Ground Forces:
Dirt, Demolition, and the Geography of Decline in Detroit, Michigan

by

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"There's not another city in the country, and perhaps civilization, doing what we're doing ... blight removal at scale. Where is a better place to do this than Detroit, where scale is in our DNA? We put the world on wheels, we were the Arsenal of Democracy. Where else to teach the world how to do this and make a great city blight-free?"

- Brian Farkas, Special Projects Director, Detroit Building Authority, 2018

“I am obsessed with a goal: To eliminate blight from the city of Detroit entirely by 2025.”

- Michael Edward Duggan, Mayor of Detroit, 2019

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to the work and life of Ernest Calloway (1908-1989), a dishwasher, coal miner, highway drifter, cannabis activist, labor organizer, journalist, full-time civil rights activist, one-time Fulbright Scholar, President of the St. Louis Chapter of the NAACP, frequent local campaign director, newspaper publisher, candidate for US Congress, political kingmaker, part-time university lecturer, Assistant Professor, research director for the Teamsters, Professor Emeritus of Urban Studies at St. Louis University, and an "architect of the unfinished dream."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation is not an independent endeavor. What appears at first glimpse to be a sum of isolation and esoteric energy camouflages the support, counsel, and love of friends, families, and colleagues. I would not be here without the time and energy of the most important people in my life. D.A.B., thank you for your kindness and honesty over the last seven years - and the prior twenty-six. H.E.A., thank you for erupting into my life and making it possible to slow down and think about the future. N.J.K., I am lucky to have had a brother along for the journey. C.R.K., thank you for demanding that I meet my potential. J.M.K., when a task is once begun you leave it not until its done. To M.L., I know I could not have done any of this without all of your help. To the graduate school mentors and advisors along the way, I can only say I never once made this easy. To the research and writing projects started and left unfinished, do not get comfortable. To my critics and allies in urban studies and planning, I promise I have plenty of fight left.

No acknowledgements could be complete without reflecting on what drove me to this field of study. I am, after all, a kid born into and shaped by the turmoil of the American Midwest. To the people of St. Louis, MO, Detroit, MI, and every Rust Belt city imagining and achieving justice for black, brown, and poor communities, I promise to do my absolute best to be an accomplice. I will never remain silent, but I will pass the mic whenever possible. Thank you.

PREFACE

Neighborhoods and municipalities just beyond my small second-floor office and front door are experiencing both the full-on biological assault of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the ruthlessness of an unequal society founded on and maintained by brutal racist difference. One emergency colliding with another, but both expressive of who, what, and where we consider valuable. When we allow leaders to declare emergencies or invoke crisis language, we also allow them to narrow our available solutions. Emergencies are a way of acting, but also a way of forgetting. It intensifies trauma while erasing the past. Forces and histories fall away as political and corporate classes bend institutions to their agendas and wills. In these moments, successes and failures cease to be useful measures for public policies. These emergencies burden us with distorted glimpses on origins and outcomes: effects become causes; causes become inaccessible.

In place of tired evaluations, we should focus on what these emergencies accomplish and for whom, what the emergency allows and why, when the emergency will end and what a return to normal really means. For planning and policy, any normal structured and maintained by inequality, violence, and insecurity should never be good enough. How do we resist the urge to call something a crisis when what we are facing is a feature of incrementalism? The challenge, then, is how our disciplines and professions confront and denounce acts of brutality, systems of domination, and practices of destruction. The carnage of novel coronavirus and the viciousness of racism are not bugs in the system; both depend on practitioners, academics, and policymakers modeling patience and performing compliance because progress has become reform. Rather than use our positions to allay conflict, we must commit ourselves to participation in these struggles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation contributes to the study of the production of urban decline by examining the process of demolishing. Recent research on the production of urban decline, by focusing on the property and real estate practices of speculation, foreclosure, and eviction, has provided an analytical framework for identifying and interpreting the persistent shifts in capital accumulation strategies that produce blight. The property and real estate practices of demolition extend beyond the site of a demolished building and reinforce processes producing urban decline. Demolishing depends on environments, logistics, policies, and resources that preserve regional geographies of uneven development.

I investigate the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) and efforts between 2013 and 2019 to demolish over 40,000 houses in Detroit, MI. I study this city and its program to question and interpret relationships between demolition and urban decline. In existing research, local public policy authorizes and pays contractors to deliver on-demand demolition to an abandoned building. Based on interviews and my analysis of public documents, DDP data, and sites, I show this focus on the practice of demolition erases the processes and effects of demolishing that extend beyond an address. Demolition is part of the production of urban decline and includes supply chains, forms of value, resources, property relations, and environments that conflict with demolition as an intervention against decline.

The process of demolishing Detroit depended on the emergence of a consensus turning blight into an emergency and removal into a necessity. Public, private, and philanthropic interests linked demolition to revitalization but also used it served regulatory, political, and

financial goals. The urgency around demolishing provided justification for DDP policies that accommodated the income-generation priorities of contractors. The DDP depended on contractors sourcing millions of cubic yards of dirt and rock to grade holes after basement excavation. Shifting DDP regulation on backfill ensured demolition was lucrative for wreckers and their networks. Backfilling Detroit meant millions of dollars in transactions that served contractors and suburban development agendas. Contractors sourced material from 444 unique sources, including luxury condos and retailer parking lots. The transformation of Detroit's built environment through demolition relied on continued regional expansion that converted wastes of growth into assets for destruction.

Demolishing Detroit was not an intervention slotted between periods of decline and development. Instead, demolishing was a value-extraction process manifesting land uses and property practices that generated income without redevelopment. Contractors engendered a regional land regime that could produce and sustain demolition. Instead of an interruption in the production of urban decline, making land vacant and ready for profitable intensification, demolishing Detroit was the continuation of decline by a different means.

This dissertation shows the limits of research on demolition that relies on the potential for reuse to evaluate consequences for neighborhoods. These dichotomies separate demolishing from the conditions and contradictions of its creation. By illustrating how demolishing is part of the process of decline I provide an alternative to research that conceals the operations of capital by relying on divides between global and local, between causes and interventions. Rather than managing decline or prompting redevelopment, demolishing is one process by which capitalist urbanization achieves the extraction of value in shrinking cities. Extending these insights beyond Detroit and demolition can identify local responses that may appear to manage decline but

through their environmental and logistical processes reinforce regional segregation and produce decline.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the Demolition of Detroit to Demolishing Detroit

On 10/13/2015, the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) wrecked 29 vacant houses. The DDP – a partnership between the Mayor's Office, Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) and Detroit Building Authority (DBA) – awarded $467,132.00 to seven contractors for the demolitions. Rickman Enterprise Group, a firm based in the Martin Park neighborhood, tore down fourteen properties and received $212,680.00 in Hardest Hit Funds (HHF), an anti-foreclosure program of the US Department of the Treasury (DOT) partly redirected towards blight removal. By the time DLBA awarded the contract to Rickman, contractors with the DDP had demolished 6,949 vacant buildings in just under two years.

The most expensive of Rickman's demolitions that day was 3206 Bassett. The contractor tore down the far-southwest property for $22,170. The house had been vacant for ten years. Standard Federal Bank, the largest bank in Michigan until a 2008 purchase by Bank of America, foreclosed on the 3206 Bassett in 2005. In 1/2014, the Wayne County Treasurer conveyed the property to the DLBA. The property had sat empty for over 10 years before a Rickman crew with its wrecking equipment in tow arrived twenty-two months later.

Rickman, no doubt, made quick work of the modest stick-frame house. A towering excavator would have punched through the roof and then veered into the remaining walls, scooping the innards into an idling truck with dump trailer. Previous encroachment by scrappers would have mined the house of metal. A laborer would have stood a few dozen feet away hosing

debris to suppress dust and contain local exposure to lead and asbestos. Perhaps neighbors stood on porches observing the choreography. Smash. Scoop. Spray. Rickman would perform this dungy routine until the empty house at 3206 Bassett faded foot-by-foot to reveal an empty hole.

That phase of emptiness, unlike the house's vacancy, will be brief. Soon, another Rickman truck would have arrived hauling a trailer of material. Its driver unloaded the 240 yd3 of dirt and rock until any remnants of 3206 Bassett disappeared into vacant land. What was once an impairment to Detroit's future is now an asset (Williams, 2018; Butcher, 2018). For many, demolition will have allowed 3206 Bassett to escape one pipeline – Detroit's decline – and enter a new pipeline: Detroit's redevelopment. For its part, Rickman Enterprises will also vanish, its presence at 3206 Bassett catalogued in a single cell in a DDP spreadsheet. A day of destruction now providing space and time for the creativity of developers, builders, and new inhabitants.

Boosters and critics of demolition continue to debate the ways it can transform vacant liabilities into developable assets. In a white paper for the Brookings Institution, Mallach (2012) argued, "Large-scale demolition, thoughtfully and responsibly carried out, is a necessary step in the process of rebuilding the nation's distressed older cities (3)." For him, demolition's return on investment is clear. "It may," he imagined, "clear the ground for redevelopment projects that can potentially make the city more competitive, including construction of housing more suited to existing market demand, or of infrastructure and buildings to grow and attract new firms (22)." Demolition's relationship to redevelopment has found its way into the agendas of DDP leaders. Brian Farkas, special projects director for the DBA, told Michigan officials, "The reason we're tearing down is to rebuild (2016, 33)." The optimism climbed to the upper levels of government. In late 2015, Mark McArdle, the DOT's deputy assistant secretary for financial stability,

conveyed the Obama administration's outlook for the DDP, "We recently visited Detroit, and you can see the real impact the blight program is having on communities (McKinney, 2015)."

Those sanguine takes on the consequences of demolition conflict with scholars critical of how a rebooted built environment will affect long-term inhabitants. In a recent history of class struggle in the city, Jay & Conklin (2020) imagine a less equitable future for Detroit's vacant land. They depict the city as a place married to decay but flirting with total gentrification. For them, demolition signals capital's tendency to reset declining neighborhoods for a new round of development to serve the wealthy. They write, "Detroit is being re-everything: revitalized, rebuilt, reborn, renewed, refurbished, revamped, restored, redeveloped. It is a 'blank slate, an 'investor's playground.' Detroit's derelict landscape, an 'American Acropolis,' is marketed as its greatest asset. (2020, 11)" That "blank slate" is more than physical space, it is also profitable. Campbell, Newman, Safransky, & Stallmann (2020) point to demolition as a major force behind that transformation, arguing, "federal money from the Hardest Hit Fund program has been routed to cities throughout Michigan to demolish houses and clear land for private development (84)." Dan Gilbert, the Chairman of Quicken Loans, told an audience in 2013, demolition would make Detroit, "very cheap for a builder/developer to develop a residential unit, and they are going to develop them and develop them in mass as soon as we get the structures down (McGraw, 2013)."

It would seem, then, the DDP and its goal of resetting Detroit is one in a long line of "re-everything" processes first described by Marx (1967) in relation to the exploitation of the British working class, "'Improvement' of towns," he wrote then, "accompanying the increase of wealth, by the demolition of badly built quarters, the erection of palaces of banks, warehouses, etc., the widening of streets for business traffics, for the carriages of luxury, and for the introduction of tramways, etc., drive away the poor into even worse and more crowded hiding places (657)."

Using the improvement of Detroit to prioritize the needs of the wealthy was never an unintended consequence of revitalization for those that controlled the region's economic development program. George Jackson, Jr, the former head of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), considered class restructuring the price of progress. At a 2013 DEGC forum, Jackson said, "When I look at this city's tax base, I say bring on more gentrification (Neavling, 2013b)."

But while gentrification has remained at the tip of everyone's tongues in Detroit, the role of vacant land in that process has been less than decisive. In 2018, Mallach dismissed the link between demolition and gentrification, claiming it was a myth that only served to disguise the city's "persistence of concentrated, debilitating poverty and the decline of once-health, vital neighborhoods (Gallagher, 2018b)." Mallach's colleagues at Brookings have presented similar arguments arguing concern about isolated gentrification ignores the real challenges facing American cities (Grabinsky & Butler, 2015; Berube, 2015). But that insistence on "two Detroits" (Moskowitz, 2015) – one a 7.2 square mile island of wealth and the other a 132 square mile sea of destitution – ignores the essential relationship between prosperity and poverty in the urban process under capitalism (Harvey, 1978). Decline and gentrification are not parallel currents of relative socioeconomic fortune but expressions of local, regional, and global strategies spawning multiple capitalisms by rearticulating regulation, accumulation, and rentiership (Boyer, 2005).

Contra claims capitalism failed or *it* is returning to Detroit (Kurth, 2019; Larsen, 2017; Vande Panne, 2017; Wolff, 2013), its built environment is more accurately explained by iteration in the practices of capital accumulation (Akers & Seymour, 2018). While gentrification may not be an automatic outcome of clearance, empty urban space still fuels a revanchist imagination. Detroit's overabundance of vacant land provides a terrain for performing the ethic and aesthetic of the pioneer. Each empty lot and abandoned building flows from an economic history of

disinvestment but, unerringly, gestures towards a future of redevelopment and profitability – the past provides but does not constrain. McKinney (2016) draws this raw resource of emptiness into conversation with the uniquely American fascination with the frontier. Despite Frederick Jackson Turner's (1893) eulogy, the frontier remains a potent organizing device for capital's reclamation of cities (Smith, 1996). McKinney writes, "This is seen in the hopeful descriptions of what will 'save' this postindustrial city: revitalization, redevelopment, reuse, rebirth. In each case the underlying assumption is that space is being "underutilized" but that with the right new people, or new ideas, or infusion of cash, the city be returned to its former productivity. (xx)"

The perceived underutilization of land, housing, and terrain serves as a justification for a range of uses and interventions that would serve the goal of diversifying Detroit (Galster, 2002). For some, that diversification entails creating sustainable agri-hoods (Adams, 2019), developing art enclaves on empty streets (Aguilar, 2020), establishing innovation centers (Gallagher, 2019), putting the city's land back to work (Nissen, 2019), and developing a renewed appreciation of undervalued homes (Mallach, 2018b). Notwithstanding the enthusiasm, in each instance, the space for action appears only after the demolition is finished. These interventions take place in the aftermath of destruction. Their boosters, like Dan Gilbert, only move forward once philanthropy, developers, and policymakers have eradicated "cancerous" blight (Pierog, 2014).

Demolition may spark new developments, but the demolition of blight in Detroit is primed to remedy everything. In 2017, Farkas insisted the DDP made it possible to solve Detroit's broader social problems (Graves, 2017). For him, "blight flight" was at the core of the city's decline. But making blight a cause and demolition the solution erases anti-Black racism and classism in public policy, banking, and real estate have created Detroit. As a policy solution, demolition is insufficient for transforming the city and its neighborhoods. Akers (2017a) writes,

"Contemporary blight remediation is a new urban medicine show, a spectacle built on false promises and negligible outcomes. It is an extension of long-running US urban policies that deploy instruments of displacement and demolition in the spatial reordering of urban economics and racial boundaries. (96)" Any evaluation of the DDP would obscure what made it appear necessary in the first place. Rather than "blight remediation," Akers argues for an analysis of the production of blight. This entails probing and understanding the repertoire of real estate market practices – lending, foreclosure, public auctions, speculation, land contracts, and evictions - that extract value from Detroit's built environment and by extension produce the city's decline.

Turning attention to the production of blight denaturalizes the conditions that developers, speculators, and policymakers hope to exploit through demolition. Blight involves more than demolition schemes that "permanently altered the city's landscape (Tighe & Ryberg-Webster, 2020)." The abandoned building – whether a house, school, or factory – is and was a product of public policy and private investment. By shifting focus to the real estate practices materializing Detroit's blight, demolition is no longer just phase one of a new (and potentially dispossessive) development process but the expression of near-constant accumulation. Where Jay & Conklin (2020), Mallach (2018c), Moskowitz (2017), and McKinney (2016) still entertain the possibility for the shocks of gentrification, concentrating on the production of decline converts that space of analysis to examining pathways and pipelines making the city what it is today (Akers, 2013a). Historicizing Detroit's decline does not mean looking into the past for explanation. Rather, it provides a critical framework for demystifying and intervening in ongoing property practices in the post-crisis city (Seymour, 2020). Authors probing vacant land in the aftermath of demolition commit themselves to confronting one possible future shaped by value-extraction, dispossession, and displacement, rather than examining persistent local, regional, and global processes that

forced programs like DDP to rescue markets in the first place. Decline, then, is less a process occurring in Detroit than an urban process under capital happening to Detroit. As Akers & Seymour (2018, 138) write, "The geographies of the subprime mortgage crisis, speculative pipelines, land contracts, and rising evictions map on to geographies of racial exclusion and class separation in US cities, in large part because this economic unevenness is highly profitable."

Despite efforts to ground Detroit in the extractive operations of investment and real estate, the production of decline approach still risks black boxing the demolition process. If some authors view demolition as the start of the next round of development, then positioning it as one instance amid accumulation can serve a separate mystification. *Figure 1* below represents the placement of demolition between one period of value-extraction producing blight and a subsequent phase of value-extraction from owning, speculating, or redevelopment vacant land.

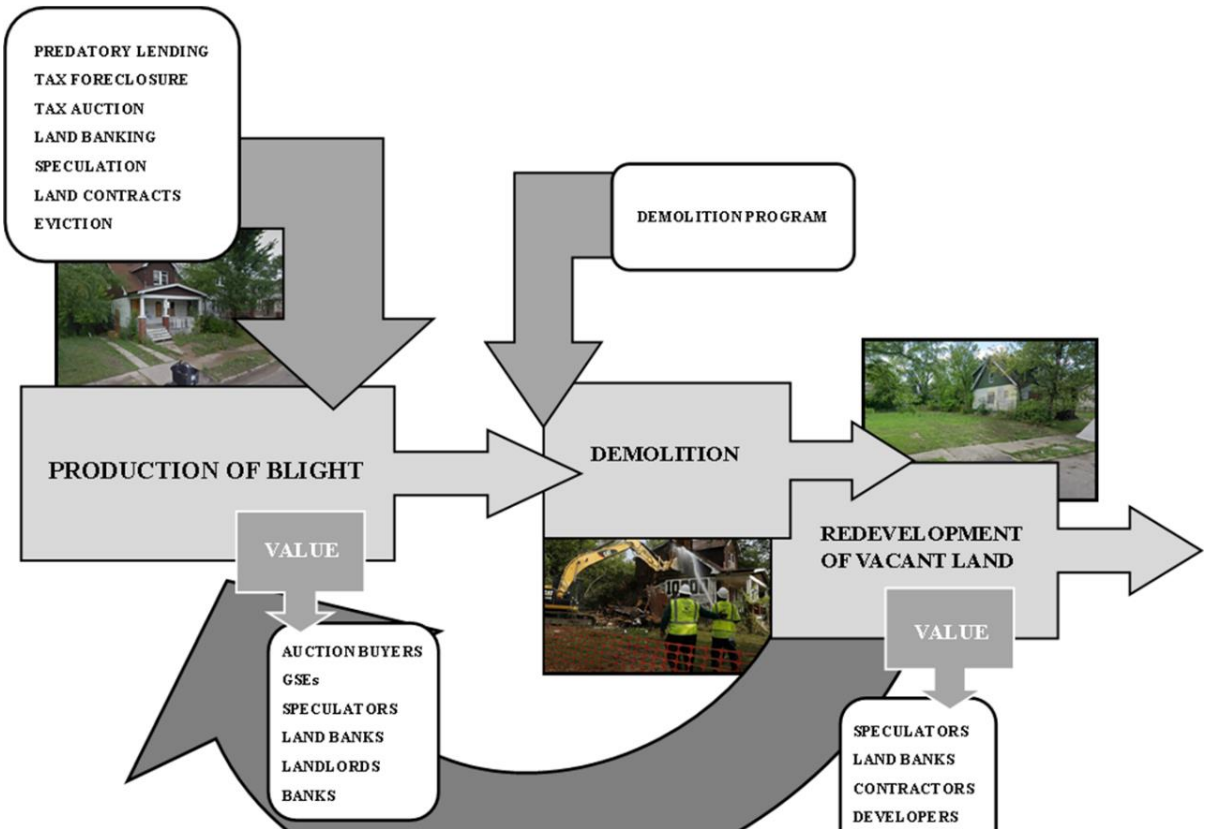


Figure 1: Production of Blight leading to Demolition and the Redevelopment of Vacant Land11

Blight removal in Detroit may be freighted with false promises and negligible outcomes but the process of demolition is a powerful social, economic, and environmental force beyond a targeted address. The DDP was a destructive interlude made possible by mortgage foreclosure, speculation, and land banking. Yet, the demolition process itself was also the convergence of pathways and pipelines encompassing and surpassing the contractor, the street, and the neighborhood. The production of decline may exhaust a structure's value to the housing market, but not the value-extraction potential of demolition. A reassessment of demolition within the broader production of decline can identify the processes and environments converging to achieve the DDP. By doing so, demolition becomes more than a precondition for the next phase of neighborhood change. Trucks, fuel, water, labor, and backfill become embedded in their own chains of valuation and accumulation. Tracing the production of demolition opens a line of inquiry that resists reducing blight removal to a bookmark or an on-demand delivered service.

By returning to the house at 3206 Bassett, we can begin to see how addressing the production of demolition reveals a repertoire of relationships that complicate and contradict that flattened view of demolition. The 240 yd3 of material Rickman Enterprises hauled and dumped at 3206 Bassett did not simply appear in the truck's trailer. DDP records reveal the precise process that allowed Rickman to fill and grade the site. In spring 2015, the DLBA contracted O'Brien Edwards Construction (OBECC) to provide clean-up services for 150 residential properties in its inventory. DLBA tasked O'Brien Edwards with preparing these properties for sale in its auction program. In a 5/2015 profile appearing in the *Detroit Free Press*, a reporter caught up with Steven Harris, OBECC's Chief Operating Officer, and interviewed him about the company's contract with the DLBA. "You go in and do what?" the reporter asked. Harris

responded, “Pretty much the auction-ready assessment (Schaefer, 2015).” Harris then detailed his run-ins with squatters, raccoons, marijuana grow houses, and skeptical neighborhood residents.

Under ordinary circumstances, OBECC and Harris would be providing a uncomplicated service. Since 2014, the DLBA has auctioned properties on an online platform. Bids start at $1,000 and auction winners agree to renovate the property within six months. Over the last six years, the DLBA has closed 2,600 auctions totaling $18,960,770 in sales. DLBA keeps track of winner status and its records show 1,174 to owner-occupants, 530 to investors, and 897 without a designation. Firms like OBECC help DLBA preserve these properties, first by removing debris and then providing an estimate for renovation. “The one down the street was really bad,” he said, “I did the assessment and found it was a fire, but it could be repaired. It was just a ton of smoke damage, and it was probably 120 yards of debris that's all wet because of the weather.” His crews planned to load hundreds of dumpsters with the debris they collected from the DLBA contract.

Six months later, that debris reappeared in the DDP’s official backfill records. Rickman Enterprises reported using 6,940 yd3 of material from a source the contractor called *OBECC Detroit Residences*. Rickman provided twelve source addresses[1]. Every address had been an OBECC project site during its clean-up contract in the spring. Following clean-up, DLBA had closed auctions on ten of the twelve properties for a total of $110,001. During that period, Rickman used material from this combined OBECC source for twenty-eight demolitions, for which DDP paid out $40,500 in HHF. Rickman is the only contractor to report using this material, suggesting it was not a DLBA-monitored source. Importantly, no renovation or excavation occurred at any of the OBECC sites to explain this reserve of material. Among

[1] 1715 Atkinson St, 3611 Three Mile Dr, 5903 Kensington Ave, 2475 Calvert Ave, 2745 Collingwood, 6787 Rutherford St, 14782 Rossini, 3951 Three Mile Dr, 1207 Longfellow, 6921 Forrer, 1936 W. Boston Blvd, 1936 W.Boston Blvd, 1197 Longfellow-Detroit, MI

several possible interpretations one is the most straightforward. OBECC collected debris from the cleanup sites, stockpiled it for later use, and sold it in one transaction to Rickman Enterprises.

Nearly two years after Rickman Enterprises dumped 240 yd3 of OBECC debris into the ground at 3206 Bassett, Jonathan Barlow purchased the lot for $100 from the DLBA. Viewed in this light, the demolition of 3206 Bassett is neither just the beginning of a new period of private investment and rebuilding nor is it a policy response with negligible outcomes. Stepping back from the isolated demolition site, OBECC and Rickman Enterprises were mobilizing the city's demolition process to extract value through destruction and its supply chain. The former firm turned waste into a resource, the latter turned the resource into an asset for demolitions. In both instance, demolition provided space for generating income from Detroit's land and property without relying on the production of blight or future development. By introducing the production of demolition as a pathway for extracting value from land, we can link the DDP to broader economies and geographies of property, development, and destruction. For researchers, narrowing the DDP to *the practice of demolition* is insufficient for capturing these relationships. In contrast, *the process of demolishing* – a logistical, environmental, and political operation embedded in regional patterns of change – illuminates the relationships making demolition a technical possibility, but also how contractors became formidable forces in the city's land use and value by controlling the creation, circulation, market, and distribution of backfill material.

On the same day Rickman Enterprises wrecked 3206 Bassett, Mayor Mike Duggan appeared before the Detroit City Council (DCC). A reporter had accused the DDP of colluding with contractors and rigging bid processes to favor major firms (LeDuff, 2015). "I have done everything I know to be transparent about this," he said, "There is no confusion about what we are doing. We are reporting it publicly. (Ferretti, 2015)" Duggan dismissed any allegations of

misconduct, arguing the DDP's rising costs were explained by his administration's commitment to suppressing demolition dust and using uncontaminated backfill (Helms & Guillen, 2015).

By the middle of 2016, Duggan and DDP officials relented to public pressure about transparency and released the *Detroit Demolition Tracker*, an online map of DDP's progress (Helms, 2016). The interactive map provided the address, date, contractor, and cost for each completed DDP demolition. Visitors could also check the status of demolitions in the DDP pipeline. "Blight is very personal," says Farkas. "If there's a burned-out house on your street, you want to know when it's coming down. Leveraging technology allows us to communicate this with citizens at scale. (Government Technology, 2017)" Farkas described the tracker as an example of a "bottom-up approach" that could rectify years of resident uncertainty about demolitions. Along with upgraded "data inputs and outputs" came an opportunity for Detroit residents to access information about the progress of demolitions in their neighborhood. Farkas stated, "We were striving to give citizens an understanding of what's happening in their neighborhood. This was best done through map images rather than raw data. (Graves, 2017)"

The DDP used the tracking platform to signal its fidelity to the DCC, city residents, and an ongoing probe by federal investigators (Burns, 2016). Council members had lashed out at the DDP after the revelation the program had not obtained formal DCC approval for demolitions over $25,000. Gabe Leland, representing Council District 7, chafed at Duggan's commitment to transparency, "This is going to take a serious look at the process (Guillen, 2016c)." Despite national press describing the tracker as tool for "holding contractors accountable," the map was not the serious regulatory tool that either the DDP described or the DCC demanded (Metcalfe, 2016; Messner, 2016). The tracker provided little more than confirmation a DDP demolition had

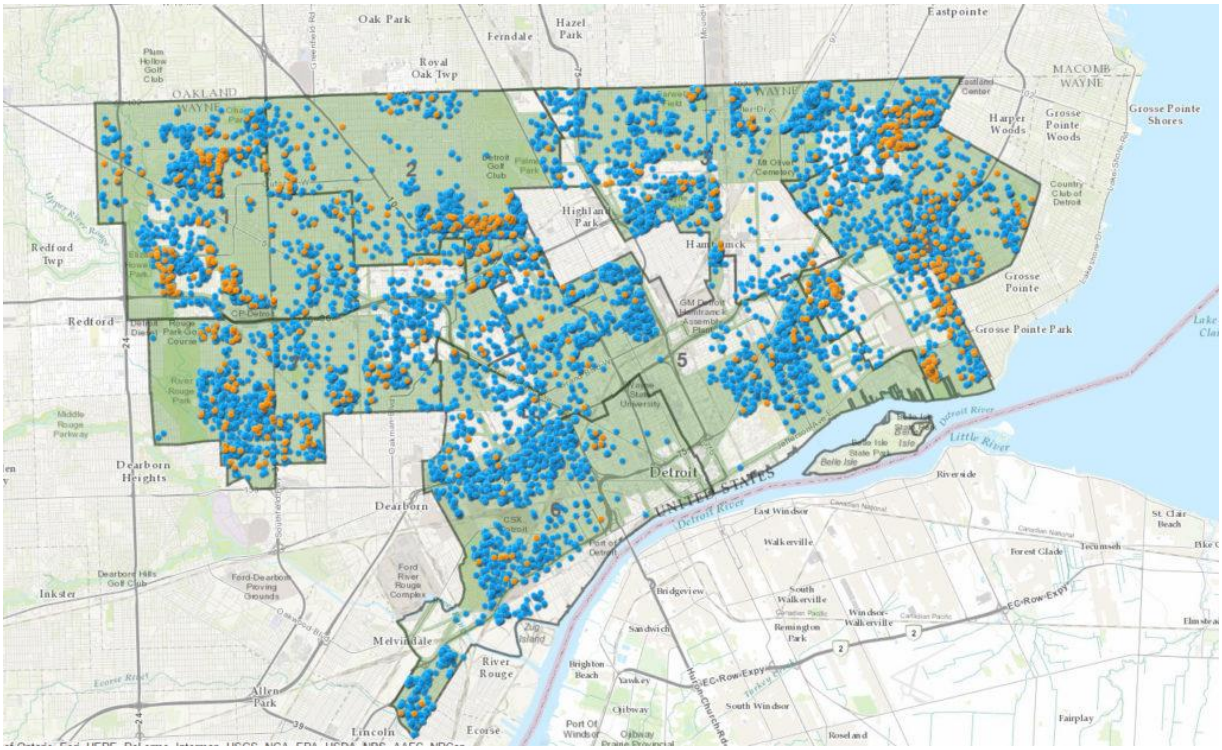


Figure 2: Detroit Demolition Tracker, 6/2016 (Lee, 2016)

happened at a site. The available information excluded the funding source, names of subcontractors and haulers, time to complete the demolition, presence of lead or asbestos, dust suppression techniques, time to fill the hole, and the quality and source material used to fill the

hole[2]. Instead of providing this information, the DDP had stripped away the supply chains, interests, sources, regulatory violations, and materials to present a flat illustration of the practice of demolition. Similar to authors that slot demolition between blight and redevelopment, DDP officials had treated it as the intersection of X and Y coordinates rather than a process itself.

DDP officials claimed they were "the first demolition agency in the nation to provide this level of transparency to people (WXYZ, 2016)." The Detroit Demolition Tracker, however, served as another example of the limits of transparency to inform, clarify, or educate. The platform constrained the geography of the DDP to include only past and future Detroit addresses, narrowing both how demolishing occurs but also which local and regional actors command and benefit from the production of demolition. But the map also privileges a conception of urban space in which demolition is an on-demand service delivered like an Amazon parcel at a doorstep. "Type in your address, it will zoom into your neighborhoods and you'll see dots," Farkas explained, "Click on those dots and it'll tell you when the demo was completed and how much it cost and who the contractor was (WXYZ, 2017)."This representation erases the

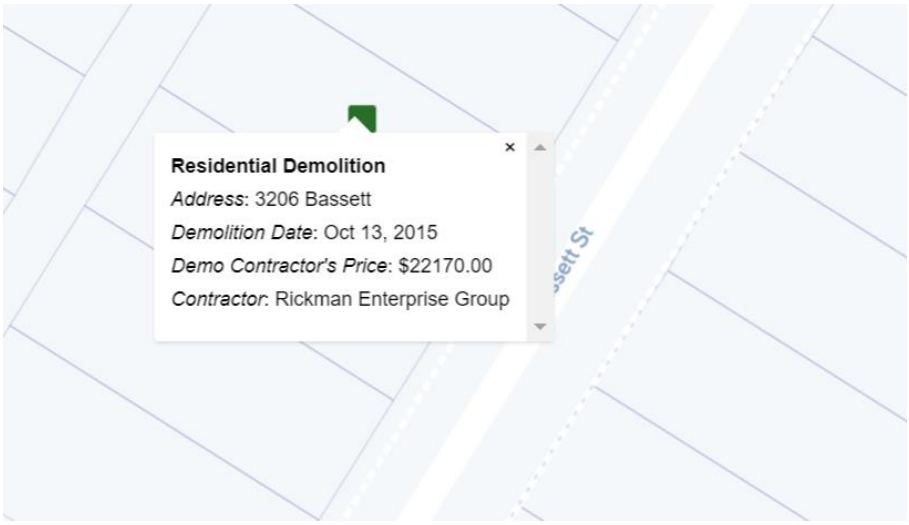


Figure 3: The demolition of 3206 Bassett, according to the Detroit Demolition Tracker

[2] I reference these omissions because journalists and the DCC would scrutinize each over the subsequent four years.

embeddedness of demolishing. DDP created the platform to maintain transparency, but instead of revealing the program's complexity, the DDP reduced demolishing Detroit into a conveyor belt.

By privileging the practice of demolition instead of the process of demolishing, the DDP made political choices about transparency that do not fall neatly into concepts of misconduct or deception. Andrew Barry (2013) writes, "instead of having the effect of reducing the finite quantity of matters that are not made public, the operations of transparency have the potential to highlight the existence of a vast range of matters that never will be made public, including matters that will not even be accessed the most skillful social researchers (60)." Transparency, then, is not merely what is publicized and scrutinized but also what remains off the agenda and off the map. By disregarding the production of demolition, policymakers and researchers sideline another tangle of City of Detroit with its suburbs that produces uneven development through anti-Black and anti-poor geographies of growth and decline (Sugrue, 1996). Within these geographies, contractors coordinate environments, supply chains, real estate, and materials to ensure demolishing converges with Detroit in ways that prioritize their extractive interests.

Since introducing the Detroit Demolition Tracker in 2016, the DDP has faced near-constant allegations of discrimination, fraud, deception, and incompetence. In many cases, these have illuminated negligence by local, regional, and national contractors (Stafford, 2019e; Stafford, 2019g; Ferretti, 2019b; Ferretti, 2019g). However, the map's representation of the DDP, remains unaltered. It is, then, an irony of recent history that revelations of contractor misconduct now serve the purpose of clarifying the demolition map. The operations absent from the map - the unseen relationships of backfill, land, and value – serve as reminders of the who, where, and what shaping the city, neighborhoods, and fortunes (Barry, 2013). As I illustrate and explain in the course of this dissertation, it is by recovering those absent operations of backfilling

as both pathways and pipelines of change that scholars can hold a renewed understanding of the production of demolition and the logistical and environment achievement of demolishing Detroit.

Placing and Planning Demolition

In the modern US city, demolition is one tool among a repertoire of measures in public-private redevelopment projects that signal capital's return to the central cities and the demographic transformation of low-income neighborhoods (Slater, 2006; Smith, 1996). Despite those shifts, demolition is a mechanism behind dislocation and dispossession – the forceful transfer of assets, value, and wealth into the hands of a powerful few (Harvey, 2007). For many observers, demolition makes class restructuring possible as it eliminates low-income housing options, alters legacy and long-standing built environments, and creates blank slates for new construction (Goetz, 2013; Crump, 2002). On the one hand, demolition is a calamitous but clumsy form of state-driven displacement that enables redevelopment regardless of costs to existing inhabitants (Highsmith, 2016; Thomas, 1997). On the other, more recently, demolition signals a slow colonization by capital of neighborhoods now situated at the frontier of investment and profit-maximization (Rosenman & Walker, 2015). In both cases, critical approaches frame demolition as the engineering muscle behind dispossessive agendas of policy and real estate.

Concerted social and legal opposition to eminent domain and the cataclysmic style of mid-century mass clearance transformed public opinion on demolition (Jacobs, 1961). The Urban Renewal vintage of redevelopment that shaped the American metropolis into the 1980s serves less as a frame of reference for scale than a shorthand that admonishes redevelopment campaigns (Gratz, 2010a). Today, logistical precision married with professional expertise has succeeded the bombardment approach that leveled neighborhoods and displaced thousands

(Ammon, 2016). While displacement and expropriation remain significant concerns in American cities, demolition in most redevelopment is now a scalpel, not a sledgehammer (Mallach, 2011).

The dichotomy between state and capital leaves little room for addressing neighborhood change in cities where neither spectacular nor scattered forms of demolition provide a comprehensive account. Contemporary demolition cannot be folded into domicide – killing the home (Porteus & Smith, 2001) – or the *root shock* of dislocation (Fullilove, 2016). Most demolition taking place in American cities today is executed project-by-project rather than neighborhood-by-neighborhood (Weber, Doussard, Bhatta, & McGrath, 2006). Cities with large volumes of abandoned or publicly owned vacant properties frustrate conceptual frameworks in which demolition equals violent upheaval (Hackworth, 2015)[3]. While demolition can be a spectacular process shaping cities, it still has the potential to be an ordinary transaction cost within more traditional forms of real estate transformation – corporate expansion, downtown development, and unlocking potential land values – and a way of preserving spatial differentiation in declining cities (Akers, Beal, & Rousseau, 2020). As a result, a critical shift from the *practice of demolition* to the *process of demolishing* makes it possible to deepen popular and scholarly debates on the how and where of uneven development (Harvey, 2006).

I argue the empirical distinction between practice and process provides a more analytically productive approach to demolition than prior work within the literature on Shrinking Cities. Over the last fifteen years, researchers within this current of geography, planning, and design have focused on the determinants of urban decline and the institutional dimensions of policy interventions to halt depopulation and attenuate economic uncertainty (Hollander,

[3] I address this at-length in the subsequent literature review and in Chapter 5. In the latter, I elaborate the argument here that scholars seal off the study of demolition by reducing it to cost/benefit or program evaluations that grade its success or failure.

Pallagst, Schwarz, & Popper, 2009). The Shrinking Cities perspective provided an alternative to research agendas centering growth and the subsequent policy prescriptions that prioritized growth and routinized economic expansion as the solution to past contraction (Pallagst, 2010). In early consideration of global and European experiences, scholars took on the challenge of analyzing post-socialist East German cities (Bontje, 2004). Within those contexts, strong national governments had partnered with local "grant coalitions" to remake cities in the wake of deindustrialization (Bernt, 2009). But initial attention to cities like Leipzig or Liverpool did little to capture the structural conditions in American cities (Couch, Karecha, Nuissl, & Rink 2005). Segregation and market-fundamentalism required amendments to the literature that could center anti-Black racism and capital's dominance as the main drivers of decline. Recent research on Detroit, MI, Youngstown, OH, and Flint, MI, has modeled a version of Shrinking Cities literature where systemic inequality matters (Berglund, 2020; Rhodes, 2019; Morckel, 2017).

Despite the renewed appreciation of the multi-dimensional character of urban decline and the drivers of depopulation, many of the major concepts up for debate within the main current of Shrinking Cities research remain static. For Oswalt and Reiniets (2006), the ubiquity of modern shrinking cities provided a window into the messy relationship between global processes and local conditions. The sheer volume of shrinking cities meant the phenomenon deserved attention from planning and urban scholars (6). Two currents of literature have emerged to address these frictions. First, researchers frequently situate Shrinking Cities within patterns of knowledge economy consolidation and the continued domination of financial centers in Europe, the United States, and, increasingly, Asia (Hartt, 2018; Shetty & Reid, 2013; Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, & Cunningham-Sabot, 2012). This global network of investment and industry manifests and excludes peripheral cities that cannot serve as command sites in transnational commerce

(Silverman, 2020). In this current of work, capital's tendency to transgress nation-state borders is an urbanization process that creates and erodes "backyards of globalization (Grossmann, Bontje, Haase, & Mykhenko, 2013)". The uneven geography of this urban process creates winners and losers struggling to process these shifts locally (Sassen, 1991). Modern modes of production relied on new markets and new fixes that abandoned cities comprising aging populations, antiquated industries, derelict infrastructure, and weak public institutions (Weichmann, 2008).

A parallel current of work highlights the presence or absence of local practices to address depopulation or decline. While labor and capital appear in those analyses connecting global shifts to local shrinkage, the same cannot be said of analyses focused on local approaches and potential solutions. In much of the Shrinking Cities literature, conceptualizations of residential blight and vacancy omit the property practices or policy regimes responsible for abandonment (Newman, Park, Bowman, & Lee, 2018; Lee & Newman, 2017; Deng & Ma, 2015; Schilling & Logan, 2008). As a result, each strategy for correcting the mismatch between a surplus built environment and decreasing population - whether "right-sizing," "smart shrinkage," or demolition - becomes a discrete treatment that can either succeed or fail to manage a city's vacant property and decline (Weaver & Knight, 2017; Lima & Eischeid, 2017; Nemeth & Hollander, 2016; Hummel, 2015; Rhodes & Russo, 2013). These studies have not so much scrutinized these local practices or unmasked relationships making those practices possible as much as they have black boxed them into tools that are optimized, observed, and measured.

Recent critiques have attempted to refresh Shrinking Cities approaches by prioritizing relationality and political economy. Bernt (2016) lobbied for a research agenda that investigated the scalar relations of urban decline and made visible the power and politics behind shrinkage and depopulation. Audirac (2018) has argued insufficient scrutiny of demolition and right-sizing

has served to reproduce social and spatial stigma in declining cities that can go on to rationalize "the repertoire of technical, political and discursive practices inherent in austerity urbanism (18)." Aalbers and Bernt (2019) also criticized the state of the Shrinking Cities literature, writing, "This situation calls for an approach that goes beyond a linear line of argument in which decline is naturalized and policies merely operationalized as a functionalist response to observed shrinking population and employment numbers (167)." These authors challenge scholars to investigate decline without reducing it to an unfortunate consequence of local political action.

While these provocations are welcome additions to the literature on urban decline, each has called for a refocusing of research on pathways in markets and institutions that was or is already under way (Seymour & Akers, 2019; Akers & Seymour, 2018; Akers, 2017b; Hackworth, 2015; Dewar, 2015; Akers, 2013a). Critical appeals for an invigorated Shrinking Cities literature have erased major contributions considering the "production of decline" while simultaneously flattening concepts of land, value, and property. Aalbers and Bernt (2019) plug those constructs into a political economy of decline without addressing how local and regional operations of speculation, investment, and destruction persist in reshaping the basic elements of the built environment[4]. In their effort to defamiliarize or scale "place" in future analyses of decline, these critics of the Shrinking Cities literature have marginalized embedded processes that produce space and extract value. In this literature, scales of global and local have predetermined content and politics. Decline is global and demolition is local. Government actors and institutions "deal with the situation" by developing and deploying demolition, rightsizing, and other built-environment strategies to manage challenges posed by the broader global

[4] In Aalbers & Bernt (2019) the word "land" appears once and only in reference to abandonment. "Value" appears once alongside surplus and the word "property" appears only in the references. The phrase "deal with" appears six times.

economy (170). Capitalism arrives outside and pressures local leadership to respond or perish. A shift to the "production of decline," however, provides grounds for a Shrinking Cities literature beyond local and global, or the self-evidence of place. That shift shows processes of decline serve as crucibles for environments, resources, markets, and institutions. Local responses are never independent of the material, political, and geographical conditions of their creation.

Approaches to demolition in declining cities should both identify and address the processes enabling "local" policies while examining the broader relationships of these responses to the operations of capital that exclude and marginalize by race and class. In this project, I examine the relationship between demolition and urban decline. I investigate and interpret how the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) has contributed to the transformation of institutions, investment, environments, valuation, and land-use. I provide an alternative to approaches within the Shrinking Cities literature by distinguishing contemporary demolition processes from past Urban Renewal and ad hoc policies while also theorizing land and value in declining cities.

I start from the premise *demolishing is an achievement itself, not just a policy tool for eliminating blight or redeveloping neighborhoods.* By linking demolishing to the active process of decline, I scrutinize how demolition is produced politically and materially. Moreover, this project challenges approaches to demolition reducing it to a local intervention with dichotomous outcomes of success or failure. As I argue, Duggan's goal of tearing down to rebuild (Raven, 2016) does not clarify the production of demolition and its relationship to the city's residential built environment. My research addresses the logistical, environmental, and financial dimensions of the DDP to illuminate and interpret the regional operations of intervening in and governing Detroit's decline. I analyze the DDP and its relationship to policy, value, regional geography, and land by investigating its demolition backfill program. In this dissertation, I ask:

1) *What is the relationship of demolition to urban decline?*
2) *What is the process of demolishing Detroit?*
3) *How did the Detroit Demolition Program emerge and what were its goals?*
4) *What stance did the Detroit Demolition Program have towards backfilling and what regulatory relationship towards its demolition contractors?*
5) *How did contractors develop and maintain their material and financial approaches to backfilling as part of the Detroit Demolition Program?*
6) *What were the local and regional sources of the backfill material and what consequences did these sources and property practices have for demolishing Detroit?*
7) *How did the backfilling process depend upon and shape the potential value and uses of land in Detroit and its region?*

Despite occasional revisions to the estimate of demolitions, Mayor Mike Duggan and his allies in Michigan and Washington, DC have maintained the belief the city could be stabilized and rebuilt by eradicating over 40,000 empty houses. The DDP has removed over 20,000 publicly owned structures since 1/2014 drawing on local and federal sources of funds. Each of these demolitions has required a second intervention to fill the excavated basement site and stabilize the parcel in anticipation of future use or development. Consultants working for the DDP claimed excavated basement foundations required 250 yd3 of material of fill to grade. In 2016, the DCC expressed concern to the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) that improper backfilling jeopardized the potential for the DDP to trigger the redevelopment of cleared space. For council members, backfill would have dramatic consequences for the "future development of the City's land" if demolition left vacant land "in no condition to be cost-effectively redeveloped (2016, 2)." The volume of clean material required to assuage DCC doubts and meet DDP goals rivals the amount relocated to construct the 31.35-mile Channel Tunnel connecting London to

Paris[5]. Viewed by many American policy observers as the largest residential demolition program in the country's history, the decentralized megaproject of demolishing Detroit triggered a second megaproject of identifying, extracting, and circulating over 10 million yd3 of backfill material.

The planning and outcomes of megaprojects are essential to the model of cities as growth machines (Logan & Molotch, 1987). Real estate interests, policymakers, and construction companies may have competing agendas but the priority of growth through land-use intensification enables collaboration. Strategic positions established through speculation allow these coalitions to profit from megaprojects as fallow land is transformed through proximity to major investments. While these growth coalitions steered public intervention to shore up private interests, demolition holds a unique place as an intervention transforming the social significance of land into financial windfalls. Demolishing obsolete buildings provides the vacant land for new developments to intensify land use and renew the income-generation process (Metzger, 2000).

Although mass clearance programs of the Urban Renewal era may more easily fit the descriptor "urban mega-projects," the DDP bears some characteristics of these transformative interventions. Bent Flyvbjerg writes, "Megaprojects are large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost US$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational, and impact millions of people (2014, 1)." These projects look to transform elemental aspects of cities and restructure the social and economic fabric through the modernization of infrastructure and logistical environments. Whether attempting to land a megaevent (Olympics, Super Bowl, World Cup) or a corporate behemoth (Google, Facebook, GM), the scale of megaprojects alters the fundamental physical and social traits of a city. For Flyvbjerg, these are vanity projects for arrogant politicians that

[5] The UK-France partnership required six years to complete at a cost of approximately $16.3 billion in 2018 US dollars.

exceed budgets, miss deadlines, and fail to meet their goals. The DDP is a largescale transformation, but as a variation its premises and outcomes rely on financial and logistical relationships that trouble cut-and-dry analysis of project performance (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2004). Where these scholars highlight the gap between the project plan and its implementation, other scholars have probed how megaprojects establish planning procedures, skirt democratic participation, and rescale capitalist urbanization (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodrigues, 2002).

Baptista's (2013) research on redevelopment in Portugal illustrates how the political consequences of megaprojects serve governance beyond what Flyvbjerg sees as monuments to the powerful. The Polis Programme in Portugal clarifies how largescale infrastructural projects rely on transforming political and legal orders to redefine the operations of power and authority. Baptista scrutinizes private developers and public officials that bypass, suspend, and circumvent standard planning tools and controls to prioritize and preserve their own political-economic and accumulation interests. Baptista views these massive interventions as vehicles for growth but also for marginalizing the democratic rule of urban change. Judging their success or failure as redevelopment projects to trigger growth can serve to camouflage the environmental or political transformations enabled by the project. For Swyngedouw, the dangers of these bureaucratic contortions are exemplified by authorities and agencies that invoke the language of disorder, crisis, and emergency to fortify their administration of the city and undermine resistance to redevelopment agendas (2009). Only decisive action by the powerful can respond to those threats. Or, as Baptista points out, "Practices of exception present the (imagined) possibility of making a clean slate out of complex institutional contexts by flexing the law's muscle (49)."

The layering of these physical and institutional blank slates and the promise of the city's everyday transformation through demolishing illustrate the DDP's twist on the modern

megaproject agenda in which environmental intervention – both built and natural – serves to reinforce regulatory and valuation arrangements. Detroit's unprecedent crisis of blight makes demolishing necessary, but the hundreds of millions in public money, millions of cubic yards of backfill material, and a sprawling geography activated by contractors and their networks makes demolishing possible. The scale of demolishing Detroit may recall classic megaprojects that transformed cities and environments but the outcomes as of 2020 suggest the DDP is a permutation of the ad hoc demolitions consistent with American urban policy between 1970 and 2010 (Hackworth 2016). Like those practices, the DDP has thus far increased the supply of vacant land consonant with vague objectives of redevelopment, quality of life, and preserving property values. The DDP has a scale reminiscent of megaprojects but unlike stadia, sunken highway tunnels, and forests of skyscrapers, the effort underway in Detroit creates emptiness.

However, the sprawl of backfilling provides an opportunity to abandon those reliable dichotomies that have simplified the consequences of ad hoc demolishing or misinterpreted recent projects as reincarnated urban renewal. Emptiness in the wake of DDP intervention is not the absence of production. Although its own tracking and mapping do not publicly represent this production, DDP's reliance on millions of cubic yards of material has helped rescale demolishing to include regional interests and priorities that protect suburban wealth and undermine the DDP. Bringing backfilling into demolishing provides a pathway for reconfiguring environments and markets but it also serves as a framework for considering how land in Detroit is transformed.

Organization of the Dissertation

Although I have conducted background research on the DDP since the beginning of 2015, I conducted formal research and fieldwork on backfilling between 1/2017 and 1/2019. As I address in my methods section, I employed qualitative, quantitative, and cartographic methods to

navigate the institutional, environmental, financial, and logistical aspects of DDP and its backfilling processes. The dissertation comprises five chapters addressing demolishing and backfilling Detroit, MI. The latter half of this chapter examines the academic literature on demolition. In that section, I present a typology of demolition research and show the limits of each approach. The chapter closes with a focus on key research questions, qualitative and mixed methodologies, and my approach to obtaining and analyzing data sources. In this section, I also narrate the sequence of events that enabled me to access DDP officials and its databases.

