

RESHAPING DETROIT A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO REINVESTMENT FOR THE GREATER DOWNTOWN

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Background: Throughout its history, the City of Detroit has embodied dramatic shifts in its urban paradigm - witnessing periods of dramatic growth and expansion, coupled with more recent periods of decline and disinvestment. These stages have corresponded with diverse and compelling models of urbanity, starting with the 1807 plan of Judge Woodward, to the Art deco skyscrapers of the 1920's and the megablock development of the 1960's and 70's 'Renaissance'. However, over the past 40 years, the city has experienced a steady decline, losing 1 million residents (of its over 2 million in the 1950's) to outlying suburbs.

This pattern is about to change. The Greater Downtown area is on the cusp of a new era of economic growth and is reemerging as a dynamic regional anchor containing a mix of cultural, institutional, residential, recreational, sports, entertainment, office and retail uses. Although similar projections have often been made in Motown over the decades, economic indicators, social trends and a very active market suggest that this time it is for real.

This presentation will focus on the approach taken in the past two years in the Greater Downtown to identify the priority reinvestment opportunities and formulate an implementation strategy. It is made on behalf of a large local and international consultant team which has worked closely with the public/private partnership spearheading the effort.

Approach: The emerging Reinvestment Strategy distinguishes itself from a traditional master planning study in that it focuses on key initiatives rather than making propositions for the entire study area. Central to the overall strategy are guiding principles which seek to ensure that all investments are strategically founded. These principles are:

- * Build Common Agendas by thinking about things in terms of the way they relate to and impact upon one another, in order to build connections and to maximize spin offs;
- * Pursue Strategic Opportunities by emphasizing initiatives having the most catalytic potential;
- * Utilize Market Momentum by focusing on areas where market support is already in evidence and targeting niche markets;
- * Focus on Place Making and City Building with infill that enhances vital urban environments and a new urban pattern that emphasizes low and mid-rise buildings to form a space-defining 'connective tissue';
- * Balance Travel Patterns by enhancing the pedestrian realm, providing viable alternatives to car travel and creating downtown residential space near work centers;
- * Green the City; with new and revitalized urban squares and a reclaimed riverfront as the focus for redevelopment.

Description: The study area encompasses five square miles of the Greater Downtown area of Detroit. The consultant team has worked concomitantly at numerous scales of analysis and design: the five square mile area known as the Greater Downtown, a series of more detailed District reinvestment strategies, specific development initiatives on key blocks and parcels and typical design conditions with broad scale applicability. The process has involved hundreds of people in numerous stakeholder workshops to help identify district strengths, weaknesses, key reinvestment opportunities and implementation issues.

The primary initiatives which have been identified to date cover a broad spectrum of scales and levels of investment and are in varying states of implementation. An early spin off of the work has been the Campus Martius mixed use development (2.5 million sq.ft) which is under way after an international R.F.P. developer selection process. Other spin off initiatives which are currently under way include loft conversions in the Necklace District and new housing and retail developments in the New Center Urban village. Other initiatives such as a continuous Riverfront Linear Park along the 5 miles of Detroit's central riverfront and the boulevarding the Woodward Avenue Median are being assessed and await appropriate funding opportunities before further elaboration.

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