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Planning, Politics and the Media in Detroit

Stephanie Branston

Supervisor: Dr. Roger Keil

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York University
Toronto, ON, Canada

Student Signature _____________ Supervisor Signature_____________

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Foreword

This major paper is being submitted as a partial requirement for the Master in Environmental Studies (planning) degree, York University, Toronto, ON. My plan of study's area of concentration is planning for shrinking cities. Throughout this degree I have had a tremendous interest in shrinking, post-industrial cities, particularly Detroit, and wanted to build upon my knowledge of political economy and planning in a Detroit specific context. My MES coursework, combined with my undergraduate degree in Geography and Urban Studies, as well as the guidance of various professors, has helped me to think critically, not just about planning, but about issues of race, poverty and the intersectionality of these issues.

In addition to my coursework, I have also worked in planning in the private and public sectors, which has helped me to reflect on the profession and I believe has helped to shape my academic work, particularly with an understanding of how local municipal planning works.

In writing my literature review, I reviewed the political, social and economic reasons for urban shrinkage and linked it to a Detroit specific context. Furthermore, I was able to provide a critical analysis of the Detroit Future City Strategic Framework, which is the city's key guiding planning document and vision for Detroit. The second portion of this paper reviewed the mainstream discourse from local, national and a few international news sources, which uncovered a generally uncritical and pro-development narrative of Detroit and it's re-birth. Upon further investigation, a second narrative was uncovered, that of long time Detroit residents who feel they are not being included in the revitalization of the downtown and midtown area of the city.

Abstract

Over the past few decades, Detroit was hit with a number of challenges including deindustrialization and outsourcing, as well as two major riots, which many argue that Detroit never fully recovered from, as social and economic unrest is still prevalent today. More recently, the City of Detroit declared bankruptcy, which was the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history. Detroit is at a crossroads; between the state of Michigan, Wall Street and private developers, with large-scale private investment in the downtown core, which has fuelled rumours in the news of Detroit's comeback. Creative professionals and developers continue to take interest in the city, in search of a new frontier, with this narrative being fuelled in part by the media. This paper attempted to uncover competing discourses of development in Detroit, both the mainstream media and local reactions to Detroit's new found coolness.

Introduction

Detroit, affectionately known as "Motown", is one of the founding sites of the automobile industry and has had considerable influence on American culture through the proliferation of music and manufacturing. However over recent decades, Detroit also invokes images of crime, overall urban dysfunction and failure by news sources and Internet. In July 2013, the City of Detroit filed for municipal bankruptcy after a decades long struggle with restructuring, racism and flawed economic policies (Sugrue, 2014; Clement and Kanai, 2015) Detroit's municipal bankruptcy was the largest in U.S. history.

Detroit has declined significantly as one of the global production centres for automobiles and is undergoing efforts to reimagine and distance itself from its past. The Detroit Future City (DFC) strategic framework (2012) has guided Detroit's city planning to encourage private developers and entrepreneurs to invest into the city's downtown and encourage the growth of "education and medical employment (“Eds and Meds”), digital and creative jobs, industrial employment (both traditional and new technologies, large-scale and artisanal, manufacture and processes), and local entrepreneurship" (DFC, 2012, pp. 18). Private development and (re)branding of Detroit as a hip, world class city is an effort to draw affluent residents, entrepreneurs and other creative workers into the core. In 2011, real estate developer, Tony Goldman, who has a long history of real estate speculation[1] stated:

> "I would remake Detroit as the capital of avant garde, the experimental, a city like no other in America. To do that, I'd flood the city with artists,

[1] Mr. Goldman recently passed away, however he leaves a legacy of real estate speculation in Miami and Philadelphia and other "distressed" areas. His website, http://www.goldmanproperties.com/, highlights properties he has "revitalized" through "creative strategies".

> 100,000 artists from all over the world living and working here (Quoting Tony Goldman in Walter Wasacz, 2011)

Goldman envisions the opportunity to attract creative workers and artists, while extracting value from Detroit. In this process, the emerging narrative is implicated in restructuring and exclusion of Detroit's majority black and low-income residents. The opening of a Whole Foods Market, an upscale organic food store, which opened in Midtown Detroit in June 2013, was an effort to cater to the increasing population of affluent, educated new residents. Generally, it is assumed that if you gentrify a community, the benefits will eventually trickle down to the majority of residents and bring about economic development, jobs and safety, however research points to the opposite. Detroit presents a peculiar case of gentrification, as the city is a predominately low density, low-rise city, and much of the historical development, including factories were built in the suburbs. Fishman states that post-1945 America would "appear to be the great age of suburbs" (pp. 78).

In the first section, I have utilized literature pertaining to shrinking cities, as well as examining shrinkage from a political economy and critical urban planning perspective, which provides context for both the historical and current situation in Detroit. The second section engages in a discourse analysis to explore the intersections of gentrification, race, class and planning in Detroit.

This paper examines how news media, specifically online news and planning sources use language to depict Detroit and gentrification in relation to race, class, urban planning, the ideology behind creative, entrepreneurial city building strategies, and what meanings and practices are embedded in this discourse. I focus on the time period from

2008 to present, which represents a tumultuous time for Detroit, including the much-publicized bankruptcy of Detroit. Furthermore, this time period includes the introduction of a plan to deliberately shrink Detroit, which has largely been applauded by the media and planning experts.

Using news media highlights both the intentional and unintentional role that journalism plays in forming public opinion. Typically, media narratives of gentrification view the "gentrifiers" as pioneers who are saving troubled communities and are in the best interest for everyone involved. However, local activist groups speak a different story, one of exclusion and displacement in Detroit's gentrifying neighbourhoods. Detroit is in a period of change, and this paper will attempt to offer a critical analysis of planning and gentrification, as well as uncover competing discourses and what sort of city is emerging.

Literature Review

1.1 Why Shrinkage?

During Detroit's heyday of the Fordist economy, the city's population peaked at nearly 2 million, which made it the fifth largest city in the U.S. (Sugrue, 2014; Pedroni, 2011; Eisinger, 2014) and attracted workers from across the U.S. in search of the American Dream, particularly Blacks from the South that escaped from oppressive Jim Crow laws. Even with slightly improved race relations than the South, as well as good paying jobs, Detroit has always been a segregated city. However, the city has also been a historically important city for African Americans, as during the 1950s, Detroit had the

largest number of black owned businesses in the U.S., and today, it has some of the highest rates of black home ownership in the U.S. (Sugrue, 2014). It was during the 1950s that Detroit entered a period of population decline which was largely due to political, economic and social changes including deindustrialization, suburbanization and global economic restructuring (Pedroni, 2011, Garreau, 1991; Sugrue, 2014). Detroit has experienced sustained population loss and subsequent disinvestment, with the current population sitting at just under 700,000 (Sugrue, 2014, Pedroni, 2011).

There has been much media coverage surrounding Detroit's population loss, including a 2010 article from Time Magazine entitled "*Detroit's Beautiful, Horrible Decline*" which documented the city's iconic abandoned buildings, streets and schools and focused attention on the city's crime, unemployment and poverty. Galster (2012) reports that Detroit lost two-thirds of its businesses between 1972 and 2002, and of the over 300,000 manufacturing jobs the city had in 1947, only 27,000 remained by 2011. The results of this crisis are apparent in the city's physical landscape, with abandoned buildings and homes, in which vacant land comprises nearly 15 percent of the city (Eisinger, 2015). While this paper focuses on a media discourse of Detroit's purported revitalization, it is important to examine the shrinkage of Detroit and to identify the underlying causes, as many cities around the world are undergoing a process of shrinkage (Friedrichs, 1992; Hollander et al., 2006; Oswalt, 2005; Oswalt and Rieniets, 2006, Rieniets, 2009).

In the US and Europe many cities, industrial cities in particular, have undergone rapid change, including suburbanization, deindustrialization and other political and economic restructuring that has contributed to shrinkage (Oswalt, 2005; Harvey, 1978;

Hollander et al., 2006, Rieniets, 2009). While shrinkage is not a new concept, Polèse and Shearman (2006) argue that in industrial nations that are characterized by historical core-periphery relationships "scope and duration of the decline will, in coming decades, occur on a scale unknown to the past" (pp. 24). According to the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN), the definition of a shrinking city is:

> "A densely populated urban area with a minimum population of 10,000 residents that has faced population losses in large parts for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of a structural crisis" (Wiechmann 2007 in Hollander, 2009: 5).

While this definition may appear broad, it provides a good framework from which to begin analyzing shrinkage. Lastly, for the sake of clarity, I use "shrinkage" or "shrinking city" to describe the process of population loss, decline, and social services and infrastructure disinvestment.[2]

While Detroit has haemorrhaged people and jobs, the Metropolitan area has grown considerably and contains some of the most affluent suburbs in the U.S., leading to a highly unequal landscape. Thomas (2013) and Sugrue (2014) suggest that discriminatory labour and housing policy, along with political corruption and NIMBYISM have contributed to the shrinkage and unequal landscape of Detroit today. Neil Smith (2008) discusses uneven development, which he argues is a hallmark of capitalism. Both Smith (2008) and Martinez-Fernandez (2012) state that it is becoming increasingly difficult for shrinking cities to find a place in the hyper-competitive, global market and that there are growing disparities between regions with high growth and

[2] I also use shrinkage/shrinking city as opposed to decline, as it sounds more neutral and less stigmatizing.

regions that have experienced shrinkage (Martinez-Fernandez, 2012; Sassen, 2002; Smith, 2008). Smith (2008) explains this:

> *The point is that uneven development is the hallmark of the geography of capitalism. It is not just that capitalism fails to develop evenly, that due to accidental and random factors the geographical development of capitalism represents some stochastic deviation from a generally even process. The uneven development of capitalism is structural rather than statistical."* (pp.4)

Smith (2008) suggests that the system creates unevenness even within itself, yet is also reflected in social and economic inequality, which is a defining feature in the urban-suburban dichotomy in the Detroit Metropolitan Region.