In Chapter 2, I present a recent history of demolishing Detroit and how a medley of public and private interests collaborated to identify, justify, and intervene in the city's 2013 "blight emergency." By doing so, these interests converted the politics, economics, and potential outcomes of demolition into various forms of *blight discipline* for governing, developing, and inhabiting the city. *These strategies made Detroit and its problems demolishable*. I show how Duggan and his lieutenants institutionalized an approach to demolishing Detroit that depended on a regional economy of scale, consensus, and strategic partnerships with demolition contractors. Demolishing provided engineering and spatial solutions to generational struggles over resources, segregation, and representation. Drawing on the work of Tania Li, Timothy Mitchell, James Ferguson, and Bonnie Honig, I illustrate how constellations of market-fundamentalism, redevelopment agendas, and political authority established a space of intervention for demolition to preserve political, economic, and social asymmetries.

However, the constructed political space for demolishing is one fragment of the DDP's embrace of destruction. The production of demolition established backfill assets, regulations, and markets that contractors positioned themselves to exploit through valuation, real estate, and rentiership. Demolishing needed to happen, and the holes needed to be filled. Demolition

contractors that took advantage of opportunities to capture, command, and circumvent local regulatory controls. Contractors treated the backfill program as an opportunity to value-grab on the DDP. My findings show the yawning gap between the development of regulation and its application in steering or sanctioning contractor behavior. In Chapter 3, I focus on the formation of these secondary backfill markets to illustrate the extent and scope of rentiership within the DDP. I show how contractors captured both regulation and valuation in demolishing Detroit to command the backfill supply as a source of income without precedent in the region's history.

In Chapter 4, I move from the political economy of demolition backfill to the regional and uneven geographies of backfilling Detroit. If Chapter 3 focused on the valuation and regulatory dimensions of managing and moving millions of cubic yards of backfill, this chapter addresses the regional space produced and implicated in the DDP. I show how public policy and contractor processes embedded the backfill program in metropolitan property practices of speculation, expansion, and development. In this section, I introduce and then amend the DDP's official categorization of backfill sources. I reject the existing typology that reduced backfill to a topographic feature that contractors identified and mobilized for their demolitions. This chapter concludes by arguing backfilling relies on processes and investments that contradict DDP goals.

In Chapter 5, I connect the DDP to broader considerations of land, property, and real estate and their relationship to the extraction of value from the built environment. I illustrate how demolishing Detroit relied on and produced land uses inconsistent with the accumulation strategies of austerity and gentrification. By analyzing sales of DLBA-owned property after an HHF demolition, I illustrate the limits of demolishing as a response to blight or the first moment of redevelopment. It is not that the current market-based approach is insufficiently neoliberal to restore the city's property market, but that a *decline machine* in Detroit squeezed value from

places the real estate market considered exhausted of profit. The policies and procedures of the Hardest Hit Funds authorized DDP contractors to capture surplus value through demolishing and backfilling. I concentrate on specific interactions of property, value, and backfill in Detroit with a focus on six sources where the operations of contractors and landowners maximized returns.

In sum, I draw on my findings to show how demolishing was both a tool for transforming Detroit and its neighborhoods, but also a pipeline for achieving political, environmental, and financial objectives. Existing work on demolition simplifies building removal as part of an ongoing redevelopment or disinvestment processes. Policymakers and developers see the old as an impediment to the new. In other currents, demolishing is an event that obliterates the vacant home and erases the evidence of the harsh reality of systemic social and economic inequalities. In both interpretations, demolition is the muscle supporting accumulation and administration for city-builders and developers. However, reframing demolishing as an active geographic and logistical process challenges the received wisdom that flattens it as the end of one phase or the beginning of another. Urban planning and geography scholars can draw on these findings to scrutinize the regional processes that provide opportunities for institutional blank slates, regulatory and valuation capture, uneven development, and land-uses beyond growth paradigms.

The History and Theory of Demolition: Review of the Literature

This section contains three subparts. First, I review and schematize the literature relevant to this research project. Second, I will describe and justify the research methods I used to complete the project. My aim to identify the gaps and lacuna within the relevant research and then present and defend my approach for satisfying these holes in the interpretation and explanation of demolition and urban decline. Finally, I connect the different components of the introduction and literature review to argue for a refreshed critical analysis of demolishing.

Below, I present and interpret the state of the literature on demolition and blight removal. I proceed by dividing the work into two sections each with subsections of more focused literature. First, I create a typology based on how authors explain the purpose and outcomes of demolition. I use "demolition" instead of "demolishing" here because these approaches have historically simplified it as a discrete policy practice. Each current of research explains how demolition became an on-demand intervention for realizing the objectives of both public and private interests. I distinguish six approaches to describing and critiquing demolition: 1) Demolition as belief in progress; 2) Demolition as a backroom deal; 3) Demolition as a burial; 4) Demolition as a bailout; 5) Demolition as a bulwark; and, 6) Demolition as a banishment. These interpretations are historically connected, and in both the literature and in professional policy settings one approach will coincide with other goals and justifications for residential demolition.

Demolition as belief-in-progress

The demolition as belief in progress perspective historicizes how 20th century public institutions imagined remaking American cities through mass clearance (Ammon, 2016). For progressives, local, state, and federal governments demolition of substandard housing provided spatial and social conditions for egalitarian cities. Early on, slum clearance initiatives sought to enable better housing and living environments for urban inhabitants and implement a progressive conception of the collective good. However, the hopefulness of the renewed and modern city culminated in demolition driving the mass displacement of undesirable inhabitants. The populist pathologizing of urban poverty and the racialization of slum neighborhoods polluted the initial optimism associated with government intervention to wreck its way to an improved society.

This literature interprets demolition as a policy tool for clearing slum housing to allow space for improved and egalitarian urban living conditions (Klemek, 2011). As a way of making

land open and developable, demolition allowed local, state, and federal institutions to respond to public health, public safety, and economic challenges. A belief in progress justified widespread destruction because policymakers and leaders linked the social and economic problems of cities in the early and mid-20th centuries with neighborhood disorder, uncleanliness, and overcrowding (Berman 1982). For activists and leaders, these neighborhoods were expressions of incivility and an urban primitivism made necessary by explosive growth (Sennett, 1970). Wiping away those shambolic urban imperfections would liberate slum-dwelling inhabitants and allow progressive leaders to imagine and realize better, safer, and more prosperous American cities (Jacobs, 1961).

However, implementation of this approach to demolition could not weather and survive institutionalized discrimination. The actual outcome of this belief-in-progress legislated and engineered the systematic dismantling of black and poor neighborhoods that stood in the way of real estate interests and their projects (Anderson, 1965). Demolition became a synonym of dispossession as the bulldozer roared through expendable neighborhoods and unlocked development potential near downtowns (Fullilove, 2016). While contemporary public and private interests within and beyond the United States continue to rely on demolition to create developable land, this approach too easily reduces demolition to a unilateral urban authority seizing property and emptying homes on behalf of private redevelopment. Moreover, this conceptualization of demolition does not provide insight into the complementary relationships beyond the demolished structures that allow the production of demolition to extract value.

Demolition as backroom-deal

The demolition as backroom-deal perspective argues demolition is an attempt to maximize profit in a process that encourages governments to collude with regional construction industry. The backroom-deal approach to demolition has gained salience in Detroit since 2015,

where journalists and reporters have undertaken investigations into fraud and kickbacks in the demolition program (LeDuff, 2016). The Office of the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program uncovered a pattern of waste in the HHF program (Burke, 2018). Federal investigations into bid-rigging and unexplained costs have provided reason to believe public officials accommodated contractor command over the DDP (Guillen, 2016a; Burns, 2016). Whether tearing down the wrong home (Stafford, 2019d), using contaminated backfill material (Ferretti, 2019h), or manipulating pricing (Ferretti, 2019b), reporters have focused attention on wasted resources and the lack of accountability. Recent federal indictments of contractors and former DDP staff seem to confirm the suspicions of reporters (Stafford, 2019e).

This approach views most demolition as an expression of corrupt institutions funneling public money into the hands of private interests, a claim that is also consistent with the failed belief-in-progress that once defined demolition. Despite evidence to support those accusations, employing this backroom-deal interpretation of demolition makes two critical errors. First, it focuses on individual behaviors and actions that corrupt demolition programs. Consequently, interpretations of demolition marginalize the relationship of contractors, policymakers, and real estate markets to broader agendas around land use and valuation. Zeroing in on a series of individual violations erases the way institutions shape regulation to accommodate industry practices. Second, the backroom-deal frame for demolition suggests that governments would invest these demolition dollars in other types of improvement if not for the pressures of contractors needing lucrative projects and developers seeking empty land. Policymakers and officials view demolition less as a burdensome cleanup than a capital investment (Frank, 2019).

Demolition as burial

The demolition as burial perspective argues that demolition is an orchestrated, strategic effort to eliminate deteriorated or disinvested neighborhoods (Hackworth, 2016). By accelerating municipal shrinking or right-sizing initiatives, demolition seals off residentials areas for a variety of infrastructural or environmental interventions seeking to reduce municipal fiscal responsibility for maintaining inhabitable, low-density neighborhoods (Hackworth, 2015). This interpretation suggests policymakers view demolition as a tool to create space for low-maintenance green and blue infrastructure: bioswales, rain gardens, parks. Vacant land becomes a community asset in the restructuring of the built environment. The consequent low- to no-population places reduce the costs associated with provisioning and managing public or social services (Butcher, 2018).

However, the burial interpretation omits how these demolitions or managed decline processes play out in neighborhoods. The public implementation of green and blue infrastructure is slow and expensive. City governments and institutions might perceive neighborhoods as test sites for sustainable infrastructures, but remaining inhabitants contest the deployment of those infrastructures. In Detroit, Mayor Dave Bing struggled to launch a planning process that would have tailored interventions to neighborhoods based on their long-term viability (Lessenberry, 2011). Using demolition in this "smart shrinkage" approach envisions reducing the footprint of serviced areas in depopulated neighborhoods while concentrating investment in other parts of the city (Newman, Park, Bowman, & Lee, 2018). As some authors have shown, the problem with this interpretation is it imagines public institutions possessing the authority to make those decisions without interference by inhabitants (Rhodes & Russo, 2013). Moreover, it can risk reinforcing decline as an issue of resource allocation at the local level rather than a consequence of regional, state, and federal priorities on the level of funding and assistance cities deserve.

Demolition as bailout

The demolition as bailout perspective contends that the urban process under capitalism uses residential demolition to the problem of abandonment caused by exhausting profitability or the predatory practices of financial institutions (Rosenman & Walker 2015). Demolition cleans up the past mess and then opens new land markets to stabilize capital. Demolition in this view aims to erase the evidence of housing crises to kickstart new periods of accumulation for property owners, developers, and speculators (who used a similar financial arrangement to precipitate the preceding displacement and dispossession) (Weber, 2002). For those adopting this interpretation, demolitions produce empty space newly attractive to the seesaw of regional capital (Smith, 2008). Demolition is a public intervention that enables private investment.

What some scholars have termed "demolition for development" looks to link these policies and programs to revitalization through private property and gentrification (Mah, 2012). Even with elevated interest in the market potential for depopulated or declining neighborhoods, demolished properties are often scattered and difficult to assemble in schemes attractive to developers and investors. Authors have connected demolition programs to a backdoor regionalism that supported the growth machine but demolition's ability to prepare land for intensified uses remains inconsistent. Recent research concluded property values in Detroit would need to increase by a factor of five to justify the costs of the demolition program (Paredes & Skidmore, 2017). Moreover, development on contaminated land is a lengthy and expensive process (McCarthy, 2002). Barring unpopular use of eminent domain, empty lots typically sit adjacent to occupied buildings and reduce the likelihood of largescale redevelopment plans.

Demolition as bulwark

The demolition as bulwark perspective argues that demolition at certain boundaries can serve a defensive purpose between desirable and deteriorating neighborhoods (Mallach, 2011). Demolition stabilizes particular "tipping point neighborhoods" in order to attract and sustain investment by incumbents maintaining/improving their own homes and outside property actors seeking windfalls for low-risk investments and improvements. This perspective relies on trickle-down or spillover effects to stabilize adjacent neighborhoods in the long-term; demolition is part of a triage program to tailor interventions along neighborhood types (Marcuse 1982). Residents in stable neighborhoods draw benefit from demolition as a vacancy management policy (Weaver & Knight, 2018). Preserving these neighborhoods signals confidence in the market and leads to increased investor interest to maintain desirability. Governments commission and rely on market value analyses to structure investment decisions along these cost-benefit lines (Safransky, 2020).

Faced with a variety of housing submarkets, city governments seek to protect the public investments they make in strong and tipping-point neighborhoods (Cohen, 2001). Neighborhoods become assets in a portfolio. Stabilizing resident morale helps justify expenditures on parks, streets, and services. However, evidence that demolition by itself staunches decline or stabilizes property value is inconclusive, notably findings from a previous statistical analysis of the DDP (Dynamo Metrics, 2015). These practices rest comfortably in the *broken windows* approach to neighborhood policy (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). For those supportive of this bulwark approach, demolition in part prevents the visual disorder accompanying economic or population instability (Branas, Kondo, Murphy, South, Polsky, & MacDonald, 2016). Despite the intellectual heft that treats these nuisance abatement programs as upstream interventions, the bulwark explanation for demolition fails to identify the structural, social, and political-economic

determinants that produce neighborhoods. By naturalizing inequality in these submarkets, public policies and property practices preserving regional and local uneven development go untouched.

Demolition as banishment

The demolition as banishment perspective suggests demolition policies punish low-income neighborhoods and communities of color for inhabiting urban zones with higher potential uses (Herscher, 2020). For planning and development officials, banishing those incumbent residents would open the potential for more revenues, more retail traffic, and more economic activity (Beckett & Herbert, 2009). Demolition, then, works to correct both a problem population – removing poor and non-white inhabitants – and an inefficiency in land use – eliminating an impediment to higher values. In this view, demolition is a powerful tool for racist or neoliberal institutions (working with and alongside speculative property interests) to clear space for potentially lucrative developments through dislocation. This approach interprets demolition as a weapon against low income and public housing (Goetz, 2010; Goetz, 2002). Capital descends on black spaces to reclaim the built environment for accumulation (McElroy & Werth, 2019). Local, state, and federal governments adopt demolition-by-neglect or eminent domain to forcibly relocate groups that do not fit investment schemes (Roy, 2019). Demolition represents another "possessive investment in whiteness" recasting non-white space as vacant land (Lipsitz, 1995).

Although research on this racist and classist restructuring has drawn connections between demolition and dispossession (Markley & Sharma, 2016), the former is not a primary driver of displacement in US cities. Environmental destruction, evictions, mortgage foreclosures, and tax foreclosures remain the dominant pathways of banishment (Akers & Seymour, 2019; Desmond, 2016; Pulido, Kohl, & Cotton, 2016). Expelling populations through demolition is also not a

straightforward response to undervalued land. Blight removal schemes that reshape submarkets do not depopulate these neighborhoods in one dramatic or swift intervention (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Employing eminent domain to accelerate banishment is litigious and provokes passionate distrust towards a city's institutions (Becher, 2014). Even with minor successes, the most targeted neighborhoods are peppered with holdout owner-occupants that reject redevelopment agendas and are willing to deepen and prolong negotiations (Barker, 2018). Inhabitants inside and outside a neighborhood mobilize against public plans that may not serve their immediate or long-term interests. Even in the aftermath of banishment, increases in those property values do not have linear relationship with past displacement (Martin & Beck, 2016). Researchers focused on transformations and revaluations of the built environment should shift analyses of land and property upstream to scrutinize dispossession rather construing demolition as displacement.

Table 1 below summarizes these six approaches to demolition and the limitations each category has for explaining contemporary demolition or in responding the urban decline.

Table 1: Explanations of demolition and their limitations

Category	**Interpretation**	**Limitation**
Belief in Progress	Revitalization and modernization through mass clearance	Lack of mass clearance in contemporary policy
Backroom Deal	Collusion between policy institutions and real estate interests	Flaws in demolition programs are isolated or individual
Burial	Eradication of depopulated neighborhoods	Low population neighborhoods are not emptied at one time
Bailout	Preparation for reinvestment and redevelopment	Vacant land is not immediately developed
Bulwark	Defense of stable neighborhoods and blocks from adjacent blight	Vacant and abandoned properties are produced upstream
Banishment	Dislocation of undesirable residents in an undervalued neighborhood	Foreclosure and eviction are more likely to dislocate residents

Demolition as demolishing

The six approaches I have reviewed – summarized in Table 1 – reflect tendencies by researchers and authors to treat demolition as the state's signal to outsiders and residents that neighborhood change is coming. Public institutions absorb thousands of abandoned buildings to remediate blight and produce vacant land. Contractors expand their demolition services to take advantage of a revived emphasis on wrecking. Real estate investors respond by purchasing swathes of underused property in hopes surrounding public and private investments will maximize values and profits. Owner-occupants renew commitments to their homes and blocks. Low-income residents and communities of color prepare for another cycle of insecurity. In each of these existing scenarios, the politics of demolition is found either in the false promises of revitalization or the conflicts over the meanings of value in the aftermath of destruction. Demolition is the end of one process of extraction and the beginning of another phase of investment. Conflicts over the distribution of gains and manner of participation in the city's future determines who and what belongs on a street, a neighborhood, and a region. Those lacking power over property or investment are vulnerable to these interactions of policy and profit that transform their environments. For the above literature, it is the failure of inclusion within these processes that represents the regressive qualities of demolition. Demolition, viewed in these ways, serves as a reactionary practice of expelling undesirable groups, transferring public wealth, and liberating land values from the iron cage of past dereliction. The practice of demolition is an on-demand intervention in the built environment that eliminates impairment to future investment and signals the end of a previous period of property relations. *Demolition is delivered*.

In place of this flattened consideration of the practices of demolition, I propose an analytic framework focused on the *process of demolishing*. Demolishing is an expression of

pathways of construction, extraction, and destruction embedded in local and regional property practices. Demolishing is productive of its own property relations while relying on a broader geography of accumulation strategies. It is an income-generating operation enabled by supply chains, resources, industrial systems, and new assets. Demolishing is experienced in the time-space of removal, but it is not coterminous with that moment. *Demolishing is achieved*. Recasting demolition as demolishing recovers contradictions and conflicts that representations like the Detroit Demolition Tracker, NOLA BlightSTAT[6], and STL Vacancy Collaborative Demolition Tracker[7] render invisible. This approach also makes possible analyses that confront how demolishing can preserve spatial differentiation in ways not made apparent by the demolition of a single vacant property. The regional embeddedness of demolishing Detroit is not one dimension of the DDP, it serves as a precondition for the material production of demolition.

Research Methods and Approach

Politicizing Grounded Theory Research

This project employs the Grounded Theory (GT) approach to social research to investigate and interpret the DDP and the processes of demolishing and backfilling Detroit. Grounded Theory is an inductive mixed-methods research method that seeks to identify and comprehend emergent themes within social settings and situations. GT stresses the relationship of practice to theory through the iterative production of codes and interpretations. Initially considered an objectivist epistemology, scholars of GT have pushed the approach into constructivist terrain and centered the construction of theory instead of the discovery of meanings by detecting the truth within data. GT provides a framework for the iterative

[6] https://data.nola.gov/Housing-Land-Use-and-Blight/BlightStatus-Demolitions-Map/rp4k-we3p
[7] https://www.stlvacancy.com/demo.html

development of codes, concepts, and explanations of social action. Researchers judge explanations on fit, workability, relevance, and modifiability (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003).

More recently, some practitioners of GT have adopted principles of the critical realist tradition (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Oliver, 2012). Critical realist epistemology aids in developing explanations of complex social relations by balancing the real, actual, and empirical (Bhaskar, 1978). The real refers to the unobservable mechanisms shaping society. The actual refers to the outcomes of those mechanisms. Finally, the empirical describes how those outcomes are perceived and experienced. The objective of critical realism is to move beyond the observable and outcomes to identify and interpret structural drivers. Importantly, the critical realist approach to social phenomena and action is less about the uniformity of events or prediction than it is the construction of theory for explaining open systems. Critical realism provides an epistemology of "retroduction" to identify the social determinants. Combining iterative GT with critical realism can form the basis for transformational grounded theory (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2017).

Despite a surfeit of warnings that critical orientations can contaminate GT findings, recent commentary on the epistemology has accommodated feminist, phenomenology, and even Marxist points of theoretical departure. Charmaz has suggested that grounded theory can be matched with "21st century methodological assumptions and approaches (2006, 9)." Seaman argues, "Constructing grounded theory is now a process more of careful interpretation than of discovery (2008, 3)." In order to anchor this inductive and reflexive approach, I have adopted one such critical orientation within the broader GT epistemology. My theoretical sensitivity to the factors of production - land, labor, and capital – centers inequality and structural power in the Neo-Marxian practice of critical urban research (Brenner, 2009). In my view, GT enhances its

value as an epistemology and approach to policy and institutions when researchers incorporate attention to institutional forms, contradiction, and accumulation in conceptual frameworks aimed at interpreting uneven urban geographies (Brenner, Madden, & Wachsmuth, 2011). GT provides an opportunity to expand and contract the unit of analysis depending on the strength and fit of an interpretation. As a result, GT maintains a unique sensitivity to relationality. Moreover, critical engagement with the factors of production and the forces of urbanization defamiliarizes the instrumental forms of policymaking and planning intervention reproducing exploitation.

Building Towards Research on Demolishing and Backfilling Detroit

A recurring challenge of scholarship is no research project is linear in execution. In 1/2015, I met with a staff member at the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) to discuss the DDP. The staff member shared professional concern over the program and the demolition backfill program. He suggested more public attention should concentrate on the cost and quantity of filling over 40,000 holes created through basement excavation. During our conversation, he disclosed that the prior year's Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF) and subsequently the DDP had not adequately accounted for the volume of material required to meet the demand of the demolitions. Public money could flow into a city program, but existing supply chains could only do so much to serve those objectives. Demolitions are not on-demand and the material inputs have inelastic demand – the city pays for backfill regardless of the price reported by contractors. Backfill material represented a particularly formidable challenge for the DDP and its contractors. At that time, he expressed to me over lunch, "Detroit needed all of northern Michigan's timber to be built and it will need all of northern Michigan's dirt to be unbuilt."

To make sense of the geography and logistics of the backfill program, I have adopted a "supply chain" approach to this project that prioritizes commodity and resource relationships

between institutions and contractors. Demolishing takes place. This attention to lifecycle allows me to pry open the black box of demolition and address the political and economic exchange that makes these programs possible in addition to the material relationships that produce demolition in declining cities. This research approach also probes demolition as an ongoing process, not an output or discrete intervention in a neighborhood. Supply chain as a research method – tracing the provisional, income-generating linkages – means abandoning the flat, Cartesian geographies of demolition that routinize demolition as an on-demand service delivered to a site.

Towards the fall of 2015, I obtained the DLBA Request for Proposals (RFP) that initiated the search for a local environmental consultant to administer the DDP backfill program. The RFP contained contact information for staff at AKT Peerless, a consulting firm based in suburban Detroit. In late 9/2014, DLBA had selected AKT to construct soil guidance standards and run the backfill program. In 10/2015, I participated in a conference call with Julie Barton, AKT's DBA Backfill Program Manager, and Tony Kashat, a principal and founder of AKT, to discuss the DDP. They discussed the history of the program, the variety of challenges faced by sourcing the necessary volumes of material, and how AKT and the DDP collaborated to monitor quality. Kashat remarked, "We've got to control costs. We've got to control quality. We need a system in place to manage this process." Barton disclosed that as part of their contract with DLBA they maintained contractor-supplied records on sources, destinations, and volumes of backfill material for the DDP. These records enabled review and approval of material quality. At the conclusion of the conference call, I requested AKT Peerless' list of approved backfill source locations.

On 11/2/2015, Barton shared a list of 27 backfill sources by email. This list contained only street names and municipalities. In response, I requested additional details about each of these sources. The following day, Paula Lancaster, an AKT staff member working with Barton, emailed me and expanded on the locations of the approved backfill sources in an attached PDF. Lancaster wrote, "Please see the attached. It was easier to just hand write the addresses on a copy of the email and get them to you. If you have any trouble with my handwriting, please let me

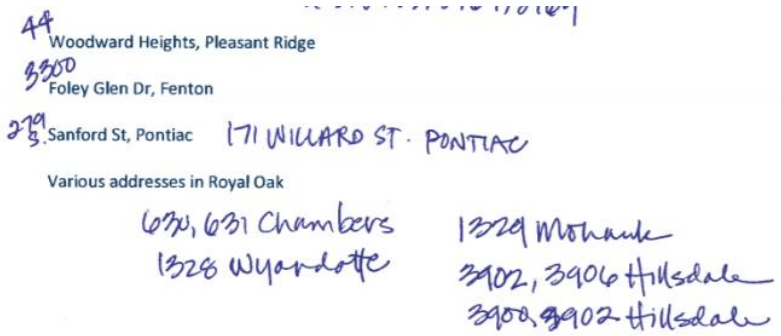


Figure 4: Example of handwritten notation from AKT Peerless (Personal correspondence, 2015)

know!" To satisfy my request for information, the official backfill manager for the DDP had printed, notated by hand, and then scanned the email to send to me. The resulting document was messy and imprecise. The interaction prompted me to reflect on the thoroughness and capacity of the regulatory practices providing oversight on demolition contractor practices in the DDP.

In early 2016, I contacted a suburban Detroit-based demolition contractor and inquired about the company's backfill practices in the DDP. An administrator with the firm described the basics of their approach and then mentioned an online soil management platform. Created and

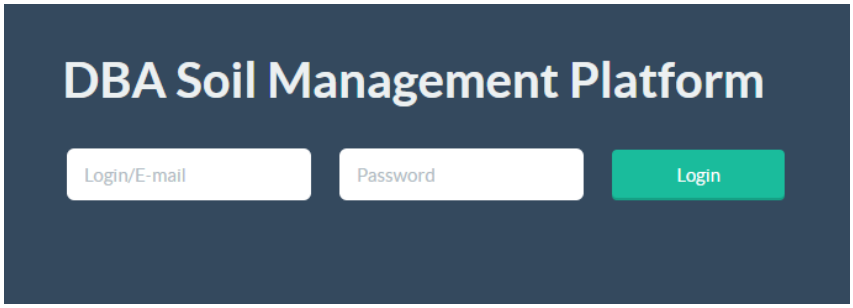


Figure 5: Login page for the DBA backfill platform (DBA.AKTPeerless.com, 2019)

administered by AKT Peerless, the platform enabled contractors to submit backfill sources, destinations (demolished addresses), and the volume of material. The backfill program team at AKT would then review aerial imagery and any soil testing and approve the material for use in a demolition. In a follow-up email, the administrator at the demolition firm provided her unique login credentials for the online platform allowing me to view the approval process. AKT Peerless denied my subsequent attempts to contact their backfill program managers about the platform.

In 1/2017, I proceeded to the next stage of this research project by contacting public officials working within the DDP. However, ongoing concerns over the two federal investigations – FBI and SIGTARP within the Department of Treasury – frustrated early attempts to schedule interviews with staff with the Mayor's Office, and at both the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) and Detroit Building Authority (DBA). Representatives from most of the administrator agencies would not schedule interviews. The DLBA demolition director cancelled four scheduled interviews and then resigned. However, AKT's backfill recording practices and the existence of the online platform suggested the DDP was maintaining a dataset with backfill sources and transactions. In mid-2017, I initiated FOIA requests to the DBA and DLBA for their backfill records. After three denials, a former lawyer for the DBA casually provided me with a .CSV file including 8,500 transactions between 2015 and 2018. Later attempts to access these same records culminated in FOIA layers disputing the existence of the files. In 2018, MSHDA satisfied a FOIA request for costs records and provided me with a complete expense report of HHF-funded demolitions. The dataset included costs for each component of a demolition conducted in the DDP. The column labeled "Dirt Cost" provided a figure for the material purchased by contractors. By connecting these records with the DDP's backfill records, I was able to create a regional profile of cost, volume, and location. This

allowed me to interpret the distribution of sources and flow of money within the Detroit metro. To establish histories of each source site I drew on land records with the Wayne County and Oakland County, property sales and building permits through City of Detroit records, state LLC documents, and assessor records through the BS&A platform for Michigan municipalities.

Finally, contractors hesitated to communicate with me based on a well-known fear their practices were unlawful or in violation of the DDP's guidance. Repeated attempts to contact demolition contractors resulted in infrequent responses. Contractors that did provide insight into their processes – Den-Man and MCM – had already been sanctioned or removed from the program. EPA officials that did respond to interview requests often referred me to personnel in DBA or DLBA. DBA officials refused to meet with me and claimed I already possessed all available information. Tammy Daniels of the DLBA did meet but then referred me to DBA staff that scheduled and then cancelled a meeting. By working with Christine Ferretti of *The Detroit News* I was able to connect my research to the agencies and institutions administering the DDP. Leadership with MSHDA, DLBA, and DBA all commented on findings. The fieldwork for this project was taxing and required that I routinely adopt different strategies for accessing data. My window into the operations of the program ultimately depended on site visits, interviews with backfill suppliers, and data from FOIA requests. In sum, I sleuthed, probed, pried, and struggled against the supply chain of demolishing Detroit to conduct research and interpret the DDP.

Conclusion: Demolishing in the Production of Decline

In this introduction, I have illustrated the limits of simplifying demolition to a technical intervention. Inserting demolition as a transaction with later social and economic consequences excludes how the process of demolishing in part creates the context of its operations. New valuations, new regulation, and new economies make demolishing appear as an on-demand

service. I have examined the existing body of literature on demolition and identified gaps where reduction of demolition to the violent restoration of capital accumulation concealed the production of demolition, its pipelines, and its convergence of regional economics of extraction and development. In *Figure 6*, I illustrate the relationship between two key processes important to the production of decline. *The Production of Blight* relies on property practices, banking, and public policies to extract value from the built environment until its potential for profit is exhausted (Akers, 2017). I leave blank spaces for those interests, actors, institutions, and practices that produce demolition in Detroit as well as those ensembles that use the process of demolishing to extract value. *The Production of Demolition* depends on public resources, local land uses, regional property practices. and supply chains to capture remaining value through

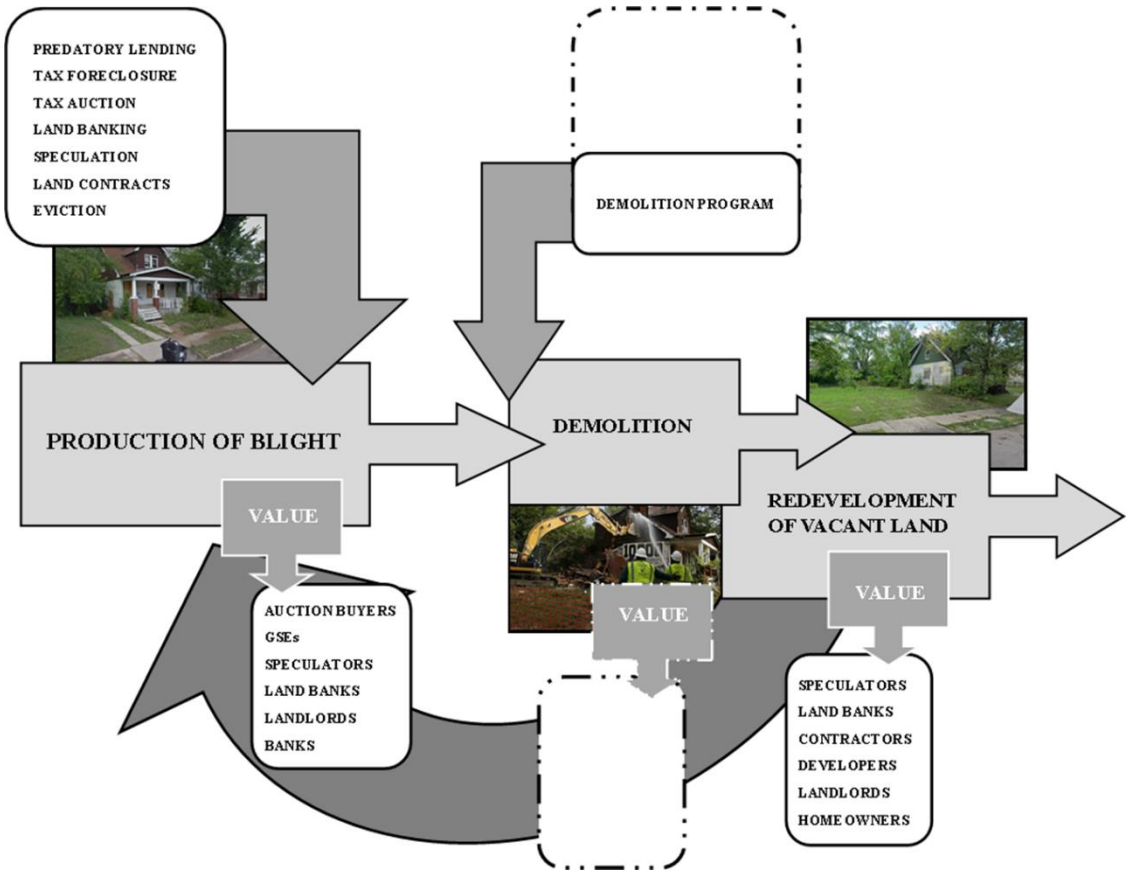


Figure 6: The Production of Demolition and the Production of Blight within the Production of Decline

demolishing. I argue these processes provide part of the foundation for the Production of Decline and represent urban changes irreducible to gentrification or austerity (Seymour, 2020).

Demolishing is not just what contractors and leaders can do, but how they proceed to command and coordinate institutions, environments, resources, and supply chains. In this introduction and literature review, I argued for an understanding of the production of demolition and the process of demolishing. The academic and public debate over the DDP and peer programs should attend to regressive aspects of demolishing and its benefits, but also how institutions, industries, land, and resources make a city politically and physically *demolishable*. I focus on the strategies, supply chains, and interventions enabling the largest residential demolition program in US history. Each chapter probes a different dimension of demolishing Detroit: public and private agendas of blight; rentiership and regulation; regional resources and real estate expansion; and a land regime of decline suggesting new forms of value in Detroit. By focusing on the backfill component of the DDP, I trace how demolition contractors controlled and commanded the production of demolition to serve their financial and material priorities.

In this dissertation, I argue scholarly efforts to politicize blight and decline by privileging the property practices and geographic relationships behind both should expand to include the production of demolition. The interests and priorities of demolition contractors are embedded within supply chains, environments, and industrial systems that use the DDP to capture the remaining value from the city's property. The Detroit Demolition Tracker represents how the DDP has relied on the practice of demolition to simplify wrecking as an on-demand service. DDP's approach implies the blighted building existed, the backfill was available, and now vacant land is developable. In a televised interview from 2016, Farkas, declaimed, "In today's day in age, you know, you can go online and track your package with FedEx, you can track your pizza

with Domino's, now you can track your demolition in Detroit (WXYZ, 2016)." Farkas' description camouflages the production of decline and the strategies of accumulation, valuation, and rentiership that have made demolishing necessary but also served to make it lucrative.

This dissertation argues for a renewed understanding of demolition and consequences for cities, institutions, land, and value. In what follows, I have constructed a narrative to color in interpretive blind spots in one of fundamental political and physical responses to urban decline: demolishing. I have done so not to endorse or condemn demolition as a policy, but to expand the ways in which scholars, residents, and practitioners can address processes and accomplishments. The flattened local practice of demolition absolves contractors and their networks of responsibility within Detroit's property market. Doing so continues the pattern of simplifying demolition into the preface of accumulation rather than a part of its operations. Demolishing is not the beginning of renewal nor the end of decline. The DDP, its backfilling processes, and its geographies, do not start and finish at a single residential address. To account for the achievements and significance of demolishing Detroit, this critical analysis follows the trail of DDP contractors and extends politically and geographically to suggest new ways forward for the study of decline that account for the environmental and logistical processes of its production.

CHAPTER 2

Clearance Consensus:

A (Recent) History of Demolishing the Motor City

"This is a hard call, because the act of demolishing a lot of properties in a neighborhood, although improving quality of life in the short run, may work against the neighborhood's long-term prospects."

- Mallach, A. (2018a). The two vacancy crises in America's cities. *Shelterforce*.

In this chapter, I examine the emergence of the political and institutional conditions that enabled demolishing Detroit. The subprime crisis of the mid-2000s preyed upon and intensified decades of population and economic instability in Detroit. The 2010 Census counts confirmed a city in jeopardy. Detroit's neighborhoods bore the brunt of the devastation as foreclosure and eviction upended any stability. The mayor at the time proposed largescale demolition to transform the city's neighborhoods. State leaders decided Detroit would not emerge from its financial insolvency without dramatic action. Governor Rick Snyder appointed Kevyn Orr to restructure the city's finances and lead it out of financial disaster (at great cost to the people of Detroit). For powerful figures in the private, philanthropic, and public sectors, the city's residential blight became an indicator of mismanagement and an inhibitor of redevelopment. The financial emergency provided an opportunity to reshape how the city approached governing its decline and neighborhoods. Blight removal and demolition became ways of administering change in Detroit. As a new generation of local leadership assumed command of Detroit, they battled to sustain their new authority by controlling and demolishing the city's blight.

Wrecking to Revitalize

In the summer of 2011, Mayor Dave Bing announced the formation of three neighborhood demonstration areas on the westside of Detroit, MI[8] (Wattrick, 2011). His administration's statement explained, "In these areas the city is applying a market-based approach to how it delivers some services and leverages some of its resources; and is working closely with the CDCs, nonprofits, block clubs, and churches to gain greater knowledge about the specifics services and resources they feel are necessary and how to align them based on the market conditions." Strained by cash shortages, billions in debts, and pension obligations, Bing and his administration resolved to take targeted approach to maintaining neighborhoods. A medley of public-private partnerships would deliver blight elimination, infrastructure improvements, beautification, and economic development in focused areas (Cwiek ,2011). Each demonstration area comprised neighborhoods fitting into one of three categories: Steady; Transitional; and Distressed. Steady described a stable market in good condition with high home values and majority owner-occupancy. Transitional designations signaled a residential area with a high volume of real-estate owned (REO) properties, rentals, and some vacant properties. Distressed areas in the city lacked conventional housing market activity and showed high rates of vacancy and abandonment (Detroit Works Project, 2011). The Detroit Works Project (DWP) – a neighborhood-by-neighborhood revision of land use in the city – would draw on results in these demonstration areas to inform a repertoire of short- and long-term strategies (Kaffer, 2011).

[8] "The Demonstration Areas are: 1.) Hubbard Farms / Southwest: This area is generally bounded to the north by Vernor and Toledo, to the east and south by I-75, and to the west by Woodmere; 2.) Boston Edison / North End/ Virginia Park: This area is generally bounded to the north by Boston Boulevard and Holbrook, to the east by I-75, to the south by West Grand Boulevard, the rail road and I-94, and to the west by Linwood; and 3.) Palmer Woods / Sherwood Forest / University District / Green Acres / Bagley: This area is bounded to the north by Eight Mile to the east by Woodward, to the south by McNichols and to the west by Wyoming."

The neighborhood categorization system helped determine the scope and scale of interventions in each area in the aftermath of the city's mortgage foreclosure crisis[9]. *Steady* areas were to receive a light touch of code enforcement and infrastructure upgrades, the city would execute demolition plans in *Distressed* areas, and *Transitional* areas would see an assortment of strategies. Bing's plan to leverage private investment alongside public resources drew partly from an eight-month community forum program. However, a Market Value Analysis (MVA) conducted by The Reinvestment Fund (TRF)[10] furnished most of his administration's demonstration area strategy. The MVA "assists government officials (sic) identify and comprehend the various elements of local real estate markets (TRF, 2011, 3)." TRF had previously conducted MVAs in other declining American cities and adopted a similar typological approach to Detroit. In its 2011 report, TRF divided Detroit's neighborhoods amongst six market clusters – Regional Choice; High Value; Steady; Transitional; Distressed; and Reclamation – and identified eight priorities ranging from nuisance abatement to demolition that governments could tailor to each cluster. Additionally, MVA distinguished between nine market types in Detroit – A to I – with nearly 20% of the city's block groups displaying reclamation market traits.

In Reclamation markets, TRF encouraged Detroit to create conditions for market rebirth to respond to population loss, low property values, and widespread vacancy (TRF, 2011, 28). *Demolition was the highest priority in these areas*. The MVA concluded its report by designating three "Detroit Initial Target Areas" for experimenting with a new service delivery approach. In the months after TRF's report, the MVAs target areas (with light revision) became Mayor Bing's *demonstration areas* and a keystone in his neighborhood policy. Over the next eight months,

[9] In a 2009 report issued by Mayor Kenneth Cockrell Jr, the city estimated banks foreclosed on 67,000 homes in 2005-2007.
[10] The Reinvestment Fund's slogan is "Capital at the point of impact."

long-term planning and short-term actions in these demonstration areas aligned TRF's findings. Moreover, the city's strategy for distributing successive allocations of federal funds echoed the strategic deployment approach laid out by the MVA report. In 6/2012, a month removed from a consent agreement between Detroit and Michigan that prevented a state takeover, Bing announced a "Summer 2012 Demolition Plan" committing to wrecking 1,500 properties before September (Wilson, 2012). The plan drew from Michigan's $97,209,465 portion of a $25 billion settlement between states and federal governments and five major mortgage lenders[11] culpable for the home foreclosure crisis. In addition to funds for homeowner refinance and community development programs, the state set aside $25 million[12] for blight removal, awarding Detroit $10 million. Bing and his administration used the state funds to accelerate residential demolitions.

Bing's commitment to remake Detroit through blight removal and demonstration areas stalled at the close of 2012. Locally, the DWP ran out of momentum after a long stretch of public derision for what was perceived as Bing and his lieutenants picking which Detroit neighborhoods would flourish or perish. With sustained pressure, the tailored intervention approach of DWP collapsed into a general strategic framework of *Detroit Future City*. For conservative leadership in Lansing, blight became less of a priority for a city with ballooning pension obligations, falling revenues, and continued population losses even after the record flight recorded by the 2010 US census. In hindsight, state government appeared displeased with the rate at which Bing was restructuring and reprioritizing. Unsatisfied with Bing's progress in reshaping the city's finances, Governor Rick Snyder announced a second state audit of Detroit (Reuters, 2012). Despite the

[11] Bank of America, Well Fargo, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, and GMAC/Ally.
[12] Foreclosure Rescue Scam Victim Restitution: $7.5 million; Assistance for Veterans: $5 million; Michigan Attorney General Home Protection Unit: $6 million; Blight Elimination: $25 million; Foreclosure Counseling for Homeowners: $20 million; Housing and Community Development Programs: $3.7 million; Grants to Help Homeowners Refinance: $5 million; Assistance to Homebuyers: $15 million; Education Achievement Authority: $10 million.

prior consent agreement that expanded Bing's mayoral authority to address the fiscal crisis, the state concluded radical methods were necessary to transform the city and restore its financial footing. The largest municipal bankruptcy in US history seemed an ineluctable fate.

For Snyder and his state finance team, $14 billion in long-term liabilities trumped Bing's efforts to stabilize Detroit neighborhoods with TRF recommendations and targeted service delivery. Bing's catalog of responses appeared out of place given the state's cataclysmic diagnosis of the city's deficits. Though far from the surgical aims of the MVA, Michigan's approach to restoring the city's market potential illustrated a muscularized version of the TRF principle that government "must be used to leverage, or clear the path, for private investment (2011, 5)." In the successive months, state-appointed emergency leadership proceeded to slash Detroit into procrustean fiscal stability. But by the middle of 2013, the investor and institutional spheres resurrected and revised Bing's agenda linking blight to neighborhood stabilization.

I argue philanthropists, political leaders, and private investors in Detroit turned demolition into an organizing principle for governing the city. In the aftermath of the subprime and predatory lending crisis, demolition became "easy politics" but also a way of doing politics in Detroit (Ikonomova, 2019). For businesspersons, community leaders, and elected officials, demolition was a means for restoring the property market but also an end made possible by constructing consensus, restructuring institutions, and transforming blight removal into social policy. More than a technical intervention clearing space for restoration, stabilization, or revitalization, demolition serves political and economic interests that make certain futures possible while foreclosing on others. I make this argument by tracing the history of demolition in Detroit with a large portion devoted to understanding how an ensemble of policymakers across

scales and a core of elites from across regional sectors and industries prioritized blight removal in the aftermath of the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history (Davey & Walsh, 2013).

Bing's "2012 Summer Demolition Plan" never fully materialized. Snyder and the Republic legislature saw to it bond ratings eclipsed stabilization agendas. Consequently, Bing's administration did not meet the goal of 10,000 demolitions by December 2013[13] (AlHajal, 2015). Notwithstanding that disappointment, Bing's tenure as mayor – and his push to conceptualize a citywide plan to remove blight - illustrates an intensified institutionalization of the "local response" to demolishing away urban decline and abandonment. Although his predecessors - Mayors Dennis Archer and Kwame Kilpatrick - both prioritized home demolition in their neighborhood policy, neither succeeded in reorganizing government to take on the challenge.

In his single term, Bing had carried on the mayoral tradition of placing demolition as a key plank of a new administration. In 10/1997, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)[14] awarded Mayor Dennis Archer a $60 million loan guarantee from to undertake what would have been the largest residential demolition program in US history (Byles, 2007). Despite federal and local enthusiasm for the *Neighborhood Restoration Project* (NRP), observers considered it a publicity stunt meant to curry favor with voters in the run-up to the mayoral election. If tearing down 10,000 buildings was indeed part of a campaign slogan, it worked. Voters reelected Archer over challenger Ed Vaughn in 1997. Archer's critics, however, were vindicated by a 1998 report completed by David M Griffith & Associates and funded by *Detroit Renaissance* – a business group comprising corporate elites - identifying deep flaws in his administration's approach to demolition. The authors of the "diagnostic benchmarking" study

[13] Bing claims his administration demolished over 9,000 properties before the end of his term. The succeeding Duggan administration claimed Bing oversaw only 5,702. Duggan's team based this on approved demolition permits from 2010-2013.
[14] New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

advised Archer and city council to establish a separate quasi-governmental entity to centralize a "seriously fragmented administrative structure." Archer's promise to incorporate some of the study's findings was overshadowed by his and his staff's public dismissal of the case for a new agency. His Chief of Staff commented, "We are going as fast as we can (McConnell, 1998a)."

In an 11/11/1998 editorial, *The Detroit News* criticized the council and administration's responses as a signal of entrenched bureaucracy, "Under this strategy, demolition isn't likely to outpace the rate of property abandonment in Detroit for years – if at all (The Detroit News, 1998)." With the $60 million still available to the city, Archer doubled down on his pledge to eradicate Detroit's blight. HUD's loan guarantee provided financial stability and by the end of 2000 Archer had awarded $43 million in contracts to wreck 6,211 structures (McWhirter, 2000). But progress was short-lived. Despite the Mayor's commitment, city council refused to authorize the full amount without a plan for strengthening the supply of affordable housing (McConnell, 1998b). Other officials demanded Archer and the NRP change focus to commercial demolitions (McConnell, 1998c). By the time Archer left office in 2001, a shortage of reputable demolition contractors and a persistent lack of agency coordination had sunk the NRP (McWhirter, 2001).

In 11/2001, Kwame Kilpatrick – a state representative and heir to a Detroit political dynasty - defeated Gil Hill for mayor promising to demolish 5,000 properties before 2003 (Wilgoren, 2002). By summer 2003, Kilpatrick's administration barely passed 2,000 demolitions. A top advisor admitted, "Can I tell you exactly where the money's going to come from? No." (McConnell, 2002)." One group of reporters observed, "[Kilpatrick] found there wasn't enough money in the budget to fuel such a ravenous demolition machine (Long, Reardon, & Kamin, 2003)." In 2005, Kilpatrick overcame a primary defeat to Freman Hendrix to win a close reelection in a run-off later that year. The second-term Kilpatrick launched a citywide

cleanup effort with state funds to prepare Detroit for Super Bowl XL (Maynard, 2006). Despite the highs of televised national events and potential for higher office, revelations of misconduct forced city council to request Governor Jennifer Granholm remove Kilpatrick in spring 2008 (Saulny, 2008). Two years later, federal convictions for perjury and misconduct contributed to a 28-year prison sentence (Baldas, 2018). Kilpatrick's political career spoiled plans, but the budding foreclosure crisis in Detroit kept demolition on the agendas of policymakers and press. A *Detroit Free Press* editorial at the time opined, "The health of Detroit's neighborhoods depends on the city's ability to tear down and redevelop vacant properties (2009)."

Whether Bing, Kilpatrick, or Archer, demolition in Detroit illustrates a mayor's authority over the city's future. But dreams of empty land ready for redevelopment provide only one dimension of demolition and its influence on neighborhoods, institutions, and investment. Materially, demolition brings together machinery, infrastructure, authorities, jurisdictions, databases, and supply chains. Politically, the process of rendering Detroit *demolishable* has enabled different ways of imagining and institutionalizing authority in the city. Importantly, the state of being demolishable is not synonymous with the presence of blight. Rather, demolishability describes the political, financial, and material processes that make demolishing possible. Abandonment by itself does not mean demolishing will happen. Demolishing requires the convergence of policies, industries, and operations. In this chapter, I interpret the recent history of demolition in Detroit, MI to apprehend the relationship amongst power, profit, and wrecking the city. How did a popular and political focus on blight and demolition shape private, public, and philanthropic approaches to Detroit's decline? How did the Detroit Demolition Program arise as a policy solution to abandonment and how did a consensus emerge within institutional, investment, and neighborhood settings to justify clearance as a solution to local

challenges? In sum, I concentrate on two major questions: 1) What processes converged to render Detroit *demolishable*? 2) How did this then shape the Detroit Demolition Program?

This chapter analyzes an inflection point in the politics and administration of demolition in Detroit, MI. I begin with the 2013 declaration of financial emergency, when Governor Rick Snyder determined the city and its institutions could not escape insolvency without substantial political and economic transformation. The chapter then traces how a medley of Detroit leaders, investors, institutions, and organizations drew on and reproduced the climate of crisis to engineer a consensus that blight and abandonment were the defining challenges in the city and its neighborhoods. I concentrate on four *disciplinary* constellations within the broader local, state, and national campaign to demolish Detroit's abandoned residential buildings and halt neighborhood decline: Kevyn Orr and the Blight Emergency; Bill Pulte and the Detroit Blight Authority; Dan Gilbert and the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force; and, Mayor Mike Duggan's institutionalization of the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP). Each illustrates an attempt to mobilize and employ *blightocracy* to shape the possibility and future of Detroit's neighborhoods. In the conclusion, I show how blight removal became a crucial tool for governing Detroit's decline and narrowing what qualified as revitalization in the city and for its inhabitants.

