Detroit Community Partnership Center

Student - Faculty Projects

2003-2004

Change Support Contribution

Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning
University of Michigan
Change, Support, Contribution...

The Detroit Community Partnership Center at Taubman College supports student and faculty projects that address community-identified needs and that advance the education and knowledge-building mission of the University of Michigan. Projects aim to support the work of Detroit community leaders and city officials who are working to strengthen neighborhoods.

Students and faculty undertake projects that:

♦ *Improve systems, so as to have broad effects on the quality of life.* For instance, students and faculty proposed policy for urban agriculture, proposed a structure for a land bank to handle tax-reverted property, and detailed a plan for using large databases and computer mapping to understand neighborhood change.

♦ *Create models for planning and design that others can use.* This year students and faculty showed new approaches to designing affordable housing for community-specific needs, and they provided a clear example of how to use neighborhood revitalization to strengthen housing.

♦ *Support community-based change initiatives.* Students and faculty developed a plan for a retail district where three community-based organizations were ready to act and provided analysis to an organization ready to work for greater transportation equity. Students also seek to achieve these aims through internships.
Their work meets community needs while they gain professional experience. Students serve Detroit neighborhoods through the Michigan Neighborhood AmeriCorps Program (part of the national community service program) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Work Study Program.

In many courses students gain the knowledge and skills they need to have an impact on projects they later undertake with community partners. The Physical Planning Workshop is one such course where students learn through application of ideas to Detroit.

Faculty research projects examine Detroit issues and make recommendations for changes that apply not only to Detroit but also to many of the nation’s cities. Faculty projects address quality of life, land use, economic development, and transportation.

This booklet describes many of the projects that students and faculty undertook in the tenth year of the Center’s existence, 2003-2004.
Although hundreds of Detroiters are involved in urban agriculture, the city of Detroit has no official policy governing this land use. Jonathan LaChance, a graduate student in the Urban and Regional Planning Program, worked with planners in the Detroit Planning and Development Department, Professor Margaret Dewar, and Community Partnerships Manager Eric Dueweke to propose policies that could enable urban agriculture to transform vacant land into productive, attractive use.

LaChance drafted an urban agriculture policy that could be the basis for a supplement to the city’s master plan. He identified the goals and benefits associated with supporting urban agriculture; provided examples of urban agriculture policies in other U.S. cities; and drafted a possible resolution in support of urban agriculture, a possible ordinance, and possible procedures for facilitating use of city-owned land for urban agriculture.

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*Urban agriculture is the production of fruits, vegetables, flowers and other natural food and non-food materials within an urban area, especially on previously vacant residential lots, in open spaces such as parks, and in other outdoor areas within a characteristically urban environment.*
These are some of John Gruchala’s gardens, in the State Fair area of Detroit. Gruchala is a Detroit urban agriculture activist and the chairperson of Foundation for Agricultural Resources in Michigan (FARM).

Vacant and unkempt property can be cleaned and reused to help residents.
Reuse of Tax-Reverted Properties in Detroit

The city of Detroit owns approximately 38,000 parcels of land acquired through tax foreclosure. The Detroit Planning and Development Department has had significant difficulties in disposing of this land for redevelopment that could improve the quality of life in the city. In January 2004, Governor Granholm signed legislation that enables counties and some cities to establish land banks. The legislation offers Detroit an opportunity to use new tools in handling tax-reverted property and facilitating its reuse.

Five Urban and Regional Planning Program graduate students, with their instructors Margaret Dewar and Eric Dueweke, worked with the Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD) to bring City Council, Mayor’s office, and community development interests together to articulate the form a Detroit land bank should take. They produced a plan that lays out the desirable characteristics of a land bank and proposes bylaws and policies and procedures.

A land bank is a system through which derelict, tax-reverted properties can have taxes waived and title cleared and can be sold at a nominal price in order to facilitate redevelopment. This structure can provide an expedited and transparent process for developers to acquire property for redevelopment.
Redevelopment of land in heavily abandoned areas of the city depends on purchase of city owned lots.

A focus group discussion with community stakeholders.
Neighborhood indicators are measures of characteristics of small areas in cities. They help to evaluate neighborhoods, guide investment, and show progress. Like their counterparts in other cities, Detroit officials are looking for ways to assure that city investments and delivery of services bring about neighborhood revitalization and deter blight. Community-based organizations seek to demonstrate changes in order to influence a range of policy decisions and private investments.