1.2 Divided Detroit: Suburbanization

In the U.S., suburban development has been cited as a major cause of urban shrinkage[3] and the solution to capitalist over-accumulation (Hayden 2003; Harvey, 1978). Harvey (1985) states that, "… the social unrest of the 1930s pushed the Bourgeoisie to adopt a policy of individual homeownership for the more affluent workers as a means to ensure social stability" (pp. 127). Moreover, Hayden (2003) states that the Federal Government encouraged developers to sell houses as if they were everyday consumer goods, but to leave to cost of public works to local (urban) taxpayers.

Expanded mobility, such as increased automobile usage and heavily subsidized freeway construction, along with U.S. Housing Act of 1949, which promoted and subsidized homeownership amongst the white, middle class, led to a massive exodus of

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[3] Suburban development is linked to urban shrinkage in the U.S., however not so much in Europe. European cities experiencing shrinkage has been due to political upheaval, including the reunification of East/West Germany (Rieniets, 2009).

(white) families to the periphery (Fishman, 1987; Harvey, 1978). Interestingly enough, suburban areas in Detroit have historically been important to the city, as the original Ford Motor Company was located outside of official Detroit City limits in the neighbouring cities of Highland Park and Dearborn. However, suburban housing was largely limited to whites through Federal housing policies and banking practices, including redlining, which prevented Blacks from living in suburban communities (Sugrue, 2014; Eisinger, 2014). As Detroit's suburban population grew more affluent and white, Detroit largely became a poorer, black city, which was the catalyst for two major riots that Sugrue (2014) argues that Detroit never fully recovered from. The growth of suburbia altered the social landscape and contributed to the decline of the inner city; while the suburbs flourished, the inner city decayed (Beauregard, 2003; Fishman, 1987; Harvey, 1978). Beauregard (2003) asserts that "white flight" occurred after the migration of African Americans from the south to the north:

> "Racial fears and suburbanization have been two of the most important factors in post-war central city population loss. The two became linked, with blacks blocked from moving to the suburbs by racial discrimination and confined to central cities in disproportionate numbers, often isolated in ghettos" (pp. 685).

Galster (2012) examines the growth of suburbia in the Detroit Metropolitan region and exposes Michigan's propensity towards exclusionary housing policies and resistance to fair housing laws. The vast majority of federally subsidized, low-income housing was located in the City of Detroit, which was a major impediment to black suburbanization (Galster, 2012; Eisinger, 2014). Galster states, the result is a "racially divided, jagged topography of inequality that is one of the region's defining

characteristics[4]" (pp. 60). Furthermore, Michigan's "Home Rule" policy enacted in 1909 stipulates that each town and city assumes their own responsibility for taxation, housing, zoning and the ability to form their own independent governments, largely free of state government oversight and provided no incentives for neighbouring municipalities to cooperate (Farley, 2015). This Home Rule policy has created regional fragmentation in the Metro area and hinders regional solutions to regional challenges.

Other academic literature views suburbanization as a phenomenon that has been accomplished at the expense of the inner city, and Beauregard (2006) views suburbanization as "parasitic urbanization". This new paradigm of decentralization of households and businesses preyed on central and industrial cities. Suburbanization according to Beauregard (2006) drained cities of their economic vitality, investment and middle class – much like a parasite – leaving behind the racialized urban poor and high unemployment.

More recently, suburbs have undergone a change from traditional bedroom community to full fledged cities in themselves. Garreau (1991: 3) states that "every single city is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles, with multiple urban cores." The importance and growing economic power of the periphery has not gone unnoticed and many names have been attributed to these peripheral cities: "Technoburbs" (Fishman, 1987); "FlexSpace" (Lehrer, 1994); "Edge Cities" (Garreau, 1991) and "Edge Nodes" (Hayden, 2003). Hayden (2003) states that the reason for the importance of the suburbs is the decentralization of urban job centres to the suburbs. The importance of the suburbs is particularly evident in the Detroit Metropolitan Area, with the City of Detroit loosing

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[4] This uneven urban/suburban divide is evident in many American cities. The recent Ferguson and Baltimore uprisings shed light on racial injustice and unequal cities that have become the defining features of the American Black urban experience.

over a million residents, while subsequently the suburban areas have growth considerably and far outnumbers the inner city population, with most job opportunities and factories being (re)located in suburban regions (Hollander et al., 2006; Oswalt and Rienets, 2006; Eisinger, 2014). Neil (2015) suggests that Detroit's suburbs, lack of regional planning and the lack of tax revenue have been attributed to Detroit's challenges:

> "By 2012 . . . the Detroit suburbs have become the city, in any real sense . . . only six percent of the taxable value of real estate in the tricounty Detroit area can be found in the city itself, while ninety-four percent is in the suburbs . . . .there's no denying that the city has largely been rebuilt out there beyond 8 Mile Road, the city's northern border." (Gallagher, 2013, pp. 15–16 in Neil 2015, pp. 6)

Post-World War II, auto factories decentralized their production facilities to cheaper greenfield sites in the suburbs and out of the Detroit region all together. According to Sugrue (2004) between 1945 -1957, twenty-five manufacturing plants were built in the Detroit Metropolitan area, with none of them being located in the city and this trend continued well into the 1990s and 2000s.

1.3 Globalization and Neoliberal Restructuring

In tandem with white flight and suburbanization, globalization and economic restructuring and a heavy reliance on the auto industry has contributed to Detroit's shrinkage. The growth of industrial capitalism led to the rapid growth of urban industrial cities during the 19th and 20th centuries. It was during this time that cities such as Detroit became centres of global commerce and power, with Detroit being the leader in Fordist mass production of automobiles. During the 1950s and 1960s, economic restructuring and deindustrialization began (Bennett and Bluestone, 1982, Polèse and Shearman, 2006)

and the dominant role of this process is visible in the geographical patterns of shrinkage, which is particularly evident in the U.S. Midwest (Oswalt and Rieniets, 2006). While shrinkage appears to be the antithesis of the capitalist economy, which is growth and profit oriented, Harvey's circuits of capital theory (1985) illustrates the role that capitalism plays in shrinkage and the spatial process that defines it. According to Harvey, growth and profit correspond with investment in a particular location; however locations are not fixed, but rather, operate with fluidity and fluctuate with economic change. The movement and reorganization of capital investment is a "fix" for over-accumulation (Harvey, 1985). This pattern in evident in Detroit's diminishing role as the centre of the auto industry, with production largely being outsourced to Canada and Mexico and wherever else capital finds the most "bang for its buck" in human capital and business friendly practices.

This trend coincides with the product-cycle theory, which suggests that industrial products have a lifecycle made up of four stages: innovation, expansion, maturity, stagnation and decline (Friedrichs, 1992: 908). According to Friedrichs (1992) and Harvey (1973) these stages often coincide with urban building booms, followed by over-investment and subsequent devaluation – "boom and bust" cycles. Once in the state of over-accumulation (stagnation/decline stage) the drive for new sources of profit leads to investment being directed elsewhere. This "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1942) denotes a "process of industrial mutation… that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one… this process of creative destruction is the essential part about capitalism (Schumpter, 1942, pp. 83). As innovation brings profit and continuous technological change, the drive for further profit

(and avoidance of stagnation) enhances the movement of capital from one region to another.[5]

In Detroit, the loss of manufacturing, which was the backbone of the city's economy, has arguably played a large part in its shrinkage. Economic restructuring and the rise of neoliberal policy has been characterized by the deregulation of markets and financial systems, the emergence of the FIRE (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate) economy, the erosion of the welfare state and entrepreneurial, "business-friendly" practices (Harvey, 1987; Harvey, 1990; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Martinez-Fernandez, 2012). Castells (2000) characterizes this process as a global phenomenon. He suggests that globalization has been facilitated by a number of global changes:

- Mobility of labour (Castells, 2000)
- Outsourcing and international production processes (Castells, 2000; Peck and Tickell, 1994)
- Emergence of a global market and trade (Castells, 2000)

Peck and Tickell (1994) suggest that outsourcing was a tactic used to overcome the economic crisis related to consumption and production in Western societies. Eisinger (2014) also suggests that Detroit's strong reliance on the auto industry, an industry prone to boom and busts, played a part in the predicament the city finds itself in today, as the FIRE economy only comprises approximately 10 percent of Detroit's total employment (McDonald, 2014).

[5] This movement of capital is particularly evident in the rust-belt/sun-belt dichotomy in the U.S.

1.4 Neoliberalism and Planning in Detroit

Hollander et al (2006) found that while urban shrinkage is a widespread occurrence, planners have little background, experience and are only beginning to comprehend and examine ways in which to respond. Hollander states:

> "In particular, (planners) need to overcome their aversion, usually induced by the growth oriented wider culture they operate in, to the very idea of shrinkage… they believe it means a pessimistic, unhealthy acceptance of decline, but planners are in a unique position to reframe decline as an opportunity, a chance to re-envision cities and to explore non-traditional approaches to their growth at a time when cities desperately need them" (pp. 5).

Conventional U.S. planning for shrinking cities generally focuses on city centre revitalization, how to attract people and manage growth – even in the case where population growth is highly unlikely. Rieniets (2009) explains that shrinkage is seen as a symptom of failure and that urban growth is associated with prosperity, which is why planning developed a relationship with continuous growth. This relationship, spawned from the industrial revolution, has roots in North America, and Leo and Anderson (2006) state, "the settlement of the west and industrial revolution were marked by boosterism, as cities competed for investment" (pp. 169). Evidently this is still the current practice, where civic leaders from shrinking cities continue to advocate for pro-growth policies at the expense of their cities and residents (Leo and Anderson, 2006).

According to Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012) cities that have experienced rapid growth are perceived as successful, desirable and are admired. However, by implication, residents of slow growing or shrinking cities see themselves as residing in places with low worth. This perception of place has guided policy-makers to think globally when trying to (re)develop their cities. Jacobs (2009) suggests that globalization, in tandem

with state neoliberalism, has forced cities to "sell" themselves to transnational capital. Jacobs states:

> "Many of the most important governing functions have been rearticulated at the city-region level, transforming urban agglomerations into the new spaces of capitalist accumulation. Regions that have pursued innovative strategies have enhanced their competitive advantage and experienced growth, while those who have not, have experienced decline" (pp. 149)

Several scholars have identified neoliberal changes in city building. The "urban regime theory" (Fainstein, 1982, 1991) and the "Growth Machine" (Logan and Molotch, 1987, 2007) suggest that during the 1970s and 1980s, the state's power over planning began to decline and developers, and other political elites largely drive the urban development process (Fainstein, 1983, 1991; Orr and Storker, 1994; Smith, 2008; Harvey, 1985, 1989, 2005; Logan and Molotch, 1987, 2007, Neil, 2015). Evidence from Detroit reinforces these theories with political regimes partnering with developers, corporations and philanthropists which have aided in financing redevelopments, strategic plans and downtown renewal during the 1970s and 1980s, and in particular, Detroit's new strategic framework, Detroit Future City (2012).

