

Build Up Detroit©

The city of Detroit, a once thriving metropolis which led the industrial revolution in producing automobiles and other modes of transportation, put the world on wheels. Sadly, the city is no longer perceived as a thriving metropolis. The automotive industry, initially designed by Henry Ford to be a one-stop-shop approach to manufacturing, could not sustain itself as the world market shifted. Tremendous disinvestment across the city left a legacy of more than 40,000 abandoned properties and many people unemployed. A city that once boasted a population of 2 million is now home to only 900,000 with an aging infrastructure and some neighborhoods suffering a 50% vacant and/or abandoned property rate.

Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ) has its roots in the fact that Detroit is home to some of the largest environmental challenges in the United States, while also being one of the most segregated cities in the country with an 80% African-American population. We believe that, collectively, these conditions afford us the opportunity to become national leaders in finding solutions to the daunting challenges of environmental justice, city revitalization, and economic redevelopment. Detroit may be unique in the vast scope of these problems, but certainly not unique in the nature of them.

DWEJ is initiating a multi-pronged approach with *Build Up Detroit*. We have established three distinct, yet complementary, pilot program areas:

- Healthy Homes
- Land & Environment
- Sustainable Businesses

DWEJ's Vision for Detroit

During these difficult times, DWEJ believes that our region's problems present great opportunity for innovation. We believe that while advocacy has its place, it is now time to step forward with new ideas that will serve the public good in more direct and tangible ways. DWEJ has established *Build Up Detroit* to help serve as a model for doing business differently through sustainable, green business practices. Our aim is to help provide the groundwork for a "green" economic development paradigm that will provide safe and healthy housing, safe good paying jobs and the restoration of the environment through best practices in the use of land.

Advisory Team and Priority Setting

With the support of a planning grant from the Ford Foundation (www.fordfound.org) DWEJ is extremely motivated by the opportunity to host a multi-stakeholder process. This process is designed to explore which of the strategies we propose will work, and set a proposed research agenda for a future proposal. We will establish an advisory team consisting of representatives from business, government, finance, urban planning, public health, environment, community, academia, etc. Together this team will work to determine priorities for the initiative, identify best practices for further research, and explore opportunities as necessary to create a new approach to revitalizing the city of Detroit.

Healthy Homes

Approximately 97% of the housing stock in Detroit was built prior to 1978, the year the use of lead paint was banned. There is tremendous opportunity for contributing to the “rebirth” of Detroit by stimulating the construction of in-fill housing. The demand for affordable housing is great. The availability of vacant land is unsurpassed.

Land & Environment

DWEJ proposes to advance a vision that embraces a concept for sustainable development through the reclamation and reuse of impaired properties. This approach will address existing problems through a genuine multi-stakeholder decision-making process. This vision for rebuilding Detroit begins with a fundamental belief that sustainable development can be accomplished without compromise to the public’s health and environmental protection.

Sustainable Business

As a model for doing business differently through sustainable, green business practices, we propose to establish the groundwork for a green economic development paradigm. Furthermore; this vision embraces a job creation and wealth-producing model that does not infringe upon a human being's right to a decent quality of life. We want to demonstrate that companies who are committed to shrinking or even eliminating their environmental “footprint” are profitable and can bring badly needed diversification of the local economy.

Why DWEJ?

In summary, Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (www.dwej.org) is looking to demonstrate that holistic linkages can be made between job creation strategies, healthy living conditions, social justice considerations and wise land use decisions. These linkages and synergies must be achieved for cities such as Detroit to truly rebound. DWEJ has the experience and positioning within the community to be the organization to carry out such an ambitious set of activities.

Since 1994, DWEJ has been a voice for environmental justice in Michigan. We have realized that while advocacy is necessary, a demonstration of what can work is equally important. We hope that our concept for doing business differently will serve as a model for other regions looking for solutions to similar challenges. Today we have an opportunity to combine the principals of environmental justice with the best practices of development and sustainable business. We hope that the initiative will not only transform how environmental justice advocates do their work but more importantly, how community development practitioners do their work as well.

The project's success will be exemplified by increased home ownership, increased employment and entrepreneurial opportunity across the city and an infusion of innovative commercial and industrial activity and investment with a smaller environmental “footprint”.