Governing In and Through Emergency: Relevant Literature

In this review of relevant literature, I focus on the relationship between emergency and politics. I present five interrelated currents of research and theory examining the relationship between authority and exceptionalism: emergency, techno-politics, anti-politics, post-politics, and rendering technical. Much of the work on "emergency" and its consequences for authority follows Agamben's (2005) interpretation of Schmitt's (2004) analysis of political liberalism and sovereignty. As an affirmation of sovereign power, the emergency suspends the ordinary order of

things – policies, ordinances, laws, and protocols – to address threats and dangers: terrorism, disease, warfare, uprising, immigration. For authorities and administrators, the chance of survival depends on their capacity to transform governing and routinize those changes. But Agamben and many of those building conceptual frameworks from his theoretical conclusions have relied on grand statements about the geopolitical order (Humphreys, 2006; Santiago & Charles, 2006; Minca, 2007) or characterized any spatial or social difference as "exception" (Lloyd, 2012; Springer, 2013; Gray & Porter, 2015). For these authors, declaring and controlling "emergency" – and its human or demographic sacrifices - is the core of the democratic order and enables institutions to suspend norms of administration to resolve sporadic civic calamity (Sarat, 2007).

Despite the attention tuned to these metanarratives of political zeitgeist, Agamben's lack of specificity on the mechanics of the emergency has concealed the existing powers that format everyday life and structural relations. The abstraction of "the state of exception" means its self-evidence makes it explanatory. But critiquing the colossus of the state risks marginalizing the common crises that make governing possible. Urban planning's foundational relationship to "blight" – decay, ruin, slums - illustrates the material and discursive potency of placing urban decline at the core of institutions (Walker, 1939). This police power – providing for the public health, safety, and welfare - enables powerful interests to "elevate blight into a disease that would destroy the city (Pritchett, 2003, 3)." Despite the plastic nature of the term, the presence of blight delivers a legal justification for planning intervention: expropriation, condemnation, demolition (Eagle, 2007). Foregrounding "blight" in relation to power allows for an interpretation of urban or spatial authority more sensitive to geographies of uneven development – *it is not a uniform emergency*. Rather than reducing "blight" to another odious social construction, it is crucial to interpret how institutions mobilize blight to name expendable places

and people (Berman, 1988; Caro, 1974). Within late capitalist urbanization, expendability mediates the temporal dimension of past and future value (Harvey, 1975). The emergency, then, is less a signal of all-encompassing context than the constituent matter of producing urban space.

In place of lofty pronouncements about sovereignty, theorists have addressed emergency as a framing device for problem-solving and a policy intervention with material and political-economic expressions. In *Emergency Politics*, legal scholar Bonnie Honig counters deliberative traditions in continental philosophy to probe and interpret the place of crisis in the democratic order. She writes of the "anti-political measures of emergency" that sustain and reproduce constructed crises (2009, 3). By invoking survival and urgency, governments establish consensus around problems that culminates in the "remainders of political and legal settlement:" the struggles that would never tolerate consensus. What the crisis omits is just as vital as its objectives. Under these conditions, governments and institutions insist "something must be done" and that "the people" is the unified agent of change. She writes, "Governments often claim to have no choice when the facts do not support the claim or when the sense of choicelessness seems to be a product of a lack of imagination rather than a lack in the situation (5)." As a theorist of radical democracy, Honig dismisses the conclusions of communicative action that treat democracy as a mystical journey and push integrating the remnants and leftovers of consensus – power imbalances, difference, history, identity – into an enlightened future (19).

The invocations of crisis, disaster, and emergency not only structure political community but also narrow the possible paths available for policymakers, officials, and inhabitants. Swyngedouw (2009) analyzes how the production of consensus around the threat of climate change cataclysm has enabled management, agreement, and technical acumen to marginalize debate about the future of the urban environment. His approach does not deny the threat but

illustrates how settling on the dimensions of climate change forecloses a truly democratic transformation of urban life. For him, post-politics operates at a global scale consonant with the rise of American-style neoliberalism that prioritized centrist approaches to governing and sets the "machine" of the environment and nature outside of social processes (Hornborg, 2001). Struggles for equality give way to populist procedural efforts to optimize this machine with existing social relations. Swyngedouw writes, "There is no contestation over the givens of the situation, over the partition of the sensible; there is only debate over the technologies of management, the arrangements of policing and the configuration of those who already have a stake, whose voice is already recognized as legitimate (610)." Under these conditions, there are no asymmetrical adversaries – only stakeholders and policies that preserve the current balance.

Ferguson (1990) illustrated in *The Anti-politics Machine*, his magisterial analysis of international development programs in Lesotho, how crisis chews political struggle and spits out technical problems. Of particular concern here is how the production and condition of a crisis or disruption establishes certain horizons and narrows the possibilities of politics. Ferguson writes, "By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of 'development' is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today (256)." Development, here, might be usefully interpreted as any policy or intervention with the objective of upgrading or improving a community – a global proxy for revitalization. In these circumstances, a political or economic crisis has the effect of neutralizing the central conflicts over resources and production at the heart of social problems. These frame the parameters of the problem and disqualify other interpretations or reforms that would provide different priorities for policy and intervention. These dynamics also appear in more mundane,

everyday social relations of the city. Baptista (2013) shows how the necessity of redevelopment enabled Portuguese leaders to reconfigure the state and its law. Threats to the future of a community or a risk to economic stability camouflage the structural determinants of a problem.

But a focus on the politics of governing or the response to problems – those efforts to shape interventions without the weight of difference or inequality compromising action – can conceal how the self-evidence of a problem first came into being. In *The Rule of Experts*, Mitchell (2002) illustrates how an ascendant actuarial expertise took command of 20th century Egypt and transformed the country into a national economy. The process of engineering this intelligible space of markets, ownership, and commodity inaugurated a political system in which capital and technical acumen interacted to produce a legible Egyptian modernity. In his analysis of 19th century European cities, Joyce (2003) also addressed the production of unified space as an essential element of creating the image of governable space. Modernity, then, functions as a kind of myth that disguises the interactions of labor, land, and capital that enable profit and reinforce hierarchies (Ferguson, 1999). The ideology around the acumen and aptitude of the technicians masks the incompleteness of their expertise which enables decline, disorder, or deterioration to become evidence of public disobedience and not politically determined.

Where Ferguson illustrates how institutions repose the political by prioritizing technical solutions, Li goes further by identifying the source and consequences of converting political struggle into a series of discrete problems compatible with expertise and calculation. Her work on forest management balances the twinned political efforts to frame problems and the possibilities of intervention. Those in command of these programs are not evicting or sidelining critical perspectives or radical politics – instead, these programs create and rely upon narratives in which private property, profit, and optimization are the commonsense (Li ,2007a). In other

words, programs focused on social improvement do not push aside structural change, they simply do not have a vocabulary for even integrating into their agendas. Li concentrates on the gaps, oversights, and failures that serve as features of schemes to enhance and upgrade communities or resources. That competing conceptions of community, resources, and property are omitted is not an instance of exclusion but an axiom of powerful market-fundamentalism. She writes, "Questions that are rendered technical are simultaneously rendered nonpolitical. For the most part, experts tasked with improvement exclude the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions. They focus on the capacities of the poor rather than on the practices through which one social group impoverishes another (Li, 2007b, 7)." This process of rendering technical serves to extract "from the messiness of the social world, with all the processes that run through it, a set of relations that can be formulated as a diagram in which problem (a) plus intervention (b) will produce (c), a beneficial result (Li, 2007a, 265)." Instead of market or state, institutions name "the community" as both the site of action and the solution.

For this chapter (and, throughout this project), I mobilize Li's (2007b) critical approach to improvement and management to probe the "will to remove" that emerged and ascended during Kevyn Orr's tenure and then entered a subsequent phase of institutionalization within Duggan's administration. In the "will to remove," profit, expertise, and political durability overshadow the social and political-economic struggles relative to the resources, representation, and the policy priorities that produce and enable decline. This "will to remove" is one dimension of making Detroit demolishable because it relies on narrow conceptions of the challenges faced by the city and its neighborhoods. However, where the "will to improve" arrives from outside in Li's work, the "will to remove" in Detroit claims to have emerged from the very places that its managers sought to demolish. For inhabitants, demolishing made the city livable again (Uberti,

2014). For institutions, demolishing made the city governable (Financial Post, 2013). For investors, demolishing made the city developable (McGraw, 2013). Demolishing became a means and an end for interests looking to command Detroit's decline and stabilization. *Table 2* shows how these different approaches to power describe authority and its consequences.

As I will show, these claims about the objectives of demolishing cannot be taken at face value. To do so would reproduce the most consequential weakness of the literature on post-politics and the post-ideological turn (Beveridge & Koch, 2017). Politics and economics are never exclusive domains of practice (Miller & Rose, 2008). Whether in nature (Mathew,s 2011), markets (Muellerleile & Akers, 2015), or decline (Hackworth 2019), expertise and struggle serve as engines, not cameras (MacKenzie, 2008). They are neither post-political nor post-ideological but ways of organizing land and value that can provide alternative, progressive paths forward or harden existing social relations. As Mieville (2018) encourages us to recognize, "We live in utopia; it just isn't ours." The "will to remove," then, is not an absence of politics but another scaling of intervention that reproduces property as an instrument of local welfare and private development as the precondition for the restoration of community harmony in the post-crisis city.

Table 2: Governing modes and how each addresses the politics of interventions and improvement

Governing Mode	**Description**	**Consequences**
Emergency	Government must act despite costs.	Leftovers of political or legal settlement
Techno-politics	The focus of technical expertise precedes the existence of expertise.	Technical expertise and economics create and control space.
Anti-politics	The available solution makes the problem solvable.	Technical solutions to political problems.
Post-politics	The solution to the problem is contained in the current social relations.	All stakeholders already participate in taken for granted consensus about social optimization.
Rendering technical	The problem and its solution are self-evident and comprehensive.	Social relations responsible for inequality remain untouched.

Research Methods

For this chapter, I draw from media coverage, public documents and records, publicly available demolition data from the DDP, interviews with officials within the DDP, archival materials, and official responses to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. This work combines to show how different blight disciplines made demolishing a goal and an expedient. I have analyzed and interpreted this material to construct a narrative detailing how state leaders cornered Detroit into a financial emergency and how that coincides with a medley of public, private, and philanthropic actors transforming the fiscal crisis into ways of demolishing, developing, and inhabiting Detroit. Duggan launched the DDP to great fanfare in early 2014 and coverage by local, regional, national, and international news provided a play-by-play of efforts to develop the largest residential demolition program in US history. Over the years, glowing reports have given way to a mix a critical, combative, and speculative engagements that took the shine off demolition. I have benefitted from this coverage despite reluctance by most DDP officials, public servants, and private individuals mixed up in blight removal to share their observations.

Governing Blight, Governing through Blight

War. Cancer. Battle. Urban leaders have long associated decay, slums, and ruins with violence – a cause of destruction or deserving destruction. Like any campaign, the process of delivering that violence relies on mobilizing and coordinating technology, knowledge, and resources. Unleashing that might ultimately depends as much on supply, transportation, and administration as the shared enthusiasm for the conflict (Van Creveld, 2004). Steering the destruction of demolition and monitoring its outcomes is a logistical and a political exercise. Those outcomes are tied closely to broader logics of discipline consonant with capital in a globalized economy (Roberts, 2009). In Detroit, discipline took shape (at different times) as *an*

authority, an emergency, a machine, and, currently, *a regime*. The urgency of removal served to justify an ongoing metamorphosis of political authority and neighborhood intervention. As I illustrate in the below, investors, officials, entrepreneurs, and policymakers deployed "blight" to make philosophical arguments, create institutions, and execute political agendas. Despite changes in leadership and finances, these factions used the existential threat of blight to foster a consensus that clearance was a precondition to governability, livability, and developability.

However, each expression of governing blight with building removal and rehabilitation presented opportunities for governing *through* blight. Demolition and blight removal were both prominent policy levers and forms of policymaking. As the founder and chairman of the Detroit Blight Authority (DetBA), Bill Pulte created a private, non-governmental organization with the appearance of public *blight authority*. DetBA's claims to authority were incorporated rather than representative. But tearing down vacant buildings in Detroit was one dimension of a broader project to normalize and deploy market fundamentalist approaches to governing Detroit. Pulte tasked himself and his organization with taking down blight and dismantling Detroit's regulatory "blightocracy." Blight removal could restore Detroit's greatness by halting "blight flight," but for Pulte and his top lieutenants – Brian Farkas and James Henderson – it also offered a market solution to the ineffectiveness and complacency of city's executive and legislative institutions.

For Orr, the *blight emergency* suspended local law around the rules and regulation of demolition, particularly on licensed contractors and backfill composition. As I suggest, Detroit's EM viewed blight removal as a precondition of fiscal stability – it was an achievement of a functional government as well as a tool. For Gilbert's *blight machine*, demolition organized local, state, and federal officials and assembled private interests because blight removal was a precondition to private reinvestment. Demolition could create opportunities for land use

intensification and re-valuation of the built environment. Finally, Duggan's *blight regime* sought to structure local government to focus on demolition, while also consolidating mayoral power in Detroit. His recent focus on placing a $200 million demolition bond on a future ballot illustrates that demolishing Detroit may be easy politics but it is also a component of building a regime.

To use the term "power," however, depends on a clarification of definitions and parameters. Lukes' and Gaventa's interpretations and conclusions demystify the constitution and operations of power. Lukes' work remains influential for its focus on the three faces of power (2005). In the first dimension of power, parties possessing greater means make decisions by pushing aside those with less resources. In the second, stronger parties narrow the agenda and police participation in the decision-making process by weaker parties. In the third dimension of power, stronger parties routinize a dominant ideology to constrain what is imaginable through decision-making. As a result, weaker parties come to identify with the interests of stronger parties. The reliance on consensus is clear, but the consensus is less a product of deliberation than it is a project of domination by stronger parties to determine the wants of the weaker ones: we all seek the same thing. Gaventa (1980) built on these dimensions of power by applying Lukes to a dispute between unions and corporate mining operations in the Clear Fork Valley of Appalachia. His research illuminated how powerful interests infiltrate and dominate weaker parties in ways that reframe political problems to be amenable to non-decisions. These non-decisions change little because determinative structures go untouched.

What Lukes and Gaventa possess for clarifying power relations they unfortunately lack in understanding the role of space and environment constituting and reinforcing that power. We might think then about the "three faces of power" as mediating thresholds on the representation and materialization of scale. It is not just the how of power, but the where of power and the ways

legitimacy is tethered to the frictions of micro meeting the macro. Gaventa argues the powerless must confront the powerful along every dimension of power. Redistributing resources, forcing participation in decision-making, and building class consciousness serve as essential constituents of resistance and revolutionary praxis. However, he and Lukes do not consider how spatial relations regulate the mobilization and achievement of power. For that, another tripartite framework is needed, sensitive to scales and geographies of uneven development.

Lefebvre's trialectics of space elucidates how hegemonic classes control the means of production of space to reinforce their domination of other classes. In his masterwork, The Production of Space, Lefebvre (1991) introduces three interactive dimensions of space: spatial practice; representations of space; and representational space. Spatial practice is perceived space – the physical and material. Representations of space is conceived space - the abstract and symbolic. Spaces of representation is lived space – the everyday experience of inhabitance. The cumulative, iterative interactions of this triad produce social space. The concern, then, is not simply that institutional approaches to demolition and blight in Detroit were wrong, incomplete, or prejudicial – that they excluded. Rather, it is how the three faces of power used and conveyed dimensions of blight and demolishing while also adopting it as a substrate to intervene.

By synthesizing Lefebvre and Lukes, the three faces of power take on spatial dimensions. Imbalances in force and resources are not bound to deliberative processes but who and what has the authority to transform the city's environment, as well as who has the means to imagine where those interventions take place. Processes remained inaccessible to communities in Detroit but so too the scale and geographies of what demolishing Detroit entailed or achieved. It was not that demolishing did not include Detroit inhabitants. The perceived space of DDP demolition showed precise, calculated strikes at sites instead of a sprawling process of political, logistical, and

environmental interventions. The conceived space of demolition presented a homogeneous Detroit ravaged by cancerous blight that impeded investment and impaired resident morale, instead of a downstream response to waves of disinvestment, regional segregation, and value extraction. The lived space of demolition crystallized the public's elation at watching an immediate neighborhood nuisance disappear. In each, the local response required a local scale. These spaces of demolition and blight expressed the efforts by Pulte, Orr, Gilbert, and Duggan to link the achievement and deployment of demolition with a restored and revitalized Detroit.

Blight Authority: Bill Pulte and Demolishing to Make Detroit Great Again

On 2/11/2014, Bill Pulte, the CEO of PulteCapital and a scion of the PulteGroup homebuilding empire once headquartered in metro Detroit, gave a spirited interview to a reporter with Yahoo! News (Bailey, 2014). In the preceding months, local and national media had heaped praise on Pulte for the Detroit Blight Authority (DetBA), a not-for-profit organization focused on streamlining and delivering residential demolition. Pulte and other leaders at DetBA insisted they could improve demolition processes by incorporating a variety of standard business principles, including specialization and division of labor. The reporter portrayed Pulte as an accomplished local businessman with unique, objective insight into regional patterns of urban growth and decline, an extensive expertise drawn from his family's commitment to scale, speed, efficiency, and precision within residential construction. Pulte suggested the DetBA could take the administration of blight removal out from under government control. In his thinking, such a transfer of public authority into his private portfolio was to be viewed as an act of technical mastery and civic boosterism. The public institutions needed to get out of his path if any progress would be made. He opined, "What's interesting is that the same principles that made a company and an industry great can also make a city great again. It's all about reverse engineering."

Beyond wrecking the city, Pulte's method for restoring a city's greatness is unclear[15]. Over three years before Donald Trump entered the presidential fray armed with revanchist slogans, the equally conservative Pulte was using the abstract language of lost greatness to suggest Detroit could be demolished into restoration. In a variety of interviews and features, he viewed residential blight as an inhibitor of growth, progress, and prosperity. He invoked DetBA as an innovative bundle of demolition industry best practices that addresses blight as a physical and economic impediment to the city's rebirth – there are no people, no housing, and no social relations in Pulte's conceptualization of Detroit. His vision of change centered impairments to private investment and anonymous masses burdened by the albatross of blight. In the case of the Yahoo! News article, the reporter did not look to press Pulte to elaborate or articulate the criteria by which a future "great" Detroit would be judged. For Pulte and his class of investors and entrepreneurs, the mere presence of blight impairs a city's greatness and undermines its future.

Pulte, the millennial venture capitalist, had concluded declining cities with large volumes of abandoned structures needed to capitulate to private sector demolition experts that could take a logistical approach to eliminating dereliction. Pulte treated this problem-solving approach as a natural extension of proven, military strategy and one uniquely personified by James Henderson, a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and in 2013-2014 the CEO of the DetBA (AlHajal, 2013b). For Henderson and Pulte, a coordinated storming by laborers and bulldozers represented the only method for challenging the public system of fees, permits, and regulations that neglected or coveted the local blight problem. The DetBa represented a disruptive, entrepreneurial solution to governing blight. To rely on the conventional approach to regulating and conducting demolitions would amount to capitulating to what Pulte described as "blightocracy." The Yahoo! News

[15] A trait of conservative political figures.

reporter elaborated, "[Blightocracy is] a word he uses to describe the enormous amount of red tape he says makes it hard for groups like his to demolish empty structures (Bailey 2014)." DetBA leadership wanted to smash empty houses but also abolish laws regulating demolition. DetBA was a product of Pulte's broader political agenda to integrate market principles into the rationale of government. It was a neighborhood intervention and an institutional reformatting.

Pulte employed his neologism to describe the rigid, antiquated, and obsolete bureaucratic barriers to accelerating the pace of demolition efforts. That government control was insufficient for dismantling empty houses was a refrain of Pulte and his deputies at the DetBA. In a 2013 article appearing in *National Review*, Pulte suggested of Detroit policymakers, "They think they can do things better, and they can't. The blight in Detroit is a [symptom] of the government's not being able to perform in any way, shape, or form (Kay Melchior, 2013)." This is an anti-government sentiment Henderson echoes in his own appraisal of Detroit's blight, "I don't know if government and government administrations are designed to solve problems. I think they're designed to administer regulations and keep the status quo… But an undertaking of this magnitude will always overwhelm a city." They conceive of blight both as producer of Detroit's decline and an artifact of dysfunctional government or excessive regulation. Consequently, eradicating blight addresses two intractable conditions: 1) establishing neighborhood investment opportunities; 2) replacing sclerotic public institutions that relied on blight for their purposes.

Dismantling the public management of collective problems sits at the heart of Pulte's anti-blight campaign. It is a perspective he enthusiastically advocated at the 2013 Mackinac Policy Conference, an annual meeting of conservative and centrist thinkers and leaders. Pulte explained, "The main problem is the blight (AlHajal, 2013a)." But the popular sentiment required a bit more dramatic language and DetBA's chairman provided a preview to language

that would come to dominant public discussions, “We're trying to raise the alarm bell and say 'Guys, this is a cancer. We've got to fight the root cause instead of the symptoms.’” For Pulte, DetBA, and Mackinac, blight was a precondition of government’s authority. It served to reason that eliminating residential blight would simultaneously eliminates government’s main purpose for being. The destruction agenda of Pulte was consistent with the deregulation platform and market-fundamentalism of Mackinac. Whether the demolition was driven by market solutions or public institutions, authority over Detroit’s future became synonymous with eliminating blight and upending the bureaucratic complacency that seemed to depend on it for its existence.

The name *Detroit Blight Authority* evokes two relationships between discipline and demolishing. In the first, an institution or organization can wield power over blight to make money off the city’s destruction. Blight removal was an end. Pulte was unambiguous in approaching destruction as an emerging market in Detroit and the region. Pulte and his lieutenants imagined residential demolition as a natural extension of the market principles optimizing suburban subdivision construction. In a municipal government lacking the political will or resources to shut off the valve of tax foreclosures, every precarious residential property served as a potential pop-up shop for the region’s growth industry of demolition[16]. Like industries creating or maintaining the built environment, the destruction economy needed its logistical meshes to monopolize and control access to what proved to be a lucrative product: demolitions. Pulte saw a need for a disruptive merchant of destruction that could camouflage the bulldozer with the colorful language of efficiency and Detroit’s imminent ascendance.

However, Pulte and his contemporaries also understood demolishing along a different dimension. Blight removal was a means. Demolishing and blight removal were political

[16] In Chapter 3, I address the relationship between rentiership and regulatory capture that placed command of the Detroit Demolition Program in the hands of contractors.

interventions and controlling this process was a testament to a person's authority over the future of the city, its people, and its institutions. Blightocracy, then, takes on a new dimension that exceeds the presence of stifling bureaucracy. What Pulte was describing was not just barriers to demolishing Detroit but opportunities for governing and organizing Detroit using the urgency of blight removal. DetBa enabled Pulte and others in his circle to begin connecting demolishing to a retrenchment and privatization campaign eyeing the reconfiguration of local administrative power and public service delivery. Pulte's enthusiastic claims about the city's blight and its relationship to governmental transformation would ultimately prove a significant part of his demise. In early 2014, Mayor Duggan ended the city's relationship with Pulte, save for a key staff member[17]. Pulte's market-fundamentalist blight authority ran up against the better funded, better staffed, and more muscular blight regime of the Detroit Demolition Program (Buss, 2014).

Blight Emergency: Kevyn Orr and Threats to the Comeback City

On 2/19/2013, the Detroit Financial Review Team – a state-level board comprised of the Michigan State Treasurer and finance industry executives - released a second report on the fiscal health of the city. Despite the "financial stability agreement" between Michigan and Detroit brought on by the team's first review in early 2012, the second review intensified the state's argument that Detroit was on the precipice of financial disaster (Williams, 2013). In a 23-page report, the review team cited a shortage of cash, general fund deficits, long-term liabilities, and ineffective bureaucracy to conclude, "a local government financial emergency exists within the City of Detroit because no satisfactory plan exists to resolve a serious financial problem."

[17] Duggan tapped Brian Farkas, a former Assistant Attorney General for Michigan and DetBA's Executive Director, as Special Projects Manager for the Detroit Building Authority and the DDP. I address this in a later section.

A week later, standing before a buzzing audience of lawmakers, officials, and journalists, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder was equally candid in his assessment of Detroit's financial status, "I believe it's appropriate to declare the city of Detroit in financial emergency (Rushe & Moore, 2013)." Within a few days, Snyder nominated Kevyn Orr – a partner in the law firm Jones Day, an alum of the University of Michigan Law School, and a Michigan native – to be the city's Emergency Financial Manager (EFM)[18]. The state's EFM law permits state takeovers – superseding elected leaders – in municipalities showing signs of severe financial distress. The law enables the Michigan governor to appoint an EFM to any local governmental unit within the state. [19] Despite a 2012 statewide referendum[20] that vetoed Public Act 4, Snyder moved quickly to replace the EFM law with Public Act 436, the Local Financial Stability and Choice Act[21].

Snyder persisted despite local and national accusations that his decision had disenfranchised Detroit voters (Fletcher, 2013). Community leaders across Detroit united in protest of Snyder's move (Sands, 2013). Charles Williams II, a local pastor and community organizer, suggested a "Slowdown in Motown" involving highway blockades to disrupt the city's traffic (Brush, 2013). Despite widespread outrage that the Michigan governor had stripped the country's largest black-majority city of its political self-determination, Snyder appeared publicly on 3/14 and introduced Orr from a lectern festooned with a "Detroit Can't Wait" poster.

[18] Snyder signed Public Act 4 – Local Government and School District Fiscal Accountability Act - into law on March 16, 2011. PA 4 expanded the state's power to intervene in municipal finance as outlined by Public Act 72, the Local Government Fiscal Accountability Act.
[19] At the time Snyder declared Detroit's emergency, Benton Harbor, Flint, Ecorse, Pontiac, and Detroit Public Schools were also under emergency financial management.
[20] Michigan Emergency Manager Referendum, Proposal 1; No: 2,370,601 (53%); Yes: 2,130,354 (47%).
[21] PA 436 went into effect March 28, 2013.

Flanked by the governor and Mayor Dave Bing, Orr outlined the city's significant social and economic challenges, which he described as "the Olympics of restructuring (Davey 2013)." The state's new law on municipal emergency allowed Orr to broaden his power beyond fiscal matters

Figure 7: Mayor Bing (L) and Governor Snyder (R) at the 3/14/2013 introduction of Detroit Emergency Financial Manager nominee Kevyn Orr (C) (Davey, 2013)

and axe "financial" from his title. Two weeks later, Orr officially arrived as Emergency Manager of Detroit, a move that stripped the city's executive and legislative bodies of authority and salary. The former was only temporary. In his first act as EM on 3/26/2013, Orr formally restored the salary and benefits of Mayor Bing and the city council (Orr, 2013a)[22]. Orr observed, "I wanted the first order issued to reaffirm how important the mayor and City Council members are to Detroit's turnaround (Pinho, 2013b)." By mid-April, Orr signed an order requiring Bing and council submit all "orders, ordinances, resolutions, appointments, approvals, terminations, appropriations, contracts, permits or other related actions" to him for approval (Orr, 2013b).

Notwithstanding the show of goodwill, Orr acted unilaterally to reshape the city's institutions. In his 5/12/2013 plan for addressing Detroit's finances, Orr pointed to the bramble snaring the city in financial trouble. Without casting any significant blame, these included population loss, high unemployment, limits on state revenue sharing, and reductions in tax

[22] PA 436 eliminates salary for governing bodies under emergency. Orr's decision to restore salary and benefits for the mayor and city council was met with derision by suburban and out-state observers (Murray 2013). Insiders suggested Orr viewed the restoration as a sign of goodwill and an acknowledgement of local voting rights.

collections. While Orr was unambiguous in holding those factors responsible, he does not hesitate to invoke blight and vacancy as determinants of Detroit's decline. He wrote then:

> [Blight] presents enormous socio-economic challenges and affects public health, crime rates, economic development and property values. All City services are less efficient, and under-resourced, because these services must be provided over a large geographic area with low population density. Indeed, blight adds to the strain on the City's public safety resources. Despite significant population decreases and the widespread abandonment of properties throughout the metro area, the City still provides services to a geographic area larger than Boston, Manhattan and San Francisco combined. Falling levels of economic activity also feed into a smaller ratepayer base to support City services, including water, sewer and electricity. (Orr, 2013c, 9)

For the newly minted Emergency Manager, the city's blight and bonds traveled on two parallel but occasionally interfering tracks along the route to financial stability. Rather than risk continued interference between those priorities, Orr adopted Pulte's view that blight was a cause and consequence of the budget crisis. Blight and bonds became of a piece when Orr proposed a 4-hour blight tour with 25 creditors (Burns, 2013). However, Orr cancelled the tour after several creditors backed out (Cwiek, 2013). A law expert familiar with Detroit's finances publicly ridiculed the plan, "If I'm a creditor, I'm looking numbers, not a tour of the city (KTAR, 2013)."

In 7/2013, Orr received Snyder's approval to file the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history with the Eastern District of Michigan (Kaffer, Henderson, & Helms, 2013). During a press conference, the Governor argued, "Now's our opportunity to stop 60 years of decline." Orr, keeping a focus on abandonment, asked, "Does anybody thinks it's OK to have 40-year-old tress growing through the roofs of dilapidated houses? (Isidore, 2013)" The courts assigned Judge

Steven Rhodes to preside over the trial to determine Detroit's eligibility for bankruptcy. He moved quickly to halt lawsuits challenging the filing and begin mediation with creditors.

Despite creditor disinterest in blight, Orr possessed the executive authority to transform dereliction from a nuisance into an institutional exigency. On 8/29/2013, Kevyn Orr released Emergency Order No. 15. *The Order Suspending Certain City Wrecking Requirements to Address Blight* unilaterally eased restrictions on licensing for demolition contractors to work in Detroit. While the order includes a fog of ordinances and certifications, Orr's description of Detroit's blight situation is crystal clear. Asserting the existence of a "blight emergency," Orr compares Detroit's residential abandonment as a cataclysm with the magnitude of an earthquake, tornado, or riot. Referencing 80,000 vacant homes, he explains, "This blight is an ongoing health and safety risk to every resident, fosters and facilitates crime and unemployment, encourages flight from the City, depresses property values and discourages investment (2013d, 3)."

Drawing from the state's existing emergency management laws, Orr reframed what many considered a formidable impairment to investment into a potentially lethal condition for the city. The only solution, then, was to lift regulatory burdens that presented obstacles to accelerating demolitions and making it a viable business opportunity for regional contractors (Vara, 2013)[23]. As Orr explained, these demolition regulations "needlessly prolong the Blight Emergency (4)." By waiving the requirement state-licensed demolition contractors also maintain an active city wrecking license, Orr predicted firms outside Detroit would swoop in for city contracts – funded by US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and eventually the Treasury's Hardest Hits Fund (HHF) - and increase the pace of wrecking houses in neighborhoods. Less

[23] "Production demolition"

than a year later, on 8/21/2014, Orr reaffirmed his Blight Emergency to lift rules on the material allowed for demolition backfill – a minor modification with considerable consequences[24].

Orr spent the remainder of 2013 pushing his case for bankruptcy and reorganizing the city's political-economic landscape through a series of agreements and declarations. Bing and the City Council never fully adjusted (Yaccino, 2013). In 11/2013, Detroit voters elected Mike Duggan, then-CEO of Detroit Medical Center and a former deputy County Executive for Wayne County, to succeed Bing as mayor – the first white mayor of Detroit in 40 years. A few weeks later, Judge Rhodes ruled in favor of Orr's bankruptcy filing, explaining Detroit "has an opportunity for a fresh start (Bomey, Snavely, & Priddle, 2013)." In the aftermath of an election and Rhodes' decision, Orr and Duggan settled on a power-sharing scheme to divide and portion executive authority between the Mayor's Office and Emergency Manager. The arrangement was based on six weeks of negotiations (Lichterman, 2013). In Order No. 20 – *Order Restoring the Salary and Benefits of the Mayor and Adopting the Agreement Between the Emergency Manager and Mayor Duggan Concerning Delegations of Authority and Transition Protocols* – Orr wrote, "The EM has determined that the Mayor will play a vital role in the collaborative process of ensuring continuity of essential services and restoring financial stability (Orr, 2013, 2)."

[24] The backfill issue/problem/program is addressed in the next chapter.

In Exhibit A of the order, Orr describes the city's new organizational structure (Figure 8). He will maintain control over major finance functions but cede daily financial management to the mayor. Orr only identifies one other specific responsibility for Duggan. He explains,

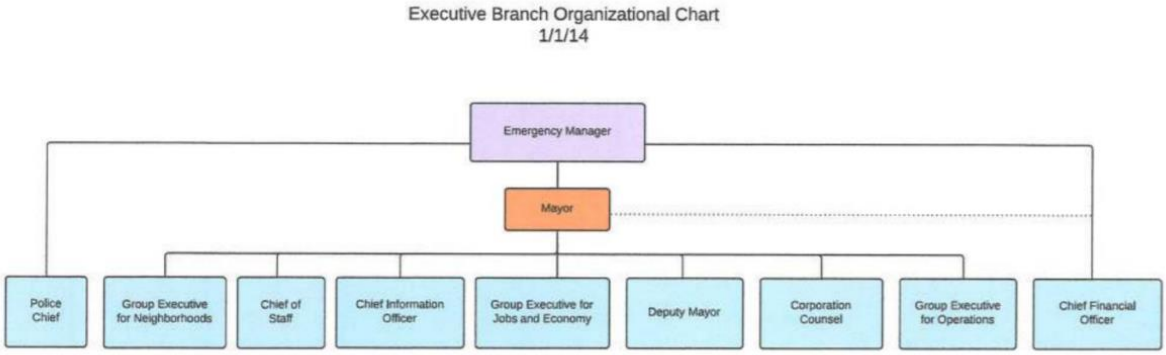


Figure 8: Orr's power-sharing agreement with Mayor Duggan (Orr, 2013, 7)

"Primary reporting relationships relating the work of the Blight Task Force will be to the Mayor (Orr, 2013, 5)." Although blight removal does not appear within the organizational chart, the title Group Executive for Neighborhoods is closely aligned with the city's demolition aspirations. At the time of Orr's order, Duggan had already tapped Charlie Beckham[25] as his Group Executive for Neighborhoods (Pinho, 2013a). In the month after negotiating power-sharing with Orr, Duggan delivered his first state of the city address and prioritized the newly-established Department of Neighborhoods (DON). Echoing a statement from late 2013[26], Duggan explained the DON would strategize and deliver neighborhood-based blight removal efforts. The city's official description of the DON matches Duggan's initial ambitions, "Their top responsibility is fighting blight and rebuilding and strengthening the fabric of the neighborhoods (Department of Neighborhoods, 2019)." The DON employs a team of District Managers[27] and Deputy District

[25] Charlie Beckham has served in every Detroit mayoral administration since Coleman Young.
[26] "Through our district offices, we plan to immediately begin addressing the blight issue, as well as code enforcement. We expect residents to see visible change very quickly."
[27] At Blight Boot Camp 2015 on the campus of the University of Detroit Mercy, a District Manager described herself as a Blight Manager during a workshop on reporting neighborhood blight violations to the DON.

Managers that work in each of Detroit's seven council districts. The six weeks of negotiations between the two men had culminated in Duggan establishing and commanding a new department to address neighborhood blight. As I illustrate later, it would be only the beginning of Duggan's move to assume complete authority over Detroit's emergent demolition program. The full shape of his control over blight would come into view as Orr began winding down his appointment.

With a power-sharing agreement with Duggan in place Orr submitted his first plan for Detroit's bankruptcy on 2/14/2014. The *Plan of Adjustment* cut retirement packages for first responders by 10% with remaining pensioners receiving a 34% decrease (Helms, Bomey, & Snavely, 2014). The city proposed paying 20% of its debts to unsecured, non-retiree creditors with the potential for additional recovery from "any increased revenues realized by a revitalized City (Orr, 2014, 2)." Health insurance for pensioners would see a 90% reduction. By escaping its $18 billion in liabilities, the city government would look to invest $1.5 billion in services and improvements, including $520 million in blight removal over the succeeding six years[28]. Detroiters called it a "gut-punch" and Snyder called it a "comeback." On a Tuesday in 9/2014, attorneys presented opening statements in Detroit's bankruptcy trial. Court observers expected 80 witnesses and anticipated Rhodes would wait to decide the city's fate until winter. City Council did not hesitate to render its decision. With his 18-month appointment nearly complete, the council voted unanimously to remove Orr at the culmination of the trial (Resnikoff, 2014).

On 11/7/2014, Judge Rhodes approved the Plan of Adjustment. He wrote, "The city is insolvent and desperately needs to fix its future (Bomey, Helms, & Guillen, 2014)." Five weeks later, the day after Detroit officially exited bankruptcy, Orr stepped down from the Emergency Manager position. The week prior, Snyder had declared the end of Detroit's financial emergency

[28] An arrangement that depended on an annual budget surplus.

and applauded Orr for his 21-month term (AlHajal, 2014a). Duggan told Reuters, "We're going to start fresh tomorrow and do the best we can to deliver the kind of services people deserve (Daniels, 2014)." The end of the financial emergency stabilized Detroit's bond situation but the power-sharing agreement had loosened Orr's hold on the blight emergency. Like Pulte, Orr had presented blight as a past failure of government that could justify restructuring regulation. While Orr had looked backward, a group of powerful development and philanthropic interests began to push eradicating Detroit's blight as a synonym for reinventing the city's real estate market.

Blight Machine: Dan Gilbert, Detroit Blight Removal Task Force, and Motor City Mapping Project

In 9/2013, members of the Obama administration convened a meeting in Washington D.C. with Detroit political and business leaders (Bradley, 2013). The summit came on the heels of Obama publicizing the release of $300 million in federal funds for Detroit programs (public dollars already distributed but without prior fanfare and apportioned across commercial demolition, transportation, and public safety projects) (Calmes, 2013). In the lead up to the allocation, the Obama administration invited Dan Gilbert, Duggan, and other Detroit dignitaries to the White House to discuss the major issues faced by the city. Media accounts have suggested Obama used this gathering to appoint the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF) (Karoub, 2014; Devito, 2014). By early October, the DBRTF convened its first meeting with three co-chairs: Gilbert, the founder and Chairman of Quicken Loans, would join Glenda Pryce, the president of the Detroit Public Schools Foundation, and Linda Smith, the Executive Director of the Detroit non-profit U-SNAP-BAC. The DBRTF Steering Committee included representatives from government, philanthropy, and business, including DTE Energy and Skillman Foundation.

In an early mission statement, DBRTF leaders insisted it would develop and deploy a blight removal strategy to "focus on creating economic opportunities for the city and its people, as well as dramatically improving the safety of residents and first responders." The co-chairs announced a plan and timeline for the "hunting and gathering" stage. Though this stage was meant to establish an executable strategy for government, it is unclear who or what was

Figure 9: Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Logo (DBRTF, 2020)

responsible for appointing the DBRTF co-chairs. The origins of the DBRTF are not as simple as Obama expressing an interest in demolishing Detroit or Gilbert persuading the president to open the public purse to address Detroit's abandonment. Early on, local and national reporters claimed Obama considered it vital for the city to tackle its residential abandonment problem to prime the city for redevelopment; that any future investment hinged on a massive demolition project (Christoff & Niquette, 2013). Later news investigations and interviews hinted Gilbert exercised his trademark belligerence on the blight issue and insisted massive demolition efforts would serve as the foundation of Detroit's exit from municipal bankruptcy[29]. Though unreported at the time, Gilbert had hijacked the White House meeting and demanded of Obama and cabinet secretaries, "The one thing you guys have to do is figure out how to help us do this blight work (Halperin, 2015)." For Gilbert, government efforts to eliminate the "cancer" of blight would

[29] Some observers suggested Gilbert viewed the DBRTF as a substitute for a de jure bailout because popular support for blight removal would encourage the federal government to allocate public funds for demolition in the city.

establish the physical and financial conditions essential to neighborhood development and long-term improvements (Pierog, 2014). An archival report on his administration's efforts in Detroit confirms President Obama had little to do with founding the DBRTF, noting, "Detroit's Blight Removal Task Force was a privately-funded effort, announced alongside federal efforts in September 2013 (2016, 9)." Obama's role was largely symbolic. Gilbert and his allies saw demolishing as a leadership tactic and an opportunity to ready Detroit for reinvestment. The emergent *blight machine* would formalize authority while enabling the revaluation of the city.

Locally, Gilbert had taken on the role of spokesperson for linking citywide demolition with neighborhood revitalization. In published profile after profile, writers traveling to Detroit from across the US had centered the online mortgage mogul as a shadow chamber of commerce of the city (Nisen, 2013; Segal, 2013; Maynard, 2013; Rushe, 2013). Journalists spotlighted Gilbert for two reasons: 1) He relocated Quicken Loans and its 1,700 employees to Downtown Detroit in 2010 (Wayland 2011); 2) Bedrock, his real estate holding firm, owns dozens of downtown properties in what has become colloquially Detroit's "Gilbertville" (Gallagher, 2018a). For some, Gilbert is a protagonist of the urban renaissance, a tenacious billionaire using his workforce to fill neighborhoods and considerable wealth to stabilize Detroit's central business district (Feloni & Lee, 2018). For others, Gilbert is another entitled developer building a "Detroit 2.0" without room for incumbent residents (Randolph, 2011) – a zone shaped by a private surveillance network and security team (Gallagher, 2015b).[30] For Gilbert, the city's blight presented a similar threat to profitable property investments - though insufficient to adjust business practices. In 2015, a *Detroit News* investigation probed Quicken Loans' lending and concluded 52% of its foreclosures showed evidence of blight (MacDonald & Kurth 2015).

[30] In 2017, Bedrock nixed and apologized for a downtown advertising campaign that failed to include any persons of color. The slogan "See Detroit As We Do" splashed over hip white people unintentionally blurred the lines of satire.

Like Pulte and Orr, Gilbert used his formidable, unelected social and economic status to push for a citywide battle with residential blight. Gilbert made the implications of his anti-blight agenda amply clear when he appeared at the *Techonomy Conference* held in 9/2013 at Wayne State University in Midtown Detroit. The annual conference is a gathering of "thought leaders" propagating a Silicon Valley-esque disruptive relationship to economics, technology, and innovation (Techonomy, 2013). Though the itinerant conference takes a national focus, the 2013 iteration foregrounded Detroit's revitalization. Publicity materials stated, "Our urgent theme is the role of technology and innovation in boosting American economic growth, job creation, and urban revival." In a mid-morning session entitled "City Re-Vision: Towards a Techonomic Detroit," Gilbert and Bruce J. Katz, a Brookings Institution scholar specializing in urban innovation, aimed to answer the question: "In five years, will we look at Detroit as an example of how to bring a city back from the brink?" In his remarks, Gilbert (McGraw, 2013) explained how residential demolition needed to become a central feature of neighborhood regeneration:

> When that blight is gone, maybe we don't have to be talking about shrinking cities because it will be such a rush of people who want to get into low-value housing — when all the utilities are there and the land is pretty much close to free— not exactly free, but close to it — and all the utilities are there, it becomes very cheap for a builder/developer to develop a residential unit, and they are going to develop them and develop them in mass as soon as we get the structures down and maybe we don't have to worry about raising peas or corn or whatever it is you do in the farm.

Gilbert and his lieutenants took the lead nurturing a multi-scalar consensus justifying a massive, coordinated blight removal effort that would sweep away the residential detritus of the mortgage crisis that deadened investor confidence and impaired development risk-taking. He predicted,

"You're going to have developers saying, 'What an opportunity, the old decrepit buildings are gone." Gilbert derided dysfunctional public institutions and then shared his vision to erect a giant board counting down towards zero with each new demolition (Burke, 2013). In a muddled political climate in which Gilbert was free to seize on the demolition agenda, assent by corporate, philanthropic, and government leaders was ineluctable. The Obama Administration amplified Gilbert's authority and provided the political legitimacy for the DBRTF to take root.

After holding a series of public meetings with local leaders and civic organizations, the DBRTF determined insufficient data on abandoned housing in the city had frustrated establishing a comprehensive blight removal strategy[31]. *How many buildings are blighted?* Observing this gap in their actionable policy knowledge, the co-chairs commissioned the Motor City Mapping Project (MCMP). They envisioned this citywide survey of conditions for the over 380,000 parcels comprising the city's residential landscape would "digitize Detroit's property information and create clear communication channels back and forth between the public, the government, and city service providers (MCMP 2018)." To design and implement the MCMP, the task force drew upon the financial and personnel resources of Gilbert's Rock Ventures in addition to the mapping and project management acumen of local business and nonprofits: LOVELAND Technologies, Data Driven Detroit (D3), and Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA).

LOVELAND Technologies, an urban informatics outfit based in Detroit, MI, developed a mobile mapping application to crowdsource individual parcel details. Jerry Paffendorf, LOVELAND's founder and a technologist with a degree in Future Studies, had arrived in Detroit six years prior after a succession of technology startup ventures in other cities. Detroit enticed Paffendorf because "[it] was a city of the future and is becoming a city of the future again

[31] Important to note that prior attempts to wreck these structures had been undermined by weak public institutions.

(Crain's Detroit, 2011)." In the time leading up to the task force announcement, LOVELAND had a reputation for eccentric projects examining property and housing in Detroit. 'Citizen-surveyors' would use LOVELAND's application to create and submit a *blext* (blight text) for each residential parcel in the city. The app allowed "blexters" to survey lots and structures based on a variety of criteria and then conclude parcel condition: *good; fair; poor; and suggest demolition*. Each blext included an attached photo. Thousands of blexts would funnel into a central command center or "Mission Control" in Midtown Detroit where LOVELAND staff would vet, clean, and assemble the parcel details into a mappable format. For Paffendorf and LOVELAND, MCMP furnished an opportunity to push the boutique startup into professional terrain with a sustainable source of financial support for its mapping service (Stevenson, 2014).

Alongside LOVELAND, DBRTF brought in support from MNA and D3 assist with executing the property survey. MNA is a statewide organization providing Michigan nonprofits with advocacy, training, and technology support. In its role within MCMP, MNA contributed expertise in volunteer management. For its part, D3 – formerly the Detroit-Area Community Information System – held responsibility for data quality, focusing its attention on cleaning and analyzing blexter submissions. From the view of D3 staff, MCMP represented a paradigm shift in the way the city and its residents collected and used data to address its other challenges. Like Paffendorf, D3 staff treated MCMP as an opportunity to experiment with governing. Diana Flora, a Detroit Revitalization Fellow serving with D3, explained, "We may see this type of project spark demand for more data transparency in other areas – like education, the city's budgetary information, and so on -- from both residents and city officials (Wasacz, 2015)."

In his position as a co-chair of DBRTF, Gilbert matched LOVELAND, D3, and MNA with his own handpicked team of Rock Ventures executives and interns. He also allocated

Quicken Loans staff to support the citywide parcel survey as drivers. Despite those staffing commitments, MCMP remained firmly grassroots in guise (Clark 2014). On more than one occasion, LOVELAND and Rock Ventures leadership insisted the blexting application would encourage Detroit residents to seize control of the narratives surrounding their neighborhoods. Lauren Hood, then the Community Engagement Manager at LOVELAND, maintained that blexting was a more democratic approach to taking on the ubiquitous blight in Detroit. For her, using the app to document decay meant residents "can have the power (Klinefelter, 2014)." While the merits of downloading this responsibility to residents deserves critical scrutiny, the claim that blexting's inherent decentralization enabled room for volunteerism and leveraged

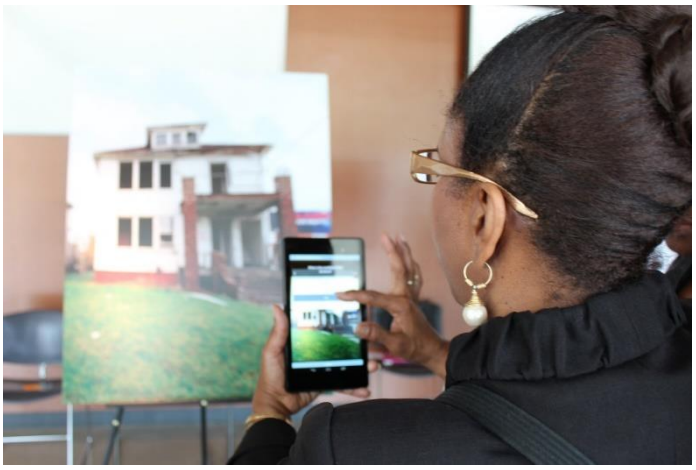


Figure 10: Citizen-surveyor practices "blexting" in a MCMP training (Muller, 2013)

neighborhood pride is troubled by the contingent labor that largely handled data collection. Although LOVELAND and Kresge made the app widely available, the record on who conducted the mapping is blurry at best. In addition to a legion of technologists, community developers, and smart city wizards, MCMP hired 150 temporary workers through Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation to fill its "citizen-surveyor" needs. MCMP staff trained these workers to use the mobile devices and then compensated them at $10/hour (Muller, 2013).

In a late-2015 article appearing in Next City, an urbanist website, Paffendorf summarized the 2013 MCMP mission, "The purity of the concept for Motor City Mapping was to end once

and for all the dark ages of misunderstanding about what was happening to Detroit's properties (Bradley, 2015)." That sentiment suggests how LOVELAND envisioned MCMP as a mapping and data project that could transcend a simple inventory of empty buildings. At that time, MCMP flamed passions for data-driven everything. More than quantifying blight to streamline demolishing, MCMP could mobilize public and private dollars to build a new data infrastructure in which objective technical know-how was to supersede the irrationality of activist gut-feelings and the torpor of political class inner-circles. For many of those who established the MCM and administered its execution, the mapping survey served two major purposes: 1) present a Detroit population unified against the crisis and emergency of blight; 2) use the proof of concept of MCMP to steer future city government operations to prioritize data-driven decision-making.

Sean Jackson, a Rock Ventures intern who Gilbert appointed to manage the daily operations of MCMP, shared Paffendorf's perspective. In an NPR interview appearing in early 2014 – as the surveying gained both footing and national notoriety – Jackson framed blight data in a way that fit right alongside Bill Pulte's demolition agenda. He posited, "If you're going to send in a demo crew, instead of sending them in four different times, why don't you all put your properties together and do all four of them at the same time so you can help get some cost savings and be able to work together on solving these problems? (Klinefelter, 2014)" Not only could MCMP help eradicate abandoned housing in Detroit but it could also rationalize local government's approach to problem solving. The effective management of blight harbored more significance than beautifying Detroit's neighborhoods. For Jackson, blight removal in Detroit was not just a government activity; it could clarify and improve the business of governing.

The precise origins of the DBRTF are overshadowed by the symbolic power the group wielded over Detroit's blight problem and possible solutions to its ubiquity in its neighborhoods.