During the 1960s, downtown redevelopment was a tactic used by both government and private investment as a way to counter the rapid shrinkage and a number of big ticket strategies, such as a new civic centre and Cobo Hall, which was touted as the world's largest convention centre, were constructed. Neil (2015) states that this "facility was promoted in a 1964 Detroit guide book as a symbol of the new Detroit" (pp. 7).

In 1973, Coleman Young became the first African American mayor of Detroit and remained in power until 1993. Young had been criticized for being an aggressive and

profane leader, and for his racially divisive politics that exacerbated white flight.[6] However, McDonald (2014) and Neil (2015) assert that Young's mayoral tenure coincided with the urban crisis[7] that plagued nearly all northern American cities and suburban racism. Young, who emerged from the political left, provides an example of problematic modes of planning and growth. Young's administration increasingly turned away from communities that contained the majority of their constituents and adopted a renewal scheme for downtown. Young was able to quickly attract powerful figures from the private corporate elite to involve themselves in the renewal projects (Orr and Stoker, 1994). Increasingly austere federal funds were allocated to projects downtown as well as redevelopment deals and tax cuts for large corporations (Clement and Kanai, 2015). This strategy was met with very limited success and Orr and Stoker (1994) conclude that:

> "The refurbishment of portions of the central business district brought small successes, but on the whole failed to counter significantly the ongoing trends of decentralization and disinvestment." (Darden et al. (1987) in Orr and Stoker, 1994)

During the tough economic times of the 1980s, the Detroit Strategic Plan emerged, which focused on crime, education, jobs, economic development and the city's image, was led by local elites, namely the head of banks, local utilities and backed by the municipal government. While the plan included civic betterment, economic development, education and race relations, economic "efficiency" was encouraged (Orr and Stoker, 1994). Orr and Stoker (1994) outline the controversial plan, which included the underrepresentation of black organizations and women's groups and instead, the powerful corporate leadership. It was estimated 76 million would be required to

[6] White flight denotes the massive exodus of whites to the suburbs.

[7] Refers to the complex and interrelated issues of neoliberalism, austerity, globalization, segregation and racism. Arguably, this is not a new crisis for Black and Latino communities in the U.S.

implement various projects; however by 1990, $2.5 million (USD) had been spent as there was inadequate buy-in from both local residents and corporate interests (Orr and Stoker, 1994).

In the 1990s, Detroit continued with its reimaging and downtown redevelopment with the opening of the Greektown Casino, sports stadiums, all of which were enticed by lucrative tax incentives and private sector investment. Neil (2015) asserts that centre-city redevelopment has failed and continues to fail in turning the city around, and that the reality is that Detroit could not build its way out of shrinkage by neglecting the wider development of the city. Detroit's limited resources were so tied into redevelopment deals downtown, that it paved the way for low-income, segregated neighbourhoods to essentially collapse.

Eisinger (2015) discusses the various "visions" of Detroit's future from the 1960s to present, wherein he suggests that none of these were official plans, nor were they formally articulated. Eisinger states:

> "These visions took form and became apparent through the pronouncements and promises of the city's political and civic leaders and through the large and small initiatives of its developers, business elites, local entrepreneurs, and neighborhood activists. Some were implicit; others explicit. Each reimagined a city that would emerge from the devastation of industrial disinvestment and severe racial conflict to become, alternatively, a "world class city," a tourist destination, or the vibrant center of a prosperous metropolitan region." (Eisinger, 2015, pp. 108)

Clement and Kanai (2015) suggest that private investment and entrepreneurialism have been, and continue to be the focus of local policy-making in the U.S. The consequences of this model, mixed with racial tension have aided in the continuation of Detroit's shrinkage. Lastly, Ryan (2012) argues that Detroit never had the capacity or desire to develop realistic planning and housing policy and states, "when left to their own

devices, cities such as Detroit simply answered the wishes of the loudest and most powerful voices" (pp. 184).

In 2012, the state treasurer notified Governor Snyder that Detroit was teetering on insolvency, which prompted the city to enter into an agreement whereby municipal employees were laid off, wages were cut and essential services reduced drastically – including fire and police services. Despite drastic cuts, by 2013 they were deemed insufficient and bankruptcy lawyer Kevyn Orr was appointed Emergency Manager. With the City of Detroit no longer in control, Orr examined the city's finances and determined the city was billions in debt and could not come close to repaying creditors. Negotiations with creditors deteriorated and Orr, with support from Governor Snyder, filed for municipal bankruptcy – and Detroit became the largest American city to be granted bankruptcy in U.S. history (Sugrue, 2014; Farley, 2015; Montgomery, 2015).

1.5 Austerity, Gentrification and the Detroit Future City Plan

During the 2008 financial crisis, Detroit faced one of the most challenging periods in the city's history, with skyrocketing unemployment, and the city's main industry, General Motors and Chrysler, saw their shares plummet which led to government bailouts (Sugrue, 2014). Abandonment, coupled with increasing poverty, unemployment and austerity have led Detroit's local government to experiment with creative city strategies. By 2000, one-third of Detroit's land was unused and abandoned (approximately 20 sq. miles) which forms an arc around the city's relatively populated midtown and downtown area (Kirkpatrick, 2015). The city's response to this shrinkage and abandonment is known as "rightsizing", which represents urban policy that shifts

resources away from the least “viable” parts of the city into areas considered viable for development (Kirkpatrick, 2015). In February of 2010, Mayor David Bing (a former NBA star and multi-millionaire business man) announced his controversial plan to downsize Detroit and close down the most blighted parts of the city, which was influenced by the Obama administration’s urban policy, *Strong Cities, Strong Communities,* which includes large-scale demolition and planned shrinkage (Pedroni, 2011, Montgomery, 2015, Sugrue, 2014). By September 2013, the Obama administration announced that it would give $300 million (USD) in federal grants to assist in paying for demolition of abandoned properties, approximately 70,000 structures (Sugrue, 2014). During this time, the White House created the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force[8], with Quicken Loans billionaire, Dan Gilbert, as the co-chair. According to Hackworth (2015), this planning paradigm has been applied to shrinking cities in North America and Europe. It is proposed by planners that by “rightsizing” the city into centralized development cores, it will promote adequate and fiscally affordable services (Hackworth, 2015; Hollander, 2009). According to Schatz (2013), Youngstown, Ohio was the first municipality to formally adopt rightsizing as a way of planning for decline. The *Youngstown 2010* document was a departure from traditional growth oriented planning, but has garnered mixed reactions from academia and the public (Hackworth, 2015; Schatz, 2013). Yet despite this, within a few years of Youngstown implementing rightsizing policies, several Michigan cities began adopting this framework, including Flint, Saginaw and Detroit (Hackworth, 2015). Hackworth (2015) states that while

[8] The Blight Removal Task force was the guiding framework, which created a narrowly focused strategy of demolition. http://report.timetoendblight.org/

rightsizing has parallels with urban renewal[9] schemes from the mid-20th century, he suggests that at its most basic level, rightsizing resembles "something more akin to barely varnished austerity urbanism" (pp. 769) and is linked to the reduction in services in Detroit's areas deemed non-viable. Furthermore, Hackworth (2015) suggests that rightsizing was implemented during the austerity movement, in tandem with the 2008 recession.

Beginning in 2010, planners, residents, community groups, business leaders and other interested parties spent 24 months and "hundreds of meetings, 30,000 conversations, connecting with people over 163,000 times, over 70,000 survey responses and comments from participants, and countless hours spent dissecting and examining critical data about our city" (Detroit Works, 2012, pp. 3) to come up with the Detroit Future City Strategic Framework (DFC), a 50 year vision for Detroit. The DFC touts this framework as being inclusive and incorporates the viewpoints and visions from all Detroiters. Moreover, the DFC is not an official plan, but a vision that the city strives for, which divorces leaders from any accountability if the reality does not live up to the stated vision and systemic change.

The framework states:

> "The Detroit Strategic Framework marks the first time in decades that Detroit has considered its future, not only from a standpoint of land use or economic growth, but in context of city systems, neighborhood vision, the critical question of vacant land and buildings, and the need for greater civic capacity to address the systemic change necessary for Detroit's success." (Detroit Future City, 2012)

[9] According to Harvey (1989) urban renewal refers to the period from the mid-20th century when urban development was guided by high economic growth and the demolition of low-income public housing – many of which were never re-built or replaced.

The DFC framework acknowledges that Detroit's population and infrastructure has declined significantly, takes into account that the city will likely never regain its peak population of two million, and emphasizes the need for a smaller scale. It provides a preliminary investigation of the serious challenges that the city faces including unemployment, poverty, crumbling infrastructure, access to food, environment and transit. Furthermore, the DFC lists a number of actions that it states are imperative for the city to take:

1. "We must re-energize Detroit's economy to increase job opportunities for Detroiters within the city and strengthen our tax base" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

2. "We must support our current residents and attract new residents" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

3. "We must use innovative approaches to transform our vacant land in ways that increase the value and productivity and promote long-term sustainability." (DFC, 2012, pp. 15)

4. "We must use our open space to improve the health of all Detroit's residents" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

5. "We must promote a range of sustainable residential densities" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

6. "We must focus on sizing the networks for a smaller population, making them more efficient, more affordable, and better performing" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

7. "We must realign city systems in ways that promote areas of economic potential, encourage thriving communities, and improve environmental and human health conditions" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

8. "We must be strategic and coordinated in our use of land" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

9. "We must promote stewardship for all areas of the city by implementing short- and long-term strategies."

