphalt segments. There is significant trash and debris on site, and there is evidence of substantial illegal dumping. Residential land uses are in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Recommendation: Warning signs should be placed around the perimeter of the site. Additional soil testing should be conducted.

Figure 11, 12: Substantial dumping of trash and debris on site with overgrown vegetation and a partial asphalt driveway (top and bottom).
SITE 7: 260 S. Crawford St., 48209

Type: Part 213

Description: A vacant warehouse facility and old asphalt parking lot cover the majority of the site. The southern end of the site is covered by grass and weeds. There is a lot of debris on site, and evidence of an outdoor fire pit. The site is not in active use. There are residences in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Recommendation: Warning signs and fencing should be placed around the perimeter of the site. More soil testing should be conducted to examine the extent of pollution.

Figure 13, 14: A mix of grass/weed coverage and asphalt cover half of the site (top) while the large abandoned warehouse covers the other half (bottom). Evidence of illegal dumping is prevalent.
SITE 8: 8557 Dearborn St., 48209

Type: Part 201

Description: An abandoned building filled with old tires and an empty, grass covered lot cover the site. The site isn't in active use, but there is evidence of recent informal activity on site including trash and debris. The site is fenced in portions, but there are significant openings. Residential land uses are adjacent to the site, which is next to the water treatment plant.

Recommendation: Add warning signs around the perimeter of the site and fix / build fence to fully enclose the site. Additional soil testing should be conducted to examine extent of pollution.

Figure 15, 16: An opening in the fence frames the abandoned building and debris covered grass/weed area (top). Abutting fences close of some areas of the site (bottom), but large gaps exist.