While it is crucial to chart the agents, agencies, and agendas at play in its initial formation, the DBRTF true potency is in mobilizing residential blight to reconsider the practice of governing a declining city like Detroit. Loveland and the DBRTF treated their collaborative effort as a far-reaching intervention in how Detroit interpreted the state of its neighborhoods. Their leadership described the MCMP as a *big data* needs-assessment (Gallagher, 2015c). By participating in the project, residents could bring their experiences and understanding of neighborhoods to bear on the issue of abandonment and how institutions delivered a response. DBRTF members, city government, and the media considered a smartphone with the blexting app a tool for constructing data by organizing the grassroots and accumulating grounded expertise to make sense of blight.

Despite enthusiasm for the lay knowledge of Detroiters, the concept of community control did not extend beyond marketing materials. While thousands of residents downloaded the mobile app and participated in the mapping project, public documents suggest public agencies had already determined how and where HHF demolition dollars would be spent. In 9/2013 – a full eight months before DBTRF released its findings - the DLBA had circulated the *Hardest Hit Fund Strategic Plan* explaining the importance of blight removal in transforming the city's housing market conditions. Intent on directing "both bulldozers and dollars," the authors wrote, "The new reality in summer 2013 is that we have now pushed a reset button at the government levels to stabilize and motivate the market to do what it does best. Catalytic change is possible, and the market needs the signal to perform (1)[32]." Residential demolition appeared to be that indicator to the housing market. However, the authors stressed blight removal would be prioritized in "six strategic, strong neighborhoods": Northend, Jefferson Chalmers, Southwest, Grandmont Rosedale, UDM/Marygrove, Morningside/EEV/Cornerstone (2). The plan's authors

[32] This report is still accessible through the City of Detroit website.

base these six neighborhoods on prior DFC analysis of neighborhood conditions, an assessment largely informed by the TRF study commissioned by Mayor Bing in 2011. The DDP, comprising the Detroit Building Authority (DBA) and DLBA, had already decided where to focus resources.

The eagerness to recruit Detroit residents into the MCMP to ground plans for blight removal is also not backed-up by the concurrent actions of Duggan's newly fashioned DDP. Notwithstanding frequent references to the epistemic authority of residents and their role as "adjunct inspector support (City of Detroit, 2013, 11)," residential demolitions started months prior to the completion of the MCMP or the release of the DBTRF report. Duggan and his lieutenants had cited the mapping process as crucial to the DDP, but his administration launched the DDP before DBRTF made any findings available. *Table 3* shows the amount of demolition dollars the DDP awarded to contractors during a period of time in which MCMP was conducting neighborhood surveys and residents were still submitting parcel conditions. Den-Man Contractors officially started the DDP by demolishing 18814 Caldwell on 1/2/2014 for $4,800.00. The demolition of 16763 Woodingham by ABC Demolition on 4/24/2014 was the first contract to draw on the DDP's first allocation of HHF support. Between 1/2/2014 and 5/23/2014, when the DBTRF was said to be finalizing a community-directed approach to demolishing Detroit, DDP awarded contracts to demolish 371 houses for $3,102,251.33[33].

Table 3: HHF and city demolition dollars awarded to contractors between 1/2014 and 5/23/2014

Contractor	**Total Awarded ($)**
1 Way Service	19,500
ABC Demolition	128,950
Able Demolition	546,748.8

[33] On 5/24/2014, DBRTF released its report summarizing MCMP findings and proposing a blight removal strategy. No residential demolitions occurred on that day.

Adamo Group, Inc.	293,419.26
Blue Star	153,600
Brown Environmental Construction	80,301
Den-Man Contractors	249,110
DMC Consultants	622,939.27
Farrow Group	12,589
Futurenet Group	239,528
Homrich	619,790
RDC Construction Services	15,000
Smalley	120,776
Grand Total	**3,102,251.33**

There are two interpretations for the DDP's quick pace. First, the 10/7/2013 agreement between Orr and MSHDA setting aside $52.3 million for demolitions required the DDP to spend 70% of HHF within a year and 100% within 18 months. The DDP simply did not have the staff, inventory, or processes in place in fall 2013 to begin demolitions. The power-sharing agreement between Duggan and Orr in December created conditions for the DDP to spend funds, but by 3/2014 no buildings had come down. Five months on a 12-month clock had expired. The DDP had to move fast to make up for lost time and could not wait for public consumption and consideration of the DBRTF's findings. Importantly, this interpretation does not rule out the second one: the MCMP and blexting process was less about data collection than converting the public's frustration about vacancy and abandonment into cogent support for demolition. By channeling Detroiters through the process of DBRTF and MCMP, a single vocabulary of neighborhood blight elbowed out ongoing debates about money, time, location, and authority.

The MCMP and DBRTF may not have been crucial to demolition but both used blight to reframe how the process of problem-solving in Detroit. In various news features and profiles, Paffendorf has expressed fondness for an analysis of social problems that hinges on deploying engineering expertise to increase the volume and robustness of data available to residents and policymakers (Orton, 2016). In a 2015 profile appearing in the *Detroit Free Press*, the serial tech entrepreneur explained, "Underlying every other crisis that the city faces – it's got a fiscal crisis, social and racial and equality crises -- information crisis underlies all… The reason that a lot of those other symptoms express themselves is that nobody knows what's going on. (Gallagher, 2015c)" Paffendorf used his platform to argue social problems are an outcome of epistemological inexactitude that can be resolved by technologies and investments. Blight may be an emergency, but it was also an opportunity for entrepreneurs to create and control markets for their ventures.

Like Pulte, Orr, and Gilbert, Paffendorf's historical reasoning for blight is linked to incompetence and ignorance. Considered in this light, MCMP exemplified one way of governing and inhabiting a city in decline: the imprecision of data serves as a formidable inhibitor of urban improvement and revitalization. Datafying blight would help in "unlocking the potential of Detroit's neighborhoods (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2016)." But locating blight in space is different than demolishing that blight. Systematic tallies of Detroit's vacancy had come and gone in the preceding years. Gilbert's machine was not the absence of politics – whether the post-political or anti-political varieties – but a proof of concept for a politics of redevelopment that restores Detroit as a constellation of valuable and undervalued properties: *what belongs*. Prior to sharing the results of the MCMP, Gilbert admitted the parcel survey would not provide "dramatically different" figures than those prior attempts to inventory blight (Aguilar, 2014). The signal to the market was not demolition, but the capacity to achieve Detroit's demolishability.

MCMP staged a local consensus by presenting a local population united in combatting blight. At its conclusion, the MCMP was a strategy for obtaining the public's authorization for demolishing to fight the city's decline. The MCMP institutionalized alarm about Detroit's blight and presented inhabitants, institutions, and investors as a united front against *a crisis*. Blight became the justification for new approaches to data collection, public policy, business development, and real estate investment. This seemingly collective and democratic campaign culminated in a celebratory spring release of the DBRTF's strategic framework. On 5/24/2014, Detroit business, philanthropic, and government leaders gathered at *Focus: HOPE*. Initial reports confirmed Gilbert, Pryce, and Smith would present MCMP findings and their recommendations for confronting blight in the city. In a large second-floor conference room plastered with glossy poster versions of the guide's key findings, Duggan, Kevyn Orr, Rock Ventures representatives, and members of the Obama administration held court before a standing room-only audience[34].

Matt Cullen, Rock Ventures CEO and a key Gilbert lieutenant involved in a variety of Detroit development projects, started the morning's proceedings. In his introductory remarks, Cullen echoed the vigilant anti-blight sentiments of Orr, Duggan, and Gilbert, characterizing building decay as a formidable barrier to revitalization in the city and its neighborhoods. The DBRTF co-chairs and the medley of dignitaries proceeded to introduce the audience and public at large to a 300-page framework named "Every Neighborhood Has a Future…And It Doesn't Include Blight." Six-months of study and data collection confirmed what policymakers had already known. The DBRTF tallied 78,506 structures requiring intervention and predicted a successful demolition program would need at least $850 million to tear down the buildings.

[34] I attended the unveiling of the DBRTF report.

The DBRTF advised reforms to property tax foreclosure that would reduce the inventory of blighted buildings and proposed changes to the formal demolition process. A new working group of agency heads would manage the demolition program, incorporate tools for data-driven decision-making, and oversee at least two future phases of the MCMP parcel surve[35]y. Duggan's Department of Neighborhoods would hire and distribute District Managers to handle resident concerns and complaints. In the framework's introductory letter, the DBRTF co-chairs warned, "Blight is a cancer. Blight sucks the soul of anyone who gets near it, let alone those who are unfortunate enough to live with it all around them. Blight is radioactive. It is contagious. (DBRTF, 2014)" Blight's contagiousness did not translate to enthusiasm for the DBRTF's recommendations. Despite his attendance at the unveiling, Duggan's administration was in the early stages of developing a regime that would mobilize blight and demolition to reshape the city's institutions. Gilbert's blight machine – making Detroit demolishable and its vacant land developable – performed and promoted public consensus about vacancy and abandonment in Detroit. But, like any other public emergency, the final decision remained with the executive.

Blight Regime: Mayor Duggan and the Detroit Demolition Program

At the 2019 Mackinac Policy Conference, Mayor Mike Duggan admitted, "I am obsessed with a goal: To eliminate blight from the city of Detroit entirely by 2025 (Cwiek, 2019)." Duggan's preoccupation with demolition is consistent with a local and state institutional agenda that connected demolition to every facet of administration and inhabitance in Detroit. In 2013, Duggan campaigned on the platform "Every Neighborhood Has a Future," a slogan and brand that provided immediate contrast to Bing's demonstration areas and baroque DFC framework.

[35] These have not occurred. Loveland moved on and the DDP now maintains the dated MCMP data. As if December 2019, the official website for the DBTRF – www.timetoendblight.com – has a dead link for the final guide.

Duggan launched a write-in campaign for mayor that centered blight removal and demolition. His *10 Point Plan to Rebuild Our Neighborhoods* brought together policy on code enforcement, vacant lot management, neighborhood cleanup, dangerous buildings, demolition, and block grants into one mayoral agenda. Duggan's plan targeted what Pulte had called "blightocracy." The proposal states, "A huge part of the problem is an inefficient bureaucracy – the city has a 36 step, 5 phase demolition process that can take years to get an abandoned house demolished (Duggan, 2013, 9)." In fact, Duggan's plan mentions DetBA as one of "14 different uncoordinated agencies" under command of his new Department of Neighborhoods (4).

Although the title suggests an explicit connection to Duggan's agenda, the DBRTF framework proposed within its "Every Neighborhood Has A Future…And it Doesn't Include Blight" is notably light on mayoral authority. In Chapter 8, the authors describe the need for a new group to consolidate and manage blight operations within municipal government. This Blight Strike Force (BSF) would coordinate "overall blight tactical activities within the City of Detroit." However, based on the power-sharing agreement with Orr, Duggan would oversee the arrangement of government agencies and authorities that would implement the DBRTF vision. The BSF would turn DBRTF's recommendations into policy action. Such a group was vital because blight shaped every part of governing Detroit. In a 5/19/2014 report to the Detroit Building Authority (DBA), the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) introduced the BSF as "Detroit's unified response to the blight crisis (10)." For LPD, the BSF was vital because blight

touched on all facets of Detroit. Figure 11 is an excerpt from that report. Blight provided the means for resetting government to focus on one challenge. BSF would aid in governing blight and developing strategy, but it also enabled governing through blight. Despite one mention in local press in six years (Laitner and Guillen, 2016), a response to the author's 2016 FOIA request for public records on the BSF confirmed the group's existence and its broad authority over the demolition process in Detroit. However, because the BSF is an internal working-group and not a public meeting, the city's legal advisors have denied access to records because deliberations preliminary and exempt from any disclosure. Moreover, the presence of lawyers for each agency in attendance also means the deliberations are subject to attorney-client privilege.

City of Detroit Blight Removal Program Overview

What is the Blight Strike Force?

The Blight Strike Force will serve as Detroit's unified response to the blight crisis. Since the components of blight are multifaceted- from illegal dumping to dangerous buildings to failing storm drains, fire hydrants, streetlighting and roadways, an integrated team of leaders from various City departments will participate in creating coordinated action plans to mitigate all facets of blight neighborhood by neighborhood.

The Blight Strike Force is led by Charlie Beckham (Department of Neighborhoods), and incorporates the combined resources of the Detroit Building Authority, Detroit Police and Fire Departments, Building Safety, Engineering and Environmental Department, Planning and Development, General Services, Detroit Land Bank Authority, Detroit Public Lighting Authority, Public Works, Water and Sewerage and others.

The leadership group meets weekly to formulate and implement action plans focused on specific areas. The current focus is the Marygrove Pilot Area.

Figure 11: Excerpt from LPD report to DBA on managing blight removal (LPD, 2014, 10)

The BSF illustrates an early success by Duggan's administration to consolidate control over residential demolition in Detroit. Even with the limited authority initially available to him through the power-sharing agreement, Duggan reshaped how the agencies under his control governed the city. Demolition became less a policy lever available to pull than an achievement of a reorganized and robust local state. Only a month prior to the DBRTF framework's release in 2014, Duggan had started putting this philosophy of consolidation into action by ending the

previous, friendly relationship Bing developed with Pulte and DetBA. Pulte would no longer receive demolition contracts just as Duggan was intensifying the blight removal campaign.

Initial interpretations of that ouster mirrored those of Duggan's staff. Alexis Wiley, the mayor's spokesperson, explained the move as an elimination competing plans for blight removal in the city (Finley, 2014). However, other local observers dismissed the efficiency rationale and suggested Duggan was taking command of the blight removal issue to reshape Detroit's governing landscape. In his interpretation, Stephen Henderson, a WDET host and former editor at Detroit Free Press, said, "You know, that's one of the things that Mayor Duggan says he doesn't really like about city government is that there are these authorities now that have control over things that he would like to recentralize, I think, under his own control (Graham, 2014)." For Duggan, consolidating authority was vital to demolishing. His *blight regime* was not just an extension of Pulte's blight authority, Orr's blight emergency, or Gilbert blight machine.

State records indicate a variation of these tensions that prompted the Pulte and Duggan divorce. In late 2013, Pulte and Farkas, the former DetBA Executive Director and current-DBA special projects director, applied for HHF funding from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). MSHDA would furnish DetBA $249,900 to demolish 72 single-family homes. Farkas would manage day-to-day operations and DetBA tapped Atwell, LLC – an environmental consultant that would go on to decline a DDP offer to run its project – to serve as "Construction Project Management team" and a local accounting firm would provide financial management. In their application, Pulte and Farkas presented a scenario in which DetBA would direct and conduct residential demolitions while the Detroit Economic Growth Association (DEGA) would serve as the lead organization and supervise the program.

DEGA's role is notable because the group represents the political and economic muscle of Detroit. DEGA is a 501c3 nested within the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), the primary economic development agency in Detroit, and conducts project management for DEGC's partners and their portfolios. As "Detroit's economic catalyst," DEGC and DEGA are a whose who of Detroit business and corporate leadership (DEGC, 2020). Both organizations exemplify key traits of the coalitions and regimes of economic and political actors that scholars claim dominate policy and development practice in cities (Stone, 1989; Elkin, 1987). DEGA leadership comprises executives from major banks, utilities, financial services, equity firms, law firms, and public institutions (Guidestar, 2020). The CEOs of both DTE Energy and Bedrock, LLC serve on the board. In Pulte's proposal, MSHDA would award DEGA the funds and DetBA would execute the plan to demolish the vacant structures between 1/6/2014 and 4/7/2014.

DetBA and DEGA made their move only weeks after MSHDA had agreed to fund demolitions under Bing's mayoralty and Orr's emergency manager authority (10/2013). In the wake of federal and state approval to reallocate HHF mortgage assistance dollars for residential demolitions, the DLBA and DBA partnered to facilitate the local demolition program. Only a few weeks later, Detroit voters elected Mike Duggan to take over for Bing. Despite the considerable social, economic, and political heft of the DEGA and DetBA partnership, MSHDA denied their joint application for HHF funding in early 2014. Pulte had attempted to match his blight authority with the existing economic development power structure – the city's growth machine – but MSHDA rejected the arrangement in favor of Duggan's DDP that had the DBA serve in the DetBA role and the DLBA handle awarding contracts and managing finances. Mary Townley, the state official managing demolitions for MSHDA, confirmed in an interview Pulte and Farkas applied for HHF funds to provide an alternative to Duggan's centralized approach.

In 2010, the US Congress authorized Hardest Hit Funds (HHF) - $7.6 billion in relief for 18 state governments - to assist owner-occupants struggling with mortgage payments after the collapse of the US housing market. However, HHF eligibility rules proved too strict for many desperate homeowners coping with the consequences of delinquency (Neavling, 2017). Facing the prospect of underutilization, a delegation of congresspersons from Midwestern states persuaded the Treasury to permit state housing development agencies to steer hundreds of millions in HHF foreclosure prevention towards financing residential demolition programs (Carmody, 2016). Michigan was the first state to receive approval to redirect the funds (Jayyousi, 2019). Blight removal became neighborhood stabilization. Money initially earmarked for protecting owner-occupancy mutated into the public sector's broom for sweeping away evidence of prior subprime and predatory lending. In 2013, following forceful congressional lobbying, Treasury gave permission to MSHDA to divert part of its HHF allocation to demolition of vacant and publicly owned properties (Mallach, 2014). Demolition programs based in Flint, MI and Detroit would be the primary beneficiaries of the reallocation. In the latter, the DLBA was the local MSHDA partner agency distributing those public dollars to eliminate neighborhood blight.

Under Duggan's watch, the DLBA matured from 5 employees in 3/2014 to 140 at the end of 2018. Established in 2008, the DLBA is responsible for absorbing derelict properties and returning them to productive use through sale, rehabilitation, and demolition (Dewar, 2015). In April 2014, Duggan placed DLBA at the center of his blight regime when his administration persuaded the Detroit City Council to transfer 16,399 properties to the land bank's inventory (Cwiek, 2014). A second transfer of properties in 9/2014 pushed the inventory to over 27,000 (Weiner, 2014). With DLBA directing HHF allocations from MSHDA and the DBA providing technical assistance and oversight of awarded contracts, the DDP aimed for at least 200

demolitions a week and as many as 10,000 per year (Hackman, 2014). By the middle of 2016, the DLBA controlled almost 100,000 vacant properties in Detroit (Guillen, 2016b).

Initial hopes for demolition funds relied on Orr's Plan of Adjustment directing $520.3 million over six year to blight removal. However, the money was only available as a budget surplus. In early 2015, Duggan revealed the city would need to identify other funding sources to continue the DDP past that summer (Gallagher, 2015a). The DDP had exhausted three rounds of Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds totaling $42.7 million (Spangler 2015). From then, demolition dollars depended on the US Treasury authorizing MSHDA to set aside part of its $761.6 million in HHF for demolitions. After awarding Detroit $107.3 million in 2013 and 2014, MSHDA allocated funds for demolition every year between 2015 and 2018 – $240,346,128.40 in HHF for 14,878 demolitions. Since a $21 million award in 10/2015, HHF has helped DDP demolish an average of 40 structures every week for 229 weeks. Kevin Elsenheimer, the Executive Director of MSHDA, believed demolition was protecting homeowners, "We believe this is the most efficient way to get these dollars out on the ground (Spangler & Egan, 2015)."

HHF is set to expire at the end of 2020. Although Duggan attempted to put a $250 million bond measure on the 3/2020 ballot, the city council rejected the proposal based on concerns about accountability and oversight (Ferretti, 2019a)[36]. Duggan's blight regime had grown too strong, too fast and city council members felt the muscular DDP needed a regulatory retrofit before new funding. Brenda Jones, the council president, explained, "We are the checks and balances to ensure that everything that should be in place, is in place (Guillen & Stafford, 2019)." In the meantime, demolitions have slowed as the DDP exhausts a final HHF award. The end of federal support also signals the conclusion of DLBA's role in the DDP, Duggan has

[36] I address the regulatory and transparency concerns in the next chapter.

moved the DDP into a new Department of Demolition, led by LaJuan Counts (Stafford, 2020). Even as bulldozers idle and budgets shrink, Duggan's blight regime - outlasting Pulte, Orr, and Gilbert – has left its trace in policies, institutions, and neighborhoods. The mayor had promised to collaborate with the council to place the bond issue on the 11/2020 ballot (Neavling, 2020). However, Duggan's formidable authority over the blight regime and his agenda of a blight-free Detroit has become less of a certainty with the community circulation of Covid-19. In early spring 2020, as the city took on the morbid mantle of the nation's highest death rate, Duggan suspended the DDP while DLBA began layoffs for 20% of its staff (Ferretti, 2020).

Building a Blightocracy in Detroit

In 2013, Brian Farkas, the then-executive director of Pulte's DetBa, told a reporter, "If you address Detroit's blight problem, you make the rest of the city's problems easier to solve (Carey, 2013)." Robust and comprehensive blight removal – funded by public largesse and managed by a trustworthy administration – suggested new possibility for remaking Detroit, its institutions, and neighborhoods. Despite publicizing that theory of change, Farkas and other actors focused on blight had little to say about how blight would affect those problems. For some, the state's insistence on bankruptcy and Orr's unilateral restructuring of the city's agencies had unsettled the institutional rust that had prevented previous attempts at demolition from transforming the city. If, as some said at the time, blight "made Detroit unmanageable" then a refreshed capacity to demolish abandoned buildings served as an alibi for the city's bankruptcy (Green & Ghopal, 2013). Indeed, on the day after DBTRF released its report on neighborhood blight, John Gallagher, the former urban affairs columnist for the *Detroit Free Press*, observed:

> Detroit's bankruptcy feels for many like a fresh start for a city that for decades has endured relentless image-bashing as a decaying, crime-ridden, irretrievable and once-

> great urban center. So much of that reputation has been tied to home abandonment and eventual wide-scale blight, which not only breeds crime and other social ills but also just looks bad. (2014c)

Whether an entry point for solving other problems or a physical face-lift to redeem Detroit's national reputation, blight removal would make the city livable, governable, and developable. Bill Pulte approached residential blight as an existential threat to Detroit and cities like it: the bulldozer would make the city great again. In that sense, Pulte and others were no different than antecedents social improvers that associated abandonment with the death of the city (Page, 2007; Beauregard, 1994). The urgency in the words and work of Orr, Pulte, Gilbert, and Duggan to counteract blight is not unfamiliar to policy think tanks, corporate boardrooms, nonprofits, neighborhoods, housing and development agencies, and city halls across the United States. However, in Detroit, blight removal was not just a policy goal for these interests but an expression and achievement of renewed civic, political, investor, and philanthropic capabilities.

Administrators of the DDP commanded the apocalyptic language of Pulte, Orr, and Gilbert to position blight as a timebomb that would halt Detroit's chances of revitalization. Demolition, for them, was a core principle of a restructured government tasked with enabling reinvestment. Leaders treated blight as a formal emergency that could lighten regulation, but they also approached blight as an everyday crisis that justified demolition at all costs. In a 4/26/2016 presentation by Farkas to the Detroit City Council entitled *Safe Demolition at Scale*, he shared the three priorities of the DDP: "1) Protecting Public Health and Safety; *2) Increasing Speed/Pace of Demos – Creating a Sense of Urgency*; 3) Cost Controls." The second priority illustrates how DDP administrators relied on a narrative of disaster to rationalize blight removal, going so far as to "create" the urgency necessary to explain the program's frenetic pace. Instead

of the discrete economic-space Mitchell observes in Egypt, leaders in Detroit crafted a blight-space with its own logics, disciplines, and interventions. The map of blight was the product of blight emergency conditions, but it also provided a coherent image that crystallized a form of expertise about blight. One could know blight without understanding its material production.

In a 6/13/2017 article appearing in *Government Technology*, Bob Graves interviewed Farkas about the DDP's efforts. The Special Projects Director of the DBA suggested residential demolition is a necessity because it confronts the main determinant of Detroit's decline: *blight flight* (Graves, 2017). In Farkas' view, blight eventuates urban decline because it discourages residents from staying and investing in their homes. In this chain of events, uneasy residents depart their weakened neighborhoods and leave behind deteriorating properties that trigger a new round of homeowner anxiety and another phase of decline. For Farkas and others administering Detroit's demolition campaign, wrecking existing blight interrupts a sequence of events in which blight is simply the product of prior adjacent blight. Despite strong evidence that population flight is pushed by the low quality of central city public goods (Bayoh, Irwin, & Haab, 2006), the dominant narrative of blight flight has remained unaltered since the early phases of the DDP. Officials in Mayor Duggan's administration and the DLBA have endorsed the view in local and national media. In a 2017 episode of "This Old House," Craig Fahle, the then-spokesperson for DLBA, expressed dismay Detroit residents would abandon homes but shared optimism that demolition and rehabilitation could counter the lack of resident morale. While stumbling through a vacant house, he told host Kevin O'Connor, "Sometimes they will leave behind everything and just leave in the middle of the night." The determinants of that vacancy remained off the table.

Orr's blight emergency declaration was a vivid example of blight as a way of disciplining institutions, geography, and markets. In Orr's formulation, blight was not simply a target of

government intervention. By declaring blight to be of such emergency proportions that it demands exceptional executive action, Orr showed how to govern blight but also govern through blight. Pulte's insistence that challenging Detroit government's monopoly over blight removal was synonymous with upending Detroit government's reason for existing suggests the politics of blight extends beyond debates over "what is blight?" and "what do we do about it?" Moreover, Gilbert's inflexibility about blight removal as a way of triggering investment and maximizing profit – gaining Detroit's reentry into a mesh of regional, national, and global capital – shows blight is more than physical nuisance and demolition is more than contractors demonstrating technical proficiency. At a public event prior to the release of the DBTRF guide, Gilbert declared, "Removing all blight is going to create economic value. You are going to have significant interest from profit-making capitalist folks." In each instance, the eradication of blight has helped to preserve and reimagine authority over governing, developing, and inhabiting.

While Duggan was quick to bar DetBA from the city he retained the Blight Authority's central philosophies by keeping Pulte's chief strategist. Farkas has remained the public face of the DDP, namely, defending lapses in DDP's practices and processes (Stafford, 2019g; Rahal, 2019). As Farkas stated in a 2013 interview, "So by getting rid of the blight you really help every other effort that's going on in these neighborhoods (Click on Detroit, 2013)." More important is the stance DetBA, Pulte, and Farkas took towards the demolition process: *demolition at scale*. This scale of demolition – descending on a neighborhood and executing the plan with logistical precision – was Pulte's attempt to overthrow Detroit's "blightocracy." However, debates over whether red tape or institutional complacency are responsible for blight misses how different interests have mobilized blight removal as a means and goal of governing Detroit. Deciphering blightocracy means apprehending how the medley of interventionist interests in Detroit and other

declining cities frame the goals of stabilization and revitalization, and how those interests envision and set about achieving those goals (Rein & Schon, 1996). Widespread insistence on demolition and blight removal as solutions to the challenges of urban decline focused public resources and attention on a set of financial and physical priorities that did not automatically prioritize improvement in the quality life of inhabitants. Blight removal presented the possibility to place the city's challenges in a vacuum of population flight, nuisance, and bureaucracy. Demolition was not only a way to clear land, but it became a way to clear structural problems.

Less a theory than a model, blightocracy marginalizes the structural and institutional factors planners, activists, inhabitants, and public officials should hold responsible for the decline of cities and neighborhoods. Institutionalizing a blightocratic approach to urban decline has material, discursive, and institutional implications. Blightocracy approaches existing or potential dereliction as a cause of present and future abandonment rather than a symptom of political-economic processes operating at a variety of scales. I adopt Pulte's word for viewing government through the lens and presence of blight, but where he argues public institutions frustrate and limit demolition through unnecessary regulation. Rather than regurgitate opprobria for government involvement in demolishing, I borrow and adapt Pulte's conservative neologism to treat blight removal as a framework for comprehending how policymakers shape government to take on abandoned structures (instead of a towering bureaucratic challenge). By invoking the threat of blight, directing funds to remove it, and restructuring institutions to oversee it, blight bridges divides between public and private while normalizing policy or investment strategies for managing decline without attention to the political, social, or economic factors of decline.

This resulting repertoire of interventions and programs elevates widespread residential demolition into a default and powerful solution to the decline of Detroit-like cities, a decline

associated with visceral and ubiquitous neighborhood ruination. Blightocracy does not merely demolish abandoned buildings because of their unproductive nature (social and economic costs; low exchange value; impairment to development) but because demolition may solve a variety of local challenges without explicitly drawing attention to the political and economic relationships and processes that produce decline and dispossession. From this perspective, demolition serves as a solution to the city's problems and the vagueness of its targets and objectives allows a variety of interests to employ it to realize and reinforce their agendas. The urgency of blight and the promise of demolition restructures public and economic authority to focus on mechanisms other than regressive political-economy or white supremacy. Like other paradigmatic standouts of urban regimes, Duggan drew on blight and demolition to establish and maintain his power and capacity to act in the collective interest (Stone, 1989).

Whether Orr, Pulte, Gilbert, or Duggan, blightocracy narrowed the range of permissible policy solutions to problems resulting from generational class and racial domination, whether regional or national in scope. In *Table 4*, I demonstrate how these institutions transformed major fields of policy intervention – including infrastructure, education, public health, and technology – and reduces fundamental disagreements over inequality into problems solved by blight removal. The example of "Safe Routes to School" is a powerful example of how blightocracy transforms social problems in places like Detroit. By linking academic performance to students passing vacant buildings, leaders have expanded demolition as a solution to segregation and unequal educational funding (Einhorn, 2016). These framings extend "blight flight" to

inhabiting, developing, and governing Detroit. These framings produced and preserved demolition as a collaboration between public and private sectors to manage the city.

SOCIAL CONCERN (local challenge or issue)	BLIGHTOCRATIC FRAMING (how officials and property interests claim blight removal *addresses* the concern)
Public Health	Eliminating toxins and pollutants; remediating sources of lead and asbestos; encourage inhabitant activity
Education	Students feel better about their neighborhoods and themselves and perform better in schools and classes; blight removal protects physical school investments
Employment	Demolition is a local growth industry; cleared areas are more attractive to employer investment
Governance	Fewer properties means less public liability and less institutional responsibility; more efficient use of public resources; blight removal encourages collaboration across sectors and agencies; new governing bodies
Beautification	Neighborhoods are more attractive to inhabitants and visitors (and potential investors)
Civic Pride	Inhabitants, officials, and investors have higher morale and feel better about the future
Youth Activity	Remediating residential blight stimulates and occupies youth in the neighborhood
Branding	Cities are easier to market to investors, events, corporate relocations, and tourists
Public Safety	Fewer properties for arson/fires; police do not focus on abandoned structures; fewer squatters; broken windows theory to address crime
Infrastructure	Decrease the budgetary burden for maintaining public works in depleted neighborhoods
Sustainability	Remove impermeable surfaces, densify neighborhoods, and introduce hydrophilic infrastructure
Innovation	Encourage artistic, entrepreneurial, and creative experimentation with empty land and property
Technology	Focus civic technology and data resources on quantifying and addressing blighted properties
Food Security	Open land for various scales of urban agriculture; sites for market and home gardens; farmers market sites
Transportation	Reduce the size of transit service network by changing residential and investment patterns
Housing	Strengthen neighborhoods by eliminating threats to property values; eliminate dangerous housing

Table 4: Blightocratic framings of social problems in Detroit; how local concerns become demolishable

Conclusion: Making Detroit Demolishable

The *clearance consensus* that emerged in early 2014 in Detroit was not a fix for the city's decline – it was a terrain for negotiating power over that fix. Orr's emergency, Pulte's authority, Gilbert's machine, and Duggan's regime were never just attempting to clean-up Detroit. The returns to property values and livability may have been uncertain at the outset of the DDP, but the gains for institutional and investment interests became as obvious as a bulldozer. Blight and political power inhabited two prongs in a dialectic of institutions in Detroit. Every invocation of

blight interacted with the limits of power and synthesized new institutional arrangements that informed and justified a wave of interventions.

With each passing intervention these arrangements mobilized new conceptions of blight that required new articulations of political power. Blightocracy perspective suggests that rather than treat demolition as a tool or a transaction cost in the process of urban change scholars should interrogate it as a way of organizing political environments. The blightocracy in Detroit provides an institutional analog to the production of demolition that recasst a discrete intervention into a regional process of income-generation and valuation. In late 2019, Farkas told a *Detroit News* reporter, "We're coming to every part of the city (Ramirez, 2019)." This planned omnipresence of destruction depends on both the achievement of blightocracy and a process of demolishing embedded in the operations of contractors. Though each phase of blight discipline since 2013 possessed its own political and economic aims, the cumulative effect has made Detroit and its problems *demolishable*.

Today, blight in Detroit serves an important role in imagining the future. Investors mobilize resources around dereliction and aim to open space for development. Inhabitants lobby for the bulldozer to transform their quality of life. But blight is also a potent tool for reframing social and economic problems – a way of structuring challenges that disguises the social determinants of inequality that produce decline. Institutions may wreck buildings to advance investor interests, but they also render a city governable by making demolition both the goal of policy and a process of policymaking in Detroit. The "will to remove" of Orr, Pulte, Gilbert, and Duggan is an intervention in governing Detroit as much as it is an intervention in its blocks. By making blight synonymous with Detroit's problems, DDP leaders could intervene locally without transforming the political-economic determinants of Detroit's decline and instability.

Detroit's blightocracy relied upon the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces of demolition to justify blight removal. The faces of power met the production of space; different conceptualizations of Detroit and its problems provided opportunities to govern and intervene. But more than control or domination, such a confluence between policy and geography allowed the mechanisms behind Detroit's decline to remain beyond the reach of the city's interventions. Political power and space converged to place the environments, achievements, priorities, and resources of demolishing Detroit off the map and off the public agenda. Demolition was produced politically and maintained institutionally. In the next chapter, I show how DDP and the Duggan blight regime created the favorable conditions for contractors to command the institutional dimensions of demolishing Detroit – *how the necessity of removal turned from governing and developing the city into generating income from its destruction*. Demolishing had to be produced financially and materially. Even in the city's emergent blightocracy, demolishing was not a conveyor belt of equipment, resources, and labor, but a regional market constructed to reward contractors and their ability to control the regulation and valuation of backfill material.

CHAPTER 3

Backfilling the Blightocracy:

Rentiership, Regulatory Capture, and the Dirt on Detroit

"Hence, money may be dirt, although dirt is not money."

– Marx, K. (2004). *Capital: Volume I*. Penguin.

In this chapter, I answer the questions: *How did backfilling become a main focus of the Detroit Demolition Program's (DDP) administration? How did contractors create or control value from backfilling?* I show how demolition contractors exploited the perceived emergency around blight to exploit the regulatory and compliance processes around the backfill program. Demolishing Detroit expanded to include backfilling Detroit. This expansion opened spaces for value extraction. By illustrating the evolution of backfill – from an innocuous concern in 2014 dealings between contractors and officials to the biggest obstacle facing the program – I argue the DDP not only yielded control to contractors but became a willing partner in building permissive accountability and enforcement measures. I address the consequences of these contractors possessing this authority over backfill and the financial, institutional, and political stakes of the DDP and its partners regulating the program. The absence of substantive controls on backfilling is not a failure of regulation but a form of valuation and regulation that has allowed contractors to generate incomes through dirt by wrecking Detroit's vacant buildings.

Demolition Production and Dirt Costs

By the fall of 2015, allegations of misconduct in the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) had fueled public anxiety and press enquiry (Burns, 2015). In the latter part of October, the City of Detroit Inspector General (OIG) opened Case No. 2015-CC-0179 to probe whether the Detroit Building Authority (DBA) had manipulated a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in 6/2014 to award Adamo, MCM, and Homrich – the region's three major wreckers – millions in Hardest Hit Funds (HHF) contracts to complete demolitions in the summer and fall of 2014. Mistrust over high costs and unclear compliance prompted OIG to pursue a review of the RFQ (LeDuff, 2015). After three years, on 12/18/2018, Ellen Ha, the city's Inspector General[37], released a report detailing OIG findings from its investigation into the contract bidding process of the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) (City of Detroit Office of Inspector General, 2018). OIG scrutinized the development of that first DBA RFQ, 2014 meetings between these large-unit contractors and DDP leadership, and the DBA's internal process for soliciting bids and awarding the contracts.

In its 2018 report, the OIG determined DBA and the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) had improperly prevented smaller demolition contractors from participating in those DDP contract meetings. Despite the process lacking "fairness, openness, and transparency," the OIG's investigation did not find evidence of corruption or fraud in the DDP's 2014 actions. OIG concluded the DDP had sought out large-unit contractors because the city needed to spend 70% of a $52.3 million HHF allocation by 10/7/2014[38]. MSHDA allocates HHF through the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Non-Profit Housing Corporation (MHA) upon completion of an

[37] The Office of Inspector General is responsible for investigating "waste, abuse, fraud, and corruption in City government."
[38] The rationale was large-unit contractors had the equipment, experience, and bonding to complete contracts that smaller firms lacked capacity to complete.

agreement between itself and its blight partners[39]. The HHF Blight Elimination Program requires partners to spend 25% of an allocation in the first six months, 70% within a year, and 100% within 18 months. Failing to meet these deadlines risks surrendering unspent funds and future ineligibility. MHA, DLBA, and Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr had reached an HHF agreement six months prior in 10/2013. However, by the beginning of 4/2014, the DDP had not completed a HHF demolition[40]. DDP leadership determined that city agencies would not be able to spend the requisite 70% of its HHF allocation without tailoring unit-price contracts[41] to fit the needs of the region's largest demolition contractors: MCM, Adamo, Homrich, and Bierlein[42]. DDP officials felt these high-volume contractors were favorable to DDP's *production* goals[43].

For Ha and the OIG, the DDP's explanation for the unit-price RFQ made sense given MHA deadlines and the urgency to identify high-capacity demolition firms[44]. The bid process and contracts did not violate any local or state policies. The DDP needed to quickly award 800 demolitions in additional contracts to hit its spending goal[45]. In addition to accelerating demolitions in the city, DDP officials had imagined the large-unit pricing model could appeal to other high-capacity demolition contractors in the Midwest and the United States (City of Detroit Office of Inspector General, 2018; Ferretti, 2015) – a dimension of the DDP that never left the draft stage. In addition to those friendly pricing models, officials also predicted the stable

[39] MHA and MSHDA use the term "blight partners" to refer to local agencies and authorities responsible for executing a blight removal plan. In many cases, independent public authorities serve as these partners instead of the municipal government. DBA and DLBA are independent public authorities supported by the city's government.
[40] The DDP had allocated $421,000 to contractors to manage the program. Barry Ellentuck, the president of ADR Consultants, was an early manager of the DDP. His relationship with the DDP culminated in litigation over unpaid bills and allegations of fraud.
[41] DDP had earlier RFQs for demolition contracts aimed at smaller contractors.
[42] Bierlein – based in Midland, MI - chose not to participate in the program.
[43] Staff with the DBA and DLBA frequently refer to demolition as "production." The word "production" disembeds demolition from the geography and political-economy of Detroit and sets it aside as an industry with its own logic.
[44] 75-100 properties per week
[45] $36,610,000; Detroit had already awarded HHF contracts for another 2,200 demolitions.

financial resources, the volume of demolitions, and bundled contracts would relax any doubts about the pace of work and the strength of the market. The DDP opened the RFQ on 6/14/2014 and closed it on 6/19/2014. They already knew the winners. In July, DBA awarded Adamo, Homrich, and MCM the unit-price contracts and proceeded with a portion of HHF demolitions.

The DDP established a $.52 per cubic foot price for the HHF demolitions based on comparable prices in previously awarded contracts. Managers shaped the pricing structure based on meetings with contractors prior to the RFQ. The contracts included accommodations for change orders because contractors expressed concern that the size and scope of the DDP could exhaust the free backfill[46] material sources that contractors rely on for completing demolitions. The $.52 unit price per cubic foot did not account for backfill costs. This was an intentional choice by DDP administrators despite a warning from Atwell Group[47], a Southfield-based construction consultant hired to review the DDP's structure and strategy, that "The market conditions and the clean fill compliance have made it virtually impossible to obtain free fill at the volumes required for this phase of the HHF project (OIG, 2018, 18)." Unprecedented backfill needs for constant demolition meant a dirt market would spring from the sudden demand and the exhaustion of free supply. In effect, the DDP transformed dirt into a commodity. To revise Marx, dirt may not be money, but for Detroit demolitions *dirt became money in disguise*.

In line with Atwell's prediction, the condensed timeline to tear down 3,000 properties in six months placed extraordinary strain on the existing network of builders and material yards providing backfill to demolition contractors. Anticipated clean sources proved contaminated and the summer construction season depleted truck fleets and overcommitted hauling services. State

[46] An RFP from the DDP defines *backfill* as: "Material with which Open Holes shall be filled to Final Grade Level and that has been previously approved for use according to Specifications."
[47] Atwell Group turned down a formal DDP offer to manage the backfill program.

agency testing disqualified presumptive sources of material like the construction of the Little Caesars Arena (LCA), the I-96 highway overhaul, and the completion of the QLine streetcar (Stafford, 2019h). DDP leaders at the time felt a failure to adjust awarded demolition contracts to incorporate those unanticipated backfill costs would endanger the DDP's demolition production, undermine contractor confidence in management, and thwart the success of the program (Helms & Guillen, 2015). DDP appeased the firms. The OIG report concluded 96% of demolitions completed by Adamo, Homrich, and MCM by 10/2014 included change orders for unexpected backfill costs. These change orders resulted in a total price increase of $4,183,736.22 over a period in which Adamo, Homrich, and MCM combined to demolish 2,229 properties at a cost of $20,065,195. In other words, backfill costs accounted for over 20% of the HHF dollars spent in the six-month period during which the Duggan administration introduced and launched the DDP.

The OIG's attempt to uncover dirt on the DDP's contract negotiations had revealed how contractors mobilized dirt to maximize the distribution of HHF and grab at all available value. DDP leaders attributed the spike in backfill costs to a lack of clean and free fill material. At the same time, the DDP increasingly relied on contractors to establish their own supply chains for sourcing backfill material. The DBA and DLBA trusted contractors to accurately report their hauling and material costs for provisioning clean fill. All of this happened at a time in which DDP officials treated residential abandonment as an existential threat to Detroit. For powerful private and public interests, the achievement of demolition would coincide with the city's renewed developability. One significant consequence of institutionalized this approach to managing decline was an almost unavoidable dependence on contractor control and access to material sources, backfill supply chains, and the logistics of demolition. The process of demolishing had to expand to include backfill material and its market. Alongside a medley of

public institutions responsible for executing the intersecting visions of Kevyn Orr, the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF), and Mayor Mike Duggan, the early months of the HHF program illustrates the opportunities available to contractors to capture and command the city's emergent blight-removal regulation scheme to serve a set of financial and industrial interests.

I analyze the development and regulation of this backfill program from 2014 until the end of 2018. I argue the DDP's backfill program illustrates how demolition contractors positioned themselves to shape the finance and regulation of demolition – *intentionally and unintentionally* – as well as be primary beneficiaries of the DDP's urgency to wreck abandoned properties. Rather than the muscle to support city-builders attempting to realize grand redevelopment plans, contractors extracted value wherever possible from the DDP. Regulators did not turn a blind eye to that extraction. Rather, regulators relinquished the steering wheel. I argue these demolition contractors took advantage of the "blight is cancer" philosophy that justified a rapid realization of a blight-free (and governable, and developable) Detroit (Pierog, 2014; Detroit's Fight Against Blight, 2014). Although the OIG cleared the DDP of misconduct related to early HHF dealings, the formal process by which the DDP awarded those contracts in summer 2014 and its financial consequences illustrate how regional contractors commanded the incipient demolition program.

In a 2015 interview, Tony Kashat, an AKT Peerless principal ultimately responsible for the DBA backfill program, described how the initial urgency surrounding residential demolition marginalized the perceived significance and constrained the organization of backfill program:

> The primary focus was getting houses down and remove the blight, stabilize the neighborhoods. There's a lot more that goes into it. Quickly behind it is this idea that as the volume of demolished houses goes up, the strain and stress on the clean fill materials,

> it became more costly. There wasn't a clear reference in previous RFP to backfill and soil. Just an assumption we'd get clean stuff. (Personal communication, 2015)

In this chapter, I show how the city was slow to implement protocols for handling backfill material but also how this reinforced the interests of contractors. The lack of depth and the length of delays in regulation were not failures or mistakes. Over time, backfill evolved from a "problem" to a "question" and finally a "program" that developed and institutionalized organizations, guidelines, and monitoring processes[48]. However, the workings of the program were unclear even to contractors, who were quick to accuse the city of slowing production with fatuous bureaucracy. Contrary to these claims of red-tape, I find the DDP adopted an "innocent until proven guilty" approach to monitoring quality, quantity, and financing of backfill. DDP managers and officials recognized the risk of pressing contractors into a regulatory scheme that could complicate contracts, discourage firms, or jeopardize the pace of demolitions. Demolishing Detroit meant backfilling Detroit, a process that required its own standards, scale, and supply. The DDP's regulatory ensemble – made of DBA, DLBA, Mayors Office, and MSDHA – did not limit contractors. Rather, DDP management crafted a regulatory system that would achieve its goal of a blight-free Detroit while facilitating and enabling contractors to identify and grab value.

I argue DDP leaders nested the backfill program in the immediacy and necessity of ending the blight emergency. DDP needed to ramp up demolition and depended on contractors to execute that agenda. Although this incongruency appears to be a gap in implementation, I show how the current state of the demolition and backfill programs is largely an artifact of unchallenged contractor power allowed through regulation rather than simply unregulated into its authority. It was not the absence of standards that allowed demolition to become "a clear and

[48] Current controversy (2/2019) over the city's backfill program suggests that the DDP has come full circle and backfill is again a problem.

present danger to the community" but the effect of DDP's prolonged effort to balance demolition production and public safety to ensure continued community support (Cwiek, 2017). Contractors approached the DDP as a stream of money to be dominated, dammed, and directed. A 9/2019 report in *The Detroit News* confirms contractors fabricated and invented prices for dirt and both MSHDA and DLBA approved of these practices until 2017 (Ferretti, 2019b). The backfilling dimension of Detroit's administration of home demolition entwines finance, industry, and regulation. Demolition contractors delivered on the objective of demolishing Detroit's blighted house while also strengthening their command over the city's built and regulatory environment.

DDP established and mobilized the backfill program to align with the logistical and industrial priorities of regional contractors. The supply of backfill became a secondary market upon which the success of the entire demolition program depended. *Backfilling became as important as taking down empty buildings.* As time passed, demolition backfill emerged as its own touchstone in the political debate and conflict over the DDP. Technical considerations and engineering concerns about dirt quality entered the public discussion and helped Mayor Mike Duggan and DDP leadership pivot so the necessity of backfilling became synonymous with the necessity for demolishing. The ubiquity of blight combined with the seemingly bottomless reserve of Hardest Hit Funds (HHF) encouraged DDP boosters and managers to frame demolishing as the jolt the city and neighborhoods needed to stabilize and revitalize. Regulation served a dual function: mollify skeptics and enroll contractors as partners. As Duggan shared in 2014, "The complexity of the blight problem is amazing. You have HUD regulations, you've got banking regulations, you've got environmental regulations. (Headapohl, 2014)" But rather than inhibit action, each sphere served to enable demolition contractors and their networks. The apparent emergency of Detroit's blight created justification for the DDP to regulate backfill into

an asset class that automated value-grabbing in post-crisis Detroit (Fields, 2019). Popular and policy appetites for a *disaster* of blight and restructuring public institutions around demolishing Detroit also provided for and opened space for rentiership and regulatory capture in backfilling.

Finding the Dollars in Destruction: Relevant Literature

Three currents of work in political economy and geography relevant to regulatory capture, rentiership, and disaster capitalism. Each are fundamental to developing my description and analysis of the practices and processes associated with the DDP backfill program. In the previous chapter, I addressed how the priority of interventions placed "beyond politics" shaped the DDP's approach to demolition and implementing the program in city neighborhoods. Drawing from scholars on law, emergency, and politics, I argued the DDP attempted to position demolition as a necessary undertaking outside history, segregation, profit, and authority. However, as I concluded, the DDP was not a post-political or anti-political undertaking[49]. Rather, DDP leaders subscribed to a form politics that institutionalized emergency and marginalized structural determinants and social relations producing residential abandonment. Where once a blight emergency shaped the context of governing Detroit, a *blightocracy* emerged to prioritize demolishing as both an achievement and expedient. The apparent absence of politics – the rendering technical – was itself a political project aimed at developing and propagating a consensus enabling the blight crisis to reshape policy and administration. In the below, I draw on currents of research on rent, regulation, and disaster to extend this administrative logic and interpret consequences for the financial and regulatory dimensions of DDP backfilling.

[49] In the previous chapter I explain why the terms "post-politics" and "anti-politics" can treat late capitalist or entrepreneurial approaches to government as an erasure or expulsion of radical or progressive politics instead of a countermovement with conservative, pragmatic, or market-fundamentalist politics.

Disaster Capitalism

In his recent criticism of capitalism's appetite for catastrophe, Jorgen Randers – the author of *Limits to Growth* - concluded, "It is profitable to let the world go to hell (2015)." Such an observation about the market potential of disaster resonates with Neil Smith's (2006) clarification on the socio-genic characteristics of calamity. Reflecting on Hurricane Katrina, Smith wrote, "In every phase and aspect of a disaster – causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction – the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus." Natural disasters are not nature's wrath against man; the co-constitution of the built and the natural means social inequity serves as a multiplier of calamity's effects (Kaika, 2004). Whether the consequence of anthropogenic climate change or socially determined vulnerability, at least a portion of a "natural" disaster can be traced back to the institutions, policies, and investments that shaped the context of its effects. As such, disasters do not reset the social, economic, or political landscape; their effect can be one of intensification rather than simply eradication. Adolph Reed Jr described this dynamic acerbically when he wrote of New Orleans, "The people who were swept away or simply overlooked…were the same ones who were already swept aside (2008, 148)." Crisis, therefore, does not erode context. Instead, crisis is made possible only in social context.

Within these spaces of intensification, powerful interests possess the ability to preserve and reinforce their position by sacrificing destroyed, depleted, and contaminated areas (Lerner, 2010). Paroxysm exploits the incremental violence (Nixon, 2011). The uneven social order may be fundamental to an economically productive afterlife of disaster, but catastrophe prompts a set of financial maneuvers that can turn tumult into windfalls (Schumpeter, 1942). The blank slate – social, spatial, or institutional - is an attractive business proposition: *out with the old, in with the*

new. Capitalism and disaster are uniquely twinned in a political economy in which floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes can be favorable in the short-term to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of developed economies (Neil Baily, 2011). That temporary favorability becomes a permanent inclination for agitating markets and industry. Those fixes and expansions depend on periodic local and global devastation to transcend the low returns from past investments (Arrighi, 2004). More than moments of creative destruction instating innovation, upheaval has taken on a foundational role in management best practice (Nolan & Croson, 1995; Hart & Milstein, 1999).