Ten graduate urban planning students, with their advisors Margaret Dewar and Eric Dueweke, worked with the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department and Southwest Detroit Business Association to plan an indicator system. These students identified best practices from thirteen cities and detailed two models for how organizations, agencies, and the public may access and interact with data. One model, the Community Empowerment System, organizes data to facilitate community access, allows community organizations to upload information, and tailors outputs based on need. The second model, the Early Detection System, predicts the future condition of a neighborhood. The students demonstrated a pilot version of the Early Detection System to predict areas of the city whose physical condition may improve or decline.
A clip from a sample report available through the Community Empowerment System.

An example of one kind of map produced with the Early Detection System.
Habitat for Humanity Detroit partnered with Core City Neighborhoods to undertake major housing construction projects in the near west side of the city. Habitat leaders realized they needed to do much more than build houses to revitalize the neighborhood and to eliminate poverty housing, but neighborhood revitalization goes beyond Habitat’s traditional activities. For a second phase of building, to begin with the Jimmy Carter Work Project in 2005, Habitat wanted a plan to strengthen the neighborhood.

Nine urban planning graduate students joined Habitat and Core City Neighborhoods to develop a comprehensive revitalization plan for the neighborhood. With their advisors, Margaret Dewar and Eric Dueweke, these students worked with the two organizations and many neighborhood residents to develop a plan for the placement of new housing, rehabilitation of existing housing, demolition of derelict structures, reuse of vacant land, improvement of services, and strengthening of community organizing. Their plan can serve as a model for Habitat to use in developing plans to strengthen other neighborhoods.

Habitat for Humanity Detroit and Core City Neighborhoods are participating in “Vision 2020,” an initiative of Habitat for Humanity of Michigan and partners, with the mission to “develop local comprehensive revitalization plans that focus resources on locally identified (geographic) target areas to eliminate substandard housing and the conditions which cause it by 2020.”

This is a house in good condition, as shown by a student survey of housing conditions in the study area.

At an early February 2004 meeting, students, community leaders and staff from Habitat for Humanity and Core City Neighborhoods considered the advantages and disadvantages of infill and concentration strategies for placement of new housing.
Housing architecture should reflect the needs and demographics of a community. But what is the relationship between the way people live and what architects design? How can architecture have a more substantial impact on affordable housing?

In an architecture studio titled “HouseWork,” taught by Danelle Guthrie, master of architecture students collaborated with the non-profit Southwest Housing Corporation to design houses that were affordable for middle- to low-income residents. In accordance with the program defined by Southwest Housing Corporation, students designed three-bedroom townhouses, clusterhouses (a variation on the duplex), and kinhouses (a single-family prototype for multi-generational families).

Through this course, Guthrie and her students used design to address the needs for affordable housing, decrease the cost of housing, and shape housing structures around modern forms and uses. Rather than relying on subsidies and government grants, students aimed to make housing affordable through innovative housing design.

As a result, students produced practical design in the form of final design documents for Southwest Housing. Guthrie hopes completion of at least one of the projects will occur in the next year.
Section showing the interior view of a three-bedroom townhouse, designed by Matt Battin and Andrew Schmidt.

Street view of a clusterhouse model, designed by Max Adams.
East Warren Avenue on the Eastside of Detroit needs commercial revitalization. Many of the buildings are deteriorated or vacant despite the fact that surrounding neighborhoods are attractive and vital with many working and middle-class residents who could shop on the avenue. Five master of urban planning students worked with East Warren Businesses United, the Friends of the Alger Theater, and the Christ Community Development Corporation to generate a plan for the revitalization of the East Warren commercial district. Their instructors were Eric Dueweke and Margaret Dewar.

Recommendations aim to create an active and attractive commercial district that serves local residents and the regional market, provides goods and services for middle-class residents, supports the Alger Theater redevelopment, and aids low-income residents through East Warren revitalization. Community leaders can use this comprehensive revitalization plan as a guide for how to improve the commercial district.
This streetscape could use revitalization. Twenty five to fifty percent of the parcels on the block are vacant, but the buildings have traditional main-street design and could have facade improvements for new tenants.

The building to the left was recently constructed, and nearby vacant areas offer opportunities for more new investment by complementary businesses.