10. "We must provide residents with meaningful ways to make change in their communities and the city at large" (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

11. “We must pursue a collaborative regional agenda that recognizes Detroit’s strengths and our region’s shared destiny” (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

12. “We must dedicate ourselves to implementing this framework for our future” (DFC, 2012, pp. 15).

At first glance, the DFC framework appears comprehensive, yet problems lie in what it omits, particularly when it comes to racial inequities. According to Safransky (2014), in the nearly 350-page document, the DFC only invokes the concept of Detroit’s racial economic disparity six times. Safransky (2014) states (quoting local Detroit law professor, Peter Hammer) “reading the report, law professor Peter Hammer ironically observed, one would think Detroit’s most pressing issue is storm water mitigation” (pp. 239). Furthermore, is interesting to note that the black input only represented 42 percent of responses for the DFC, in a city that is 85 percent black (Montgomery, 2015).

The framework came in tandem with both Mayor Bing's proposal to downsize Detroit, as well as Obama's federal urban policy of demolition and downsizing of "distressed" cities; yet was also endorsed and funded by powerful private interests including the Bank of America, Deutsche Bank, Ford Foundation, Kellogg, Kresge and J.P. Morgan. The DFC plan articulates a vision of a smaller, greener city, complete with urban farming and reforestation. The DFC outlines several rightsizing land use areas by labeling certain areas as, for example, "innovation ecological" and "innovation productive" with these ecological areas being turned to forest and prairie. It articulates framework zones (see Fig. 1, appendix), and categorizes neighbourhoods in three categories: high, moderate and low vacancy. The downtown area is added as its own zone and even though it suffers from high vacancy, as it "enjoys strong market characteristics and thus qualifies for funding where other high-vacancy areas do not" (Kirkpatrick, 2015,

pp. 266). Approximately 20 percent of Detroit's land area has been mapped as ecological (see Fig. 2, appendix). Furthermore, the DFC proposes to coordinate city services and divides the city into areas: "Upgrade and Maintain" (which corresponds to the downtown area); and "replace, repurpose or decommission" which is in reference to high-vacancy neighbourhoods (see Fig. 3, appendix). The premise behind this ranking system, according to the DFC is "the city's main systems were planned for a larger city with a heavier load of industrial activity than Detroit has today" (DFC, 2012, pp. 161).

The DFC promotes abandonment of high vacancy areas through the deliberate discontinuation to vital city services such as utilities, fire and police (Pedroni, 2011, Montgomery, 2015). The DFC states:

> "Detroit has large, centralized infrastructure systems that were designed to support a population of at least 2 million, with large areas of heavy industry. As a result, today's Detroit has systems that are oversized for the current population and are no longer aligned with where people and businesses now reside or will likely be in the future." (DFC, 2012, pp. 11)

Residents in these high vacancy neighbourhoods will be encouraged to leave through subsidized purchase offers, however Montgomery (2015) states that nearly 88,000 Detroiters live in low vacancy neighbourhoods and are at the highest risk of service cuts and displacement. While the DFC articulates that residents may remain in areas slated for demolition and reforestation Kirkpatrick (2015) argues that it is difficult to understand how displacement and/or forced removal will be averted in this process. The DFC's answer to this is rather murky, and while it speaks of providing residents with "choice", for people living in high vacancy neighbourhoods, there does not appear to be much choice – move out or survive on your own.

The DFC has a strong focus on economic development and heavily promotes this through entrepreneurialism and attracting creative professionals and college graduates to work and live in Detroit. Current development is concentrated in approximately 5 percent of the city's land area, and has already attracted investment from various corporations, including Quicken Loans, Blue Cross Blue Shield Michigan and Compuware (Montgomery, 2015; Farley, 2015). While this represents good news for the city's tax revenue, very few of these workers reside in the city of Detroit (Eisinger, 2015). Furthermore, this investment benefits highly skilled workers and does not address the high poverty and lack of educational opportunities for residents outside of the core. Much of the development occurring in Detroit falls between a few wealthy developers, and their visions do not necessarily serve the interests for people who do not utilize the downtown area. One particular developer, Dan Gilbert, had been the dominant force in re-shaping downtown Detroit, and has invested $1.3 billion in over 60 properties, including subsidizing the Detroit Police Department with state of the art surveillance systems downtown (Eisinger, 2015). While Gilbert's investment into downtown has been highly successful, with a 97 percent occupancy rate for condo buildings, Eisinger (2015) points out that, projects of this scale have typically involved a public-private partnership and are subject to community meetings and planning approval, yet Gilbert has not involved the public, city hall or residents and "has not been accountable to anyone" (pp. 112). The assumption is that these improvements will "trickle down", however the city has not allocated any affordable housing or local hiring to Gilbert's projects (Eisinger, 2015; Montgomery, 2015). It is clear that renewal and gentrification is occurring in the downtown core, as well as increasing numbers of educated whites. Farley (2015) states:

> "Gentrification will contribute to greater inequality and polarization…and the racial distinction between the gentrified 5 percent of Detroit and the low-income 95 percent will be great." (pp. 130)

Marcuse (1986) views gentrification in two ways, including the physical and economic effects of gentrification such as displacement from rent increases and increasingly unaffordable commercial development, and these are very obvious and tangible consequences. However, Marcuse goes on to describe the less obvious and more insidious effects of gentrification and displacement in the form of exclusion by an increasingly hostile environment for residents who do not "fit" with the culture and values of new residents.

On the surface the DFC does not seem to be growth oriented. Rightsizing appears to be the opposite of "the Growth Machine" (Logan and Molotch, 1987), yet Montgomery (2015) states that its "network resembles growth coalitions in areas of the city with market potential" (pp. 3). Moreover, this type of neoliberal urban development reflects what Harvey (1985) describes as a "spatial fix" through a process called accumulation by dispossession. What this entails is a (re)investment into the built environment for further capital accumulation and that Detroit's "spatial fix" is also a "racial fix" (Pedroni, 2011; Eisinger, 2003).

Detroit's political and corporate leadership strive to reposition and rebrand the city as a hub of technology and tourism, and attracting capital investment is a top priority (Eisinger, 2003; Pedroni, 2011; Montgomery, 2015). While the framework makes mention of equity and systemic change, it still works within a neoliberal framework and has opened the doors for a flood of private investment. The DFC gives the illusion of progress, as the city builds an image to break away from its past. The Detroit "brand" has

a particular appeal and is a common place-making strategy to attract capital and creative workers to the city – a strategy supported and encouraged by the DFC. In a 2014 UK newspaper article from *The Guardian* entitled "Detroit: the bankrupt city turned corporate luxury brand, author Rose Hackman discusses Detroit as a "brand" in terms of grittiness and authenticity and quotes new creative workers living and working in the downtown area:

> "I love Detroit," Stevens says, after declaring how depressing he finds the idea of suburbs. "Detroit is full of heritage and history. I came for its grittiness. It's full of culture – old Americana culture… To an advertiser's eye, Detroit is cool. Gritty. Tough. Resilient. Authentic in its struggle. True in its American spirit of hard, honest work, ruins and all." (Rose Hackman, 2014).

This type of rebranding plays into feelings of nostalgia for whites, celebrating American exceptionalism, Detroit's industrial past and presents a masculinized landscape of a tough, gritty city. While the article makes brief mention of Detroit's segregated, inequitable past, it pushes forward this rebranding strategy. Looking further into this city building strategy, the opportunity to extract value from the city fuels the desire of the creative class to live in a dense, urban area, but for a fraction of the cost. Detroit is framed as a low risk investment (Pedroni, 2011), coupled with an abundance of abandoned, low cost buildings and storefronts, unmonitored landscape, the city is coined as the "perfect" place for artists and entrepreneurs. The idea that the city is a "blank canvass" is appealing to the entrepreneur, and it sparks the notion that Detroit is there for the taking. Furthermore, this discourse plays into a "pioneer" or "frontier" mentality (Eisinger, 2015; Safransky, 2014; Millington, 2013) where change occurs at the individual level. What this uncovers is the American ideology of self-reliance and "pulling yourself up by the bootstraps". Additionally, this ideology views the individual

and state divorced from one another, a sort of wild-west mentality. Eisinger (2015) asserts that these groups are people who "enjoy few external support such as reliable public services or government subsidies as they go about their business" (pp. 112). In other words, people who have the means and privilege to not rely on public services.

1.6 Detroit Future City and Neoliberal Environmentalism

One of the most striking aspects of the DFC is the emphasis on the greening of Detroit, which is unlike other revitalization strategies that generally rebuild on vacant or abandoned land. With reforestation and urban agriculture, the DFC is increasingly pushing Detroit into a "hybrid city" (Millington, 2013), which blurs the lines between city and nature. Montgomery (2015) states, "merging rightsizing with greening, smart decline treats vacancy as an opportunity for creating a new kind of place" (pp. 3). In shrinking cities, excess land is portrayed as a planning problem, and the DFC framework represents a new type of market-oriented, environmental planning. However, it is still rooted in development, gentrification and a frontier narrative, which describes Detroit as empty and underutilized (Kirkpatrick, 2015; Safransky, 2014). In a neoliberal sense, this greening represents the dismantling of Detroit's public infrastructure under the pretense of green urbanism, which opens the doors for privatizing public land and resources.

As discussed briefly in the previous section, the DFC calls for high vacancy lands to be repurposed for green and blue infrastructure including retention ponds, forests and farms. According to Safransky (2014) green infrastructure represents a multipurpose strategy that promises to promote a healthy ecosystem, all while mitigating the effects of

crime and a poor real estate market, which has been adopted across the U.S. from New York to Los Angeles. Detroit is no stranger to urban greening and farming, as during the 1940s, the United Auto Workers (UAW) unsuccessfully attempted to encourage the city to build satellite cities with greenbelts and agriculture (Montgomery, 2015; Thomas, 2013). During the 1970s, Mayor Young started the Farm-a-Lot strategy as a way of providing Detroiters with food security and to tackle the issue of vacant land. However, Montgomery states:

> (1) Greening is a revitalization strategy, not a subsistence plan.
> (2) It is wed to austerity.
> (3) Its private network takes over government functions.
> (Montgomery, 2015: 2)

Jonas and Gibbs (2004) describe the reinvention of post-industrial cities into green cities as a "sustainability fix", similar to Harvey's (1985) "spatial fix" for a crisis in capitalism and describe a similar rebranding and greening in both Manchester and Liverpool, UK. While urban greening is a strategy that Detroit has been playing around with for a number of years, Harvey (2005) states that speculation on land is crucial for increasing growth and investment into post-industrial urban cities. The potential land value in Detroit is the city's greatest asset, and creating a real estate "growth machine" has been the key to "success[10]" in many revitalization projects in the U.S. (Pedroni, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2002). Recently, local venture financier, John Hantz, purchased 40 square miles (approximately 1500 lots) in an attempt to create Hantz Farms[11],[12], an urban farm and forest in Detroit and called for planting 15,000 trees and cleaning up derelict

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[10] By "success", I question success for whom.