But weathering incidences of technological uncertainty is different than inciting or prolonging that instability in the pursuit of grabbing value. In *Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein (2007) shows how global corporations and state actors depend on destruction to establish and expand markets. She writes, "Believers in the shock doctrine are convinced that only a great rupture – a flood, a war, a terrorist attack – can generate the kind of vast, clean canvases they crave. It is these malleable moments, when we are psychologically unmoored and physically uprooted, that these artists of the real plunge in their hands and begin their work of remaking the world (25)." Democracy is meant to serve as a shield against these ruptures – a stabilizing structure that prioritizes collective good over corporate – but constant crisis has created a commodity of insecurity for corporate actors to extract value (Loewenstein, 2015). Vulnerability and dereliction are now pillars of income-generation at a time when the declaration of emergency no longer mediates and manages disaster but demonstrates the opening of market potential. *Disaster capitalism* instrumentalizes catastrophe to "promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist interests (Schuller & Maldonado, 2016)." A border crisis enables private

detention camps (Delgado, 2018). A drug war enables mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010). A blight emergency enables a billion-dollar home demolition program (Abbey-Lambertz, 2013).[50]

In her ethnography of post-Katrina housing security, Vincanne Adams portrays how New Orleans' recovery provided windfalls for for-profit firms that treated the rebuild as an exploitable market opportunity (Adams, 2013). The aftermath of Katrina provided succor for public housing opponents that used the devastation as an excuse to finish off remaining complexes, with one conservative US congressperson admitting, "We couldn't do it, but God did (Saulny, 2006)." While divine intervention is an improbable culprit, the outcome appears constant. Destruction of the variety wrought by Katrina created the opportunities for investment and accumulation that thickened the silver lining until it concealed the entire storm cloud. In the wake of catastrophe, crisis production emerged as the dominant industry in town (Roitman, 2013). Exploiting, reinforcing, and normalizing disaster proved essential to generating income from it. The appeal of disaster capitalism as a philosophy – and one consonant with American neoliberal capitalism - has been its relationship to creating and adding value to the GDP while also stabilizing class dominance (Harvey, 2007). Technological innovation and (eventual) shared growth provided relief to the immediate pain of change. However, Komlos (2016) has argued the destructive side of creative destruction now dwarfs any claims to creativity. Rather than a gale that galvanizes change by anticipating productive activity, creative destruction is now a persistent maelstrom extracting rent and redistributing that value to powerful classes (Purifoy & Seamster, 2020).

Rentiership

In 1974, Anne Krueger outlined a theory of rent-seeking. Her approach spotlighted the positive correlation between regulation and rent-seeking, specifically related to competition for

[50] A vaccine for a pandemic.

government-provisioned licenses. For scholars like Krueger and some Marxist scholars, rent-seeking can be reduced to a distortion or corruption of economic processes – a wrench in the gears of production and competition. However, following Birch (2019) and his engagement with technoscience, I argue rentiership should be approached as a form of historically situated value extraction and the consequence of spatial-specific configurations of institutions and policies. Rent-seeking and rentiership are not flaws within the urban process under capitalism; they are expressions of the relationship between state and capital rooted in appropriating value. As Ferguson (1999) concludes of African mining operations, what might be considered market inefficiencies or policy failures by one party are thriving economic sectors for others. Disaster capitalism is one such approach to developing and maintaining political-economic conditions compatible with this generation of income. Rather than an unearned income or an error, rents are made possible by transforming a possession into a commodity. Whether data (Sadowski, 2019), knowledge (Fuller, 2019), or housing (Teresa, 2019), curation and standardization provides the foundation of a discrete asset class upon which expertise, regulation, and markets may develop.

Rentiership is the "circulation of money and profit through non-productive forms of value appropriation (Andreucci, Garcia-Lamarca, Wedekin, & Swyngedouw, 2017)." As David Harvey has suggested, rent brings "together an understanding of the ongoing production of space and geography and the circulation and accumulation of capital. (2010, 183)." Rent and accumulation may overlap, but the resources and strategies of the former distinguish its class struggles from the latter. Where capital accumulation depends on production and myriad fixes to sustain its profit rate, rentiership relies on the monopolization of assets and the distribution of that value without appreciation or expansion (Sayer, 2020). If accumulation is the violent, vigorous river, rentiership is the still, glassy oxbow lake. Rentiership, Lapavistas (2013) has argued, generates

income without contributing much of anything. Perched beside the exploitative features of late capitalism is this rentier capitalism of predation – a political-economic relation that extracts and funnels value (Pollin, 2007). The occupation and appropriation of existing value – notably within the built environment – thwarts capital flows across space that would usually operate as the engine of the capital accumulation process. The rentier class serves as an intermediary that assetizes its possessions and deploys them to intensify control over urban space (Moreno, 2014).

Andreucci and his co-authors are astute in recognizing rent relations rely on flexible property rights to enact conversion of use-values into exchange-values. Their term, *value grabbing*, renders "visible and politicize taken-for-granted distributional relations (2017, 29)." For them, value grabbing is synonymous with mobilizing the rent-relation to appropriate surplus value produced elsewhere – the rentier does not control the means of production. Property regimes and entitlements back this transformation into exchange-values. Proprietorship may be essential but so too is the role of the state to preserve and reproduce bonds between rentiers and the built environment. Regulation enables and formalizes concentration of ownership. Scholars have argued the control of resources and the revaluation of nature serves as a useful distinction between accumulation and value extraction. (Greco & Apostolopoulou, 2019). As such, to avoid the abstraction that comes from world-historical explanation, analysis of rent-relations must address concrete arrangements of resource (nature), assets (property), and regulation (state).

Rent, therefore, exceeds a price representing differences between superior and inferior products or land (Ricardo, 2012), nor is it synonymous with a price paid for a use by another person (Smith, 1977). These classical definitions centering supply and demand do not capture political conflicts over space and resources. Notwithstanding the importance of price, the struggle for power is central to accounting for the workings of rent and the system that stabilizes

this social relation between labor and capital (Marx, 1992). Currents of thought drawing on critical traditions have grounded the study of rent-relations in specific land, property, and resource regimes. Land values under capitalism remain an artifact of potential and capitalized rents on property and housing (Smith, 1979). Capital's circulation in space enacts an iterative process of devaluation and revaluation of land within a regional geography of uneven development in which the powerful extract the surplus value (Smith, 1987; Harvey, 2005). The risk and reward of rentiership– as the distribution of value rather than an additive process – is fundamental to probing gentrification and speculation. Hammel (1999) evaluated land price change over 130 years to illustrate neighborhood change in Minneapolis, MN. Darling (2005) employed a similar approach to shifts in value in rural Adirondack communities and the swift transition from individual owners to developers. Haila's (2015) study of the "rent question" in Singapore uncovered value extraction regardless if land is "private, common, public, collective, state, municipal and shared (71)." By reframing Krueger's rent-seeking as *political rent-seeking*, Haila drew attention to the policies that allow and maintain rent-seeking. These institutional patterns – in Minneapolis, the Adirondacks, or Singapore – make value-grabbing possible.

Regulatory capture

Policymakers and officials construct and shape institutions to safeguard income-generation through extraction. Rather than a separate sphere of relations, these choices signal the social dimension of economic life (Polanyi, 2001). Rent requires monopoly control over the supply of an asset, but the state safeguards the conditions of that ownership. Concomitant with rentiership, regulatory capture – in which special interests use and influence government power for their narrow advantage over that of the public (Levine & Forrence, 1990) – is essential to making sense of value-grabbing. Despite arguments by Pautz and Rinfret (2013) that regulatory

capture is a rare occurrence, the role of policy and institutions in enabling business models based on value-grabbing is well-documented (Sadowski, 2020). Capital's continuity depends on allied modes of regulation to attenuate internal contradictions (Boyer, 1990). Jessop and Sum (2006) argue the stabilizing force of the state on capital is essential to the scale of modern production. Regulationist literature approaches accumulation and regulation as a dynamic socio-economic process of capitalist institutions managing crisis tendencies within labor markets (Peck, 2001), bond markets (Peck & Whiteside, 2016), urban politics (Goodwin, Duncan, & Halford, 1993), and education markets (Cohen, 2017). Therefore, the state and mode of regulation play a major role in enabling accumulation and normalizing markets in the provision of collective goods.

As scholars in the Regulation School tradition, Andreucci et al (2017) describe three ways the state regularizes, facilitates, and enables rent-based social relations. First, it controls property and associated entitlements. Second, it acts as a regulator of uses and how they apply to development and ownership. Finally, the state can take the role of a landlord and control access to its holdings and resources. Scholars have argued the state is essential to understanding how the rentier class controls private property, innovation, and accumulation processes (Parenti, 2015; Jessop, 1990). Importantly, the state and its agencies regulate the boundary between public and private to the benefit of industry instead of people or place (Davis & Abraham, 2013). In a concrete sense, the revolving door between industry and watchdog – capital and state – illustrates how the inside/outside dynamic of regulation blurs to accommodate capture. Makkai and Braithwaite (1992) have distinguished three varieties of capture: industry identification; sympathy for private firms meeting standards; and absence of toughness. But more than a failure of monitoring or enforcement, regulatory capture indicates the ways in which public institutions serve the goals rentiership and prioritize income generation over maintaining collective good.

Research Methods

My analysis in this chapter draws on backfill and demolition records at the city and state levels. By focusing on the financial transactions and approval date for backfill transactions, I have grounded the backfill program in specific practices to de-fetishize the process and pathways used by the DDP and its contractors. I have adopted an approach laid out by Christophers (2011) and followed the money and the regulation that enabled the value-grab by contractors – this, of course, also requires following the dirt (see Chapter 4). Importantly, following the money means moving between different venues of policy and industrial practice; the inside and outside of regulation blur together. Profit and income provide more than incentives for firms to act; the prospect of extracting value from the DDP also shaped the contexts in which institutions monitored action – determining the scope, depth, and spaces of regulation. Records from local and state agencies illustrate the lengths to which the DDP went to accommodate the practices and processes of powerful and smaller-scale demolition contractors. My research identifies how the interaction of blight removal money and backfill material served to ensure contractors could bring production demolition to Detroit without the bogeyman of regulatory challenges.

Beginning in 3/2015, the Detroit Building Authority (DBA) maintained an internal spreadsheet record of demolition backfill transactions (n=8,239). I also use data I obtained through Detroit's demolition open data portal that provides addresses, dates, contractors, and wrecking costs for HHF and non-HHF beginning 1/2/2014 (n=16,737). In addition to the city's data, I draw on Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) data on HHF that reports costs for each component of a demolition (n=13063). This MSHDA data includes dirt costs for demolitions completed using HHF between 4/2014 and 3/2018. I matched the destination addresses of the backfill data to the demolition addresses of the MSHDA cost data

and created a database containing every HHF backfill transaction beginning in 2014 and running until the middle of 2018. Each demolition in this dataset was linked to a cost, volume, and origin of approved backfill material. In response to a FOIA request, the DBA also provided cost records for a series of demolitions between 1/31/2017 and 7/11/2018 (n=2,675). I have used these data to construct a record and narrative that shows how DDP addressed backfill and created the regulatory plasticity that contractors could shape towards their own purposes and priorities.

How Backfilling Became the "Biggest Problem"

On 11/23/2015, WDET, the NPR station based in Detroit, posted an update on the city's residential demolition program. "Detroit's Blight Problem…and Solutions" reported on efforts by the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) to address residential blight through the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP). Although the bulk of the story features an interview with Craig Fahle, a former-WDET host and the then-DLBA spokesperson, it does include a quote from Mayor Mike Duggan drawn from a public statement he made to a meeting of city council:

> The biggest problem turned out to be filling the holes… When you're knocking down 25 a week you can always find some office park somewhere where you can go get the dirt and fill in the hole for free somewhere nearby. When we started doing 150 and 200 a week, we used up every bit of dirt within 20 miles of Detroit. We had to get trucks. We were going out to Rockwood and Port Huron. The cost got so high at some point that we were driving up the truck prices for the hockey arena deal because we were hiring the trucks away from the hockey arena to go get dirt. We brought 2 million cubic yards of dirt into this city in the last 18 months to fill holes. (Batcheller,, 2015)

Duggan's observations are instructive because they show the limits of unleashing bulldozers to transform a city. Having reached a multi-scale consensus in early 2014 on the potency of

demolition to realize the city's revitalization, DDP moved forward from DBRTF with a halo burnished by positive coverage from local, state, and national press (AlHajal, 2014b; Byrnes, 2014; Rushe, 2014). Before late 2015, Detroit inhabitants, institutions, and investment interests appeared to share a comprehension of the city's blight challenge, but also the costs involved and administrative virtuosity necessary to eliminate it. However, the necessity of backfilling and scarcity of backfill tested the goal of accelerating residential demolitions across neighborhoods. Although spirited advocacy, flattering news coverage, and glossy guides illustrated unanimity for and the urgency of Detroit's demolishability (DBRTF, 2014); the practice of demolition faced dwindling reserves of dirt. Demolition officials had neglected to address how demolishing – a process aspiring to wreck over 40,000 houses in 5 years – was embedded within both a regional industry of wrecking and a logistical space insulated from slogans of ineluctable progress.

Despite plaudits for the DDP's blight removal bravado, officials and contractors struggled to build a backfilling program. Attention to money and feasibility had marginalized material and physical requisites to wrecking. John Gallagher, a columnist with the *Detroit Free Press*, crystalized these challenges in a 12/2014 writeup. After describing the city's demolition ambitions – 200 per week and 10,000 per annum – he alights on the logistical complications associated with Detroit's goals. He writes, "Shortages of trained workers, trucks, bulldozers, and even enough clean dirt to fill the basements left behind after a house is demolished challenge the city's efforts (2014)." Large projects – Little Caesar's Arena and the I-96 reconstruction – were poised to provide plentiful stocks of material but heavy metal and salt content forced contractors to seek out rural sand pits and gravel quarries. Commercial backfill sources equated to higher material and hauling costs. Contractors were billing the DDP and MSHDA for material that only

eight months earlier they had forecasted to be free and readily available. The rapid launch of the program meant a minor cost of business became a full-blown secondary market (Trickey, 2017).

DDP ambivalence towards backfill costs appears to be a failure to establish and streamline its regulatory and institutional approach, but a review of the official demolition process suggests another blind spot that established market conditions for backfill. By overlooking backfill the DDP was not ignoring an essential ingredient to demolition; rather, the program and its administrators had taken an entire industry and turned it into an on-demand service. This is less of an oversight than a regulatory choice that sealed off the regional and industrial process of demolition from the policy and engineering practice of demolition. According to one local contractor, a residential demolition in Detroit takes a 23-step course over 2-3 as shown in *Figure 12*[51]. Prior to arriving at the demolition site, a contractor also proceeds through a period of pre-demolition activities required for DBA and DDP compliance.

1. Preform due diligence on the house (Asbestos Survey) secured and paid by owner.
2. Obtain utility clearances: gas, electric and water
3. Submit for a 10-day Notification Intent to Renovate (Asbestos)
4. Submit for a 10-day Notification Intent to Demolish (Wrecking)
5. Apply for a City of Detroit Wrecking permit
6. Take pre-demolition photos of house and neighboring houses
7. Clean house of Asbestos and environmental items
8. Wreck house: spray with plenty of water to keep the dust from dispersing in the environment.
9. Load-out house of wood debris (leaving only the driveway, basement walls and foundations)
10. Load-out house of concrete (driveway, basement walls and foundations)
11. Clean streets of dirt and debris
12. Cut and cap the water and sewer
13. Take photos of the cut and cap
14. Secure site with posts and fence
15. Call the city for an open hole inspection
16. Backfill the hole after approval
17. Call the city for a rough grade inspection
18. Place topsoil, seed and mulch over site
19. Call the city for a final grade inspection
20. Take final grade photos
21. Submit lots of paperwork & photos all via electronic
22. Submit billing
23. Get paid.

Figure 12: Demolition summary provided by Eric Dovas of MCM Management (Personal correspondence, 2015)

[51] Eric Dovas – the Vice President of Estimating for MCM Management – provided this sequence in an email on September 17, 2015.

The apparent technical recipe culminating in a completed demolition camouflages the supply chains that make demolishing possible. Notwithstanding efforts to instrumentalize demolishing as a predictable decision tree, blight removal is not tantamount to awarding contracts and awaiting the arrival of a crew and machinery; nor is it wrecking a house and relocating the remainder to a landfill. Networks of haulers, contractors, suppliers, consultants, and administrators shape and steer each stage of the demolition. As evidenced by MCM's understanding from its order of operations, backfill is just step 16 in a choreographed dance of engineering between demolition contractor and demolition program. But this serves to obscure a sprawling network that makes *step 16* (and backfilling) possible, achievable, and lucrative for the contractor. Backfill and demolition are not items rolling along on a conveyor belt and conveniently delivered to an address in Detroit. Backfilling sits within a region of interests that produce and perpetuate configurations of industries, resources, and value. Approached this way, backfill is more than a set of properly mixed ingredients – it is a chain of achievements across space, sectors, and spreadsheets. These are chains of capital and production that can contradict and conflict with demolition-dependent redevelopment. They can also render invisible the process by which contractors use backfill to capture and extract value in Detroit.

More importantly, step 16 in this sequence undermines its significance to the producing demolition and DDP operations. The technical practice of demolition is one step while the backfilling process is five separate steps. Backfilling a hole is not an intermediate stage of action but a logistical and environmental process around which the entire DDP rotates. In 2015, Detroit City Council expressed concern that improper backfilling would jeopardize the goal of demolition: creating developable vacant land (LPD, 2016). To put this another way, without the identification, extraction, and circulation of backfill material, the entire DDP may fail to achieve

the objective of rebuilding the city through demolition. As I show later in this chapter, backfill was not a contributing factor to the success of the DDP – *backfilling determined success for the program*. However, contrary to those pressures, DPP leader and officials treated filling holes as a one point in an on-demand operation. The DDP awards the contract, contractors wreck the structure, contractors fill the hole. Contractors, on the other hand, turned the essential process of backfilling into a market where dirt became an asset and valuation could surpass regulation.

The Levers and Leverages for Ground Control

Despite fanfare about the Motor City Mapping Project (MCMP), demolition officials with DBA and DLBA launched the DDP a month prior to the release of a demolition framework. The DDP emerged in the context of the unit-price approach and moved rapidly to spend down over $50 million by 10/2014. Residential demolitions drawing on HHF funds commenced on 4/24/2014 with the teardown of 16763 Woodingham by ABC Demolition. ABC received $6,900.00 to remove the structure, backfill the hole, and grade the lot[52]. In the first full month of HHF-demolitions – 5/2014 - the DDP contracted out 183 demolitions totaling $1,747,788.61 to eight contractors. HHF-supported residential demolitions continued through the summer of 2014 with production dwarfing the launch period. From 6/2 to 8/20, the DDP paid contractors $12,990,635.63 to complete 1,120 demolitions at an average of 200 demolitions per week.

The pace of demolitions, however, did not satisfy city leaders and DDP management. On 8/21/2014, Kevyn Orr released a new emergency manager order aimed at rectifying inefficiencies. In three pages, Order No. 33 – *Order Suspending Certain City Demolition Requirements to Address Blight* – reasserts the city's blight emergency from Order No. 15 and continues Orr's practice of lifting restrictions on the industry and practice of residential

[52] MSHDA does not have a Dirt Cost for this demolition. The file shows $750 for "Lot Maintenance."

demolition. While the previous order lightened rules applied to contractor credentials – thus increasing the volume of qualified wreckers – the 2014 order addressed the rising costs of demolition backfill. Orr ordered:

> Section 12-11-19.10 of City Ordinance 290-H establishes certain requirements with respect to demolition of residential properties and filling of excavations. Such requirements include specifying the type of fill to be used. The specified fill procedures impose severe financial burdens on efforts to address the City's Blight Emergency, as described in Emergency order No. 15 and continuing today, specifically, they require the City, its Departments, and the City of Detroit Building Authority (the "DBA") and the Detroit Land Bank Authority (the 'DLBA") to spend approximately $6,000 on fill for each residential demolition. (2014, 2)

By framing the burden of rising backfill costs as a contributor to Detroit's blight emergency, Orr deepened the apparent crisis to release the DDP and its contractors from guidelines required by Detroit municipal code. Orr goes on to link the blight emergency as a major determinant of the city's financial precarity with deleterious effects on Detroit's "public health, safety, and welfare." He explained compliance with established backfill rules "imposes unnecessary costs in connection with the demolition of blighted structures which needlessly impair the City's efforts to address the Blight Emergency (2014, 2)." The solution was clear. He ordered contractors to recycle excavated concrete basements by crushing them into "pieces no larger than 8 inches." Contractors would fill excavated basements with this material and finish with clean topsoil. For Orr, the suspension of rules and the adoption of "Alternative Fill Procedures" allowed agencies to "more effectively address the Blight Emergency." There is little evidence to suggest Orr's

change in backfill rules contributed to lower costs.[53] From then through 9/8/2014, the DDP funded the demolition of another 449 residential structures at a total cost of $5,970,366.20.

Orr's declaration was just the beginning of regulating and then re-regulating backfill. On 9/9/2014, the DLBA and DBA posted a request for proposals (RFP) to contract with outside environmental firms to administer a new demolition backfill program. Until this point no formal arrangements provided oversight on backfill practices. The RFP sought "Materials Testing Consultants" capable of assuming responsibility over five components of the city's program: 1) Track origin and destination of backfill; 2) Interpret backfill testing reports; 3) Approve or reject material based on testing; 4) Communicate and record approval process; 5) Perform testing at request of the DLBA (DLBA, 2014). The RFP required backfill material to be tested in accordance with Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)[54] procedures and residential soil standards included in "Cleanup Criteria Requirements for Response Activity" – state-level rules for screening and detecting levels of hazardous substances[55]. The DLBA closed the RFP on 9/17 and announced its selection on 9/22. DLBA awarded project management to AKT Peerless, an environmental consultant based in Farmington Hills, MI, with additional technical assistance provided by the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority (GDRRA). GDRRA is an independent local governmental unit established in the late 1980s and, according to its website, provides "efficient, environmentally responsible waste disposal service to the

[53] There is virtually no way to definitively determine if Orr was describing an actual cost problem. MSHDA data from most of 2014 is inconsistent and contractors were not reporting backfill costs in accordance with any standard. The DDP did not report backfill costs for non-HHF demolitions. Contractors completed 1,875 demolitions as of 8/21/2014. Only 251 demolitions have a backfill cost listed with MSHDA, totaling $306,137.89. The average backfill cost was $1,224.55. During the year after Orr's declaration, backfill costs averaged $1,973.25, exceeding $2,000 over June and July 2015..

[54] Rebooted on 4/22/2019 as the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy

[55] Acenaphthene to Zinc

residential, commercial, industrial sectors of Detroit (GDRRA, 2018).” According to USEPA staff, GDRRA negotiated contracts with potential corporate suppliers of backfill material[56].

In the weeks following the close of the backfill RFP, representatives of Detroit’s health department appeared in local and national press coverage declaring the demolition program’s unprecedented commitment to transparency and sustainability policies. David Manardo, Duggan’s Group Executive for Operations, explained his departments were prioritizing safety in what was becoming the “largest undertaking of residential demolition in the history of the country (Detroit raises safety, 2014).” In candid photos accompanying these reports, contractors modeled the wet-wet method of dust prevention[57] and public health officials touted their aggressive approach to maintaining environmental safety relative to lead and asbestos. Regina Royan, an epidemiologist with the health department in 2014-2015, underlined the DDP and her department were more than capable of meeting the challenge of monitoring the safety and sustainability of the demolition program. She remarked, “This effort is the largest municipal redevelopment strategy in the country, maybe the world. When you think about these extra environmental and public concerns, why not address these up front? (Hulett, 2014)” Despite her enthusiasm, the *Taskforce on Demolitions and Health* scrutinized the DDP dust controls in 2017 after blood analysis confirmed elevated blood levels in children living near demolitions (2).[58]

Journalists and officials praised Duggan and the DDP’s commitment to public health, but the DDP was slow out of the gate to establish backfill guidance and monitoring. Although the USEPA released a statement in 9/2014 recognizing the DDP for practices balancing “speed, cost,

[56] FCA being the largest
[57] Demolition contractors use a “dustbuster” to mist demolition sites with water and reduce lead and asbestos particulate. In the early stages of the DDP, contractors frequently used mister equipment but recent site visits (2018-2019) confirm contractors are now using high pressure water hoses.
[58] The thirty-page report on health does not mention backfill.

and environmental performance (DBA, 2020)," the DDP did not formalize backfill guidance until 12/18/2014. The first backfill transaction (date, address, source, volume, contractor) did not appear in approval records for another three months[59]. These records contain six transactions in 2014 and 52 transactions in 2015 before DDP officials and AKT both claim they made the online management system available to contractors (Ferretti, 2019g). Contractors submitted these backfill transactions months after the completion of each demolition. The first HHF demolition in DDP backfill records is 2931 Halleck – completed by Homrich on 7/28/2014. However, Homrich did not report the backfill transaction until 11/19/2015[60]. On average, contractors reported backfill transactions for those first 58 demolitions 282 days after completion. DMC Consultants submitted a record for 4003 Gilbert almost four years after completing a demolition.

Although officials and regulators stressed the DDP's heightened focus on public health, the inconsistency and scarcity of backfill records between the launch of the demolition program and the first entry in the DDP's platform suggest the city was not prepared to monitor material or, at worst, that managing the backfill program was delegated to contractors themselves. DDP managers used the necessity of demolition production to justify initial gaps or missteps in program oversight (Snell & Ferretti, 2017). Duggan observed of this time, "We were acting with urgency. In retrospect, we were trying to do too much too fast." During this period, the city approved $43,650,962.83 in HHF funds with 11 contractors to tear down 3,285 buildings. Although backfill costs are not available for 1,611 demolitions conducted in 2014 and 2015, HHF records include payments for backfill material at the remaining 1,674 demolitions in the

[59] Homrich reported the first backfill transaction in the city's record on 3/12/2015. The contractor sourced 3,440 cubic yards of material from The Corners of Cherry Village – a suburban development in Canton, MI – for the demolition of 8539 Grand River. However, this was not supported by HHF and the city's own demolition records report that another demolition contractor – 1 Way Service - wrecked the building on 2/18/2015 for $22,025.00.
[60] Homrich did not distinguish the backfill cost from the demolition cost.

sum of $3,893,875.03. State records confirm money changed hands, but not how the material changed places. Demolition backfill costs during this period averaged $2,326.09 per house.

The irregularities of these figures show the DDP was unable to match action to the rhetoric of protecting public health. Tony Kashat of AKT Peerless admitted the backfill compliance process was anything but turnkey, sharing "Smaller [contractors] need a lot of handholding and training." Contractors had grown accustomed to ignoring prior monitoring process, but new regulatory schemes attempted to expel those behaviors from their routines. Even with Detroit officials and DDP administrators describing the novelty and impact of new measures, records show little oversight until mid-2015. As a result of these delays and gaps in monitoring, it is difficult to verify the quality of the material used to fill and grade demolished properties over those 11 months (4/2014 - 3/2015). Leaders of the DDP claim to possess paper records for transactions during this period and into the first half of 2015, but a 3/2019 report by *The Detroit News* illustrated DDP's current recordkeeping and retrieval measures were lackluster compared to the challenge of the task (Ferretti, 2019g). Farkas explained then, "We see the fact that some records may not be immediately retrievable as a reflection in the record keeping process, not as a reflection of our work in the field to ensure the use of clean dirt." Farkas was confident paper records for these transactions would eventually be located and shared publicly[61].

Even as the DDP's backfill monitoring process ramped up, the quality of transaction information provided by contractors remained inconsistent and unreliable. The monitoring platform shows contractors were free to submit inaccurate information without consequence. Two transactions by SA Torello on 4/25/2015 report "Detroit" as the destination for 80 yd3 of material from 3500 Dove Road in Port Huron, MI. Incorrect destination addresses is just one of

[61] Farkas was able to produce a limited number of requested paper records to *The Detroit News* but eventually ceased updating reporters with information on the missing transactions.

the routine errors in backfill records.[62] Those early transactions show SA Torello as a demolition contractor even though Homrich was responsible for those teardowns. A simple review of public data confirms SA Torello has never completed a demolition under the DDP and an online search indicates the company specializes in fill and excavation services. This is only a minor example of the frequent mistakes and inaccuracies in the DDP's data. In my analysis of the DDP backfill records, I identified a consistent pattern of errors. Contractors submitted wrong or flawed backfill data on at least 151 transactions totaling over 80,000 yd3 of material. These ranged from seven instances of contractors misspelling "Detroit" to 115 in which contractors misspelled the street name: Lahser became Lasher; St. Aubin became St. Auburn. In *Table 5*, I compile these errors along with the contractor responsible for submitting the flawed transaction information.

Contractor	Reporting Errors
313 Construction	1
Able Demolition, Inc.	8
Adamo Group, Inc.	33
AKT Peerless	1
Berkshire Development	1
Blue Star	3
Direct Construction Services	6
DMC Consultants, Inc.	21
GLO Wrecking	1
Homrich	21
Rickman Enterprise Group	47
S.A. Torello Inc.	2
Salenbien Trucking & Excavating Inc	5
Smalley Construction Inc	1
Grand Total	**151**

Table 5: Backfill record errors in DBA dataset by demolition contractor (2014-2018)

[62] In Chapter 1, I described the process of obtaining and cleaning the city's backfill data. I corrected the errors listed in this section but I thought it crucial to identify the ubiquitous mistakes in the records as evidence that contractors had wide berth to manage the city's demolition program.

While the DDP backfill data indicates the careless reporting by demolition contractors, these mistakes also demonstrate another way in which AKT's approach to the approval process failed a stress test. Contractors submitted transaction information, AKT approved that transaction information, and DDP maintained that transaction information as an accurate record of the backfill program. Regardless of the quality of the material distributed to these addresses, the errors complicate the shared narrative on public health and material quality. DDP managers and administrators stated their confidence in the safety of the program, but their records suggest at least 151 instances when contractors misrepresented basic source information. Safe harbors for inaccurate information are inconsistent with Kashat's focus on changing backfill practices, "[Contractors are] looking for dirt from everywhere. Left unchecked they'll bring in anything," But even when checked, DDP permitted contractors to turn source nowheres into *somewheres*.

When pressed by city council, Duggan provided one logistical explanation for escalating costs and regulatory leniency, but another suggests new and old contractors leaned into a stable market for demolition bankrolled by public money. The emergence of 313 Construction and Gayanga both demonstrate how demolition became a growth industry in Detroit that encouraged startup firms to enter the market. Between 2015 and 2016, 313 Construction completed 41 demolitions worth $518,688.58 in DDP contracts. Sonja Poncy incorporated 313 two weeks before the DBRTF released its demolition guide. Notwithstanding Pouncy's observation, "We're truly in the thick of a renaissance in Detroit (Thibodeau, 2016)," the DDP has not awarded 313 a contract since 2016. In 2017, Gayanga Co. LLC completed 35 demolitions in the HHF program totaling $445,222.35 in contracts. Gayanga also completed another 449 demolitions outside the HHF program to the sum of $9,934,610.15. In 2016, Brian McKinney incorporated Gayanga – a "construction engineering startup" - after returning to his hometown of Detroit from Houston,

TX. In a 2019 profile appearing in *Crain's Detroit*, McKinney described how he used data-mining to obtain DDP contracts and "figure out where the market should fall (Livengood, 2019b)." Despite Gayanga's precision, DDP officials briefly suspended them in 2019 over concerns the firm failed to properly excavate basements during demolition (Ferretti, 2019f).

The greenness of 313 Construction and Gayanga is not an anomaly in the DDP. Five demolition contractors – BBEK, Blackstar Global, RDC Construction, J Keith Construction, and Detroit Next – incorporated within two years of the DDP. These five have demolished 116 properties since 2014 totaling $1,645,455. FutureNet Group, a contractor completing demolitions in 2014, tore down 88 properties to the tune of $1,088,477 before the Department of Justice brought charges against its CEO for bribing a former director of Detroit's technology department in a scheme unrelated to DDP (Snell, 2018). Inner City Contracting – an engineering firm dating back to 2009 – did not conduct residential demolitions until 2019 but has torn down over 100 properties since joining the DDP in 9/2019. Beginning in 2014, the Detroit Training Center (DTC) – a for-profit vocational training center - launched its Blight Removal Program available to students for $3,500. DTC marketing materials state, "Let's bring out Detroit's full potential. In order to improve our city, we need trained and certified professionals in urban blight removal (DTC 2020)." The six-week program includes eight certifications so trainees can join a "dramatically growing industry" in Detroit and Flint (DTC, 2020) despite contractors sharing that curriculum is unwarranted for entry-level work at a demolition site[63]. Whether for services or training, DDP deepened the demolition market and turned destruction into a lucrative venture

[63] Contractors expressed doubt the DTC-trainees would enter a position requiring any of these advanced certifications. Most contractors train laborers on their own practices. In one encounter at a DMC site, an entry-level laborer admitted her job was holding the hose to control dust as an excavator operator tore down the house.

The powerful, experienced firms have also benefited from a robust demolition economy. In 3/2015, John Adamo, the CEO of Adamo, told a reporter with *Construction & Demolition Recycling Magazine*, "We would welcome a steady workflow over an extended period of time so it would be good for everyone if this work would continue at this pace (Smith, 2015)." Prior to the DDP, Adamo had not considered itself a residential demolition contractor, but the advent of the new program and the insistence on production meant Adamo was now busier than any previous time in its five decades of operations. In the same writeup on Detroit demolitions, Anthony Abela, a manager at Homrich, echoed this sentiment and described how his firm had invested in "a new fleet of six Komatsu 240 excavators with buckets and thumbs specifically for the residential demolition program[64]." Regional contractors once specializing in industrial and commercial projects had retooled to concentrate on Detroit's thousands of house demolitions. Notwithstanding both companies' newfound appreciation for residential blight removal, neither Homrich nor Adamo websites mention the DDP or any home demolition in their past projects[65].

Homrich and Adamo remain special cases within the DDP. For most contractors, producing and using the crushed concrete fill made legal by Orr in 2014 is cost prohibitive for most smaller, regional demolition contractors. According to the EPA, both experienced firms had developed an industrial approach and possessed the capacity to crush basement concrete on site. The remainder of contractors had to purchase new equipment or identify their own crushed materials sources to take advantage of Orr's re-regulation of backfill. Initially favoring larger contractors, the shift in policy would open new terrain for value-extraction. Though it would take ten months for the source to first appear in DDP records, Mid-Michigan Crushing & Recycling

[64] Machinery dealers are protective of pricing for new models, but Machinerytrader.com lists this model used for $87,000. Models with fewer hours – including one 240 manufactured in 2018 – list for $250,000.
[65] Both firms emphasize services for industrial and commercial companies, institutional, or utilities.

(MMCR) – based in Fenton, MI – entered the city's growing backfill market when it shifted its production site in Highland Park, MI. MMCR is located on the footprint of the defunct Model T factory adjacent to shopping centers studdding Woodward Avenue[66]. Despite owning concrete crushing equipment, Homrich was the first contractor to purchase backfill from MMCR to complete the demolition of 16503 Strathmoor. Homrich reported a dirt cost of $3,750.00 on 6/9/2015. The DDP backfill records do not disaggregate by specific residential addresses but shows the contractor sourced 840 cubic yards of "crushed aggregate" for 13 HHF demolitions. Orr's decision to lift rules on backfill had created a new regulatory environment in which transforming rubble into rents was not a by-product of compliance but a primary achievement.

On 6/12/2015, Next City – an urbanism blog with a national audience – featured both Royan and Farkas praising the standards and compliance practices of the DDP (Owens, 2015). Each official implicitly describes the lack of formal accountability in prior demolitions programs that enabled contractors to skirt public health regulation. Invoking outlaw imagery, Royan described Detroit demolition practices prior to 2014 as loose and ad hoc. Royan was not alone in characterizing this unruly period as an artifact of the sloppiness of Duggan's predecessors – administrations that had sidelined resident welfare[67]. An EPA staff member called this the "Don't ask, don't tell" period of Detroit demolition. Farkas was unequivocal that DBA and the DDP had overhauled its formal regulatory approach to monitoring and sanctioning demolition backfill. Farkas remarked to the reporter, "We realized that there was really no [fill dirt] testing that went on beforehand. Think about that. We were about to undertake the largest demolition

[66] I examine this property in depth in a latter section.
[67] Although Farkas does not accuse Mayor Dave Bing's administration of irresponsible management, Mayor Mike Duggan had previously criticized Bing and Kwame Kilpatrick before him for giving contractors free rein over the quality of demolition work and backfill.

operation probably in the country, if not the world, and there was kind of an honor system on the type of dirt we were putting in the holes. Immediately we were like, 'That's not going to fly.'"

Dirt Becoming Money in Disguise

Farkas' confidence in reform may have been immaterial. The DDP's honor system remained resilient even as he boasted about a new era of compliance. DDP records show the city paid out $309,508.00 to three contractors – Adamo, Homrich, and Able - to tear down 24 houses on the day his interview appeared. Nineteen demolitions drawing on $261,416.00 in HHF. Only eight of these HHF demolitions are linked to both backfill source and backfill cost records (all Homrich).[68] MSHDA reports $30,000 in backfill costs for those demolitions. However, MSHDA also reports $11,455.73 in HHF for ten Adamo demolitions and $3,750.00 for one additional Homrich demolition[69]. This means $15,205.73 in HHF paid for backfill material that is not linked to any specific source or approval record. While Farkas is commending DDP efforts to implement and monitor robust protocols, major demolition contractors are flaunting backfill guidance and distributing untracked material to fill basements. More importantly, by the time Farkas and Royan's positive spin reached NextCity's national audience, AKT Peerless and GDRRA had served as the DDP's official backfill program managers for nearly seven months. Soil testing was never tantamount to ending the honor system of demolition backfill. Rather, DDP officials used testing to suggest high quality material required patience with high costs.

The empty suit of regulation in 6/2015 is not unusual for the DDP, but the sum of unapproved backfill costs during 2014-2015 is subject to a variety of important disclaimers. As I stated earlier, inconsistent contractor reporting and inferior data management are partly

[68] The backfill volume is not disaggregated for these 8 demolitions.
[69] 12873 Stout; 12822 Stout; 13529 Kentfield; 12153 Archdale; 12069 Archdale; 12047 Archdale; 12900 Vaughan; 19740 Ashton; 7248 Ashton; 6354 Ashton; 14317 Westwood (Homrich)

responsible for the estimate. First, the DDP and its administrators claim the online platform through which contractors submitted backfill transactions was not accessible until 3/2015 and therefore could not have been used to track backfill[70]. However, the backfill data contains 58 backfill transactions for demolitions between 7/24/2014 and 3/2/2015 in the sum of $131,505.87[71]. ABC Demolition submitted 48 transactions totaling $120,050.00 in backfill costs. Homrich submitted six transactions totaling $11,455.87. Contractors were able to submit sources and transactions for review by AKT Peerless during a period in which DDP management also claims only paper records could demonstrate formal approval of material. Under different circumstances, these transactions could be forgiven as mistakes due to slow adoption by contractors or an incremental intensification of the DDP's method of compliance. However, transactions into 2016 show a pattern of regulation captured and controlled by contractors.

Submitting sources to a platform prior to the platform's existence raises a red flag, but 1,171 demolitions are also not attached to a state record of dirt cost. This period begins with 25 demolitions on 7/24/2014 with a total of 1,113 through 2014. Another 55 demolitions lack cost records in 2015 (while 2016 and 2018 each have only one demolition with a reported $0.00 for backfill). Mary Townley, a MSHDA director leading blight removal, offered the explanation that individual demolition contractors approached reporting backfill costs differently at the launch of the program than later periods. Some contractors included the cost within the total demolition while others reported it separately. There is no way to know for sure how much contractors were spending on backfill material at the beginning of the DDP. Even accounting for the change orders in 2014 on 96% of those demolitions – a total of $4,183,736.22 for backfill alone – does

[70] DDP officials claim they were maintaining paper records for every demolition prior to March 2015.
[71] ABC Demolition batched many of these demolitions, so it is impossible to identify the specific backfill volumes for each demolition over this period.

not clarify unapproved contractor expenditures. Contractors requested additional HHF funds but MSHDA did not have the data to report those costs independent of general demolition costs. Recognizing the implausibility of free backfill – especially at during a period when contractors working in Detroit were expressing alarm about access to fill material – it stands to reason that the sum of total unapproved backfill costs beginning in the summer of 2014 is deceptively low.

We can attempt to fill gaps. The average backfill cost during 2014 was $1,580.56. The average backfill cost in 2015 was $2,035.44. The same figure for 2016 was $1,608.08. The average for 2018 was $1,721.42. By inferring from these averages, I estimate an additional $1,850,835.76 in backfill costs for 2014, $111,949.20 for 2015, and $3,329.5 combined for 2016 and 2018. This represents an extra $1,966,114.46 in potentially unapproved backfill costs. Because I calculated these figures from estimates based on averages, I do not include this in the above tally of unapproved backfill costs. It is possible demolition contractors were able to identify free or discounted stocks of backfill material. However, this figure suggests another way in which contractors disguised backfill costs, by hiding it within the total cost of each home demolition[72]. In an interview, Eric Dovas summarized this approach when he explained, "Demo contractors assume to pay for backfill and reap the benefit when it comes for free, a gamble of sorts." Free or not, demolition contractors reported a backfill price to the DDP and expected MSHDA and its HHF allotment to cover the cost regardless if it reflected their own expenses.

In 9/2015, Dovas shared an HHF1 cost breakdown his company used to tabulate margins. *Figure 15* illustrates the typical budget and billing for a residential demolition. HHF1 demolitions occurred between 10/2013 and 4/2015. The chart states that "Soil material" costs

[72] The additional backfill costs would need to be added to both the unapproved cost and the total cost. This would increase unapproved costs to $7,438,260.89 and the total backfill cost to $17,165,449.40. By including the estimate costs, the percent of costs of unapproved backfill rises to 43%.

$745.67, roughly 6%, and "Backfill labor" costs $895.34, a total backfill-related cost of $1,641.01, or 12.5% of the demolition figure. This percentage is not consistent in the MSHDA data. During the HHF1 period, contractors billed $3,002,216.48 in backfill costs ($152,085.60 approved; $2,850,130.88 unapproved). Not all 2,813 demolitions over that time included a backfill cost. Given the improbability of having no backfill cost (logically and logistically), I removed each blank value and $0.00 figure, leaving 1,691 demolitions. Congruent with the breakdown, backfill costs during this period represented an average of 13% of the total demolition cost. However, the percentage ranged from 1% to 60%. Of the remaining demolitions, 667 during HHF1 included backfill costs over 14% of the total demolition –

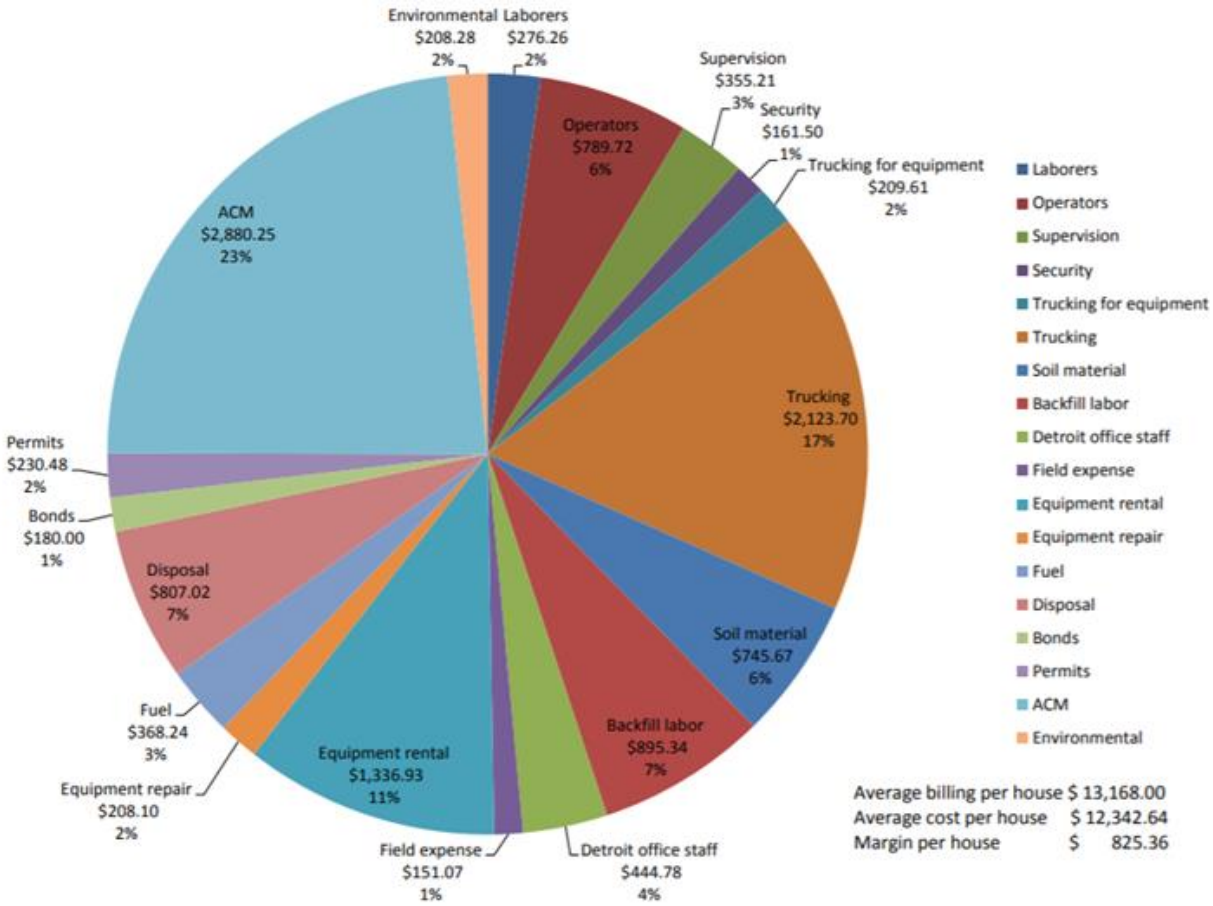


Figure 13: Hardest Hit Fund (first allocation to DDP) costs per demolition according to MCM (Personal correspondence, 2015)

representing approximately 40% of every HHF demolition conducted in 2014 and 2015. These findings suggest contractors invented costs and did so without repercussion.

By the middle of 2018, the number of unapproved backfill transactions thwarts claims about the thoroughness of regulation. Out of the 6,782 unique addresses included in the DDP soil management system, 5,324 demolitions received HHF dollars. MSHDA awarded $78,954,995.30 in HHF to those 5,324 demolitions between 7/28/2014 and 6/20/2018. The last address with a backfill transaction in the records provided by DBA is 5611 Wayburn on 6/20/2018 (total: $12,064.3; backfill: $1,200)[73]. Contractors completed 9,875 HHF-funded demolitions during the same period at a total cost of $145,730,387.10. However, only those 5,324 demolitions are linked to both DBA backfill approval and MSHDA backfill cost records (even if the MSHDA cost cell is blank). The total backfill cost for these is $9,736,733.15. The remaining 4,551 do not appear in the digital backfill records. This represents $5,472,146.23 in backfill costs without reported sources. *Figure 16* illustrates these discrepancies for each demolition contractor working until summer 2018. *Figure 17* maps the distribution of demolitions with approved and unapproved backfill sources. Contractors involved during this period failed to provide DBA with a source or volume for 47.2% of HHF demolitions and 36% of HHF backfill costs. Four contractors did not report backfill sources for any of the demolitions they completed while working with HHF[74].