This block is beginning to show signs of decline and needs beautification, cleanup, and traffic calming.
Students in a transportation and public policy course in the Urban and Regional Planning Program looked at the importance of public transportation in serving the needs of Detroit's residents. Under the supervision of Professor Joe Grengs, students worked with the non-profit Metropolitan Organizing Strategies Enabling Strength (MOSES), first, to evaluate regional equity in transportation funding and, second, to assess the decision-making procedures for transportation funding in Southeast Michigan.

Community organizing for transportation advocacy has inspired scrutiny of current planning methods in a number of metropolitan areas. Some transportation authorities appear to be cutting back on funding and services in central cities while enhancing services in the suburbs. To examine this issue in the Detroit metropolitan area, students investigated whether some social groups bear a disproportionate burden from transportation funding practices. They found that some municipalities with higher than average shares of African American residents appear to be receiving proportionately lower shares of overall funds.

Some advocacy organizations claim that metropolitan planning organizations—the agencies that typically allocate transportation funds—tend to under-represent central city interests. Students tested this claim for Southeast Michigan by analyzing the voting structure of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG). They found that the Detroit region is like many others—the central city is under-represented in the decision-making process.

Detroit metropolitan decision-makers can use the recommendations from these projects to deliver a wider range of travel choices, address social and environmental costs, and redistribute resources across a broader constituency.
Evidence suggests that nine cities out of ten with middle density African American population have low funding per capita (1993-2002).

Deviation from Proportionality on the Executive Committee of SEMCOG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By County + Detroit</th>
<th>% of total votes</th>
<th>% of regional population</th>
<th>Difference s-p</th>
<th>Absolute value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livingston</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macomb</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Clair</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washtenaw</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne (without Detroit pop.)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The voting structure indicates that low-population areas may have disproportionately more power in transportation decision making. The “Difference” column indicates how much a jurisdiction deviates from proportional voting, with negative numbers suggesting under-representation.
While advanced graduate students work with faculty and community partners on planning and design projects, beginning students have many opportunities to work with faculty to learn the ways of thinking and the skills to enhance living environments and improve community landscapes.

In one such course, the Physical Planning Workshop taught by Professor Aseem Inam, urban and regional planning students deal with the concept of “place” and learn by applying their ideas and skills to an area of Southwest Detroit. The course helps students think and communicate visually, using a language of graphics. The three basic components of the course (basic drawing skills, hands-on studio projects, and preparation of a physical planning project) provide students with visual and analytical skills that allow them to explore ideas, develop creative strategies to address problems, and present plans. Their work provides the students insight about a broad range of issues in Detroit. The students are interested in urban design, land use, real estate, public infrastructure, environmental planning, transportation planning, housing, economic development, and community development.
These are proposed designs for a central commercial area in Southwest Detroit, by Nora Beck, Elizabeth Jellema, Ryan McGee (above), and Kate Blacquiere, Chris Lee, and Jason Myers (below). The studio focused on West Vernor Highway.
Students also gain professional experience and learn about and contribute to Detroit through internships. Following are highlights of some of the projects in which urban and regional planning students have been involved through the Michigan Neighborhood AmeriCorps Program, both with non-profit organizations and the city of Detroit.

**Focus: HOPE**
Paul Urbiel worked with this civil rights organization famous for its innovative job training programs. Urbiel worked under the housing director to plan and do predevelopment work for an infill housing program. He wrote a successful grant proposal for more than $1 million to help in the organization’s efforts to strengthen the surrounding neighborhood.

**NorthStar Community Development Corporation**
Priya Mehendale worked on NorthStar’s commercial revitalization plan. The booklet she created, highlighting available commercial properties, building conditions, and ownership details, will encourage businesses to relocate to the area. Mehendale also helped formulate design guidelines and a brochure for the organization’s façade improvement grant program, and she used a geographic information system to compile property information for funding reports for the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization.
NorthStar CDC addresses the needs of businesses like these on Livernois Avenue.
Warren/Conner Development Coalition
Katie Bouchard, a student earning dual master’s degrees in social work and in urban planning, worked with this Detroit Eastside non-profit organization to coordinate neighborhood beautification projects that involve youth. Bouchard also developed and assisted with the curriculum on beautification for the Youth on the Edge…of Greatness summer program.

WARM Training Center
Christopher Hubbell furthered the Center’s goals of incorporating environmentally sustainable practices into affordable housing by creating a Green Building Resource Directory and acquiring materials for a Michigan State Energy Demonstration center. Hubbell is continuing his work with the Center for his final master’s project by evaluating one of the Center’s programs for an Environmental Protection Agency report (with supervision from Professor Elsie Harper-Anderson).