[11] http://www.hantzfarmsdetroit.com/

[12] Interestingly enough, when googling Hantz Farms, the second most searched Google search phrase is "Hantz Farms land grab."

structures[13] (Sarah Goodyear, 2013). Hantz President, Mike Score, fashions himself as a saviour of Detroit:

> "Conditions in the neighborhood, Score says, have been dire, with overgrown sidewalks, piles of refuse, feral dogs, and no streetlights. "Most of the sidewalks aren't fit to walk on," he says. "I've actually physically cried before, going to work in the dark, seeing mothers walking their kids to school through unmanaged brush and shoulder-high weeds. To go in there and take away most of the danger from the landscape is so satisfying." (Quoting Mike Score in Sarah Goodyear, 2013).

While many Detroit residents voiced their concerns over Hantz Farms during community meetings, Montgomery (2015) suggests that while community input is encouraged in planning, it is most often ignored in favour of stakeholders with market-oriented ideals and the means to reach these ideals.

Safransky (2014) suggests that cartography has been used to produce "frontiers" by asserting their dominance and control over land and resources such as "planning to tame racial others and their disorderly landscapes"[14] (pp. 239). Furthermore, the idea of vacant land brings about a "settler colonial imagery" (Safransky, 2014) where this type of "discovery" narrative is commonplace in much of the media and planning documents pertaining to Detroit which reveals power structures, as well as notions of race, class and a new type of city building – people from outside of the city, who are attempting to position the city as a niche, or artisanal city, are redefining Detroit through the framework of green urbanism. This rebranding is not neutral, and plays an important role in the process of "geospatial global reorganization" (Pedroni, 2011). The rebranding of Detroit involves a "process of creative destruction that remakes a city physically and

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[13] In a 2013 article from the *The Atlantic,* "A 40-Acre Forest Is About to Materialize in the Middle of Detroit" (Sarah Goodyear, 2013) discusses the planned shrinkage and re-greening of Detroit as a planning strategy.

[14] Hantz Farms website states: "Picture oaks, maples and other high value trees planted in straight, evenly spaced rows". This language really captures the theme of taming disorderly landscapes.

discursively" (Pedroni, 2011). Detroit offers numerous opportunities for neoliberal experimentation through rightsizing and a remaking of white space through dispossession (Pedroni, 2011; Safransky, 2014). With the DFC's utopian conceptions of Detroit's high vacancy neighbourhoods returning to a state of nature as new, clean, liveable and equitable, Pedroni states that, "even urban residents will greet neoliberal occupiers as liberators" (pp. 212).

2. Methodology

This paper focuses on the intersections of urban planning and media narratives of gentrification, race and class in Detroit, and a critical discourse analysis has informed this research. A media discourse analysis has allowed me to explore numerous issues and uncover publicly presented positions of Detroit. The media sources I have utilized include online news publications such as The Detroit Free Press, Huffington Post and The Atlantic[15]. Furthermore, a video series[16] from creative city theorist, Richard Florida, which documents the so-called "rise of Detroit" as well as the documentary *Detropia*[17] (2012)

In the first section, I briefly discussed both global and local reasons for Detroit's shrinkage, systemic racism and the private interests, which are very present in the city's urban development process. Based on this analysis, I explain gentrification related

[15] This list is not exhaustive.
[16] Richard Florida documents the "Rise of Detroit". All installments, complete with video interviews with Florida can be found here: http://www.citylab.com/special-report/detroit-rising/
[17] Detropia, directed by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady documents the planned shrinkage of Detroit and follows three residents over the course of a year. It is heavily focused on the creative "potential" for artists. www.**detropia**thefilm.com/

discourse in three themes including race and class, urban planning practices and neoliberal, creative city and entrepreneurial endeavours. This analysis has been useful in exploring my research questions, as the media influences how we react and critique urban planning practices, as well as issues of race, class and ideology and sheds light on how these practices are reinforced.

In my analysis of online media, international, national and local news sources and magazines, local blogs and video, my particular interest were discourses of race, class, creativity, gentrification and the various metaphors used to describe Detroit, such as "blank slate" or "abandoned". Specifically, news articles for this paper were sourced from my personal twitter feed. Firstly, Twitter was utilized due to the far-reaching audience and the ability to "re-tweet" articles, particularly articles and papers that may not otherwise have a particularly large audience such as local activist papers. Secondly, Twitter has a relatively simple search function, in which "hashtags" can be searched to find relevant articles and commentary. The hashtags searched for the purposes of this paper included:

- #detroitfuturecity, #detroit, #detroitplanning, #detroitgentrification, #detroitcrime, #corktown, #SWDetroit, #movedetroit, #casscorridor, #midtowndetroit

These "tags" provided the opportunity to filter through articles that pertained to my own areas of interest.

Secondly, Twitter uses have the ability to "follow" local, national and international media and popular online planning literature. Moreover, Twitter gave me the opportunity to "follow" various local community groups and to analyze the opposing

viewpoints counter to the mainstream. Some of the main media sources followed included:

- The Detroit Free Press (@detroitfreepress)
- The Huffington Post (@huffpost)
- The New York Times (@nytimes)
- Crain's Detroit Biz (@crainsdetroit)
- MLive (@MLive)
- CityLab, The Atlantic (@citylab)
- Inside Southwest (@InsideSouthwest
- DETROITography (@detroitography)

After finding articles, I was able to code each article into the category it fell into, whether it was local or non-local and whether it pertained to issues of race, gentrification and/or creative spaces. In my experience, I found these categories to overlap significantly.

Most outsiders will only experience Detroit from the mainstream media's accounts, and it may be difficult to see the positive in a city where the image of crime, economic depression and drugs are constantly reinforced by news sources, and accessing non-traditional news sources has the potential to challenge established power structures.

Pavlik (2001) examines technology and the potential to reshape discourse through the Internet, where marginalized voices may be included in the discourse via publically accessible articles. Furthermore, Pavlik (2001) suggests that news consumers are increasingly valuing diverse perspectives, and the Internet is "central to re-engaging an increasingly disturbing and alienated citizenry in a 21st century democracy" (pp. 320).

Detroit has received much public attention, and Hajer (2005) suggests that certain topics receive attention and concern, not merely from analysis, but the socially constructed symbols and experiences that govern how people interpret a particular topic.

In many instances, Detroit has been depicted as an abandoned, crime ridden, post-apocalyptic city, despite the fact there are over half a million residents. The media has fueled this narrative with movies such as Robo-Cop, and also by articles such as Time Magazine, *Detroit's Beautiful, Horrible Decline"* (2010). The article displays haunting photos of Detroit and its abandoned office towers, schools and churches, all of which have become iconic and synonymous with the city. This photo essay, along with other depictions in the media have spurred "ruin tourism", with Detroit attracting much attention, in part to its dysfunction, but also for investors, and urban pioneers who wish to cash in on this niche city. In a 2014 speech[18] on gentrification, actor and director Spike Lee spoke about what he calls "Christopher Columbus Syndrome", which refers to outsiders (commonly white people) learning of a "new" place – a place that has already existed and trumpet their "discovery[19]" Spike Lee states:

> "Then comes the motherfuckin' Christopher Columbus Syndrome. You can't discover this! We been here. You just can't come and bogart. There were brothers playing motherfuckin' African drums in Mount Morris Park for 40 years… Here's the thing: I grew up here in Fort Greene. I grew up here in New York. It's changed. And why does it take an influx of white New Yorkers in the south Bronx, in Harlem, in Bed Stuy, in Crown Heights for the facilities to get better?" (Spike Lee, 2014, in Cascarelli, 2014)

This narrative of "discovery" is commonplace in much of the media pertaining to Detroit, particularly when referencing vacant land and abandoned properties. Lee's statements reveal the unequal access to resources, and local Detroit activists echo Lee's sentiments. Detroit has been stigmatized as a failure and in need of revitalization, and

[18] Spike Lee pointing out the unfairness and hypocrisy was actually touted as a "rant" as opposed to a speech by this author.

[19] Spike Lee was referring to his former neighbourhood in Brooklyn and how gentrification has drastically changed the face of New York. See: http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/02/spike-lee-amazing-rant-against-gentrification.html

many media and planning sources have not critically analyzed the planned shrinkage and view the DFC and related processes It is important to examine this revitalization discourse, as Detroit has significant rates of black homeownership – ownership for people who have historically been denied property rights. According to Pedroni (2011), these neighbourhoods are threatened by this "racial spatial fix" (pp. 213).

The majority of the media portrayal of the DFC, gentrification and other social and physical changes in Detroit had race as the underlying theme, however this was not always explicit. Redevelopment is not just economic or physical, but a way of discursively reimagining Detroit as a white space (Pedroni, 2011). Race relations in Detroit have historically been contentious, and the media's portrayals of black youth have reinforced negative stereotypes. Publishers and editors are the deciding factor in what gets published, and those that are published do not always contextualize or humanize black lives. Van Dijk (2004) defines racist discourse as:

> "A form of discriminatory social practice that manifests itself in talk, text and communication. Together with other (non-verbal) discriminatory practices, racist discourse contributes to the reproduction of racism as a form of ethnic or racial domination. It does so typically by expressing, confirming or legitimizing racist opinions, attitudes and ideologies of the dominant ethnic group" (pp. 351).