[73] I was not able to obtain DBA backfill transactions records for the period following 6/20/2018.
[74] Leadhead Construction; MCM; Timesavers Contracting; Jenkins Construction

Contractor	Unapproved Backfill Costs	Approved Backfill Costs	Total Backfill Costs	% Unapproved
313 Construction	$0.00	$46,733.35	$46,733.35	0%
ABC Demolition	$134,600.00	$235,850.00	$370,450.00	36%
Able Demolition	$176,200.00	$733,480.00	$909,680.00	19%
Adamo Group, Inc.	$1,868,789.01	$1,087,896.70	$2,956,685.71	63%
Berkshire Development, Inc.	$1,050.00	$3,500.00	$4,550.00	23%
Blue Star	$241,179.00	$64,541.00	$305,720.00	79%
Den-Man Contractors	$204,240.06	$8,104.49	$212,344.55	96%
Direct Construction Services	$31,795.89	$28,569.75	$60,365.64	53%
DMC Consultants	$326,824.67	$1,554,229.77	$1,881,054.44	17%
Esso Wrecking Co.	$68,000.00	$558,000.00	$626,000.00	11%
Farrow Group	$193,500.00	$69,000.00	$262,500.00	74%
Gayanga Co	$9,525.65	$111,935.72	$121,461.37	8%
Homrich	$1,576,834.80	$2,788,610.87	$4,365,445.67	36%
Jenkins Construction	$28,500.00	$0.00	$28,500.00	100%
Leadhead Construction	$35,700.00	$0.00	$35,700.00	100%
MCM	$140,224.54	$0.00	$140,224.54	100%
Rickman Enterprise Group	$333,290.61	$1,291,528.00	$1,624,818.61	21%
Salenbien Trucking & Excavating Inc.	$74,721.00	$1,151,608.50	$1,226,329.50	6%
Smalley	$445.00	$3,145.00	$3,590.00	12%
Timesavers Contracting	$26,726.00	$0.00	$26,726.00	100%
Grand Total	**$5,472,146.23**	**$9,736,733.15**	**$15,208,879.38**	**36%**

Figure 16: Unapproved and approved backfill costs by demolition contractor (2014-2018)

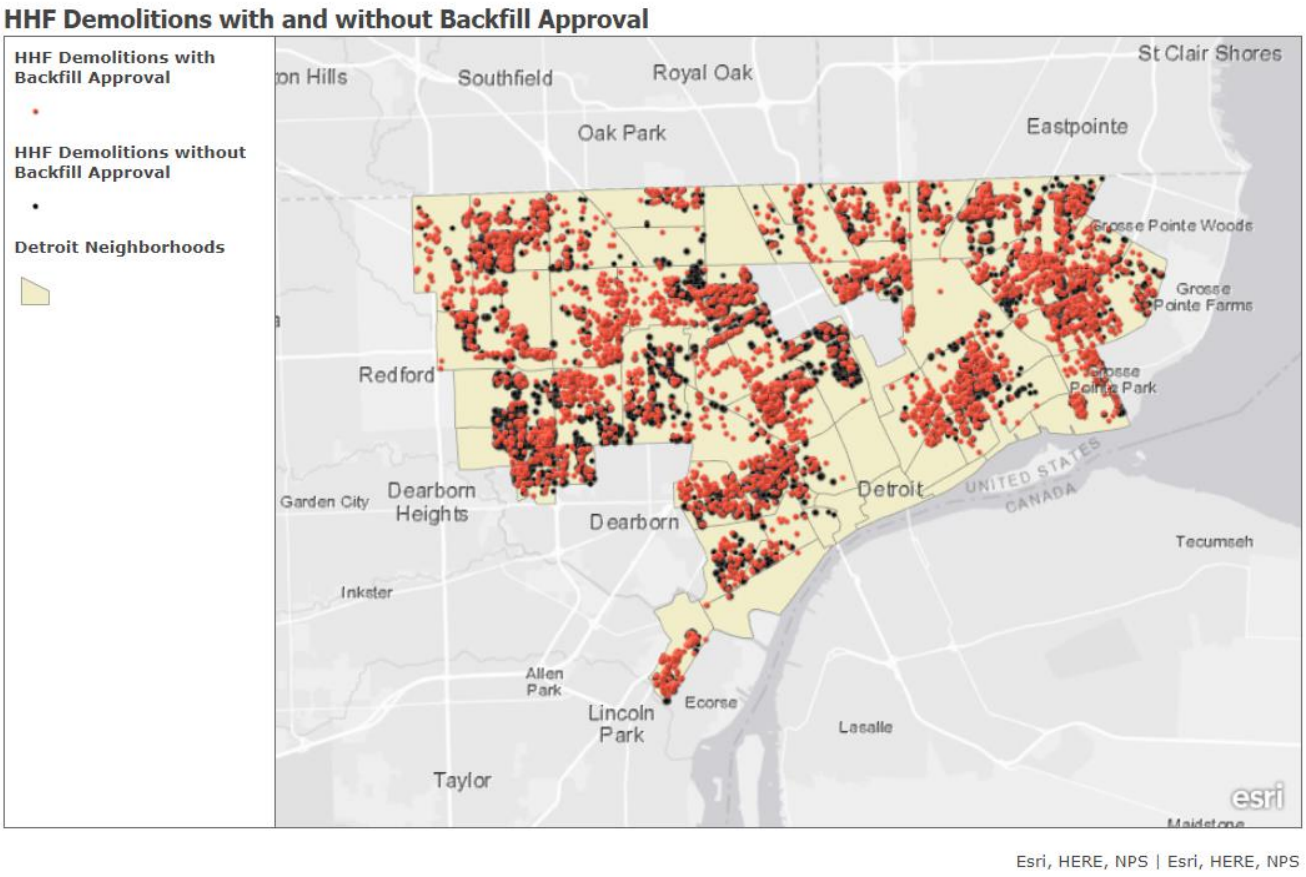


Figure 17: Map of Detroit and status of the Backfill Approval at each Demolition (2014-2018*)*

Alongside inconsistent practices and unreported dirt costs, the MSHDA records for HHF demolitions also include a column for what the agency called “Dirt Refunds.” Mary Townley justified this column and the refunds by explaining, "Through some file review we determined that dirt costs were overpaid and we needed to create a field for all possible refunds. Any refunded money from Detroit was accounted for in each category it was originally reported (Personal correspondence, 2018)." During the launch of the DDP over the summer of 2014, Adamo Group, Homrich, and MCM completed 1,367 HHF demolitions linked to $3,478,399.78 in dirt refunds. The OIG report from December 2018 illustrates how these contractors engaged in a unit-price contract arrangement that – despite warnings by Atwell Group - did not include backfill costs. Because contractors frequently reported bundled demolition costs to MSHDA, it is

difficult to identify the original sum of overpayment. State data suggest that over the period 2014 to 2018 MSHDA management did not hold the DDP to any uniform standard for reporting costs. Orr's move to release contractors from the burdens of backfill standards had succeeded, but not because it reduced costs. Re-regulation of backfill became a necessity in a policy environment in which 2020 was the deadline for eradicating the city's blight (Ferretti, 2015). Orr and the DDP hoped a different stance on backfill would give the go-ahead to accelerate demolition production, but contractors took it as an opportunity to misrepresent material sources and manipulate costs.

From Compliance to Capture

The gap between DBA backfill approval and MSHDA backfill costs is not the sole discrepancy contained within the city's backfill program. The 12/2014 backfill guidance document lists compliance requirements for each category of backfill material. If demolition contractors source material from locations falling into Category 1 (Residential Construction Sites; Residential Landscape Yard Sites) and Category 2 (Virgin (Native) Commercial Borrow and Sand/Gravel Pit Sites) they are required to submit "written certifications" to the DLBA. For Category 1 sites, these certifications are submitted by the contractor to the DLBA. For Category 2, the owner or operator of the gravel pit must submit certifications to the DLBA. In both instances, the backfill guidance outlines four components of certifications: 1) origin of material; 2) evidence of clean material; 3) evidence of a native soil source and homogeneous composition; 4) material is free of debris, large rocks, concrete[75]. Despite the requirement to provide these certifying statements, a former administrator with Able Demolition, a contractor operating out of Shelby Charter Township, MI, was not aware of this required practice. There is no record of

[75] The DBA backfill monitoring data does not identify the category of material. However, my review of the DBA Soil Management Platform – dba.aktpeerless.com – confirms contractors are required to submit this information.

these certifications. By mid-2017, her employer had completed 557 HHF demolitions totaling $17,647,668.33[76]. She explained, “We as contractors do have to input the address of the backfill, which source it came from and the yardage (Personal correspondence, 2017).”

In the 4.5 years since that initial backfill guidance, the DDP has not released updated protocols. The 2014 guidance remains available for review on the DBA soil management platform. In 5/2018, MSHDA circulated a document as part of its authority over HHF. The sixty-three page “Blight Elimination Program Operations Manual” includes three instances of “backfill” and nine for “dirt.” On page 24, MSHDA requires contractors to submit a written statement reporting “the source material is free of environmental contamination, is from a native source, and free of debris, concrete and other unsuitable substance. *This written statement must be uploaded in each file* [emphasis added].” In a response to a fall 2018 FOIA request for examples of these statements[77], attorneys with The Allen Law Group (DBA’s FOIA lawyer) explained, “Your request has been denied because, after a diligent search for the requested records, we have determined and certify that the records do not exist.” AKT Peerless did not respond to repeated requests for information pertaining to the requisite backfill certifications. For its part, AKT holds no public presence in the DDP. However, AKT’s silence on the program serves as an ironic twist on Kashat’s interpretation of his firm’s urgent regulatory role for the DDP, “What you find is people ignore the backfill. They just don’t ask the questions. Bring in clean fill is all the RFP says. We have one opportunity to do it right. (Interview, 2015)”

These lapses were not unique to Detroit or Michigan. On 4/21/2015, Christy Romero, the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (SIGTARP), released an audit

[76] Able completed these demolitions between 5/1/2014 and 10/17/2016.
[77] I submitted the request on 9/5/2018, the city confirmed receipt on 9/12/2018, and issued a response on 9/26/2018. The request was: Please provide copies of written certifications mentioned in the DBA’s Backfill Guidance document for 2014 to the present.

of the Hardest Hit Fund Blight Elimination Program. Writing to the Treasury secretary, Romero stated, "SIGTARP found that Treasury takes a hands-off approach to the HHF Blight Elimination Program and has very limited involvement in the planning or execution of the program (4)." Romero accused Treasury of ignoring risks that could culminate in fraud and abuse. Moreover, Treasury failed to establish controls and goals for HHF spending and allowed state and local governments to treat demolition as an end itself. She wrote, "It is the outcome of that demolition, not the demolition itself (6)." SIGTARP expressed concern about a Michigan official disclosing MSHDA was not interested in actively monitoring program performance (51). Romero criticism was vindicated at the end of 2015 when officials in Evansville, Indiana used HHF to fund the seizure and demolition of occupied homes to clear land for a car dealership (SIGTARP, 2016, 3). A similar leniency allowed DDP and MSHDA to move the regulatory goalposts to fit the priorities and interest of demolition contractors operating in Detroit.

In addition to internal regulatory concern over backfill, the public's attention turned to backfill in 10/2015 after Charlie LeDuff, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter formerly with *The New York Times* and *The Detroit News*, conducted an investigation into escalating demolition costs on his WJBK-TV program (LeDuff, 2015a). His reporting showed the price of demolition had risen sharply throughout 2014 and 2015 and had exceeded costs under prior mayors. LeDuff implied the mayor had established contracting processes skewed to benefit four major demolition contractors. To quell these reports and rumors of collusion and malfeasance, Duggan appeared at a city council meeting on 10/13/2015 (Helms & Guillen, 2015). He linked inflated demolition prices to changes in the regulatory approach to sourcing clean backfill material and controlling

the spread of dust at sites. Duggan also attributed part of the cost increase to the DDP's more rigorous asbestos disposal program in contract to leniency in the prior administration[78].

Standing behind a lectern in the Young Municipal Center, Duggan refuted LeDuff's allegations, "To suggest these costs went up because we're doing something wrong, I don't believe is true." In his view, backfill costs had risen because the volume of demolitions had strained available reserves of clean dirt and forced contractors to venture further and further for approved material. The act of approving material became synonymous with regulating the material. His explanation echoed the column penned by Gallagher (2014a) reporting how excavated material from several major development projects was disqualified as a backfill source because of heavy metal and salt contamination. For Duggan, rising backfill costs were a distressing but necessary aspect of keeping the pace of residential demolition. Danielle Lewinski, a director with the Center for Community Progress and consultant to the DDP, dismissed any evidence of misconduct, "It's not like going to the market and buying an apple that's going to be the same regardless of which market you buy it at (Ferretti, 2015)." Differences in produce quality aside, the regional demolition market is more like buying the teeth to chew the apple.

LeDuff continued to probe and speculate on demolition costs in a series of televised reports and confrontations with DDP officials. In a contentious broadcasted debate in 10/2015, LeDuff appeared alongside Duggan at the FOX affiliate studio to discuss the DDP backfill program and the ballooning costs (WJBK. 2015). Both men volleyed accusations of inaccuracy and impropriety. The back-and-forth provided little clarity to Duggan's or LeDuff's claims. The former rationalized demolition costs as a necessary evil to realize a blight-free city. The latter

[78] In a *Detroit Free Pres*s report two weeks later (Helms & Guillen 2015b), former Mayor Dave Bing took issue with Duggan's characterization of his administration's asbestos abatement approach. Duggan also claimed Bing's program never exceeded 25 demolition a week. Bing bristled at the figure and asserted his program tore down 60 a week.

accused the mayor of rewarding his construction buddies with sweetheart demolition deals. However, LeDuff's reporting had already exacted sufficient damage to the stability of Duggan's signature program. The mayor's vigorous defense of DDP did not blunt skepticism about demolition policy and what interests the DDP was serving. In spring 2016, SIGTARP broke precedent[79] and subpoenaed Detroit's Auditor General for demolition cost records, marking the beginning of a formal federal investigation into program operations. Mark Lockridge, the Auditor General for Detroit, explained SIGTARP investigators were focused on invoicing and an alleged conflict of interest involving a member of Duggan's inner circle and contractors (Guillen, 2016d). Lockridge viewed SIGTARP's interest as more than a standard review, "They're not just doing an audit of course." Erica Ward Gerson, the chair of the DLBA[80], chafed at the perceived gravity of the SIGTARP subpoenas, "This is the biggest program of this type that anybody has ever done in the country. It was needed. We are very proud of what we've done. It's working. But we had to invent it. So, you try different things along the way (Ferretti, 2016)."

Gerson's explanation of inventiveness only captures part of the regulatory process. Where invention stalled, policy accommodation had room for expansion. In a follow-up to his initial reports on rising costs, LeDuff challenged Duggan's cost explanation in a series of sensationalized reports on the backfill program. In "Detroit's Dirty Dirt Drama," LeDuff chronicled how DDP officials revised city ordinances to quicken backfilling processes and allow the "alternative fill measures" allowing different quantities of topsoil and crushed fill (LeDuff, 2016). On the advice of the city's principal corporation counsel, Detroit City Council integrated Orr's 2014 emergency order into municipal code. From 7/2016 onward, DDP allowed

[79] Policy observers and pundits speculated on SIGTARP's reasoning for subpoenas instead of a formal request.
[80] Duggan appointed Gerson in 2014. The two had previously worked together at the Detroit Medical Center. In a profile for *The Jewish News*, Gerson recalled Duggan saying, ""I can't do it unless I come up with a policy I believe in to cure blight in the city; because if I can't cure the blight, nothing else I do will matter. (Headapohl 2014)"

contractors to use six inches of topsoil in place of the prior three-foot standard. Moreover, as LeDuff reports, city attorneys made the rule change retroactive to include backfill processes that preceded the ordinance change – this revision released contractors from potential future liability.

The rule change was not an imperious revision forced on the city by Duggan and his DDP lieutenants. The shift originated in a 2015 supplemental report in which the council's Legislative Policy Division (LPD) responded to the body's inquiries about the technical management of the demolition program. David Whitaker, then the Director of the LPD, shared concern demolition contractors may not be complying with Emergency Order #33 and its newly imposed backfill standards (LPD, 2015b). Whitaker indicated the DBA's official backfill guidance from 12/2014 conflicted with the order and that such a contradiction could pose significant problems for managing contractor compliance and demolition practices. He wrote, "Therefore, a question arising out of these mixed legal and technical documents would be whether demolition standards for the City's ongoing blight eradication efforts are governed by: 1) the terms of the Scope of Service Exhibit A proffered as an attachment to the subject demolition contractor management agreement with the DBA; or 2) alternatively are they governed by EM Order No. 33 (2)?"

But rather than lift or rescind the city's blight emergency, the city council's solution was to incorporate the "substantive provisions" of Orr's emergency order into municipal code in concert with a more elaborate explanation of fill materials and procedures (Gross, 2016). The exception became the rule, the suspension became the norm. In passing the change, city council formalized four backfill types: clean soil; combination fill; hard fill; and inert material. The new ordinance did away with contradictions in requirements and formalized three backfill depths:

- The portion of the hole or excavated area more than 3 feet below grade shall be filled with clean soil, hard fill, or combination fill, at the option of the permit holder.

- The portion of the hole of excavated area from 3 feet below grade to 6 inches below grade shall be filled with either clean soil or combination fill, at the option of the permit holder.
- The portion of the hole or excavated area from 6 inches below grade to grade level shall be filled with clean soil.

The rule changes eased stress on contractors and regulators but also meant there was no longer an outside to the blight emergency and a possible return to normal. In effect, city leaders and DDP officials turned the extraordinary situation described by Orr in 2014 into the ordinary context for demolishing and backfilling Detroit. The blight emergency was no longer a prolonged exception to the rule of law, *the city council incorporated the precepts of the blight emergency into the rule of law*. The DDP was not just a dramatic response to the cancer of blight, it could now be a policy laboratory for the city going into the future. Detroit may have exited financial emergency through bankruptcy, but its blight emergency was now permanent.

Pacifying contractors by collating internal regulation did not relieve pressure from external observers. Press scrutiny of backfill costs took on extra significance when DDP announced in 10/2016 the Department of the Treasury had suspended demolition activities and MSHDA would place observers in the DLBA offices (Wisely, 2016). An ongoing audit had uncovered inconsistent bid procedures and inadequate recordkeeping (Guillen, 2016a). The DDP had halted demolitions for two months by the time reports surfaced about the audit. Duggan admitted then to reporters, “The speed at which we went outstripped the controls that we had in place.” MSHDA lifted the suspension in early fall, contingent on DDP imposing new contracting practices that limited the size of bid packages and monitored subcontractors (Ferretti, 2016).

Notwithstanding Duggan's admission of responsibility, state and federal agencies continued probing and uncovering misconduct. Over 2017 and 2018, local press turned scrutinizing the DDP into a genre. In 2017, the US Attorney empaneled a grand jury to broaden the investigation into the DDP (Snell & Ferretti, 2017). A different 2016 audit completed by the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Nonprofit Housing Corporation (MHA) – coinciding with the internal audit - detailed more evidence of no-bid contracts, pricing manipulation, and collusion between officials and contractors (Dietz & Hutchinson, 2018). DDP officials immediately disputed the audit's significance and whether its findings rose to the level of criminal activity (Guillen, 2018). Despite those objections, the MHA turned the results over to the FBI.

In early 2019, SIGTARP subpoenaed demolition contractors operating in Detroit for backfill records between 2016 and 2018 (Ferretti, 2019i). As one contractor shared with me following the announcement of subpoenas, "It's a tumultuous environment at the moment." SIGTARP's abrupt focus on backfill brought refreshed scrutiny on DDP's approach to monitoring contractor practices. Investigations by the *Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News* proceeded through the spring of 2019 unearthing and scrutinizing a pattern of violations by contractors, including allegations of unverified backfill and unfilled holes. By the end of 3/2019, the DDP incorporated ground radar systems to inspect the quality of backfill (Ferretti, 2019e). Press reports continued to address whether contractors manipulated the results of soil testing that disqualified I-96 and LCA excavations from being used. These reports implied demolition contractors deliberately axed the 800,000 yd3 of material from the supply to create the backfill market through artificial scarcity. Kat Stafford, a *Detroit Free Press* reporter, wrote (2019h):

> The Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program is also probing whether some companies used free dirt obtained from a variety of unverified sources—

> including the I-96 freeway construction project — and then passed it off as an approved residential dirt source before billing the federally-funded Detroit Land Bank Authority demolition program for materials they never actually paid for, sources said.

Stafford's reporting echoed an 8/2018 post on *Deadline Detroit* by LeDuff. In that post, he shared evidence that the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) had approved I-96 soils for use in construction projects in communities neighboring Detroit (LeDuff, 2018). The free material may not have been contaminated. Diane Cross of MDOT stated, "It was tested for heavy metals and Northville required chloride[81] testing. It came back at standard levels."

Concerns over backfill quality intensified in 2/2019. Spurred by questions about the quality of material, Mary Sheffield, the Detroit City Council President Pro-Tem, requested US congressional hearings on the backfill program (Neavling, 2019). In early 4/2019, Rashida Tlaib and Brenda Lawrence, Detroit's US Representatives, echoed Sheffield and expressed formal concerns to the MDEQ and MSHDA and encouraged the agencies renew their scrutiny of the DDP. In the joint letter, the congresspersons wrote, "The potential use of contaminated and unverified sources of dirt being used to fill these demolition sites presents an alarming lack of oversight that could have public health ramifications for thousands of Michiganders (Cottom, 2019)." Three days later, federal prosecutors charged Aradondo Haskins and Anthony DaGuanno, two former employees of Adamo Group, with bribery and corruption (Mondry, 2019). Before the week's end, the federal government released a statement that SIGTARP and FBI investigations into demolitions and bid-rigging would not produce additional charges (Snell & Ferretti, 2019). This statement did not mention the status of the backfill investigation.

[81] Road salt.

The criminal inquiry into the DDP closed but reporters continued probing. In 9/2019, *The Detroit News* reported findings from an investigation into MSHDA and DLBA's approach to backfill costs (Ferretti, 2019b). Emails obtained through FOIA illustrated a joint failure to monitor and scrutinize contractor practices. Early in the DDP, regulators encouraged contractors to "simply place a cost in the dirt column." In 1/2017, MSHDA and DLBA adopted a "cost reasonableness" structure that narrowed backfill costs to a range of $2,000 - $2,500 for what one staffer called "dinky houses," with as much as $3,000 for large houses. Prior to the reasonableness policy, backfill costs with an approval averaged $3,306, with a range between $200 and $7200. After MSHDA changed the cost standard, the average for approved material fell to $1,654.03 but maintained a range of $366.03 to $6,912.00. For unapproved transactions, the average was $1,630 before the rule change and $1,533.10 after the introduction of the "cost reasonableness" standard. MSHDA and DLBA were not able to produce an explanation for the sudden decrease in backfill costs. One interpretation would be contractors encountered cheap reserves of backfill at the end of 2016. The alternative interpretation is contractors continued their practice of concealing inflated backfilling costs in other categories of their expenses[82].

On 8/24/2017, Rebecca Camargo, then DLBA Demolition Director, resigned her position (Guillen, 2017a). A spokesperson with DLBA declined to explain. Camargo's departure followed the resignation of the previous demolition director in 1/2017 (Guillen, 2017a). Unlike her predecessor, Camargo did not leave town or enter a phase of professional anonymity. The former legal counsel and demolition director at DLBA positioned herself as a specialist representing contractors working in the DDP. In 2018, Camargo joined Beier Howlett, a law firm

[82] In 2016, the DDP hid costs by redistributing money across several demolition contracts to avoid exceeding the $25,000 cap on HHF (Ferretti 2016). Example: If the DDP had two demolitions priced at $28,000 and $17,000, the DDP would report the latter as $20,000 and the former at $25,000.

based in Troy, MI, where she now advises demolition, construction, and real estate clients. Since joining Beier Howlett, Camargo has represented BBEK Environmental, Salenbien, Gayanga, and Smalley Construction (Kiertzner, 2019; Stafford, 2019d; Ferretti, 2019i). Now through the revolving door, Camargo has remained busy in her industry role. DDP accused BBEK of non-compliance. SIGTARP subpoenaed Salenbien, Gayanga, and Smalley for backfill records.

Contractors retain the former demolition director as counsel because of her prior insider-status and ability to navigate the DDP bureaucracy. She is a former regulator now representing the regulated. But of comparable significance is the stance Camargo previously took as the demolition czar and how that shows through in her present approach. On multiple occasions she encouraged contractors to "simply place a cost in the dirt column," and explained to one the figure they reported "is not necessarily reflective of the actual cost" (Ferretti, 2019b). Regulation was not a process of monitoring demolition production; it was a process of enabling and accelerating demolition production. This is no clearer than in her capacity as a representative of BBEK in its suspension for asbestos violations, Camargo was adamant that investigating the contractor would jeopardize DDP's effectiveness. She told one reporter, "They're the company that has the capacity to do it. It's going to slow down the whole timeline (Stafford, 2019d)."

The revolving door of DDP officials illustrates how regulatory capture is especially crucial to understanding the demolition and backfill programs in Detroit. A former journalist once responsible for scrutinizing the DDP joined and then resigned from the DLBA public relations team (Dudar, 2018). The perceived urgency of the DDP punched through the already porous barrier separating the regulated from the regulator. Recently, the state of Michigan has been embarrassed by the consequences of regulatory capture. Gravel and aggregate producers – a significant supplier of material for demolition contractors – have come under increasing scrutiny

for mischaracterizing the gravel supply in Michigan (Egan, 2019a). This systematic attempt at deception was meant to undermine efforts to limit local zoning approvals of new gravel yards. According to email records, Michigan Aggregates Association (MAA) encouraged the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to report the state faced a gravel shortage that could doom infrastructure and construction projects (Egan, 2019b). MAA leadership then used the "objective" MDOT report to lobby state lawmakers to pass legislation[83] limiting community resistance to new gravel pits and mineral yards. Although the attention has remained on the relationship between gravel and road construction, the implications for backfill are significant. At least 236,036 yd3 of material for demolitions has originated in pits with MAA membership. The Board of Directors of MAA includes two executives from Edward C Levy, a multi-national material management firm, that has sold 12,396 yd3 of backfill material to Adamo and Farrow.

Despite claims to the contrary, the DDP has continued to market the program to national demolition contractors (OIG, 2018). McDonagh, a contractor based in suburban Chicago, entered the fray by completing 90 HHF demolitions between 12/2018 and 3/2019. By the end of February, McDonagh had submitted invoices totaling $1,489,936.70 to the DDP and MSHDA. In March, accusations that McDonagh used demolition debris as backfill culminated in DDP permanently banning the contractor from receiving future contracts and revoking its city wrecking license (Stafford, 2019f)[84]. The ouster cancelled an additional $15 million in awarded contracts (Ferretti & Noble, 2019). DDP officials insisted the expulsion signaled their commitment to regulating contractors, but later reports revealed DDP had not uncovered the misconduct. A former McDonagh employee reported the violation to DDP officials (Ferretti,

[83] Senate Bill 431 – introduced by Adam Hollier (Detroit - 2) – would (in accordance with existing zoning) prohibit a local unit of government from deny a permit for mining or extraction if the resource is a) valuable and b) deemed safe. The bill remains in committee.
[84] A later cleanup settlement between McDonagh and DDP qualified the contractor for future work.

2019h). Farkas admitted the DDP only employed seven liaisons responsible for monitoring demolition sites (an improvement over two during 2014 and 2015). In 1/2020, the DDP completed 218 demolitions, with as many as eighteen in a day (1/13). According to a recent job posting, Field Liaisons for the DBA are "responsible for daily monitoring and interaction with various contractors performing all aspects of demolition activities." Liaisons prepare daily reports on demolitions in addition to monitoring pre and post demolition work. When pressed about prior stop-work orders related to backfill practices, Farkas could not confirm that Field Liaisons had been those responsible for discovering contractor misconduct (Stafford, 2019g).

Conclusion: Valuation as Regulation

In Detroit, consensus around disaster and crisis prompted the formation of the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF) and helped justify the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP). But rather than the world-shattering emergency of Hurricane Katrina or an earthquake, Orr, Duggan, and DDP officials narrowed disaster capitalism to an area code and the institutions imagining its political, economic, and social restructuring. Demolishing held promise as a response to a perceived crisis, but also in unlocking the potential for neighborhood stabilization and revitalization. However, the possibility for rentiership on the DDP – as policymakers and officials steered the agenda to fit the monopoly on destruction held by regional contractors – also enabled regulatory capture that rationalized, accommodated, and legislated non-compliance. Like landlords extracting income from inventory, contractors became a rentier class that relied on a preprogrammed process of regulation that affirmed and protected the value of dirt (Fields 2019).

The structuring of Detroit government around demolishing first entertained in 2013 and then institutionalized in 2014 established a new backfilling process that depended on demolition contractors to report costs, sources, destinations, and quality. But dirt did not begin as backfill

nor as an asset. As Birch explains of assetization, "A process in which value is constituted by the management of value and valuation, especially as they relate to organizational entities and their capacities (2017, 470)." In other words, valuation and regulation do not always overlap. Contractors captured the space of valuation that extended beyond regulation's reach. Despite the state's demand for refunds during the initial rollout of widespread demolitions, the sudden scarcity of free and clean material meant contractors controlled where dirt came from and how it was used. Contractors did not avoid and evade regulation, the regulators responsible for monitoring their activity crafted standards that prioritized production. Whether gaps in source certifications, online reporting, or paper records, each mistake prompted a fix that accelerated the DDP and strengthened valuation. Contractors did not produce backfill material, they relied on DDP regulation to assetize and then capitalize on dirt. Production was not encouraged or frustrated by regulation. *Regulation made demolishing feasible; valuation made it practicable.*

The maneuvers by demolition contractors to capture the DDP's regulatory apparatus recalls strategies by corporate actors at a national and multinational level to exploit catastrophe for profit. Although property abandonment and blight may not rise to the level of "terrorist attack," Detroit policymakers and the investor class mobilized the language of cancer, crisis, and catastrophe to explain blight as an emergency and justify demolition-dependent redevelopment. Disaster made demolishing necessary and demolishing made backfilling inevitable. Alongside these discourses of cataclysm to rationalize land clearance is a coincident push to view regulation as a mutable interference when addressing the emergency. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Pulte, Orr, Duggan, and Gilbert each invoked the urgency of blight removal as reason to reshape and transform the institutions responsible for oversight. Klein's insight suggests how the income generation dimension of the blight shock meant demolition contractors possessed

authority to steer and command these policies and interventions to directly benefit their own financial interests. Contractors saw in the disaster the potential rents through invigorated demolition and DDP leaders saw the promise of a blight-free Detroit ready for development.

These interests transformed backfill from an unanticipated cost in a fast-moving program into a secondary market and value chain upon which the DDP would ultimately depend. Regardless of Duggan and the DDP's explanations for soaring demolition costs, the scarcity of clean fill material enabled the sudden emergence of a backfill market. Overnight, the strain placed on material by demolition caused a spike in costs as contractors converted dirt from recycled waste into a scarce commodity. Questions about supply, demand, and quality remain open and continue to jeopardize local trust in the DDP. Although LeDuff and others have claimed contractors intentionally excluded LCA and I-96 dirt to justify expenditures, the effect of banning that material created a regional environment in which dirt became money in disguise.

Demolition is a vital public service for managing the built environment and does not contain a political essence: progressive, regressive, revolutionary, or authoritarian. Demolishing buildings and backfilling holes are and will be fundamental components of Detroit's ongoing neighborhood stabilization. But considerations of value and who has an interest in that valuation process matters. Backfilling presented an opportunity for contractors to impose a mode of valuation that stretched beyond the regulatory controls of the DDP. The ubiquitous gaps in backfill reporting, incomplete or deflecting explanations, the unreliability of the DDP's source and destination data, and the delay in establishing protocols to verify material illustrate choices of political-economic expediency – the relationship between rents, regulation, and the possibility of realizing value - and not the consequences of policy failure. Rentiership was not a flaw in the DDP's method of implementation, it was a feature of implementation – a necessary cost within

conducting the business of demolishing. Contractors used these structural conditions to transform profit-seeking into value-grabbing. The DDP may have periodically resisted regulatory capture with sanctions and suspensions but did little to discourage a different form of capture: valuation. As a place-based measure to address the city's decline, demolishing was less a matter of investing to restore neighborhoods than a scheme by contractors to capture value from the DDP.

In this chapter, I continued the history of the DDP and the emergence of demolition as a dimension of local government and regional industry. The priority of demolishing established a political-economic environment with conditions favorable to regulatory capture and rentiership. The enormity of the blight disaster – an official emergency for those leading the city – forced DDP officials and policymakers to prioritize demolition production. But that emphasis on enabled demolition contractors to influence and shape DDP and its enforcement processes. Backfilling provided a way for contractors to control the demolition market by turning dirt into an asset, one the DDP was willing to pay for. I drew on gaps between approved and unapproved backfill transactions to show contractors exploited opportunities to use valuation as a form of regulation, a strategy accommodated by DDP officials facing production goals. Contractors did not corrupt the DDP, nor were they charging premiums for superior products. Rent-seeking was a feature, not a flaw. Contractors proceeded within this regulatory environment confident DDP officials would adopt their approaches to the material, market, and method of backfilling. These findings contrast with existing research on demolition that narrowed the practice to focus on outcomes for adjacent properties rather than the contractors and networks involved in demolishing. The DDP was not a local response effectively or ineffectively delivered. Instead, the DDP was part of a value-grabbing operation that generated income for contractors.

In the next chapter, I analyze and discuss the geography of backfilling and its relationship to the regional real estate market in Detroit. In late 2014, the DDP issued guidance to contractors for backfilling. These standards provided an approval process but also required contractors to record their sources. However, if backfilling's value does not precede valuation and regulation, then dirt does not precede its excavation and circulation. As I argue in Chapter 4, the sources described backfill as a topographic or geologic feature delivered to a demolition site. In place of this approach, I categorize each of the backfill sources based on the real estate and property practices that produced the backfill material. The material that becomes backfill is embedded in a regional geography of growth, decline, and extraction presided over by an unsustainable expansionist logic. The value grabbed by contractors was part of a broader process of demolishing and backfilling. As contractors demolish Detroit, their supply chains grow to include the regional operations of speculation and capital accumulation. Contractors, haulers, excavators, and developers use continued expansion to preserve a landscape in which risky housing development is crucial to the regional economy. By bringing attention to these pathways for backfilling, I illustrate how demolishing can reproduce spatial differentiation at the regional scale. I reconsider sources as an expression of socio-environmental transformation rather than regional topography. I move from the value-grab of regulation to the dirt-grab of geography. I situate demolishing and backfilling Detroit within a system of development and circulation.

CHAPTER 4

Soil Horizons and Waste Frontiers:

A Regional Geography of Backfilling Detroit, MI

In this chapter, I extend my analysis of backfill management in the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) to include the regional geography of sources. Contractors captured the valuation and regulatory processes by manipulating and misreporting demolition costs within a political environment that demanded accelerated blight removal. However, controlling the financial dimensions of backfill represents only a portion of the authority contractors and their networks wielded over the DDP. Although program leaders established source categories for backfill material that would confer rapid approval, the regulatory framework treated backfill material as a topographic feature rather than a product of regional processes of growth, speculation, and expansion. This chapter investigates the origins of backfill and in doing so draws conclusions on the material contradictions of demolishing to change neighborhood fortunes and reshape cities.

River Street in Ypsilanti, MI is rarely more than a means for locals to access the growing Depot Town business district at the northwest edge of the small college town's downtown. At its northern terminus, River Street is capped by a pair of sprawling cemeteries before fading into LeForge, an undulating county road cutting through fields and golf courses. At its southern terminus, River Street meets its end between a KFC and Dairy Queen and fades into a gravel trail after merging with Michigan Ave – a busy thoroughfare that slices east-west and links Ypsilanti to a chain of industrial suburbs before spilling into the southwestern boundary of Detroit, MI.

On 11/20/2015, the link between Detroit and River Street exceeded the ordinary traffic feeding into Michigan Ave. That day, Direct Construction Services – an all-purpose contractor with offices in Detroit - demolished 14410 Alma and 14418 Alma. DDP records show Direct completed the 14410 for $22,500.00 and 14418 for $12,478.96. MSHDA records report the use of Hardest Hit Funds (HHF) and list backfill costs for the pair of demolitions on the eastside of Detroit. In both cases, Direct billed MSHDA $1,000 in backfill costs. Direct Construction sourced the 160 yd3 of material from a site 41.6 miles away: 8 North River Street, Ypsilanti, MI.

The question, then, is how did this 160yd3 of backfill come to be and what processes enabled its production and presence in the supply chain of the DDP? On 5/11/2015, the Building Department of Ypsilanti issued a permit to Philip and Roselyn Meyers, the owners of 8 North River since 1983, to "REMOVE & REPLACE CONCRETE STEPS DUE TO VEHICLE DAMAGE." They retained Robert Hopps, founder and owner of The Equity Build Company, to complete the residential construction project. Hopps crushed the concrete steps and sold the material to Direct Construction. On 4/24/2019, the Meyers placed the rehabbed 118-year old building on the market for $234,900.00. The Meyers purchased 8 N River for $80,000 thirty-five years earlier. On 5/2/2019 they received a contingency offer for the 2-story colonial house. On 5/31/2019, the Meyers sold the five-bedroom house to Desmond Kolean-Burley, the owner-operator of CameraMall in Downtown Ann Arbor. Kolean-Burley purchased the property for $226,000. Through 8 North River, the chain of backfill relationships enabling destruction in Detroit grew to entrain the Meyers, Robert Hopps, and Kolean-Burley in ways that defy demolishing as an isolated action in space judged on its relationship to future redevelopment.

Backfilling and demolishing are powerful financial processes shaped by regulatory and valuation capture .The backfill transaction joining renovation to destruction, Ypsilanti to Detroit,

and the Meyers to Direct Construction exemplifies the circulation of soil and aggregate material expanding the space of demolition beyond a wrecked address. However, the logsitics, flows, and environments of backfilling Detroit go undetected when leaders and observers simplify the DDP as an urban megaproject obedient to 8 Mile Road (Cwiek, 2019; Ikonomova, 2018; Trickey, 2017; Messner, 2016; McKinney, 2015; Griggs, 2014). The *Detroit Demolition Tracker* – released in 2016 to signal DDP transparency – plots the site of daily demolition but omits the continuous process behind demolishing that is linked to forms of production and accumulation beyond a demolished building (Helms, 2016). The wrecking industry depends on regional relations and a supply chain linking River St to Alma Ave and contractors and DDP officials to an ever-expanding resource hinterland of decline. The marketplace of demolishing Detroit now depends on a secondary marketplace of dirt, gravel, and sand reaped from regional change. DDP and boosters vow to identify the billions of dollars necessary for demolishing over 40,000 buildings (Aguilar, 2015), but backfilling depends on finding at least 10 million yd3 of material.

In 2015, AKT Peerless estimated the average backfill amount at 250 yd3 per demolition[85]. The DDP's own backfill transaction records average 189 yd3 per demolition. However, the latter figure contains multiple transactions per destination address as well as multiple transactions per source address[86]. In place of that misleading figure, I have chosen to use the mode volume of the DBA's backfill records: 200 yd3. If the DDP can demolish the 40,000 structures anticipated in the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF) report, contractors will need a volume of material comparable to the dirt displaced by construction of the 150-mile English Channel in the late 1980s. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam on

[85] Interview, 2015

[86] As I mentioned in the above, contractors did not follow any uniform standard for reporting backfill transactions. It is difficult to disaggregate the backfill volume without relying on estimates of basement size.

the Yangtze River in China moved 13,400,000 yd3 of dirt. The Central Artery/Tunnel Project in Boston, MA removed 17,000,000 yd3 of material[87]. In a 2015 interview, a Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) staff member observed, "Detroit needed all of northern Michigan's timber to be built. It will need all of northern Michigan's dirt to be unbuilt." The identification, excavation, extraction, and distribution of backfilling Detroit will transform houses, the city, and the region.

In the previous chapter, I showed how demolition contractors working in Detroit, MI took command of the DDP by shaping, steering, and controlling the finance and regulation of the backfill program. I argued contractors captured the medley of agencies and institutions responsible for managing the thousands of residential demolitions. Although policymakers and officials claimed Detroit was undertaking the most transparent and public health-conscious blight removal project in the US, the slow and sometimes contradictory process to draft backfill guidance complicated that characterization. Contractors frequently omitted and misreported backfill transactions despite the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) reporting dirt costs for each residential demolition. I presented the political and economic tensions of the demolition backfill program from its inception to the more recent series of controversies that continue to cast a pall over its operation. The scarcity of free fill material jeopardized the DDP philosophy of maximizing demolition production. In turn, a commodity market for backfill material emerged that DDP officials and administrators struggled to support and manage. I showed how demolition contractors have failed to submit backfill transaction details for thousands of demolitions and I argued this represents a shift in contractors from technicians behind real estate intervention in Detroit to transformative actors themselves.

[87] I include these latter two projects because they show the company Detroit's backfill program could keep should it surpass my conservative estimate.

I turn my attention from the money and regulatory side of contractor value-grabbing to the regional geography and real estate relations of the demolition backfill program. I spotlight the material supply haunting the political, logistical, and environmental achievement of demolishing Detroit. I focus on the backfill program and its embeddedness in property and land use change in Detroit and metropolitan area. As I argued earlier, planning, urban studies, and geography scholars often approach demolition as a technical practice with future policy effects (Prener, Braswell, & Monti, 2020; Garboden & Jang-Trettien, 2020; Weaver & Knight, 2018; Yin & Silverman, 2015). This Cartesian conceptualization isolates and flattens demolition as a point in space without probing spatial and material contradictions shaping the process of demolishing. Instead, I address the scope and geography of the DDP's backfill needs and argue backfill is not a topographic or geologic feature of the regional environment. Contractors did not stumble upon backfill while roaming the metro. Rather, backfill is produced in contexts that can contradict demolition-dependent redevelopment. Backfilling relies on material linkages between the property relations of a declining city and property relations of regional prosperity and profit.

This chapter travels in the current of classic and recent scholarship complicating the history and origins of urban decline (Hackworth, 2019; Thomas, 2013; Gordon, 2008; Sugrue, 1996; Beauregard, 1994; Darden, Hill, Thomas, & Thomas, 1990). Rightfully esteemed for their authoritative accounts of the racist and classist footings of distress, the emphasis of those works on public policy and capital mobility curbed analysis of the diverse industries and strategies generating income through decline. By concentrating on the material/materialist production of vacant land, I add to critical approaches revealing pipelines feeding property into the portfolios of slum lords and land banks (Seymour, 2020; Seymour & Akers, 2019; Akers, 2015; Dewar, Seymour, & Druta, 2014). That dirt is a financial and physical artifact carrying legacies beyond

the departure of inhabitants, owners, and excavators complements work examining the pieplines behind the production of decline. Developable land does not come from nothing. The points of backfill source and destination both depend on the firmness of chains formed by developers, builders, excavators, crushers, and contractors. Like the property that lives on after tax foreclosure as a speculative vehicle or the contract-for-deed that plunders occupants until the building crumbles, backfilling is rooted in conflicts over land and property. These are conflicts linked to regional asymmetries that reproduce differentiated urban space. These are pipelines of dirt, gravel, and sand – constituents of land - but also pathways for value, policy, and power.

Extraction and Environments: Relevant Literature

Demolition backfill has not attracted the attention of scholars in urban planning and geography. Considering this, the robust work on extraction, urban political ecology, and urban-environmental history can provide some insight into the limits and possibilities of studying decline through the geography of backfill. The scholarly literature on extraction[88] focuses on the ordinary and spectacular forms of destruction associated with the environments of rural mining or drilling operations and the "minescape" of capital (Ey & Sherval, 2015). Whether indicative of the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, scholars have pushed concerns over the environmental despoliation wrought by socio-political processes of coalmining and hydraulic fracturing to center stage (Lave & Lutz, 2014; Mitchell, 2011). For these authors, nature and society are always co-productive. Recent work has attempted to expand the concept of extractivism to integrate analyses of the hegemony of logistics and the potential for friction, resistance, and struggle (Luque-Ayala & Marvin, 2015; Cowen, 2014). Tsing (2009) went so far as to name

[88] Scholars have used the term "extractivism" to capture the constellation of political and material that gives extraction weight within present and historic structures of investment and policy (Pahnke 2018).

these linkages of profit, flow, and power as *Supply Chain Capitalism*, arguing extraction is more representative of plantation logics at a global scale (Tsing, 2017). New approaches have connected extraction to webs of capital accumulation as corporations and governments deplete and destroy environments, landscapes, and resources (Arboleda, 2020; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2017). This scholarship has revealed extraction as an operation of modern capitalism producing waste while serving corporate and authoritarian agendas (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019)[89].

The matter and materialism of soil has also not gone without attention from critical physical geographers and political economists interested in the connections enrolling extraction, accumulation, and environmental transformation. Blaikie's (1985) analysis of soil degradation remains a landmark text elaborating the capitalist exploitation – rather than irresponsible farmers - at the heart of environmental destruction. Bebbington (2012) points to how extraction is constitutive of and constituted by political, economic, and institutional arrangements. Calling for an "underground political ecology," Bebbington argues extraction illuminates state-society relationships and how they are intertwined with the operations of capital and the economy. In his view, extraction and mining are essential to the functioning of capitalism and the invisibility of extractive processes to critical analysis has significant political, methodological, and conceptual consequences. This is echoed in Lave's recent work (2014) and her call to create critical social theory drawn from a deep materialist knowledge of the environment and its determinants.

Soil in the above work, however, is an agricultural input subject to social power and not a manufactured supply or resource in the production of the built environment. Recent work on the manufacture of construction materials and aggregate has illuminated supply chains stabilizing the metropolitan condition. By "following the thing" of cement and its place within city-making,

[89] The concept of "operation" is an important one for distinguishing the financial dimension of rentiership and valuation from the material conditions of supply and resources. I return to this term later in the chapter.

Choplin (2019) argued the building material's prominence in West Africa illustrates the potency of the continent's construction sector to transform cities. Researchers have mobilized these construction materials as lenses for clarifying urbanization processes and possibilities for new economies and architecture (Minuchin, 2016; Myers, 1999). This work has concentrated on the enormous resource appetite of expansion. However, these approaches have prioritized the cultures and political economies tied to the assembling of the city and have not addressed how these supply chains or construction materials figure physically in non-growth circumstances.

My approach to backfill recognizes that extraction and construction material does not always illustrate material relationality of places, values, or interests. That a commodity has originated elsewhere and has been acted upon does not by itself analyze the entanglements of land, labor, and capital making its appearance possible. Gestures to relationality can conceal the mechanisms and exchanges underlying the relations[90]. The question, then, is how these supply chains and relationships serve as determinants of urbanization, instead of the *urban* acting as a container for those relationships. Research from within the urban-environmental history literature has centered the dynamic linkages between center and periphery, between urban and rural, and between use and exchange. In *Nature's Metropolis* (1991), Cronon introduces an inchoate Chicago, IL a disorienting place where entrepreneurs, traders, and builders attempt to will the city's greatness into inevitability. By linking the explosive growth of a fur-traders' outpost along Lake Michigan to the transformation of regional commodities and their markets, Cronon interweaves hinterland to metropolis in ways that complicate pure luck or destiny.

In a similar vein, Klingle (2009) documents how Seattle, WA underwent a series of "regrading" projects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in order to produce land. In parts of

[90] "It's relational" risks becoming the new "It's political."

the city, engineers blasted away hills with hydraulic cannons to unlock space for development. Urban environmental histories are always also urban social histories. Nature was transformed into property and the physical elements of the latter intersect with the social value attached to it (Klingle, 2006). Cities, then, are not the mythical or fated outcrops of good luck or godly providence, but artifacts of intervention entangling supply chains, markets, and environments under the banner of growth and profit-maximization. Gandy (2002) has captured how the urbanization of nature in New York City both heralded an age of technical prowess but also served to depoliticize ideologies of capital and empire as natural traits of urban growth and expansion. This strand of work offers immense possibility for considering the hinterlands, commodities, and socio-natural processes that make city-unbuilding as practical as city-building.

Urban political ecology (UPE) has emerged as a theoretical subfield of critical geography that expands upon urban-environmental history to illuminate the ways ecological processes are intrinsic to social, political, and economic processes (Heynen, 2016, Rademacher, 2015; Heynen, 2014; Keil, 2003). This perspective challenges prior scholarly accounts of nature that UPE thinkers believe fetishized environmental change and disguised the salience of capital (Christophers, 2018). UPE offers a historical-geographical and relational approach for making sense of interconnected processes that produce highly uneven and inequitable landscapes (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). Moore (2015) has argued for an epochal shift that recognizes how Wall Street organizes nature. Importantly, that approach omits other largescale modes of regulation and regimes of accumulation that have played a major role in creating and exploiting these natures (Haraway, 2015). Notwithstanding those flaws, by integrating the environmental and the social (or tracing attachments), UPE scholars contend the fight for a more sustainable future is a struggle against the global hegemony of capital. The potent dialectic of nature-society

means capital produces its own environments and terrains of class conflict (Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006). At the same time, *the city* is a product of multiscale metabolic processes and cannot be studied as an object outside a web of domination (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015).

Notwithstanding the attention to the urban, the political, and the ecological, much of the research coming out of the UPE current fails or struggles to mobilize workable definitions of each tip of the tripartite. The work has prioritized manifestations of ecology – forests, watersheds, waste – but has omitted a more forensic account of urban land and space. Persistent social inequality and uneven development has accommodated approaches that can mystify the institutional or income-generation processes. The outcomes of urban-political-ecological relationships are evident, but the operations remain generic. By analyzing timber, Prudham (2005, 55) offers one approach by viewing ecological and social production within the frame of ecoregulation – *the tree is not incidental*. Extraction, supply chains, and resources depend on a balance of the political and ecological where valuation and assetization often resist scripts.

Research Methods

For this chapter, I analyzed the DDP's demolition backfill data to create a database of approved backfill sources between 2015 and 2018 (n=444). The DDP data – drawn from DBA and DLBA work - includes submission date, backfill volume, destination address, source name, source address, the demolition contractor, and the contractor staff member responsible for the backfill transaction. By isolating and geocoding each source site, I have illustrated the broad regional footprint of the backfill program. In addition to mapping each source site, I accessed property records to determine the use and condition of the source property. By drawing on publicly available data in municipal assessor offices in southeast and eastern Michigan I was able to identify a history of real estate transactions for each source property. I also linked LLC actors

to the backfill expenditures associated with sources and the destinations, creating a mesh of land use and property exchange that can be applied to existing transactions. I then coded the sources using my own categories (8) and identified specific real estate transactions or sales that preceded or followed the acquisition of backfill. My fieldwork included visiting at least 90 of these sites to confirm their categorization. I focused on these transactions because they illustrate how demolishing Dettroit is entangled in a variety of other forms of land and property transformation.

I begin this chapter by illustrating the sprawling "dirt-shed" that feeds the DDP's demolition backfill appetite. From there I proceed to challenge and reconstruct the categories used to distinguish backfill sources and material. In this section, I address how the geography of backfill is linked to a set of real estate tensions and spatial contradictions shaping the demolition-dependent redevelopment of Detroit. If it is true that Detroit is undertaking the "biggest urban policy project America has seen in a long time[91]," then it is vital to understand how demolition is a practice embedded in regional geographies of urban-environmental transformation. Demolition is not only a policy project or an urban-environmental project but the constant interaction of those projects as they rely on processes of extraction and circulation that preserve regional property dynamics and the uneven development of shifting capital. Rather than treat demolition backfill as a found object – a resource that is "out there" for contractors to capture and use – I show how each source is freighted with histories of accumulation, expansion, and destruction.

Recategorizing Backfill Material

The DDP's backfill guidance codifies and identifies six categories of backfill sources. AKT Peerless and DBA jointly drafted the guidance and determined backfill categories. Wendy

[91] Email Correspondence: Brooke Furio (EPA) to Dave Manardo (City of Detroit), 10/20/2016; obtained through FOIA request to City of Detroit.

Sitek, formerly of Able Demolition, said of AKT, “They pretty much are the dirt police.” Tony Kashat, founder and principal of AKT Peerless, was a realist about the resistance from demolition contractors, “The first thing we did was develop this guidance policy. It included types of materials and types of locations. We developed protocol for testing. No one has tackled this before. No one can really approve it. Everyone gave it a head nod and a thumbs up, but early complaints were this cost so much.” Regardless of the onerous compliance process, DDP officials expected contractors to abide by the rules linked to each of the source categories. Kashat remarked of the region’s demolition contractors, “They’re looking for dirt from everywhere. Left unchecked they’ll bring in anything.” Despite Kashat’s assertion, the regulatory approach favored by Pulte and Farkas of the Detroit Blight Authority – and fully integrated into the DDP by 2014 – privileged demolition production (volume) and accommodated valuation capture.

The six official DDP source categories are: 1) Residential Construction and Residential Landscape Yard Sites; 2) Virgin (Native) Commercial Borrow and Sand/Gravel Pit Sites; 3) Commercial, Utility, and Road Construction Sites; Commercial Landscape Yards, and Agricultural Sites; 4) Industrial Construction Sites; 5) River and Lake Dredge Sites; 6) Other. In the 12/2014 guidance document, the DBA states of the latter three categories, “Backfill soil materials from these types Sites are prohibited for use as backfill materials for residential demolition projects. However, these and other Categories are under review and may be included in any future guidance document (DBA, 1, 2014).” No contractors have sought approval for backfill sourced from any of those three categories. Although MSHDA had released frequent guidance updates for backfill reporting and monitoring, these state directives have not elaborated on the DDP’s requirements. That guidance often takes a descriptive approach to compliance that

adopts existing contractor approaches as the best practices for regulating backfill in the DDP. *Figure 14* illustrates the location and distribution of these backfill sources across the region.