City of Detroit Planning and Development Department
Select students work full-time for eleven weeks each summer on a variety of planning projects. In 2003, Sarah Goralewski, Calvin Hwang, Brian Martin, Tiffani Moore, and Paula Young worked with the City of Detroit Planning and Development Department. Goralewski updated and mapped the department’s database of health and social service providers and devised a format for implementing supplements to the master plan. Hwang, Moore, and Young performed similar tasks in the Advance Planning division. Martin analyzed three property information databases for inconsistencies and created a dynamic website to display census data.
Katie Bouchard and Beniteau Street resident.

Tiffani Moore, Calvin Hwang, Brian Martin, Paula Young, and Sarah Goralewski.
Detroit’s Empowerment Zone had as one of its three major goals the creation of economic opportunity. Margaret Dewar interviewed several hundred employers in five industrial and retail districts to identify the effects of the Empowerment Zone on employers’ decisions to hire Detroit residents.

Tax-reverted property is a problem in many older industrial cities. Some cities have developed systems that efficiently move such land into redevelopment, while others have not. Looking at the experiences of Flint, Detroit, and Cleveland, Margaret Dewar is working to explain the differences that lead to more effective policies.

Brownfield redevelopment is a challenge in many city neighborhoods because of added costs and liability of contamination. However, the redevelopment challenge in older cities is much more complex than just cleanup of pollutants. In Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Detroit, Margaret Dewar and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Maryland are doing research to show when redevelopment occurs and when it does not.

Quality of life is a topic of interest to planners as well as politicians, the media, and the public. In 2001, the Detroit Area Study focused on the role of place in contributing to residents’ quality of life in Southeast Michigan. Aspects of community life such as commuting, public transit use, recreation, public services, and development were measured. Robert Marans is investigating relationships between these conditions, survey responses, and how findings are being used by planners and government officials.

Public transit in inner city neighborhoods in Detroit is funded through federal transportation programs. As employment centers spread further from impoverished city centers, jobs decentralize and transportation infrastructure is relied upon more. Joe Grengs
is looking at the relationship between these phenomena for Detroit and Flint in the 1990s. Grengs’s study evaluates whether federal transportation provisions unintentionally increase the isolation of people living in inner-city neighborhoods by hindering local transit agencies’ ability to adapt to spreading urban land-use patterns.

**Cars and supermarkets** have in common these planning concerns: sprawl and access. People who do not own cars and live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty without nearby supermarkets must choose either to pay high prices to shop locally or pay with their time, effort, and money to travel. By explaining the growing burden of purchasing food for low-income households in Detroit and Flint, Joe Grengs is investigating the importance of owning an automobile in the ability to access food.

**Mobility** in Detroit is greatly influenced by car ownership. While fewer U.S. households are carless, no study has asked whether improved access to cars has been proportionately distributed across households by race and ethnicity. Joe Grengs is questioning whether the problem of lacking a car is becoming more concentrated by income, race, and location.
Locations of Student - Faculty Projects

1. Habitat for Humanity
2. Southwest Housing Corporation
3. Physical Design
4. Indicators
5. AmeriCorps (WARM)
6. AmeriCorps (NorthStar)
7. AmeriCorps (Focus: HOPE)
8. Urban Agriculture
9. East Warren
10. AmeriCorps (Warren/Conner)
11. AmeriCorps (PDD)
Detroit: 2003-2004

- Highways
- Residential Land Use
- Vacant

Legend:

- Blue arrows represent Highways.
- Yellow areas indicate Residential Land Use.
- Gray sections denote Vacant areas.

Scale:

3 0 3 6 Miles
We look forward to continued partnership with Detroiters. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact us.

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Also see Urban and Regional Planning Research and Outreach, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning:

www.caup.umich.edu/acadpgm/urp/research/urpresearch.html

Sponsors for Detroit projects during 2003-2004 include:

Brademas Fellowships ♦ Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy, University of Michigan ♦ Christ Community Development Corporation ♦ Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance ♦ Detroit Planning and Development Department ♦ East Warren Businesses United ♦ Friends of the Alger Theater ♦ Ginsberg Center, University of Michigan ♦ Habitat for Humanity Detroit ♦ Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization ♦ Michigan Neighborhood AmeriCorps Program ♦ Roads Scholars, University of Michigan ♦ Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan ♦ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development