Furthermore, Van Dijk (2004) suggests there are two major forms of racist discourse, which includes discourse directed *at* ethnic minorities, and racist discourse *about* ethnic minorities (pp. 351). The discourse uncovered did not speak *at* ethnic minorities, but rather spoke about issues of crime and blight. While racist terms are not used explicitly in media, Harvey (1996) asserts that connotations and associations are built into meaning. Using progressive language in discourse, according to Harvey (1996), is redundant and not sufficient for systemic changes to occur elsewhere.

3. Media and Detroit

The *Detroit Free Press* (*DFP*) was, by far, the main news source used, as it is the city's main newspaper and reports on local news and development. The *DFP* is owned by Gannett, which also publishes *USA Today.* Gannett is a company, which has a history of union-busting and anti-union policies (McChesney, 2005). The *DFP* displays a somewhat conservative editorial policy when it comes to reporting on social and economic development in Detroit. In 2014, the *DFP* endorsed Republican candidate, Rick Snyder for Governor of Michigan[20] (*DFP* Editorial Board, 2014) and has largely spoken positively about development and private investment in the city.

In Detroit, it has and continues to be the belief from city officials that in order for the city to be successful, the downtown and midtown area must be developed. The *DFP* as well as *Crain's Detroit Business* have largely been supportive of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC)[21] by advocating for pro-business policies on behalf of the corporation and for the city. In a 2014 *DFP* article entitled "DEGC chief: Don't derail Detroit's recovery", which highlighted an ordinance, which would require large-scale developers to enter into community benefits agreements, author Tom Walsh sides with the DEGC and argues that community benefits would be detrimental to the city:

> "This would be the absolute worst time to repeat the blunders of past city governments by making it more risky, more complex, more expensive to invest and do business here" (Tom Walsh, Detroit Free Press, 2014).

The DEGC has a rather murky relationship with citizens of Detroit. The 53-member board of directors hold regular meetings, which are not open to the public and is not

[20] Republican Snyder beat out incumbent Democrat in 2011 to become the governor of Michigan.
[21] The Detroit Economic Growth Corporation endorsed to DFC and is a highly prominent non-profit located downtown Detroit that promotes business enterprise and economic development in the core. http://www.degc.org/

subject to public records requests, even though they are funded through tax-payer money (Ryan Felton, 2014). Despite this, the DEGC has helped to bring millions of dollars in investment into the core.

Online print media provides suggestions for the city's problems, which are generally pro-development. Narratives of running the city like a business are often presented as a cure for the city's precarious financial situation. Detroit's newest mayor, Mike Duggan, a former hospital executive and county prosecutor and is the city's first white mayor in 40 years. Mayor Duggan passed a budget in early 2015 that the *DFP* called a "conservative budget" (Christine Ferrietti, 2015) which includes many cost saving initiatives and highlights how street lighting and garbage have already been privatized, which is to save Detroit millions. After elected, when asked whether he was up to the task of running Detroit, Duggan stated:

> "I learned in the hospital business that if you do the basics very well the results will take care of themselves…I think everything's the same… Management is management." (Mike Duggan quoted in Tanvi Misra, 2015).

In early 2015, many citizens in Detroit were left in a precarious position of not being able to afford their municipal water bills, and shut off notices were sent to 39,000 homes. Mayor Duggan had remained adamant that aid could not cover all delinquent accounts without raising the water prices (Guillen and Helms, 2015) and his aggressive policy of shut-offs continued. Local Detroiters voiced their concerns over water affordability, stating that water bills are unaffordable and many low income Detroiters are paying 10 to 20% of their income for water bills (Shea Howell, 2015). Despite this, Duggan raised the issue of delinquent water accounts as a business problem for the utility companies and was quoted saying:

> "Unaffordability of water and sewer services contributes to unpaid bills and the associated collections expenses associated with such unpaid bills." (Mike Duggan, quoted in Shea Howell, 2015).

This narrative of running the city like a business is not limited to local utilities and has encouraged development and private investment into the core, which is one of the stated goals of the DFC. Public-private partnerships have been credited in bringing economic revitalization to the city, with nearly "1-billion in private investment occurring in the riverfront over the past 10 years" (Mark S. Lee, 2015) and bringing in investment and private development into the core could potentially increase tax revenue for Detroit. The pro-business and restructuring is framed as a common-sense solution to the city's financial woes (Nancy Kaffer, 2014; Jamie Dimon, 2015; John Gallagher, 2015; Mark Lee, 2015) and has been credited with revitalizing neighbourhoods and creating a lively downtown and riverfront.

Billionaire investors Mike Illitch, owner of the Detroit Red Wings hockey team and Little Caesars Pizza, along with Dan Gilbert of Quicken Loans, are often spoken of in local media sources; both own a large portion downtown Detroit's buildings. Much of the development that has occurred and continues to occur, including the development of a new hockey district with a new NHL arena from Illitch, has occurred over the past decade from both Illitch and Gilbert. Wayne State University Law professor John Mogk suggests that the impact that Gilbert and Illitch have had in Detroit is unprecedented. Mogk states to the *DFP:*

> "No two individuals have made more major investments in the city… the percentage of property in a major urban core owned or controlled by the two is unprecedented in the U.S." (John Mogk quoted in John Gallagher, July 27, 2014).

The larger pro-development and entrepreneurial narrative has Gilbert and Illitch emerging as embattled heroes or mavericks that are saving Detroit, and is in line with current trends of urban development. The narrative of Detroit being a metaphor for both America's challenges and opportunities for developers, as well as residents is prevalent. Even in the face of systemic inequality, the ingenuity of Detroiters is touted as one of Detroit's greatest assets – those that work hard enough will benefit (Darren Walker and Kofi Appenteng, 2015) which is very much in the spirit of hard working American ideals. Moreover, Mayor Duggan was quoted as saying "every entrepreneur has a little bit of rebel to start with. But those who are real rebels tend to find their way here" (Duggan quoted in Tim Alberta, 2014).

Much of the local media speaks of private investment in the housing market, particularly in the downtown and midtown area, which cannot keep pace with the demand (Sherry Welsh, 2015). Revitalizing iconic properties into lofts and boutique apartments located in historic buildings is attractive to a young, hip and affluent crowd and very much a part of Detroit's development and comeback narrative. John Gallagher of the *Detroit Free Press* has published several articles highlighting the "one-of-a-kind" developments in historic property. However, talk of affordable housing has prompted concern from local developers, who are not in the business of providing the poor with housing, and do not feel that affordable housing is conducive to attractive communities. Local developers are reportedly concerned over a proposed affordable senior complex is the mostly young midtown area. Midtown Detroit Inc.[22] was quoted in *Crain's Business Detroit* (2015) saying, "affordable housing is not what we need to bring back our

[22] Midtown Detroit Inc. is a non-profit planning and development organization that assisted with the rebranding of the midtown area through arts and culture. http://midtowndetroitinc.org/. It is interesting to see the people they chose to represent the faces of Detroit, mostly white, presumably educated, in a majority black city.

neighborhoods" (quoted in Sherry Welch, 2014). Low income Detroiters may apply for the Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG), a federally funded grant program for home repairs. However in December 2014, Mayor Duggan and other city officials have decided to change the CDBG from a grant into a loan. Local resident Joyce Moore submitted a formal complaint, citing the inability to repay loans for many low-income Detroit residents. She stated:

> The purpose of the CDBG funds is to help low to moderate-income citizens through Federal Regulation laws and HUD guidelines. These tax-dollars are very much needed, to be used to help build our blocks, build our neighbourhoods, build our communities and build our city in terms of removing blight, as houses are being demolished as we speak" (Joyce Moore, 2015).

A judge dismissed Moore's case and the program is now considered a no-interest loan program[23] which will be used to go towards home repairs and removal of blight for property that lost value during the recession.

Despite this, Mayor Duggan and the equity ideals of the DFC framework state that affordable housing and neighbourhood choice remain a priority and that positive effects of development will trickle down to all Detroiters (Monica Davey, 2015); displacement and marginalization fears have surfaced as a secondary narrative. Long time Detroit residents have spoken of positive changes for certain parts of Detroit (namely downtown and midtown) but are skeptical as to whether these changes will actually benefit the majority black community (Suzette Hackney, 2014; Keith Owens, 2015). Recently, Dan Gilbert announced his plans to revitalize Brush Park, a historically low-income, black neighbourhood that sits adjacent to several fashionable areas such as Eastern market, downtown and midtown. Several articles have highlighted the proposed mixed-use development, which would target the higher end rental market. John Gallagher

[23] http://www.detroithomeloans.org/

(2015) states in his *Detroit Free Press* article entitled “More Higher-end Apartments planned for midtown Detroit” that this new development “would rise from a vacant lot”. The author invokes images of abandonment, when in fact, there are still people residing in Brush Park. Local Detroit Blogger, Ron Siegal (2015) offers a more critical analysis of this development and argues that racial discrimination has historically been rampant in Brush Park, with forced relocation and terrorism to evict tenants from their homes.

Despite this, there is also talk of how local Detroiters are trying to stop the economic revitalization of their own communities and how gentrification is an inevitable process and overall good for Detroit. Historic buildings that have been neglected and “pillaged by scrappers and vandals” will now be saved and restored to their former glory (John Metcalfe, 2015). Nancy Derringer (Detroit Free Press, 2014) questioned whether there was an alternative to gentrification and stated “change is inevitable… that market can be a cruel mistress, but it cannot be denied”.

Catering to the preferences of young, urban professionals is important for Detroit, and based on the media reports, the city seems to have carved out a gritty brand. The city has marketed its gritty, industrial past in an effort to lure artists and other creative types and is a popular revitalization strategy, which was pushed forward by urban theorist, Richard Florida. Detroit has become trendy in today’s counterculture youth, as well as attracting hip New Yorkers, driven out by the high prices of Manhattan and Brooklyn to the affordability and authenticity of Detroit. Emily Jupp (2015) invokes metaphors of gentrification by using Detroit’s motto “Seramus meliora, resurget cineribus” (we hope for better things; we will rise from the ashes). Articles highlighting Detroit’s growing popularity for artists came with several narratives. Locally, articles highlighting the

rebranding and creative strategies in creating a "Silicon Valley type of economy" (Tanvi Misra, 2015) disclose the practice of planning with creative branding strategies.