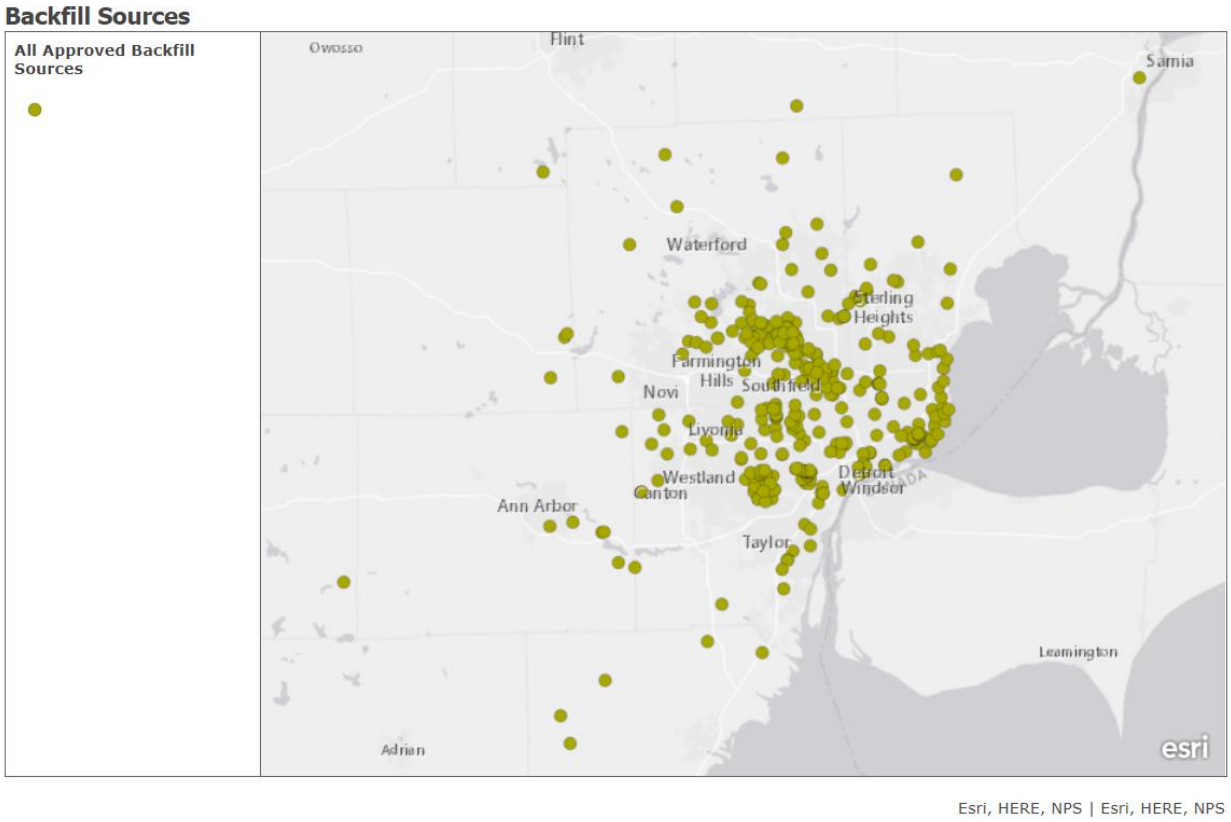


Figure 14: Location of approved demolition backfill sources in the Detroit region, 2014-2018

Even with DDP's efforts to narrow backfill categories for contractors, many of the backfill transactions do not fit tidily into these definitions. In a review of backfill sources, contractors have used Category 1 to describe material drawn from residential addresses in suburban neighborhoods as well as material stockpiled on an industrial or commercial site[92]. The categories generated and employed by AKT and the DDP reflect an understanding of regional space as static and self-evident: the source is a feature or gift of the geomorphology of land and its resources. A source contains backfill and contractors move it to a demolition site. The

[92] In 2015, AKT Peerless prioritized stockpiling backfill in city lots to reduce demolition costs. DDP and AKT asked MSHDA for several hundred thousand dollars to pilot the program. MSHDA did not fund the project. However, the DDP did encourage contractors to dump fill as a cost-cutting measure. I discuss this in Chapter 5.

categories flatten backfilling into an uncomplicated supply chain with a beginning and end. In place of that instrumental approach taken by DDP officials and consultants, I have distinguished backfill material along different dimensions and established a typology of sources as material products of social and economic relations within a changing urban and regional environment. I have generated these categories based on property histories, mapping, and data drawn from municipal records of sales and other transactions. My categories are: 1) Illusive; 2) Speculative; 3) Extractive; 4) Destructive; 5) Expansive; 6) Infrastructure; 7) New construction; 8) N/A.

Illusive sources are those submitted by contractors that meet at least one of three criteria. First, the address does not exist. Second, the address was the location of a stockpile and not an original or native source. Third, the residential address disguises an adjacent infrastructural or non-residential source[93]. *Speculative* sources are those that match with residential development projects in which there is no record of an owner-occupant prior to a sale. *Extractive* sources are those that match a sand pit or gravel quarry operating as a commercial enterprise[94]. *Destructive* sources are commercial enterprises that specialize in producing backfill material. *Expansive* sources describe commercial or industrial developments. Finally, *Infrastructur*e sources match onto sites with evidence of public street, sewer, park, and sidewalk projects. I have included one additional sub-category for sources with evidence of *New Construction* but insufficient evidence to conclude they are associated with a speculative development. This category also includes new construction by owner-occupants or affordable housing developments. Through analysis of DDP data obtained through FOIA, I have identified 444 unique backfill sources used by contractors

[93] I believe the use of Illusive sources amounts to defrauding the DDP and its funders, as well as jeopardizing the health and well-being of Detroit residents living near or using the newly vacant land.
[94] I recognize that all backfill material could be considered "extractive." Dirt, as it happens, is the "ground," but naming it extractive does not account for the other political or economic interests at play. I chose to distinguish mining aggregate material from simply excavating for a sports complex or a residential basement.

between 7/2014 and 6/2018. *Table 6* represents percentages for each category. *Figure 15* maps how re-categorizing converts backfilling into an embedded regional process. Contractors sourced 34% of material from *Destructive* sources. Five categories supplied between 9% and 15% of material for DDP demolitions. I could not identify a category for 1% of sources[95]..

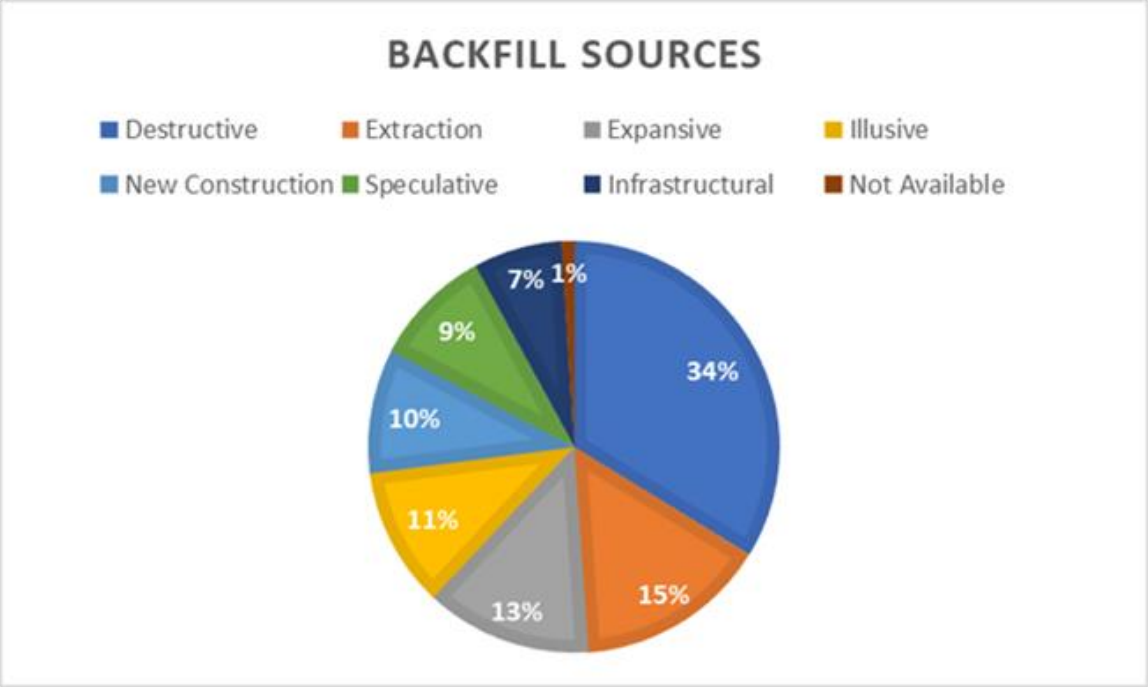


Table 6: Percentage of backfill material by category, 2014-2018

Sources of all types are distributed across southeastern Michigan. Each have histories that explain how backfilling become possible for the DDP. The source located furthest from a DDP demolition was 2400 E. Ganson, Jackson, MI. I categorize this property as a *Destructive* source. Smalley Construction used 946 yd3 of material from the site to demolish 17 properties. Demolition were located an average of 72.5 miles from the 2400 E. Ganson source. On 8/29/2017, Smalley transported material 78.7 miles to 10403 Harper to complete a demolition

[95] There are several reasons why a source may not fit a category: 1) The address could be a mistake and I was not able to identify an adjacent address or project that fit the reported source profile; 2) Aerial and street photography may not show visible activity and property records with the county and municipality do not suggest a construction project; 3) Aerial and street photography may not show visible activity but a latter infrastructure/expansion/construction project could have occurred at the site.

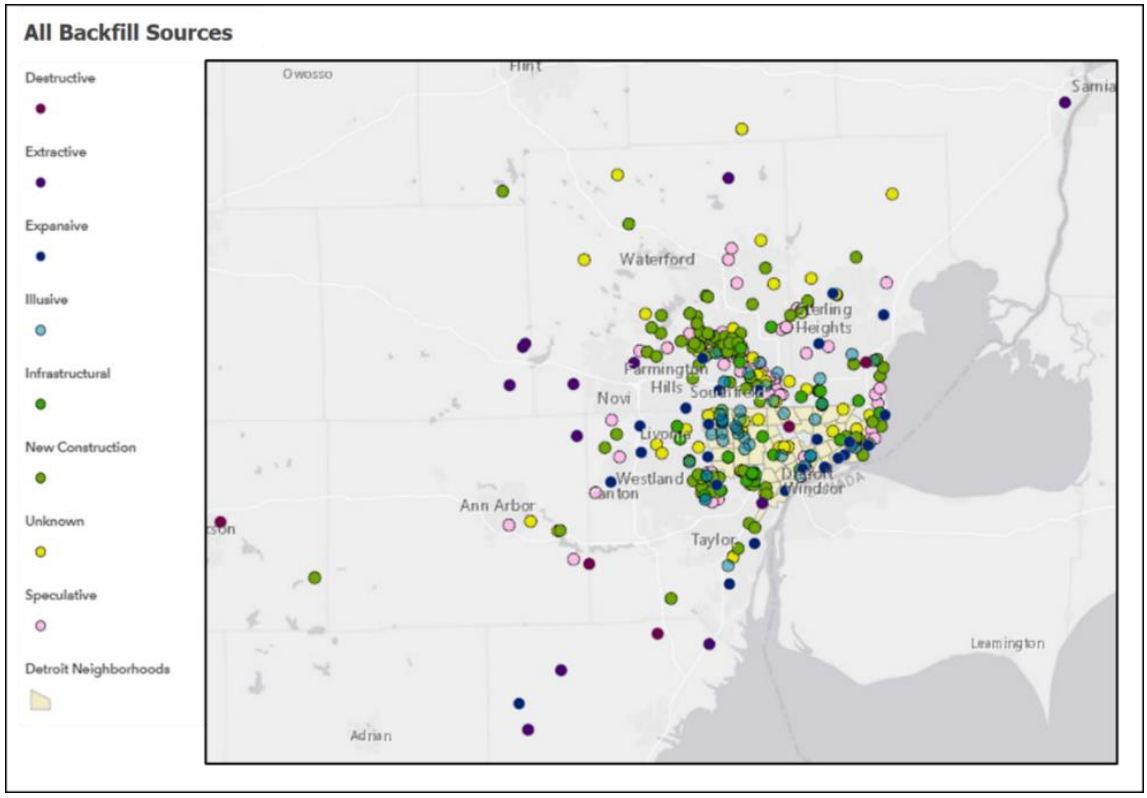


Figure 15: Distribution of all backfill sources by category of material in the Detroit region, 2014-2018

priced at $26,920.00. The DDP did not allocate HHF to support the Harper demolition or the other 16 demolitions. Despite the DDP maintaining data for both HHF and Non-HHF demolitions for most of 2017 and 2018, costs associated with purchasing and moving backfill for 10403 Harper do not appear in available DDP records. However, property records for 2400 E Ganson suggest the relational dynamics of sourcing backfill from the site. Until 10/2013, 2400 E. Ganson was owned by Bill Springer, a real estate developer and owner of Daylight Donuts based in Auburn, Alabama. Springer purchased the sprawling facility and two other properties in 2010 for $3,500 from Sparton Corporation[96] (Gautz, 2011). On the evening of 3/26/2011, a group of arsonists set fire to the factory (Aupperlee, 2011). Jackson firefighter efforts could not prevent

[96] Sparton (SPA) is a manufacturing company specializing in defense and health care products. The company closed its Jackson, MI headquarters and factory in March 2009. Sparton laid off 200 employees. They are currently based in Schaumburg, IL. A 2008 interview with Cary Wood, the new CEO of Sparton, framed him as a turnaround specialist. Wood said of himself, “I do well in operating turnarounds and distressed situations."

the inferno from raging into the morning and destroying the factory. Prosecutors charged four teenagers, sentenced two, and incarcerated one perpetrator (Salisbury, 2011). Although the facility was uninsured, Springer promised Jackson County he would clean up the site.

Springer's planned clean-up never materialized. The fire intensified Springer's neglect of the property (Jackson, 2013). Consequently, on 10/25/2013, Jackson County foreclosed on the properties for unpaid property taxes. In 2014, Smalley Construction purchased the rubble-strewn property for $150 through the county auction (Flory, 2014). In an 8/15/ 2014 local news profile about site improvements at 2400 E. Ganson, Joseph Smalley, the owner and operator of Smalley Construction, laid out a vision of short-term and long-term reuse. He explained, "We're going to clean it up and park our equipment there (Flory, 2014)." Smalley proceeded to describe how his company would manage the debris left behind by the arson and the prior owner. His expertise in recycling demolition waste would come in handy. He would send the wood to a nearby landfill and recycle the remaining concrete and brick as road base. He anticipated converting the derelict and damaged industrial site into a concrete recycling center. In *Figures 16-18* I show how the property at 2400 E. Ganson evolved from a derelict factory into a concrete crushing facility.

Figure 16: 2400 E Ganson, 2011 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 17: 2400 E Ganson, 2016 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 18: 2400 E Ganson, 2018 (Google, n.d.)

Smalley found markets for the "burnt rubble" of the Sparton plant. His plan for road base operations shifted to demolition backfill origins within three years. Smalley first used recycled and crushed foundation from its Ganson property on 8/8/2017 for a demolition at 11359 Littlefield. Smalley demolished 11 properties in 8/2017 totaling $156,215.00 in city contracts. Seven of these were commercial properties[97]. On 10/6/ 2017, Smalley used 160 yd3 of backfill material from the Ganson source to complete the demolition of the fire-damaged and decommissioned O'Shea Recreation Center at 15810 Capitol St in Detroit, MI. DDP paid out

[97] Detroit does not track backfill material for commercial properties. Despite my broader focus on HHF and residential demolitions, I felt it was important to show how money, property, and backfill material produce landscapes within and outside Detroit – especially one that included such considerable distance.

$55,000 in “Quality of Life” demolition funds to Smalley to remove the complex and create 10-acres of vacant land (Guillen, 2016e). Today, the land at 15810 Capitol St is a DTE solar array[98].

Figure 19: O'Shea Recreation Center, pre-demolition (DetroitUrbex.com, 2018)

The source site at 2400 E. Ganson is only one of 444 sites that makes backfilling possible. While its volume may not suggest its significance to the broader DDP agenda, the history and transactions behind that 946 yd3 of material illustrates one way that backfilling is a process embedded within a regional constellation of land use and development. Demolishing Detroit helped transform Ganson from expendable into essential. The flattened map of residential demolitions and backfill sources conceals the combined actions of Sparton, Springer, Smalley, DTE, and the DDP. Their interests, values, conflicts, and priorities fall to the wayside of demolishing. For DDP officials and boosters, demolition is the production of vacant land – the city’s comparative advantage (Williams, 2019) - but the technical practices of dumping material and grading lots camouflages how regional processes of backfilling can tilt the scale of Detroit’s redevelopment in favor of suburban homebuilders, excavators, haulers, and aggregate producers,.

[98] DTE – a local utility company – negotiated a 20-year lease of the site from Detroit. The solar array is the second largest urban solar array in the US. Detroit will use the remaining land for a park integrating sustainable technologies. DTE made a one-time payment of $25,000 in 2017. DTE’s use of the site is expected to generate $1.4 million in property tax revenue over the 20 years.

While Smalley initially specialized in demolitions of institutional and commercial properties, the contractor's backfill practices reveal the makings of a resource hinterland of urban decline that I will probe and analyze in this chapter. By linking backfill source sites to residential demolitions in Detroit, the geography of the DDP shows how demolishing can reinforce regional difference and uneven development instead of revitalizing Detroit neighborhoods. The supply chain of backfilling provides a lens for identifying and interpreting a regional geography and political economy of demolition with priorities that are not compatible with strategies to rebuild the city through destruction of abandoned properties. The volume and sites in *Table 7* defamiliarizes the practice of demolition – encouraging explanations that address demolishability, governability, and profitability. In the case of 2400 E Ganson, demolished houses in Detroit are embedded in histories and relationships that transcend industries and parcel lines, while complicating evaluations that depend on post-demolishing trajectories for properties.

Category	**Backfill Volume (yd3)**	**Source Sites**
Destructive	573,219	5
Extractive	182,126	12
Expansive	210,031	25
Illusive	170,862	52
New Construction	140,247	125
Speculative	145,640	124
Infrastructural	108,116	35
Not Available	28,986	66
GRAND TOTAL	**1,559,227**	**444**

Table 7: Backfill source categories by volume and number of source sites, 2014-2018

Illusive Sources

I have identified 52 *Illusive* sources used by demolition contractors between 2014 and 2018. Illusive sources illustrate the lengths to which demolition contractors are willing to go to

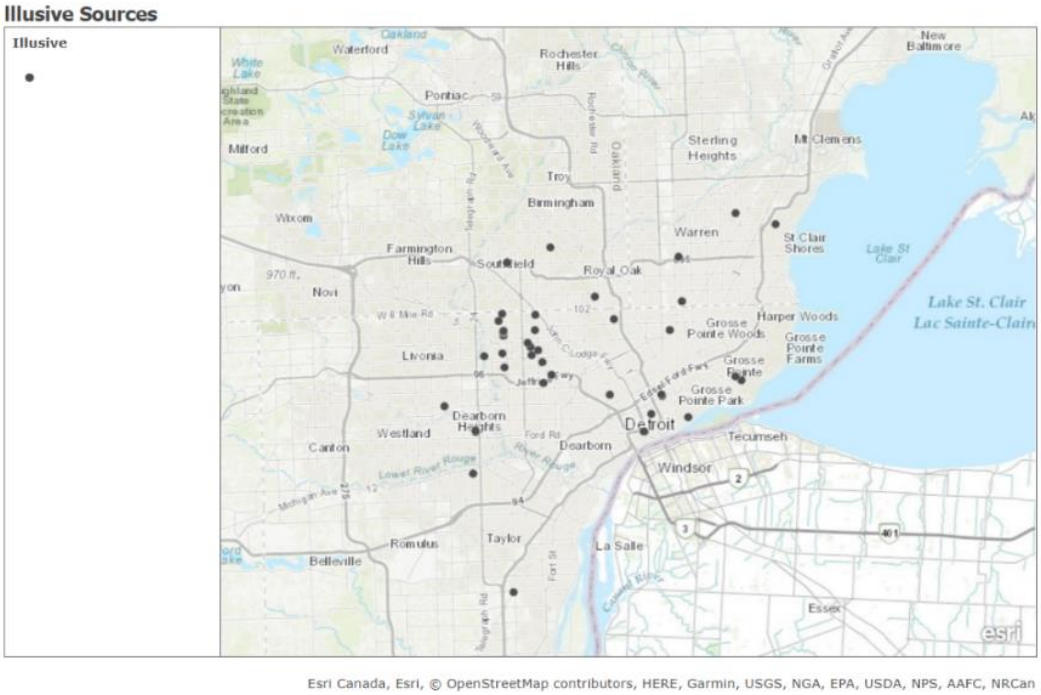


Figure 20: Map of approved Illusive backfill sources in the Detroit region, 2014-2018

manipulate DDP regulation to obtain and use backfill material. Contractors marshal the regional geography of property and development to camouflage the origins of backfill[99]. These 49 sources in *Figure 20* provided 170,862 yd3 of material to at least 359 residential demolitions in Detroit by summer 2018. Illusive sources are those used by contractors that exhibit one or more of the following traits: 1) Contractors reported the site was residential despite contrary evidence; 2) The site was a stockpile or dumpsite for backfill material and not an original or native source; 3) The reported site address does not exist; and, 4) The site could have not have produced the volume of material reported by a demolition contractor. Within this section I will focus on two approved sources located within the boundaries of Detroit: 1406 W Elizabeth and 1355 W Elizabeth.

[99] It is important to point out the category of "Illusive" is not tantamount to using contaminated material.

On 5/7/2017, Monahan Construction began construction of the $150 million Elton Park project in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood (Runyan, 2017). Named for a historic park removed by 1950s highway construction, the mixed-use development was set to include 420 apartments and 30,000 square feet of retail space. With nearly $7 million in public financing, the Elton Park development would consolidate 18 parcels owned by "billionaire" Anthony Soave and his Soave Enterprises, LLC into one cohesive development (Williams, 2019). Soave had spent the prior four years assembling these properties under the name Trident-Checker, LLC[100], a reference to the Checker Cab company he purchased in 2002 that maintained its headquarters in a nearby warehouse at 2128 Trumbull. Soave, a favorite personality among city and county leaders[101], accumulated his wealth with City Management, Inc, a multi-state garbage hauling company, and then selling the firm to the Waste Management corporate colossus in 1968 (Pinho, 2016).

The Elton Park development was not Soave's first residential project. Soave's portfolio also includes luxury developments in Northern Virginia and Naples, FL (Soave Enterprises, 2019). It is, however, Soave's first attempt at a dense urban environment. The promotional website for Elton Park calls it "an eclectic mix of residences, retail and inviting public spaces at the heart of Detroit's most historic neighborhood." In addition to rehabbing the Checker Cab headquarters as two properties, the project included five new structures: *2100 Trumbull*, *2120 Trumbull*, *8th Street Row*, *The Robertson*, and *The Crawford*. Monahan built The Robertson and The Crawford on parking lots used by adjacent bars. The latter building, the largest of the structures at five stories and the property with the most "refined aesthetic and sense of airiness

[100] Ten days after breaking ground, Trident-Checker, LLC "sold" these seven properties to Trident Corktown, LLC for $70.00. According to state records, the latter took on the assumed name of Elton Park in 4/2019.
[101] Soave's involvement in the city's public affairs and the social lives of the city's leaders is well known. For an instructive example of Soave's status and his irreverence, see the transcript of his testimony during the Kwame Kilpatrick trial: https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/kwame-kilpatrick-trial-soave-i-dont-brag. In reference to a prosecutor's question about his wealth, Soave stated, "It's a lot of muchachos, yeah."

(Elton Park, 2019)," featured fifty-two 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom units. Across from The Crawford, The Robertson would offer 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom units but also connect directly to the Checker Building by way of a bridge on the second, third, and fourth floors (Elton Park, 2019). At the 9/2019 ceremony marking the completion of Elton Park's first stage of construction, Duggan predicted, "Elton Park is going to be a huge part of this city's future (Durr, 2019)." The developer and his lieutenants declared apartments in The Robertson and The Crawford were at 70% occupancy and promised they would soon announce retail occupants.

The story of Elton Park does not begin with breaking ground for footings or the first tenant inhabiting The Crawford. These fallow Corktown addresses were part of a scheme several weeks before Monahan arrived at the empty lots. On 4/19/2017, Rickman Enterprises demolished three houses in Detroit's Springwells Village neighborhood: 2565 Carson, 2418 Casper, and 9171 Rathbone. The contractor billed the DDP and MSHDA $38,450 to complete the demolitions. In 10/2017, Rickman reported to AKT Peerless and DDP using 620 yd3 of backfill sourced from 1355 W Elizabeth. Rickman recorded backfill costs of $6,920 or over $11/yd3. This reported source address is a parking lot for Nemo's, a nearby tavern, but also within the footprint of The Crawford in the Elton Park development. Ordinary backfill sourcing practices suggest Rickman was recycling basement digs from the Elton Park construction; moreover, due to the nature of the construction, this material would have fit into the Residential category as established by DDP in its 2014 guidance[102]. Under more routine circumstances, this arrangement exemplifies the "symbiotic" relationship between builders and wreckers within the regional built environment. Builders possess material and wreckers need that material. However, the valuation capture and rentiership described in the prior chapter established the institutional

[102] Residential categorization exempts the soil from testing.

conditions in which that fortuitous symbiosis around recycling would not ensure the income-generation and margins desired by contractors. Reporting a zero for backfill costs was a missed opportunity to value-grab on the DDP and its reliance on contractors managing the supply.

Rickman did not source the material from Elton Park. No evidence exists placing the 620 yd3 of material at 1355 W Elizabeth. Neither is there activity on site to conclude 4,820 yd3 of material for 21 HHF demolitions in 4/2017 - 5/2017 originated from the address. Aerial imagery from this time period show the site at 1355 undisturbed by Monahan Construction crews until 7/2017. Even accounting for the three-week gap between Rickman tearing down these structures and Monahan breaking ground in Corktown, demolition regulation in Detroit only allows a maximum of 30 days for open holes. The latest Rickman could have sourced material without sanction is 5/17/2017. Despite claims to the contrary, Rickman could have served as a contractor for site work prior to Monahan. However, no building permits are on file with the city showing Rickman was retained to perform any excavation or preparation. Joe Monahan, the Project Manager responsible for the Elton Park project, disputed the accuracy of DDP data and rejected the notion clean fill material could have originated from the address. Monahan stressed Rickman had no prior relationship to the Elton Park project, stating, “We have no record of this material. It was not their property. These were flat sites with no material open. (Interview, 2018)”

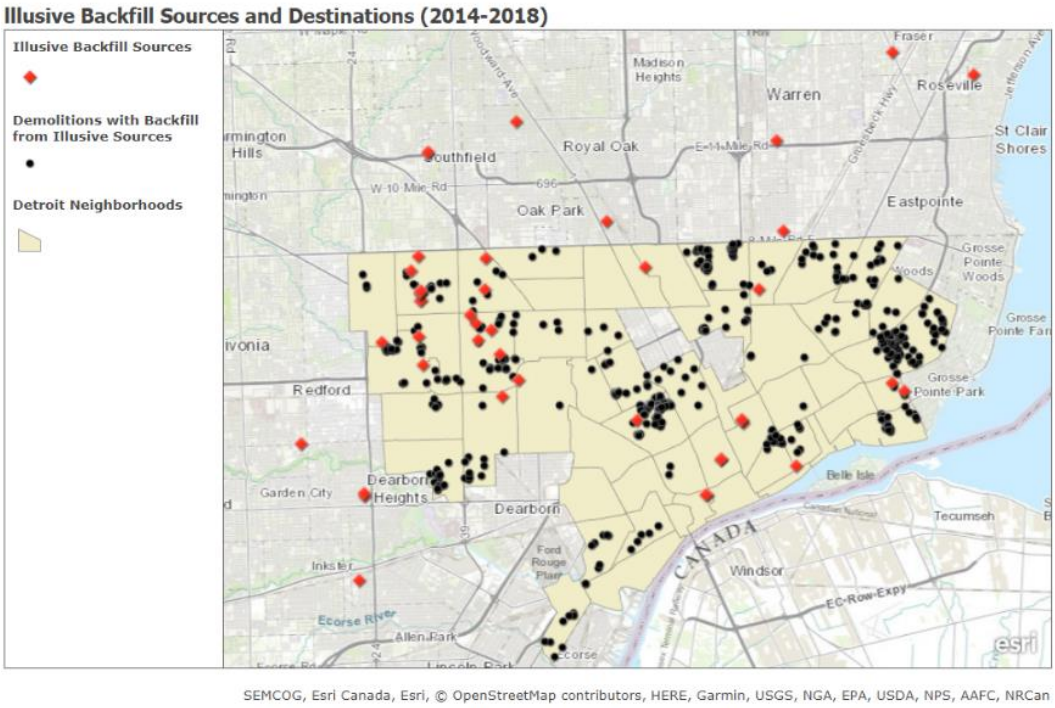


Figure 21: Map of approved Illusive sources and demolitions where contractors reported using the material, 2014-2018

In March, April, and May 2018, Rickman completed three more HHF demolitions: 6345 Grandville, 6206 Auburn, and 7517 Archdale. The contracts totaled $61,574. Rickman billed MSHDA $7,916.00 for 700 yd3 of backfill material, an average cost of $11.3/yd3. The contractor reported 1355 W Elizabeth as the source address. However, the official submission timestamp in the DBA backfill data shows 10/24/2017. Rickman, DBA, and AKT Peerless have not been able to provide an explanation for the former recording and the latter approving 1355 W Elizabeth as a backfill source for demolitions that would not be completed for another 4 to 6 months. In total, Rickman reported using 6,140 yd3 of backfill from the Elton Park development and billed MSHDA $66,856.00. Joe Monahan, a 25-year veteran of construction in Detroit, believed Rickman had fabricated the address and used Elton Park in a “dirt-laundering”

scheme[103]. Even if 1355 W Elizabeth had produced the material, Monahan denied it could be used, “This is contaminated dirt – fuel, oil, brick, debris. You can’t bury that shit throughout the city. You can’t put that stuff back in a hole. I can’t see how they’d use that material.”

Monahan also shared his professional concerns about 840 yd3 of backfill sourced from The Robertson address at 1406 W Elizabeth. Monahan confirmed he worked with M.J. VanOverbeke Contracting to haul excavated material but again stressed that it should not be used as backfill. Mike VanOverbeke Jr was not able to provide any additional details about the backfill transaction and concluded, “I didn’t get paid to dump the dirt. I had to get rid of it. I just did it.” Den-Man Contractors tore down the three properties[104] using this material and its president responded by email, “At that time a former employee was handling the backfill.” Regarding the possibility excavated Elton Park materials are part of the city’s growing inventory of vacant and developable land, Joe Monahan offered, “You can’t develop anything on it – you have to dig it out and redo it. You can’t put a fitting on it. Your building would sink.”

Figure 22: 1355 W Elizabeth, 4/2016 (Google, n.d.)

[103] Before discussing Elton Park with Joe Monahan, I had used the term “dirt-washing” to describe the process by which a contractor uses a false address to accelerate the backfill approval process. It was a happy accident that Monahan invoked “dirt-laundering” in the course of our conversation.
[104] 3086 24th Street; 9941 Roseberry; 9940 Roseberry

Figure 23: 1355 W. Elizabeth, 7/2018 (Google, n.d.)

Elton Park is an exemplar of the Illusive source phenomenon but the process of manipulating the backfill program through "dirt-laundering" often takes place in more mundane ways. *Figures 22-23* show the implausibility of its source status. The "dirt-laundering" occurs in tandem with multi-unit projects in addition to single family homes. In 2017, Blue Star sourced 2950 yd3 of backfill from six residential address on two streets in Troy, MI: Aleppo Drive and Luchu Drive. Blue Star wrecked 11 residential properties with one funded by HHF – 8295 Auburn. However, no such streets exist in Troy, MI. The only mention of either Aleppo or Luchu is in an early planning document prepared by Mondrian Properties, the developer, in a public presentation to a zoning commission in Troy, MI. No search of aerial imagery or active construction projects would have confirmed the location or category of the source. AKT approved these sources despite lacking evidence to verify it was Residential. Today, what was temporarily Luchu and Aleppo are now Stonington Drive and Rockingham Drive in the Pinery Grove subdivision, where Mondrian has constructed "25 home sites with a park like setting (Mondrian, 2019)." Blue Star certainly used material from this part of southeast Michigan, but

the regulator had no way of matching the source to an address: aerial imagery would have illustrated little about the source or its history. On many occasions, DDP contractors have assigned a residential address to adjacent infrastructural or institutional projects.

In other instances, AKT approved material from "residential" sites that upon scrutiny were vacant lots where contractors had dumped material from elsewhere[105]. On 7/12/2016, Adamo Group tore down 4054 Carter and used 40 yd3 of backfill from a site at 2989 W Philadelphia. A week later, Adamo demolished 2989 W Philadelphia. Adamo sourced 224 yd3 from 3770 Manistique in Detroit and another 312 yd3 from an aggregate yard in Highland Park, MI. Adamo billed $1,023.73 in backfill costs to MSHDA. In 6/2018, Able Demolition innovated a variation of this sourcing approach when it tore down 2687 Whitney and used 160 yd3 of material from 14700 Coyle – an address that does not exist in Detroit Assessor records. The DLBA is the landowner for at least 10 approved backfill sources inside Detroit, four of which were addresses for demolitions only after contractors reported sourcing material. Categorizing any of these sources in the manner created and monitored by the DDP does not capture how contractors mobilize uncertainty within Detroit's built environment to perform compliance[106].

In a 2015 interview, Tony Kashat remarked, "We don't need a rigorous testing process. They're required to log the source. We spot check that with aerials." AKT Peerless verifies sources in the residential category by reviewing an image of the area. But by attempting to draw insights from aerials the consultant and the regulators are merely confirming that a residential area exists, not the sequence of practices and events that produced the material or placed that material on-site. The Illusive source category illustrates the lengths to which contractors will go

[105] Many of the volumes originating from these sites were so small – under 200 yd3 – that it is improbable contractors used these sites for stockpiling or staging demolitions.
[106] In the following chapter, I present in detail Stout Street. Contractors have repeatedly recorded the addresses of demolished and planned demolitions as source sites.

to mark the boxes of compliance – 1, 2, and 3 – while relying on the scale of the DDP to push sources through that under ordinary conditions may engender sanction. That dirt was present at the site for any amount of time corroborates its Residential status. For Illusive sources, the official categories serve only to demonstrate that an approval process is in place and not ascertain the origins behind the material. By tracking back through the priorities, interests, transactions, and objectives associated with these sources it becomes clear that a "spot-check" is a poor substitute for apprehending the quality of material and the reasonableness of backfill cost.

Extractive Sources

Demolition contractors have sourced material from 12 regional sites that I categorize as Extractive. Property records, satellite imagery, and site visits confirm these are addresses with active extraction operations. Firms specializing in aggregate materials mine exurban and rural sites for sand, topsoil, and gravel and market the materials for infrastructure and demolitions. Since 2014, contractors have sourced 182,126 yd3 of material to complete 2,240 demolitions. These sites range from an unnamed pit where McCabe Road and La Pointe Drive meet in Brighton, MI to a sprawling commercial mining site located in the "gravel capital of the world." But stripping the ground of resources is just phase one. Oxford, MI, a town of 3,400 residents northeast of Detroit, is home to Koenig Sand & Gravel (Pendle 2016). Koenig's facility is located on a 1200-acre site 1955 E. Lakeville, which is the largest continuous property in Oakland County[107]. On 2/15/2015, AKT approved Koenig as a Category 1 source for DDP demolitions. In official AKT and DBA parlance, Category 1 describes sources that are residential in nature or companies supplying residential landscaping material. Koenig's ordinary customer

[107] The realtor states, "CAN BE REZONED TO RESIDENTIAL, MULTIPLE, COMMERCIAL OR INDUSTRIAL, MASTER PLANNED 1 UNIT PER ACRE, MUST SEE!!!"

base is almost entirely commercial and industrial scale. Between 3/2015 and 8/2017, seven demolition contractors sourced 9,804 yd3 of material from Koenig in 52 transactions (49 total demolitions). In 2016, Koenig listed 1955 E Lakeville with Wilhelm & Realtor, Inc for $16 million. The listing emphasized the ease with which a new owner could rezone the rural property from Mining to Residential and construct a new master-planned subdivision taking advantage of the property's "rolling hills, wooded, 2 deep spring fed extremely clean lakes (Zillow, 2019)."

As of early 2020, 1955 E. Lakeville remains an active listing. The property's next incarnation appears inevitable. The promise of converting mineral planets and quarries into residential properties is on full display just a few hundred feet south. Lake Edge Development began building Oxford Lakes in 1986 and completed the first phase of the 455-home project in 2004 (Hogue, 1999). The subdivision encompasses the eponymous artificial body of water and a series of private parks. The tangle of cul-de-sacs is on property once inhabited by a quarry operation that dug the pit, cleared the trees, and flattened the ground. As one public official said of the development, "It's basic. You get growth where there is vacant land (Hogue 1999)." The scenery is a product of both speculation and extraction, of destruction and construction. The quarry and mineral operations served as the enabling work of residential sprawl as the commodity of aggregate came to be the waste of redevelopment. Concerning Oxford's extractive history, one former quarry laborer observed, "Many people aren't aware they're living on top of a former gravel pit (Carnacchio, 2010)." In this way, the material drawn from the still-active Koenig operation just to the north of Oxford Lakes is not simply one link within the supply chain of demolition-dependent development in Detroit, but a signal of Oxford's own redevelopment.

One source site 30 miles from the Detroit border exemplifies the way these extractive backfilling processes link into other forms of regional change and development, as well as the

conflicts over urban transformation that a narrow focus on removal can conceal. Burrell Investments owns 27120 Haas Road, Wixom, MI. According to Oakland County property records, Holloway Sand & Gravel conveyed the deed to Burrell Investments in 2016 after entering into a land contract in 2013. That site has been the source site for 522 backfill transactions totaling 53,742 yd3. According to DBA backfill records, Adamo completed all these demolitions between 6/2016 and 4/2018. Rodney Burrell incorporated the eponymous Burrell Investments incorporated in 2013. The 522 transactions involving Adamo and 27120 Haas – and therefore Burrell Investments - represent 341 unique residential demolitions within Detroit. Of those, 257 were HHF-funded demolitions which culminated in $315,768.99 in billing for backfill material. These demolitions began on 6/20/2016 with 18508 Braile. Adamo wrecked the building for $10,596.00 and billed $864.60 to MSHDA for backfill. Available records involving 27120 Haas conclude with the demolition of 13011 Flanders on 6/5/2018. The DDP awarded Adamo $14,707.20 for the demolition and the contractor $982.00 billed to MSHDA for backfill.

The DBA Soil Management platform includes three records for material from 27120 Haas Road. One contractor reported using backfill material from this source in 2016, 2017, and 2018. The 2018 record shows AKT approved 49,000 yd3 of material as Category 2 backfill: Virgin (Native) Commercial Borrow and Sand/Gravel Pit Sites. Records for this source from 2016 and 2017 maintain a “Pending” status. The contractor submitted the 2016 record on July 5, 2016 and reported 100,000 yd3 of available material. Despite the “Pending” status, the contractor also reported using 9,400 yd3 of the material. Similarly, the contractor submitted a 2017 record for 91,000 yd3 from this source on 9/5/ 2017. As in the case of 2016, the source shows a “Pending” status despite drawing down 41,742 yd3. In total, the contractor used 51,142 yd3 of Category 2 backfill material from a source site without formal AKT approval. Based on DDP

and AKT guidelines, no “Pending” source should be simultaneously drawn down by demolition contractors. One possible interpretation is AKT simply forgot to fully approve the site in 2016 and 2017, a less generous interpretation is a Pending status is compliance without the content.

Burrell is no stranger to the dangers of noncompliance in Detroit’s aggregate and demolition industries. On 11/29/2010, Rodney Burrell entered a guilty plea to "fraud, money laundering, and obstruction of justice" related to HOPE VI demolition and related earthwork as part of HUD contracts (Click on Detroit, 2010). Eastern District of Michigan records show Bobby Ferguson instructed Burrell to submit rigged bids as part of the Gardenview Estates housing redevelopment project[108]. Ferguson, a confidant and advisor to former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, received a 21-year prison sentence in 2013 for racketeering, extortion, and fraud in relation to public works contracts awarded by Kilpatrick (Schaefer & Baldas, 2013). In a conspiracy purportedly crafted by Ferguson, Burrell submitted false and inflated bids under the name of his company – R&R Heavy Haulers - and received lucrative subcontracts in return for fabricating bids (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). The charges against Burrell could have culminated in three-years in prison and a $250,000 fine. Despite claims by Ferguson’s defense that Burrell was a protagonist in the conspiracy, Judge David Lawson looked to sentence Burrell to six-months in prison and fine him up to $5,000 for his role in the scheme[109]. Alongside 37 other convictions, the district court ultimately sentenced Burrell to 24 months of probation.

[108] According to the Detroit Housing Commission, Gardenview Estates encompasses 607 single family and rental homes. The 66 townhomes for sale were available to buyers with incomes at or below 80% of AMI. Gardenview Estates is on the former site of Herman Gardens. The development’s official website includes testimonials and ratings. One testimonial states, “Sooo much better than what was here before 2010.. It was a Dumping put if Sludge, Tired, Drugs and Prostitutes.. Its still a very dangerous area. But its like years better.”

[109] The 2012 court proceedings illustrate the uncertainty around Burrell. Bobby Ferguson’s lawyer claimed Burrell was the architect of the conspiracy and the district court was out to get Ferguson regardless of the facts. His lawyer claimed Burrell routinely lied to the grand jury in his testimony. Court records show Burrell and an accomplice failed to detail their own financial records. Court records also show Burrell and a colleague used racist language to describe Ferguson.

Burrell's return to the aggregate industry is not itself instructive of the tensions at play in the DDP. Although the optics of his association may undermine the credibility of the DDP (Ferretti 2019c), Burrell has faced his punishment. However, his objectives in returning to the industry illustrate the limits of treating him as one part of a supply chain or reducing Haas to a Category 2 site. On 8/16/2016, Tyler Salamasick of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) conducted an inspection and compliance evaluation of 27120 Haas Road. The purpose of the inspection was to verify the present property use was within the parameters of the state permit. An activity report on the MDEQ website contains a narrative of Salamasick's visit to the site and his interactions with Rodney Burrell. The inspector states that Burrell disclosed he purchased the property "with the intent of crushing and removing the existing concrete." Burrell also shared he was extracting and selling topsoil from the site. State records indicate the site produced 35,000 tons of material in 2015 and 45,000 tons in 2016. However, the site's purpose extends beyond a location for a crushing or extractive operation. During the tour of the Wixom material yard, Burrell revealed to DEQ's Salamasick that he intended to remove debris in order to develop 27120 Haas into a speculative residential subdivision[110]. As of 9/2019, Burrell's extraction efforts have deepened the nearby basin and graded the land around 27120 Haas. The images in *Figure 24-25* show how much progress Burrell has made in his speculative plans.

[110] Aerial photos of the site suggest Burrell has expanded the crushing operation at 27120 Haas. No records with Oakland County or the surrounding municipalities confirm property development plans. A site visit confirmed Burrell Investments has continued extraction and crushing operations. However, the site is adjacent to recreational lakes, four golf courses, and several existing residential subdivisions.

Figure 24: 2710 Haas Road, 2015 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 25: 27120 Haas Road, 2018 (Google, n.d.)

As exemplified by the conversion of the Oxford Lakes area and the seemingly ineluctable conversion awaiting 1955 E Lakeville, the operation at 27120 Haas is positioned to give way to the more lucrative industry of residential development. The 9,804 yd3 of material from Koenig and the 53,742 yd3 of material from Haas have served an essential purpose in filling in holes left behind from demolishing parts of Detroit neighborhoods. That contractors should grade those voids and DDP should open the purse strings for the material is irrefutable in its merits. However, another relationship between prosperity and security slides into view by concentrating on the histories and potential futures of these sources. Their status as extractive industries in the Detroit region is a temporary stage that prepares the land for speculative redevelopment.

By marshalling the DDP, Koenig and Burrell have transformed Detroit into a frontier where the demolition industry commodifies and disposes of the waste of suburbanization. The newly vacant land at 11810 Wilfred in Detroit should be seen as a signal of 1955 E Lakeville's development potential and not solely a measure of Rickman Enterprises' demolition prowess. The same applies to the empty lot now at 13003 Kilbourne and its relationship to the value imagined and produced within 27120 Haas Road as Burrell Enterprises extracted and sold 160 yd3 of backfill to Adamo. It is not simply whether these sources fit an AKT Peerless or DBA backfill category profile but how HHF, MSHDA, and DDP have subsidized and accommodated extractive industries that perpetuate residential environments that draw populations away from Detroit. In the context of the DDP, the operations at these two sources – and other extractive sites – should be reframed from extraction and mining to the production of new environments.

Destructive Sources

Contractors source most material from the *Destructive* category. These are sources within the Detroit region where private companies produce aggregate material for use in road construction or demolitions. I describe these sources as destructive because the companies use an array of crushing equipment to recycle concrete – infrastructure and foundations – or screening equipment to process organic matter – soil and compost. The largest destructive source is Mid-Michigan Crushing & Recycling (MMCR) in Highland Park, MI[111]. Destructive sources account for 3,698 of the backfill transactions between 2015 and 2018. This amounted to 573,219yd3 of material. The second largest Destructive source is at the above-mentioned Jackson, MI site.

Destructive sources are notable because they serve as spatializations of Kevyn Orr's 8/21/2014 order changing Detroit city ordinances regulating backfill material. In Order #33 –

[111] I address this source, its history, and implications for Detroit's decline in the next chapter.

Order Suspending Certain City Demolition Requirements to Address Blight - the Emergency Manager triggered a shift in industrial practices within and outside the city. Citing rising and "unnecessary" demolition costs, Orr mandated "Alternative Fill Procedures" that permitted contractors to crush excavated basements for use as backfill (Orr, 2014). At the time of his order, Adamo Group and Homrich were the only contractors that possessed the equipment and know-how to produce this fill material on a demolition site. However, the order established conditions consistent with launching a backfill production site within striking distance of demolition sites. Jon Grosshans, USEPA staffer, disclosed that Orr's order "wasn't effective" until MMCR moved operations from Fenton, MI and had the capacity to accommodate multiple hauling runs in a day. Although MMCR is without a doubt the destructive behemoth in the region, other material sites emerged to supply demolition contractors with backfill based on Orr's new fill directive.

One of the largest destructive sources is 32 miles southwest of Detroit. Monroe County lists Regulated Resource Recovery (R3) as the owner of 200 Matlin Road in Carleton, MI. Tim Homrich, the President of Homrich, serves as President of R3. R3 began conducting business in 1985 and commenced operations at the Matlin site at the end of 1993. The demolition contractor uses the company and site to produce compost and dispose of hazardous materials culled through their demolition projects. The Matlin site has been involved in 288 demolitions and 357 backfill transactions totaling 46,350yd3 beginning with two HHF demolitions on 8/14/2014: 6551 Minock and 6543 Minock. No disaggregated backfill costs exist for those demolitions. Homrich did not use the source again for an HHF demolition until 5/13/2015. On that day, the contractor demolished four buildings: 16260 Kentucky, 16245 Kentucky, 16500 Ohio, and 16246 Indiana. Homrich used its R3 site for 209 HHF demolitions in 2014-2016 and billed MSHDA $771,250.00 for material the Homrich family of companies already possessed. Other than the

initial two demolitions, the only property with backfill costs under $3,750 is 16117 Coram. On 7/16/2015, Homrich wrecked the house for $6,857.61 and billed only $750 for backfill.

Although the Matlin site became active in March 1992, MDEQ does not have digitized records for any hazardous waste disposal before April 2011. At that time, according to state records, R3 began contracting with Safety-Kleen to ship Tetrachloroethylene – a dry-cleaning solvent and known carcinogen with a liver pathway – to a disposal facility in Dolton, IL that specializes in "solvent recovery." The Dolton Technical Service facility is part of Clean Harbors, the largest hazardous waste disposal company in North America. On 2/12/2013, R3 shipped 750lbs of waste off-site to a Safety-Kleen facility in Toledo, OH. MDEQ was unable to assign a waste code to the material. The EPA National List of Asbestos Landfills from March 1992 lists the address on Matlin as an approved asbestos disposal site (Office of Enforcement 1992). Today, no records suggest Matlin is an active disposal site. However, the official backfill source categories view sites like Matlin as topographic features outside of time – they are waiting for the train of trucks to take material away. By identifying Matlin as a Destructive source where hazards temporarily circulate and compost goes to decay, the issue of what was destroyed and why can complicate the image of a streamlined supply chain between origin and demolition.

In the case of the Ganson site in Jackson and the MMCR site in Highland Park, Orr's shift to alternative fill measures cracked open a new market for their crushed product. Like Yiftachel's (2009) approach to the gray space of citizenship between the light of legality and the dark of criminality, Orr's declaration created gray spaces of demolishing in which expediency eclipsed site history or any potential toxic legacies. Importantly, legality here did not "lighten" regulation but expanded the inscrutability of demolishing to prioritize contractor valuations. Smalley Construction could redevelop the derelict Sparton footprint by shipping obliterated

foundation material to addresses in Detroit. Backfilling holes at 8361 Strathmoor and 9900 Cheyenne is now part of a cleanup campaign to restore property, one located 68 miles west of Detroit on a parcel of land where the owner has eyes on future MDOT dollars. As with the extractive sources in the above, Smalley was able to satisfy its own land-management goals in the process of dealing out 946 yd3 of material for demolitions (five of which received HHF).

In the next chapter I will expand upon the development of MMCR but for the purposes of this section its vital to address how the crushing operation takes advantage of the DDP and HHF. Foremost, it is arguable if MMCR's official categorization as a Residential source is accurate given it operates solely at an industrial-scale to serve resource needs of professional contractors. Contractors unable to crush excavated basements on a demolition site haul the material to MMCR. In this scenario, DDP and HHF have paid to possess the basement – the cost of its removal is a form of acquisition – and are its relocation to MMCR. MMCR crushes the basements and mixes the material with other processed basement material. At the same time a contractor is leaving the foundation with MMCR it is also purchasing fill material for the next or ongoing demolition. DDP and HHF have paid twice for the same material – once to the contractor for excavation and again to MMCR for the fill. The 230 yd3 of fill resting beneath the grass at 4374 Chatsworth is material excavated from another house, hauled to Highland Park, crushed by MMCR, purchased by Able Demolition, and dumped to produce a vacant lot. That the material comes from a different teardown is less important than how the material becomes backfill and the environments of policy, contracting, aggregate, and hauling it moves through.