Outside of Detroit, from both a national and international perspective, Detroit has established itself as an artisanal brand with start-ups, hip coffee houses and boutique shops, such as locally owned and operated, Shinola[24] where a custom, artisanal copper single-speed bike sells for $4,400 (Jen Wieczner, 2014). Much of the reporting involves interviewing people that have moved to Detroit, who speak of how the city is inspiring, exciting and invokes metaphors of blank canvass – a canvass for the artist to recreate the city and for the art itself. Former Brooklyn artist Robert Elmes, who recently relocated to Detroit, stated "I came here thinking I might help same Detroit, and instead it saved me" (quoted in Jennifer Conlin, 2015).

Crime and safety issues represent one of the main concerns in Detroit, and are often referenced by local and non-local media. References to violence and crime such as "America's crime capital" have been used to talk about crime and the city's above average murder rate. However, indirectly, demolition of blight is cited as safety measure that the City of Detroit has taken to protect citizens from crime and an effort to make the city more appealing. The Blight Removal Task Force, as well as city officials suggest that revival of Detroit is partly based on blight removal, which is considered key stabilizing neighbouroods and removing undesirable elements such as crime and squatters. Recently a property owner was brought to court due to his negligence of duplex near Indian Village, one of Detroit's more stable neighbourhoods (Matt Helms, 2015) and the city appears to be cracking down on property owners with dilapidated property. Non-local

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[24] A luxury Detroit brand that sells a number of local artisanal products, including $4400 bikes http://www.shinola.com/

stories of crime and blight in Detroit often implicate desperate looters that steal copper pipes and wiring, squatters as well as squatters and cite the "third world" within the U.S. borders.

A common narrative, particularly from non-local media sources speak of safety in terms of dystopian landscapes:

> "Shut off behind a fence of razor wire, the city's grandiose Michigan Central Station looks haunted and savage, as dystopian as the exclusion zone around Chernobyl, as unsettling as the pedestal of Shelley's Ozymandias" (Marcel Theroux, 2015).

This dystopian narrative is good for Detroit, as it adds to the "brand" and is appealing for a particular subset of the population. Yet it also highlights the narrative of abandonment and "blank slate" that artists and investors are looking for. The narrative of vacant land has brought about interest in urban farming and other greening strategies and Detroit is seen as somewhat of an "epicentre" for urban farming. Successful green entrepreneurs have come to Detroit and have set up profitable farming operations due to the abundance of vacant land and the proximity to cultural amenities. Hantz Farms, which is owned by wealthy, local venture financier, John Hantz, is the largest farm in Detroit. The farm has demolished a number of blighted homes and has plans to plant up to 15,000 trees. However, this farm was not without controversy, as many Detroiters saw this as a land grab:

> "I think it opens the gateway for other rich folks to come here to buy up land and essentially make themselves rich compounds" (Quoting Kate Devlin, in Sands, 2012).

However, Hantz farms, as well as other farms are promoted as an environmentally friendly way to remove blight, provide jobs and to reimagine and repurpose the land.

4. Discussion

Detroit has become highly visible in magazines, blogs and newspapers with images of the city's abandoned buildings and stories of crime, blight and crumbling infrastructure. With images and stories highlighting these topics, much of the mainstream media paints a picture of a socially and economically distressed city in desperate need of repair and revitalization, and much of the media, both local and national, highlight the "positive" influence of new residents and investment into the downtown area. Urban farming and creative workers are brought together and the city itself becomes a metaphor through which to construct a narrative of renewal. Much of the media coverage regarding Detroit has a shiny veneer and has helped to construct imagery of a down-and-out city that is on the rise, a place where anything is possible. Interestingly, Detroit is often spoken of as a single entity, even though it lies at the centre of a large metropolitan region, and there is no mention of cooperation or reconciliation between the city and mostly affluent suburbs.

The city has an aesthetic value in terms of history and architecture, and the ability to (re)invent the city and one's self have been the key in how Detroit is represented. However, as John Patrick Leary notes:

> "So much ruin photography and ruin film aestheticizes poverty without inquiring of its origins, dramatizes spaces but never seeks out the people that inhabit and transform them, and romanticizes isolated acts of resistance without acknowledging the massive political and social forces aligned against the real transformation, and not just stubborn survival, of the city" (John Patrick Leary, 2011 in Millington, 2013, pp. 280).

Much of the media coverage has been overwhelmingly positive on the growth and development process in Detroit, yet remains ambiguous when it delves into issues of

poverty and race. The current development process is implicated in displacement and marginalization of low-income and black communities, and the manner in which Detroit is represented has worked to create a new imaginary of the city and has policy implications for planning, social and economic justice. Long time Detroiters are aware of how their city is being represented, and have expressed that they do not feel part of the city's revival. One Detroit resident stated of new residents:

> "They started [comng] back into the city with the New Center area (Woodward and Grand Boulevard area), then inched on down to the theater district. Did you not notice the old warehouses being bought and renovated into expensive lofts? . . . All the waterfront property has been bought or owned since I was 21. . . . All property around the Wayne State area now belongs to the DMC medical financiers. They have been taking back the City of Detroit since before Kilpatrick was put out of office. The only ones that didn't notice were the ones who couldn't see the forest for the trees and the smoke that was put before us. We all need to wake up. Stand up before it really is to late. . . . We should be standing up, looking at what's going on and staying" (Yvonne McCaskill quoted in Alan Stamm, 2015).

Detroit's urban renewal process serves as good news for those that will benefit from a newer, cleaner and safer Detroit. The local media serves as a hegemonic force through optimism in their analysis of development and renewal in Detroit and distorts the discourse. This privileges the dominant viewpoint and works to promote specific interests while silencing or ignoring those that are directly impacted. This grants city officials and media to view those critical of neoliberal urban development as being too sensitive or anti-progress:

> "The horror! Market-rate real estate is worse than Hitler… But, of course, the gentrification narrative in Detroit isn't about displacement or quantifiable demographic change, it's all about feelings" (Jeff Wattrick, 2012).

Of particular interest for this research is the greening of Detroit's vacant lands through urban farming and reforestation. Aside from the neoliberal framework this originates from (as discussed earlier) farming in Detroit has a lurking romanticism with almost utopian ideals. Through the lens of the "growth machine" (Logan and Molotch, 1987) it is possible to see how renewal in the form of farming is an effort to unlock the value of the land in an area that is inhabited by the "wrong" people. Many local residents in the community largely hold this sentiment, yet this is not readily articulated in the mainstream media:

> "I think they're just reclaiming what they feel is theirs anyway.
> Their grandparents left, their parents raised [them] in the suburbs. They're coming back to fill the jobs we weren't trained for. . . .No they're not tryin' to be our neighbors. They know we won't be able to hang in there much longer. Insurance, taxes, utilities will wipe out our incomes." (Ifraj Schkoor, quoted in Alan Stamm, 2015).

The DFC has been the guiding framework behind Detroit's re-branding and the local and national media has promoted the accompanying development behind this framework. However it is problematic for a number of reasons. From a national and international perspective, Detroit has established its brand, with "decay" and "rust belt chic" as well as promoting Chrysler's "Imported from Detroit" slogan[25]. This narrative masks the reality of globalization rhetoric, devalued labour and the contentious history of racism in the auto industry of Detroit. As Ross and Mitchell (2004) point out, the majority of auto plants in the Detroit area were built in mostly suburban, majority white

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[25] This was an ad campaign promoting hard work, conviction and American automobiles. The ad features Detroit rapper Eminem saying "This is the Motor City and this is what we do" referencing producing automobiles. Chrysler world headquarters is not located in Detroit, but rather one of its suburbs, Auburn Hills. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKL254Y_jtc

neighbourhoods and black workers were forced to work longer hours, in more dangerous conditions, and with less job security.

The vast majority of news articles do not reference race or humanize the poor. Rather race is referenced through narratives of crime and blight removal, with metaphors of cutting out metastasized cancer, thus reinforcing the image of a hostile, oppositional and violent black population who are responsible for Detroit's challenges. This narrative is dangerous as it implicates local residents as the cause of their own demise, rather than systemic issues. Many of the metaphors used to speak about Detroit, play into the white and suburban collective imaginary of the black, crime-ridden city, and (un)intentionally criminalizes local residents. Using loaded words such as "dystopian" and "crime capital" reinforces negative stereotypes. Yet, at the same token, these metaphors also fetishize and romanticize the city by invoking the promise of rebirth and renewal. In Detroit, this is undertaken by displacing long time residents through pro-development policies and cleansing itself of blight and violence. This type of discourse adds legitimacy to deeply held racist views. In many ways, the language used renders those who already live in Detroit as irrelevant, "outsiders", not part of the city's new-found coolness and excludes residents from the planning process. While the journalism reminds us, albeit briefly of poverty and history of racism, it continues to push forward the narrative of rebirth.

Conclusion

This paper examined Detroit's shrinkage and recent challenges such as the bankruptcy, and the social and economic disparity that has existed in the city for decades. The DFC framework pushes an agenda of austerity and neoliberal planning, with a shiny

veneer of sustainability and green city building, which is pushing Detroit into the direction of a much smaller, greener and artisanal city. Detroit is at a pivotal point in its (re)development and is slowly carving out a new brand and has slowly developed into an experimental, niche city. While city officials continue to push a pro-development agenda at the expense of low-income and communities of colour, it is pushed forward and funded by federal funds from the Obama administration. Much can be learned from Detroit. While the city presents an extreme example of post-industrial urban shrinkage, it is a testament to systemic racism, and a failed economic system; yet it also highlights the importance of equitable policy and planning.

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A list of Media Sources used

The following were the main media sources used:

- *The Detroit Free Press*
- *Crain's Detroit Business*
- *The New York Times*
- *New York Magazine*
- *Grist*
- *The Atlantic, City Lab*
- *London Evening Standard*
- *Politico*
- *The Guardian*
- *The Michigan Chronicle*
- *The Huffington Post*
- *Jalopnik Detroit*
- *CBS Detroit*
- *Metro Times*
- *Critical Moment*
- *Entrepreneur*
- *The Telegraph*
- *Time*
- *Voice of Detroit*
- *The Irish News*
- *Deadline Detroit*
- *ModelD*
- *MLive*
- *Fortune*

Appendix

Figure 1: Framework Zones

Figure 2: Future open space network

Fig. 3: 20 Year Strategic Renewal Scenario

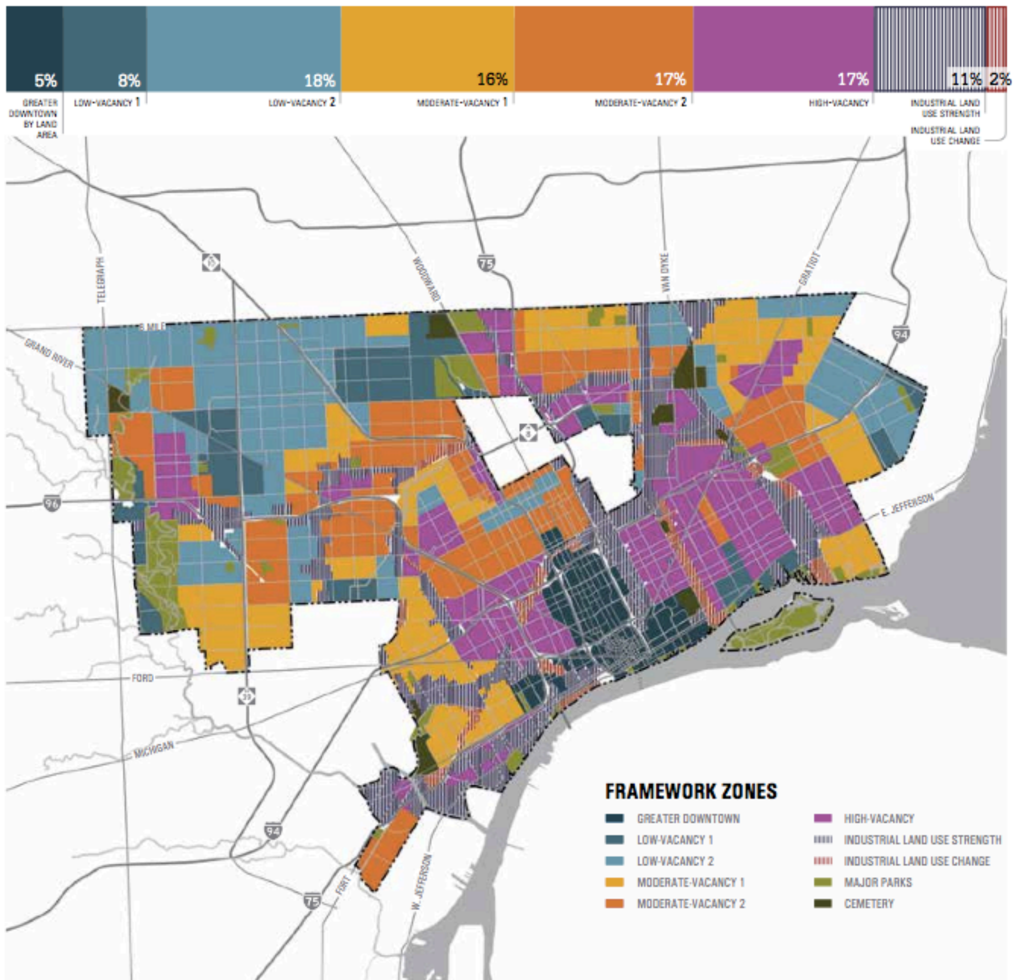

Figure 1: Framework Zones, Detroit Future City, 2012

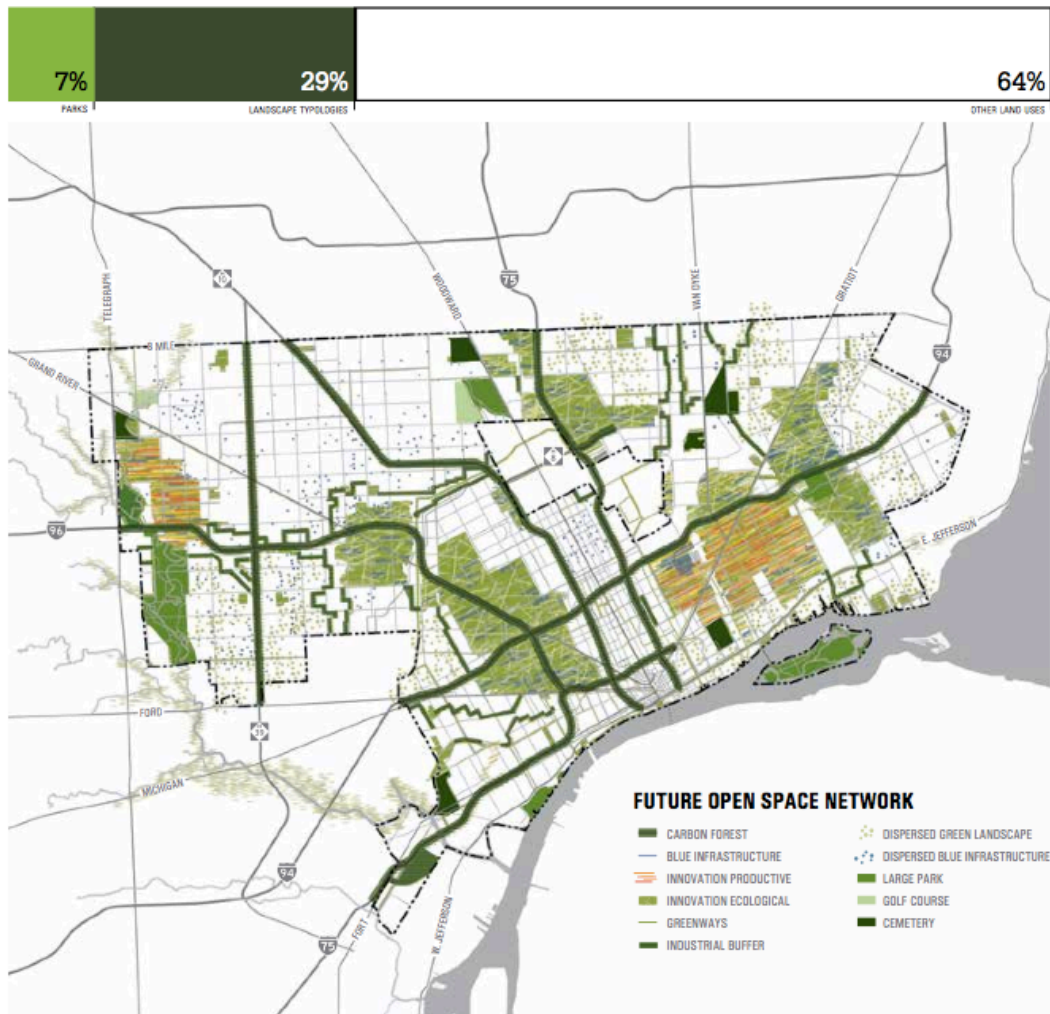

Figure 2: Future open space network, Detroit Future City, 2012

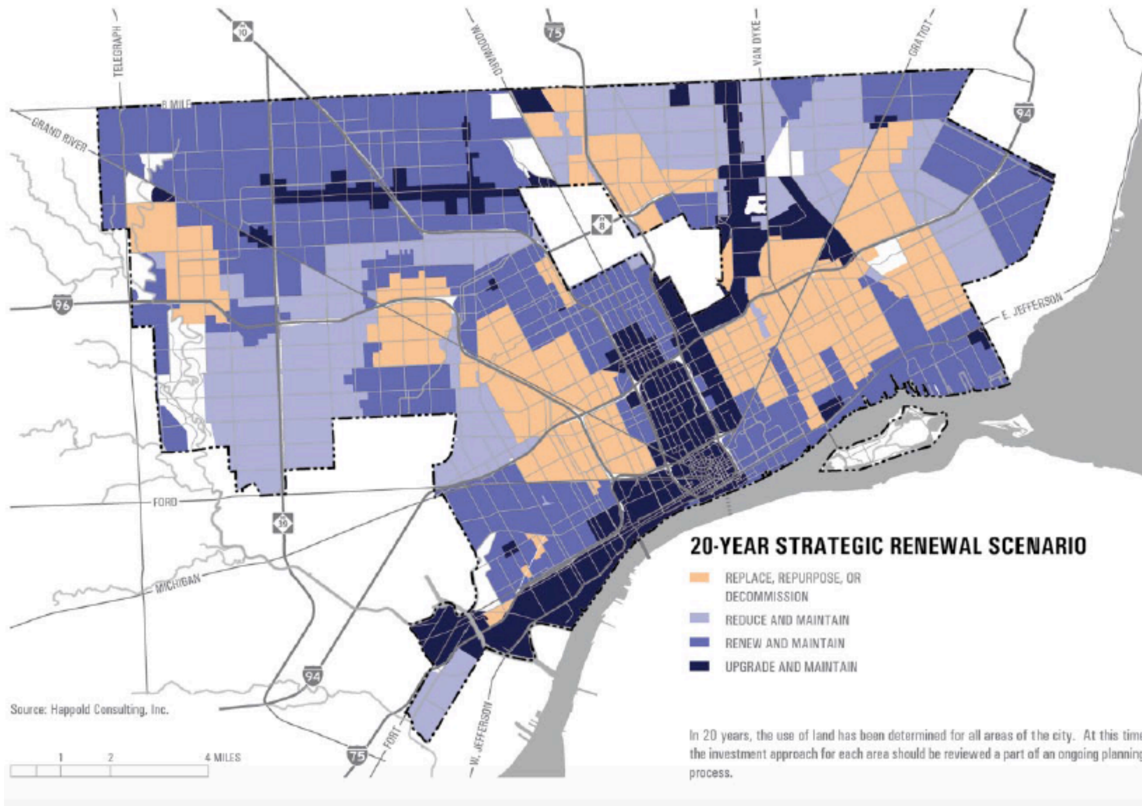

Fig. 3: 20 Year Strategic Renewal Scenario, Detroit Future City, 2012