For the site managed by R3 and Homrich, its status as a Destructive category raises a different set of questions about hazards both historical and financial. While the site has prior associations with carcinogens, no strong evidence suggests that Homrich is maintaining a

wasteland of toxins or contaminating its backfill with asbestos or dry-cleaning solvents. More important than the quality of the fill material is the corporate relationship between the contractor and its supplier. The official DBA backfill records identify 200 Matlin as the source of backfill supplied by Regulated Resource Recovery. It is only by deciphering LLC documents that R3 *the supplier* is seen occupying the same footprint as *the customer*. Under ordinary circumstances these backfill costs would represent the process of acquiring a needed product from another firm, but the relationship between R3 and Homrich illustrates how contractors are commanding the backfill market. Demolition in this case is less about restoring developability in Detroit's land market and more Homrich funneling backfill dollars through a sibling firm to strengthen corporate interests. The crushed concrete is not the only gray part of demolishing in the DDP.

Expansive Sources

Expansive sources are those associated with sites where commercial, industrial, or other private interests are expanding their operations or footprints. I contrast this with Infrastructural sources in a latter section, which are sources of public expansion or improvement. Contractors have used material from Expansive sites to complete 1,204 demolitions. These 25 source sites have yielded 210,031 yd3 of material. These sources are scattered across the region and involve a variety of uses. They range from a new athletic field at Lawrence Technological University – 9,786 yd3 - to a food hall built of shipping containers in Midtown Detroit – 192 yd3.

HHF demolitions with material from Expansive sites began on 1/29/2015 with the removal of 15367 Baylis. ABC Demolition demolished the property for $8,825.00 and billed MSHDA $2,450.00 for backfill. ABC sourced the backfill from 9400 W. Fort, Detroit, MI. That address is also the official address belonging to Woodmere Cemetery. Aerial photos show the material originated from one of two locations in and near the 250 acres of the 9400 W Fort

address. Woodmere produced this material through two processes: 1) the excavation of burial sites; 2) updating the landscaping of the cemetery grounds. ABC Demolition used 44,800yd3 of material from Woodmere in 166 demolitions in 2015 and 2016. Two other cemeteries – Mt Elliott and Grand Lawn – have served as sources. In total, these three sites have contributed 59,680 yd3 of material for 181 demolitions. That gravedigging is a major supplier to the DDP would no doubt exercise the eyebrows of observers who view the program as the city's last rites.

The largest expansive source site is listed as 1322 Lycaste Street, Detroit, MI. The DBA platform reports this source as *FCA Jefferson North Assembly Plant Storm Water Project*. FCA is one of the world's largest automobile manufacturers with corporate headquarters in Auburn Hills, MI. FCA excavated a southwest section of property to divert runoff from the sewer system. Five demolition contractors[112] sourced 49,412 yd3 of material from the site to complete 196 demolitions, 104 supported by HHF. Despite its frequency, 1322 Lycaste was never the accurate source address. The retention pond is at 11601 Jefferson, which is owned by FCA. The Department of Homeland Security owns 1322 and stationed a Border Patrol headquarters at the site. Regardless of the side of the street, both addresses are formally zoned *Intensive Industrial*.

In a 2015 interview, Jon Grosshans implied demolition contractors jumped at the chance to use the excavated material from the FCA project because it meant they were "not beholden to a quarry." He suggested its availability reduced costs for contractors because John Prymack of the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority (GDRRA) had helped broker a deal between FCA and the DDP. The state's demolition data lead to a different conclusion. Based on a pricing model provided by MCM - one of the region's big three of demolition - the backfill costs for these 104 HHF demolitions should have been dramatically lower. Instead, contractors priced out

[112] Homrich, Adamo, Farrow Group, Able Demolition, Rickman Enterprise

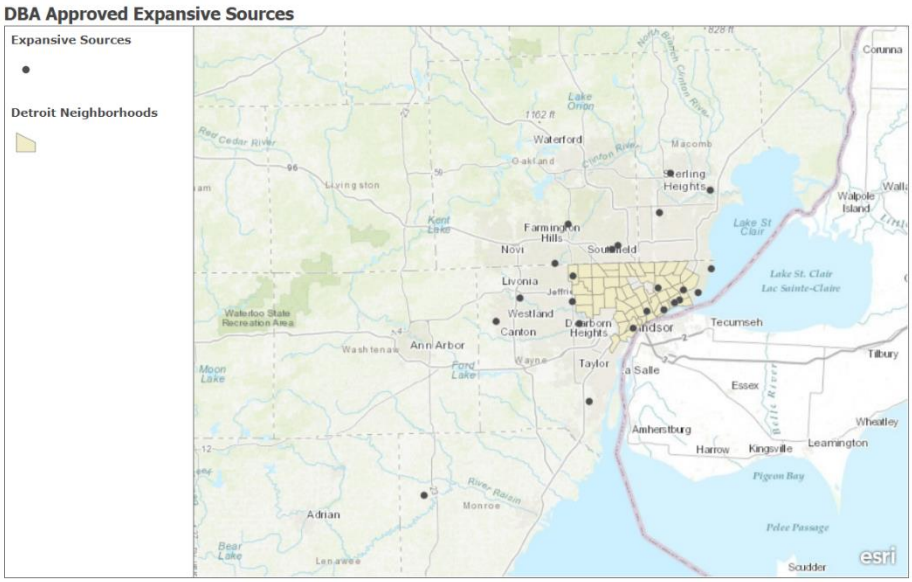
demolitions and billed MSHDA as if they had purchased material from a distant mineral plant or aggregate yard. Table 8 shows how contractors generated income by using material removed from the site. Homrich completed the first HHF demolition using the FCA source on 6/8/2015 and charged $3,750 for backfill. In 7/2015, Farrow Group tore down 5130 Casper and billed MSHDA $1,500 for 120 yd3. On 8/5/2015, Adamo knocked down 4232 Chene and billed MSHDA $23,198 with $2,408.78 going towards 192 yd3 of backfill. A month later, the same contractor wrecked 2403 Hudson and billed MSHDA $41,038.00 with almost $4,200 for 96 yd3 of backfill. Between 6/2015 and 1/2016, four contractors billed MSHDA $203,272.04 for backfill material at an average of $1,973.51 per demolition. Homrich reported backill costs of $3,750 for each of its 21 demolitions regardless of season, distance hauled, or size of structure.

Contractor	**Dirt Cost ($)**
Adamo Group, Inc.	15,022.04
Farrow Group	43,500
Homrich	78,750
Rickman Enterprise Group	66,000
Grand Total	**203,272.04**

Table 8: Contractor billings for FCA backfill material from upgrade of parking lot at Detroit facility, 2016

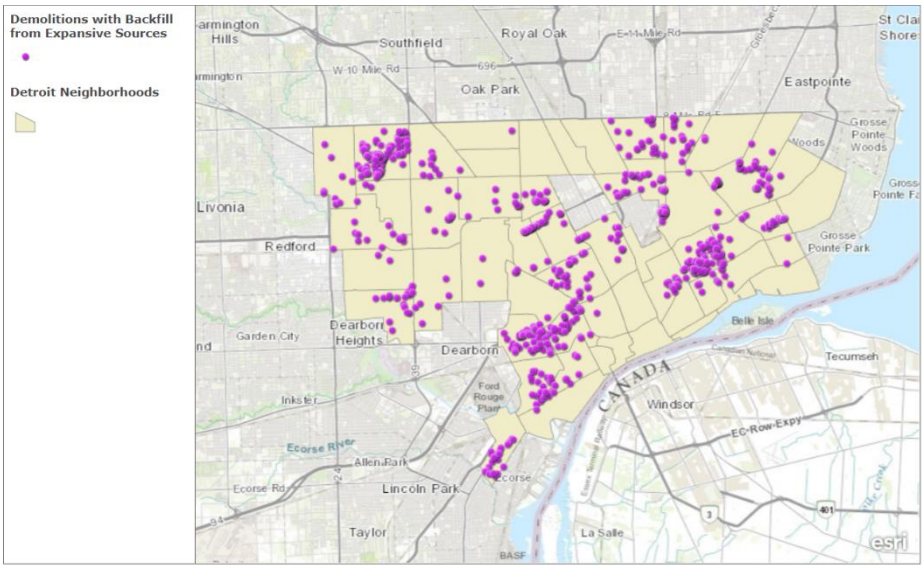
This fits with internal discussion at MSHDA at the time that encouraged contractors to submit their "self-determined estimate" as the official dirt cost for HHF. The Expansive sources show that not only did contractors already possess accessible backfill material, but they also could set the prices for that material. If backfill from FCA was free or discounted, then backfill costs should mostly reflect hauling and delivery costs (approximately $5/yd3 for transportation and $3/yd3 for placement). As an example, Homrich demolished 11664 St Louis on 12/16/2015 for $12,800.00 with $3,750 towards backfill. Using the prior cost breakdown, the transportation

costs (to travel seven miles) should have been $1,250 and placement $750. This estimate would suggest Homrich paid at most $1,750 for 250 yd3 of backfill from a supposed brokered discount. More likely, Homrich reported a cost to MSHDA that fit with the contractor's favored margins. Homrich was not alone in this approach. Many contractors billed MSHDA as if they had entered the secondary market for the material, a cloudy regional market in which they were forced to negotiate and haggle. As one contractor disclosed, "Demo contractors assume to pay for backfill and reap the benefit when it comes for free, a gamble of sorts." However, the FCA source illustrates how in a best-case scenario contractors served as manufacturer, merchant, and market.



Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, USGS, NGA, EPA, NPS

Figure 26: Map of approved Expansive backfill sources in Detroit region, 2014-2018



SEMCOG, Esri Canada, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, NGA, EPA, USDA, NPS

Figure 27: Map of DDP demolitions using Expansive sources, 2014-2018

Figures 26-27 show the scale and reach of these sources across the Detroit region. Homrich has been a consistent player in the Expansive source approach. For almost two years, it used backfill material for 255 (228 HHF) demolitions from a site at 20448 Sibley Road,

Brownstown, MI. Homrich sourced this material between 7/28/2014 and 2/17/2016, spending $856,263.60 in HHF according to MSHDA records. 20448 Sibley does not have a property record reported with Brownstown Township but is encompassed by the nearby property at 20450 Sibley. Brownstown lists Christie Land, LLC as the current owner of the property 22 miles south of Detroit. Scott Christie is the owner of Christie Land, LLC and serves as the President/Partner of CMAC Transportation, a company that also owns adjacent property. CMAC Transportation is part of a larger family of companies that includes Motown Fleet Repair, Superior Global Logistics, MSH Logistics, and MSH Holdings. All of these reflect CMAC's specialty in freight.

The backfill material used by Homrich for these demolitions was waste from part of CMAC's construction of a new 300,000 square-foot warehouse. Aerial imagery in *Figures 28-30* indicate the dramatic shift at the site. CMAC moved into the facility in 7/2018. The logistics center reinforces CMAC's corporate claim they are "24/7 logistics powerhouse" by housing 250 trucks and 450 trailers that ship 5 million tons of freight per day. The Sibley site was the home of *Par-Fection Golf Center* from 1994 up until 2010 when Comerica Bank foreclosed on the owners. Two years later Comerica sold the property to MSH Holdings for $525,000. Christie Land, LLC then purchased 20450 from MSH Holdings, LLC on 10/10/2014 for $1.00 in a Quit Claim action as part of a Distressed Sale. Prior to completion of CMAC's new warehouse, Brownstown Township assessed 20450 at $1,266,295. Today, 20450 is assessed at $5,768,700. In three years, Christie Land, LLC has experienced a $4,513,700 gain in the value of its property. While 20450 has seen staggering appreciation, 15293 Coram – where Homrich removed charred debris on 9/15/2015 and billed MSHDA $3,750 for backfill and $14,100 for demolition – remains in DLBA's inventory after an aborted sidelot sale in 7/2017.

Figure 28: 20448 Sibley, 4/2015 (Google, n.d.)

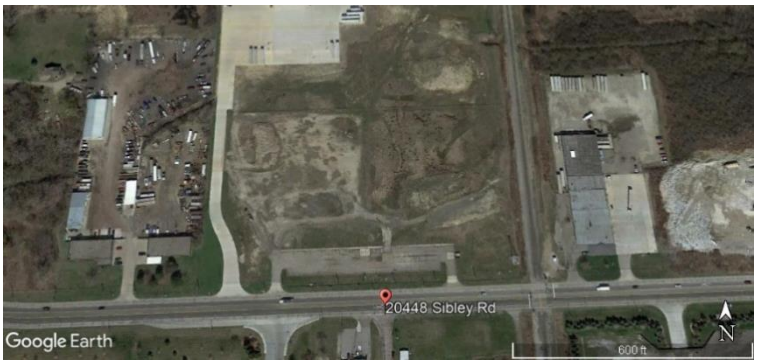


Figure 29: 20448 Sibley, 4/2016 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 30: 20448 Sibley, 2018 (Google, n.d.)

Expansive sources are not only signals contractors bilked MSHDA and DDP into paying exorbitant backfill costs, although they certainly have set prices in ways that manipulate the backfill guidance. Instead, the dynamics of these Expansive sources suggest how the DDP and the achievement of demolishing Detroit relied on urban-environmental transformation inside and outside the city that in no way privileged the objective of stabilizing or regenerating Detroit's neighborhoods. The list of Expansive sources is a showcase of affluence underlying the region's uneven development. Sources include the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, a sports dome, a new

parking lot for a car dealership in Redford, MI, and the Detroit Zoo – which sent 400 yd3 to three demolitions in 2016. A 2015 parking lot upgrade at the Cabela's superstore in Dundee, MI contributed another 19,972 yd3. The backfill supply chain involving all these addresses are not characterized by any principles of unlocking value or development potential within Detroit, but rather growing and preserving the private sector's relationship to value. For FCA, it was an act of environmental control. For CMAC at Sibley, it was an act of financial control. For others, the DDP was the supply chain moving unwanted matter out of the way. In the majority of instance, DDP and the backfill program reinforced where and how development happened in the region.

Speculative Sources

I identified 124 *Speculative* sources of backfill material used between 7/2014 and 6/2018. The status of these sources is significant because their approval illustrates the competing and conflicting priorities at the center of DDP and the allocation of HHF dollars. DBA records show that contractors sourced 145,640 yd3 of material from these sources to complete 782 demolitions over that period. Demolition contractors acquired material removed for residential basements as part of what Grosshans of the USEPA described as "the relationship approach" to sourcing material. Of that total, the city allocated HHF to 633 demolitions. The total cost of DDP demolitions with speculative sources of backfill was $10,111,059.89, at an average of $15,973.24. Cost records for demolitions without HHF support are inconsistent but MSHDA reports dirt pricing for all but two of those HHF-demolitions. The sum dirt cost is $1,055,630.25 and the average dirt cost is $1,672.95. However, the backfill costs are only part of the story involving demolition and speculative sources. After connecting the material excavation at each

source to a future property transaction, I calculated at least $66,413,937.00 in real estate sales (as of 3/2019) that directly benefit municipalities and property markets outside of Detroit[113].

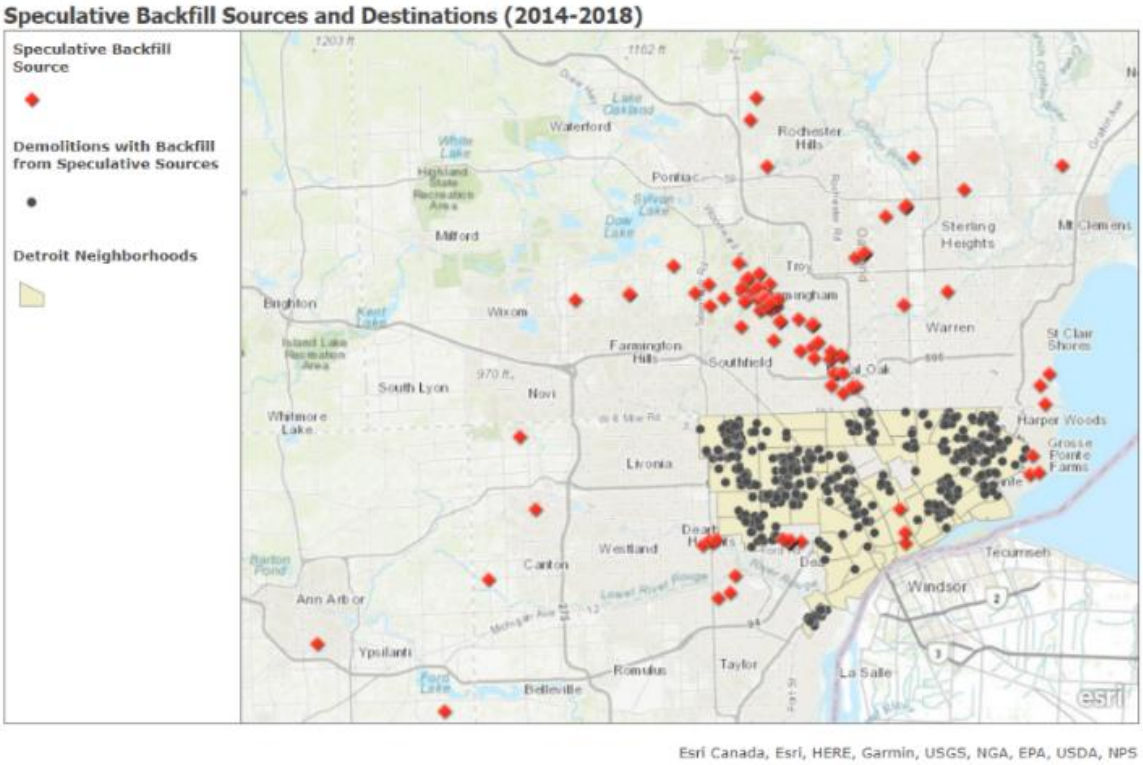


Figure 31: Map of approved Speculative backfill sources and demolitions in Detroit completed with material, 2014-2018

Figure 31 shows the reach of these sources and suggests a difference in interests served by demolishing. Importantly, the presence of a speculative source does not automatically mean demolition contractors, excavators, or haulers made a direct payment to a builder or developer for basement digs (or that the payment was HHF backed). However, as part of MSHDA policy on HHF, the DDP and its network of contractors do not follow uniform standards for costing out material or its trucking. As mentioned in prior chapters, state and local officials accommodated imprecision and inaccuracy in costs to accelerate demolition. Neither of those parties nor the

[113] This is a conservative figure because many of the speculative sources are within larger tract-housing or subdivision developments. I based this estimate on the specific residential address provided by demolition contractors. However, given the likelihood of stockpiling or dirt-washing, it is plausible that backfill transactions are linked to more real estate sales not captured by the city's backfill records. It also stands to reason that several of these properties will come online after 2018.

DDP's leaders and officials possess records that distinguish between trucking and material costs. Multiple interviewees confirmed MSHDA and DDP accommodated contractors setting costs based on "reasonable" estimates. Federal, state, and local officials have avowed trucking costs constitute the bulk of backfill costs, however, the individual transactions suggest feeble standards for these costs. A 9/2018 FOIA request[114] submitted to the DBA asked for "Documents separating costs between purchasing demolition backfill material and hauling the demolition backfill material." The Allen Law Group replied, "Your request has been denied because, after a diligent search for the requested records, we have determined and certify that the records do not exist." DBA attorney issued that response 4 months after MSHDA circulated its manual requiring, "Blight partner must provide a copy of the actual dirt invoice and transportation invoices for moving of the dirt (MSHDA, 2018)." When granted the opportunity to share documentation, the DDP and DBA were not able to produce cost breakdowns justifying billings.

Despite a lack of DDP or state records differing material from hauling, there is evidence demolition contractors purchase material from these speculative developments. By entering a competitive backfill marketplace, basement digs from speculative developments go from the waste of sprawl to a resource for destruction. The question of whether contractors are paying a significant amount directly to homebuilders becomes irrelevant because hauling the material from a development site serves as an in-kind subsidy as it allows for disposal. In these supply chains, the act of loading, hauling, and dumping becomes as financially significant as purchasing. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) allows contractors to dump dirt on private property contingent on the property owner's permission, otherwise dumping

[114] This is the same bundle of FOIA requests I made that included statements certifying backfill sources, the job duties of AKT Peerless, and my own name (Michael Koscielniak; RJ Koscielniak). I have included a copy of DBA's responses to my requests in the appendix.

fees apply that can paralyze large construction project. One demolition contractor operating out of Warren, MI described how his company also provides excavation services for new home construction. Although a suburban developer contracts with his company to remove and transport material, he disclosed that upon possessing that material as backfill he fabricates a dirt cost to report to DDP and MSHDA. As he explained, "Dirt is a commodity with a price."

The first demolition to receive material from a speculative source was 1890 Electric. MSHDA shows a $1,500 dirt cost for a demolition completed by Rickman Enterprises on 6/3/2015. Rickman reported sourcing 200 cubic yards of material from 15 residential addresses in the Auburn Grove condominium development in Auburn Hills, MI located 32 miles northwest

Figure 32: A standard condo unit on Grove Lane in Auburn Hills, MI (Ferlito Group, 2018)

of Detroit[115]. Over the summer of 2015, Rickman drew on the Grove Lane project to source an additional 13,780 yd3 of material for 60 HHF demolitions with a total dirt cost of $88,500. Ferlito Group, a developer based in downtown Detroit, completed and sold out the Auburn Grove project in 2016 (Ferlito Group, 2019)[116]. *Figure 32* shows the style of property built at the development. *Figure 33-34* show the change in the landscape. The speculative development

[115] 3432-3500 Grove Lane

[116] Ferlito Group took over as the developer at the Auburn Grove site. A quote from Steven Cohen, the Director of Community Development in Auburn Hills, on the developer's website characterizes Ferlito as the successor to a prior homebuilder.

included 130 condos between $225,000 and $300,000. Ferlito also recently completed The Reserves of Auburn Hills, a nearby development of 1.5 story condominiums for senior residents.

Figure 33: Auburn Grove Subdivision, 2015 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 34: Auburn Grove Subdivision, 2017 (Google, n.d.)

The EPA is aware of the contradiction materialized in relying on speculative suburban development to create reserves of backfill material for Detroit demolitions. In a 2016 interview, Brooks Furio, a staffer at the EPA specializing in demolition backfill in the Midwest, admitted to this tension in Detroit's program. Although he characterized new suburban construction as one of the "local, municipal, and state land policies that are killing us," he justified the backfill source contradiction as one of many straining Detroit. In his view, Detroit "blew up Michigan's supply chain for construction materials" and stressed that no American city in history had made a similar attempt to eliminate blight at this scale. While the Cuyahoga County Land Bank Authority operates its own backfill production that manufactures an approved fill material (Stansberry, 2015), the DDP trusts contractors in Detroit to develop more personal or customized logistical operations for sourcing material. Furio explained of DDP contractors, "They work out

a deal to move the dirt. They have friends with backhoes and pickup trucks. If they're a big enough company, they are paid to excavate and move that material to another project."

Speculative sources take a variety of forms. Developers and haulers work out deals with demolition contractors in which the waste of this residential construction is not simply reused or salvaged but commodified within a regional market and supply chain of wrecking. Builders hire a basement excavator that either leaves the material behind for the builder to sell or attempts to enter the backfill market themselves. In late summer and early fall 2017, Blue Star sourced 1,850 yd3 of backfill for seven non-HHF demolitions from the construction of the Estates of Willowbrook. Mondrian Properties, the housing developer based in Troy, MI, describes the Estates of Willowbrook as the "new standard in premium-quality new construction, services and amenities – all set in the heart of Troy, where you can share in the comfort and peace-of-mind associated with living in the Troy School District including Barnard Elementary, Baker Middle and Athens High School (Mondrian, 2019)." The development is located on a footprint that up until 4/2016 had five single-family homes. Each of the 59 homes located within the Estates of Willowbrook will feature GE appliances, Kohler faucets, and Jeldwin windows. Three-car garages will flank open concept colonial plans with guest suites and prep kitchens. DDP could only produce cost records for four of seven demolitions. Blue Star sourced the 750 yd3 for these demolitions from Willowbrook and billed MSHDA $5,500. The material originated from 2018 Osprey as part of the basement excavation for Mondrian's model home marketing the project.

Tracing backfill also illuminates how builders and developers create fixes for value outside Detroit. In tony Detroit suburbs of Birmingham and Royal Oak, homebuilders were buying older and modest homes and replacing these structures with custom houses. Contractors sourced 35,251 yd3 of material from 26 speculative builds in Birmingham. Great Lake Custom

Builder constructed 118 Waterfall in 2015. The builder purchased the vacant lot at 118 for $710,000 in 2013. The 5,214 square foot home is on the market for $4,995,000. In 3/2019, *The Detroit News* featured the home in its MI Dream Home coverage. The realtor declared, “Rarely in my career have I been in a home that captures so much of an aesthetic and quality (Ramirez 2019)." With its view of a cataract and 8 bathrooms, 118 Waterfall was part of a bundle of five speculative builds that Rickman Enterprises used to complete 35 demolitions during 2015.

In Royal Oak, MI, seventeen speculative properties have supplied contractors with enough material to fill and grade 106 demolitions. In 2016, KRH Inc, a builder based in Royal Oak, purchased a modest bungalow at 727 Hawthorn for $121,000. Within five months of purchase Royal Oak approved a demolition for KRH at the address. By the beginning of June, KRH began construction on the 3,100 square foot dwelling. Over the summer of 2016, Adamo and DMC Consultants combined to complete 11 demolitions with 1,186 yd3 of material excavated for the new basement at 727. KRH struggled to sell the home for two years until 5/2019, when a buyer satisfied the builder’s speculative ambitions for $599,000. In total, the contractors billed MSHDA $20,069.14 for backfill. The imbalance between production and destruction – a process in which HHF has become a subsidy in recycling suburban land – is never sharper than in comparing backfill origins to their *destinations*. For the demolition of 2333 Ford on 6/9/2015, DMC billed $3,000 for 300 yd3 of fill and $14,262.50 for the demolition. Today, 2333 Ford remains in DLBA inventory and a $6,522 HHF lien weighs on the property[117].

For the DDP and MSHDA, demolishing vacant or abandoned properties in Detroit are part of an effort to stabilize neighborhoods and prepare the city’s property market for new investment. In a 2016 presentation to MDEQ, Farkas included a slide declaring, “The reason

[117] I address the purpose and consequences of these HHF liens in Chapter 5.

we're tearing down is to rebuild (Farkas. 2016)." The presence of hundreds of speculative sources troubles the strength of causal chain that could link wreckage to regeneration. As Weber et al (2006, 21) observed, "Demolition is one kind of 'spatial fix' that prepares land for conversion to higher and better uses." The link between clearance and investment is intuitive if the derelict structure is viewed as the main impairment to unlocking a property's development potential. The abandoned structure physically and financially stands in the way. Land is cheap and plentiful by virtue of capital's flight from Detroit neighborhoods to the suburbs. Over time, development costs in the latter rise and an aging built environment encourages investors to seek bargains elsewhere. Seeing potential returns on cheap land, builders, and speculators support demolition (Smith, 1996). The city is a frontier of investment when the periphery is exhausted.

However, by drawing lessons from the backfill program, the demolitions tasked with enabling Detroit's redevelopment worked towards contradictory purposes. Speculative conversions of modest homes and vacant lots are examples of the remaining frontiers contained within affluent suburban environments. As my research suggests, the backfill supply chain - and therefore the DDP itself - is embedded within a suburban land market in which builders and developers have unlocked nearly $70 million in home sales since 2014. Detroit's decline depends on a suburban hinterland of backfill, but the continued recycling of properties in the same suburbs relies on Detroit as a hinterland of sinks and disposal, with HHF as a source of subsidy. In most American cities, demolitions are the initial engineering interventions that reopen land or a property market to reinvestment. Capital flows back to the undervalued core. However, these hundreds of sources illustrate how demolishing Detroit can mean disposing speculation's waste.

The speculative component of the backfilling Detroit entangles developers, builders, and destroyers of the regional built environment. Categorizing this material as Residential fails to

capture the conflicts and tensions shaping the backfill supply. Instead of DDP and HHF paying Able Demolition to stabilize and unlock development at 15762 Freeland - $11,817.00 for demo and $1,600 for 120 yd3 of fill in 10/2017 – the rewards are more apparent at the backfill source: 3973 Lisa Marie Dr, Sterling Heights, MI. Lisa Marie Gardens is a speculative project developed by Ryan 19 Properties. The development company is owned by Fazal Khan – a civil engineer based in Troy, MI – and represented by Douglas Wozniak, a Sterling Heights-based real estate attorney and broker. New-builds in Lisa Marie Gardens contributed 2,190 yd3 of material for 18 demolitions in Detroit. 3937 Lisa Marie Drive, a 2,800 square foot home, is currently listed for $468,000. On 7/12/2019, U.S. District Court Judge Robert H. Cleland found Khan guilty of four counts of bribery related to engineering projects in Macomb County. He will be sentenced in November. In 1/2019, Wozniak began his first term as the State Representative for Shelby Township. A hardline conservative and Republican, Wozniak garnered attention when he challenged Governor Whitmer's plan to increase taxes to fund roads. Without a dose of irony for the projects straining state infrastructure, Wozniak rebuked the assumption suburban constituents were responsible for infrastructure improvements, "Macomb County taxpayers' wallets are not bottomless pits the government can keep reaching in to (Michigan House Republicans, 2019)."

Infrastructural Sources

In addition to private Expansive sources, contractors also source backfill material from infrastructure projects across southeast Michigan. The presence of *Infrastructural* sources raises critical questions about the material quality and monitoring processes that initially established the regional conditions for increased backfill costs. In the early phases of the DDP, regional demolition contractors planned to source backfill from two largescale construction projects located within and adjacent to Detroit – the I-96 surface rebuild and the Little Caesar's Arena

(LCA) development – but elevated chloride and lead content disqualified the millions of cubic yards (Gallagher, 2014a). Kat Stafford, the government watchdog reporter at the *Detroit Free Press*, summarized the incident, "City officials said due to testing performed by environmental consultants, dirt from the I-96 road construction project and the Little Caesars Arena site has been deemed 'not suitable for residential use' and has been prohibited from being used (2019)."

The scarcity of free and clean material transformed backfill material into a commodity and established the conditions for a new secondary market within the regional demolition economy. As a result, contractors turned to their own regional networks of builders, excavators, and suppliers to meet the massive backfill need. By relying on a more sprawling set of backfill supply chain relationships, material and hauling costs surged during the initial rollout of the demolition program in spring 2014 (Helms & Guillen, 2015). The disqualification of material produced by these largescale infrastructure projects set up the regional and political-economic climate in which the scales of authority over the program tilted towards contractors. *Figure 35* shows the infrastructure source contractors did use for backfill. The speed and scale of the DDP

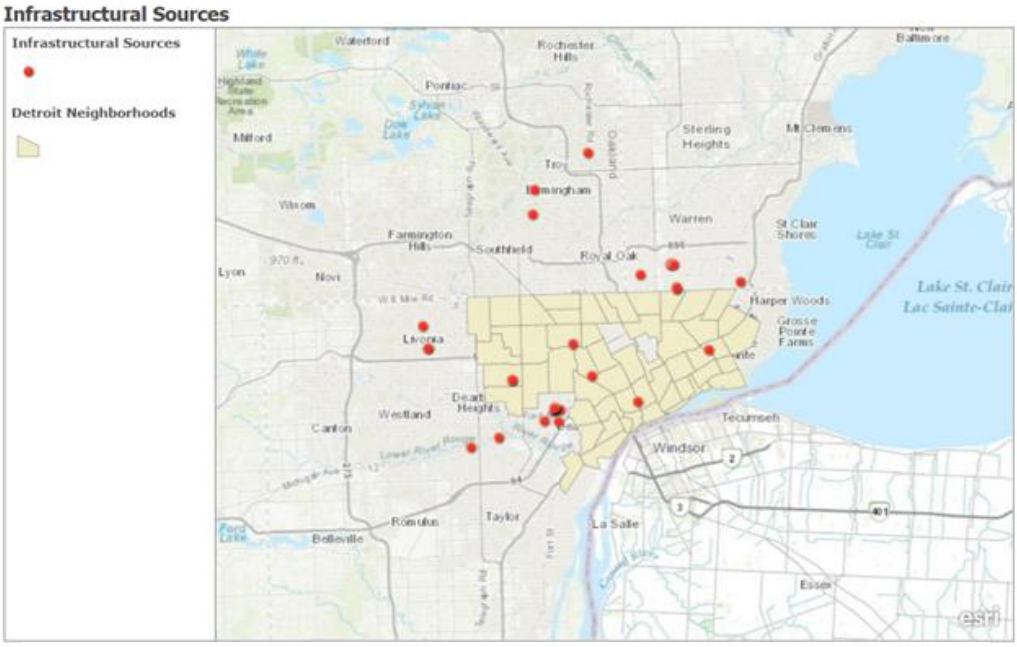


Figure 35: Map of approved Infrastructural backfill sources in the Detroit region, 2014-2018

depended on the circulation of backfill and contractors filled the gap by identifying and taking advantage of sources already within or available to their routine supply chains. When testing disqualified the anticipated I-96 and LCA stockpiles, contractors suddenly had reason to assetize dirt as a precious resource and bill the DDP and MSHDA accordingly[118]. In effect, the contaminated spoils of those early infrastructural improvements in Detroit became the precondition to accessing the rentiership riches of HHF funding. The potential toxic dangers of these infrastructural sources justified an accommodating DDP approach to backfill costs.

Even with the ineligibility of LCA and I-96 spoils, Infrastructural sources are not by rule inconsistent with DDP's approach to regulating material in the interest of public health. Despite official concern about chloride and lead contamination present in backfill material, the DDP has approved numerous sources sharing a profile with LCA and I-96. Since 2014, the DDP reports 329 HHF-supported demolitions[119] included material from street, sewer, park, library, sidewalk, and bridge construction. As it happens, orange-barrel season is also the season of opportunity for regional wreckers. Contractors billed MSHDA $669,699.33 for 108,116 yd3 of material from 34 infrastructure sites scattered throughout the region. The largest single source within this category was a sewer upgrading project on Ternes Street in Dearborn, MI. DMC Consultants used 63,500 yd3 of material from a residential water main replacement completed in 8/2017. Aerial imagery shows the project included removing road surface and sidewalk material in summer 2017. An article appearing on the *Patch* page for Dearborn suggests the Ternes project started in 2/2017 and concluded in August (Thomas, 2017). However, DMC first listed Ternes as a backfill source

[118] Although MSHDA sanctioned many of these backfill transactions by requiring refunds, the overall success of the DDP remains subject to contractors identifying and sourcing material with inconsistent supplies. MSHDA has not imposed refunds on any HHF demolitions since 2014 even as subsequent backfill costs remained comparable to the early refund period.
[119] Total demolitions drawing on infrastructure source is 521.

for a 5/2016 demolition: 4240 Neff. In total, DMC reported to the DDP using this backfill material for 161 demolitions prior to the City of Dearborn officially beginning the sewer project.

On 6/9/2017, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) closed a section of the John C. Lodge Freeway that slithers northwest from downtown Detroit (Ramirez, 2017). MDOT scheduled this closure to demolish the Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard Bridge near the MotorCity Casino and Corktown neighborhood. The $15 million bridge replacement promised to accommodate increased traffic along the nearby southbound M-10 exit in anticipation of the opening of LCA (Michigan.gov, 2019). Walled Lake-based CA Hull was responsible for bridge construction and partnered with four contractors to complete the bridge. Hull's online newsletter (CA Hull, 2017) states, "Building a project of this size within the footprint of Motor City Casino, Little Caesars Arena, and several Detroit Public Schools was not easy." Able Demolition first reported using 540 yd3 of material from the bridge project on 9/28/2017 for four demolitions on Glenfield, Wykes, and Parkway. DDP could not produce the backfill cost records. Able Demolition used an additional 1,460 yd3 of material for eleven demolitions in the Hubbell-Lyndon neighborhood to close out 2017. The contractor billed MSHDA $16,800 for backfill.

The M-10 source is one of the few categorized as an Industrial (3) source. The DDP backfill guidance does provide instructions for contractors drawing on this infrequent source category. Contractors are required to submit three soil samples for laboratory analysis (DBA 2014). The DDP expects a contractor to retain its own "environmental professional" to conduct these tests and submit nine other deliverables[120]. The DDP also accommodates alternatives to monitoring but workplans must receive AKT approval. DDP expects contractors to follow EPA methods and test for volatile organic compounds, semi-volatile organic compounds,

[120] These range from Google Earth imagery to descriptions of the firm's soil sampling methodology.

polychlorinated biphenyls, Michigan metals[121], chloride, and herbicides and pesticides. The final provisions are contingent on the location of the source. The latter is conditional on agricultural or commercial landscape property. The former is required if the source is "located beneath parking lots *only*" (emphasis added). This means the parameters of the soil testing of MLK material were not extended to include analysis of chloride, the active ingredient in snow and ice control for roads. In MDOT's "Current deicing practices and alternative deicing materials," the agency warned, "In humans, chloride causes skin bums, severe tearing, and respiratory irritation; handlers should wear respirators, rubber gloves, and protective clothing (1993, 17)." That DDP and AKT were not requiring chloride tests under most circumstances raises questions about the process that disqualified major infrastructural sources in 2014. *Figure 36* shows demolitions where contractors used material from these sources. Kashat had been unequivocal on how proof

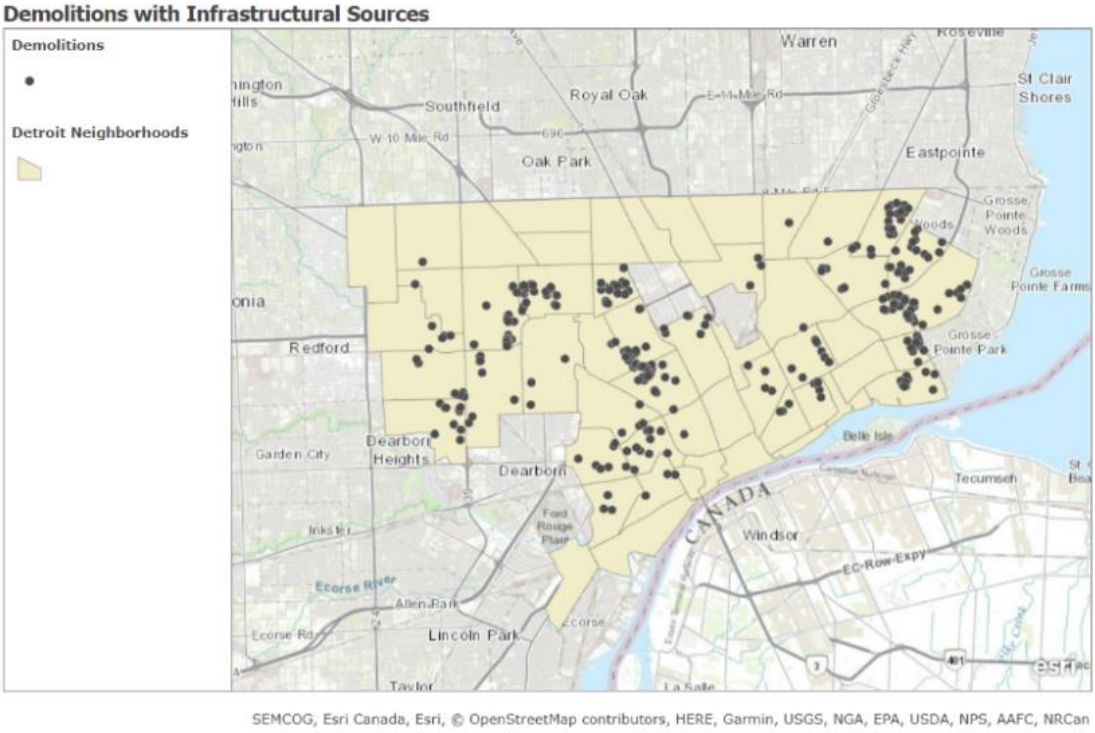


Figure 36: DDP demolitions in Detroit using Infrastructural backfill sources, 2014-2018

[121] Arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, mercury, selenium, silver, and zinc.

of chloride at those sites reshaped the backfilling economy, “Lots of road salt and heavy metals. It’d be great if we could use it. It’s been a tough one. We’ve seen the same data submitted to us three or four times. It’s got to be current. We’re not trying to stand in the way.”

Regardless of the potential for chloride to be present in the dirt from MLK, AKT Peerless would need to provide a *Certificate of Approval to the Contractor* in order to use material from CA Hull’s bridge rebuild. The DDP’s backfill guidance instructs, “These certificates must accompany all trucks transporting the approved material (4, 2014).” In correspondence with Wendy Sitek of Able Demolition, I requested information about the backfill certifications provided and required by AKT. Sitek replied, “I'm sorry to say I have never received a backfill certification. As long as we use one of AKT's certified approved sources they don't issue one.” Outside of Sitek misinterpreting the request, the lack of a certification could suggest AKT and Able were not thorough in regulating the 2,000 yd3 of Industrial material that the contractor used as backfill. Based on the irregularities in the dates included in DMC’s parallel use of material from the Ternes sewer project, the circulation of backfill from Infrastructural sources shows the limits and challenges of regulating the backfilling process through chemical histories.

The regulatory protocols applied to the Infrastructural sources are as much a part of backfill’s constitution as the organic matter filling up haulers. In *The Social Production of Soil,* Swidler (2009) argues for “a history of the geological body that proposes that social dynamics and struggles over power are important determinants and producers of particular soils. For social history, soil is invisible and therefore unmentioned (3).” Although Swidler is correct that soil is an artifact of conflict and inequality, that approach threatens to sideline how soil and its health are mystified or black-boxed as technical artifacts to serve social or political ends. Like the bottlenecks, inefficiencies, and scarcity that served the interests of demolition contractors and

their associates, the seeming apolitical nature of soil is not remedied by invoking its politics. Rather, it is by tracking the ways soil – or backfill – took on the appearance of a neutral input for demolition. How is soil transformed into an object of engineering? Infrastructural sources in the DDP signal not merely a social history but the work to erase it. One approach is to avoid any evaluation indicating a common contaminant. Another is to categorize soil in ways that makes its hazard and history invisible – the waste of a more important intervention. Still another is to construct a history in which the material appeared from nothing; a resource found in the wild.

New Construction Sources

In addition to backfill sources associated with speculative residential developments; contractors sourced material for 459 HHF-supported demolitions from *New Construction* (NC) sources across the Detroit area. These 125 sources fitting within this category contributed 140,247 yd3 of approved material to DDP demolitions. *Figure 37* shows these New Construction

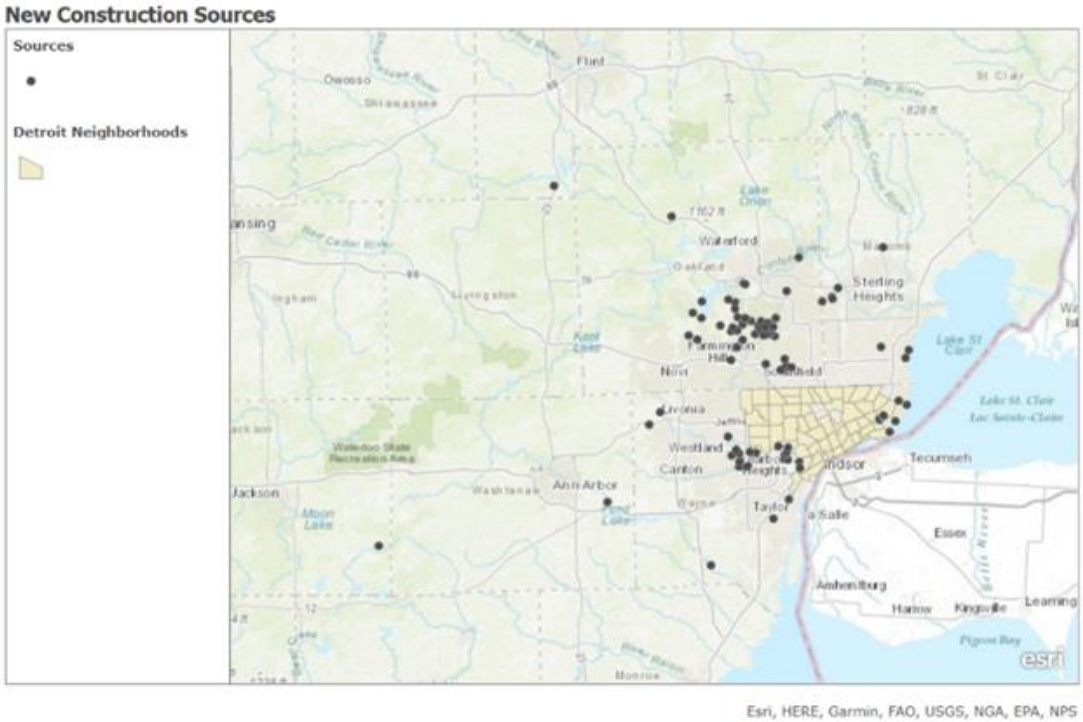


Figure 37: Map of approved New Construction backfill sources in the Detroit region, 2014-2018

sources. I chose to categorize these sources as NC because available property records and real estate transactions show these sites were: 1) a new-build or rehab completed by or on behalf of an owner-occupant; or, 2) clouded by inconsistent or unreliable records about who owned the property and whether it was sold after the backfill transaction. For the most part, sources within the NC category are those that do not fit tidily within the *Speculative* source profile.

Contractors billed MSHDA $779,882.43 for material from these sources. *Figure 38* shows where this material ended up in Detroit. The implications of these sources mirror those of speculative and expansive sources. In most instances, these sources represent the triumph of suburban and regional value over that of Detroit and the efforts by DDP to unlock development potential within the city and its neighborhoods. That they are not Speculative only confirms that HHF was not subsidizing the forms of residential sprawl that undermine the welfare of urban cores. However, HHF did provide a kind of subsidy as part of an arrangement with 24 unique

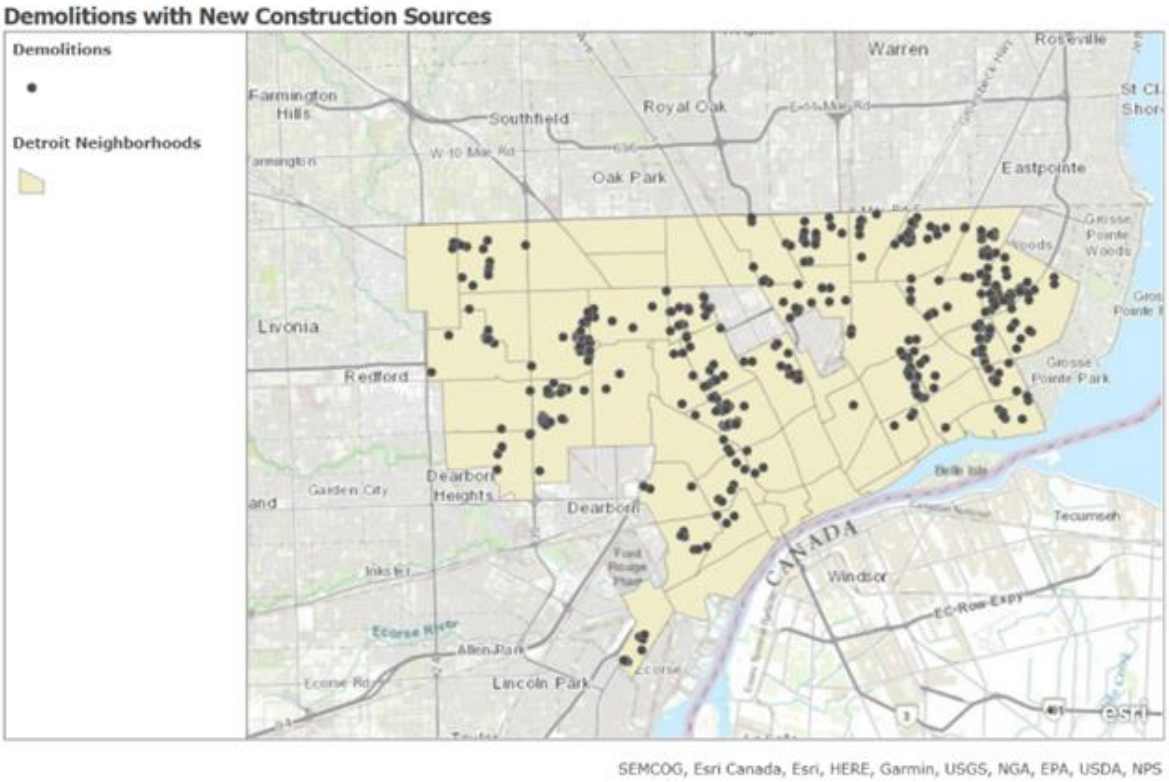


Figure 38: DDP demolitions in Detroit with New Construction backfill sources, 2014-2018

sources within the Mack-Ashland II development in Detroit's Morningside neighborhood. Mack-Ashland II is a 28-unit affordable housing project developed by Southwest Housing Solutions and supported by $700,000 in Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). Rickman Enterprises, Adamo, and Homrich combined to source 41,347 yd3 from the project for 232 demolition backfill transactions by the end of 2017. HHF demolitions completed with material from the Mack-Ashland II development illustrate a geologic stacking of subsidies: LIHTC paid to produce the material and HHF paid to use it.

Beginning in 2013, contractors have completed 13 demolitions in this section of the Morningside neighborhood prior to the construction of Mack-Ashland II. Towards the end of 2016, Homrich demolished 3697 Alter. Southwest Housing Solutions paid for the demolition after purchasing the vacant house from the DLBA in 4/2016 for $17,750.00. In early 2017, Southwest broke ground on a new structure at 3697. Today, the land once occupied by the demolished structure is home to a yard, driveway, and garage for the new 3697. Adamo Group reported using 304 yd3 of material from 3697 for six non-HHF demolitions in 7/2016[122]. No records exist confirming backfill volume or quality at 3697 Alter. Consequently, the quality of the material used at these six demolitions cannot be verified. Records suggest 3697 may also have contributed backfill material to dozens more demolitions throughout 2016 and 2017.

In 7/2016, Mayor Duggan appeared at 14097 Marlowe to celebrate the 10000th demolition completed by DDP (Helms, 2016). Rickman Enterprises tore down the tax foreclosed building for $13,500. Rickman billed MSHDA $1,486 for 200 yd3 of backfill from a single source drawn from addresses between 3746 Manistique and 3884 Manistique. Upon review of aerials from the construction at Mack-Ashland, the basement excavation for 3884 included

[122] 3726 Clavert; 14607 Terry; 13295 Sussex; 13019 Promenade; 12304 Chelsea; 6378 Greenview

adjacent parcels at the corner of Manistique and Lozier. Although today the property and parcel number are no longer available to search on city websites, the new townhouse at 3884 occupies land once belonging to 3876 Manistique and 3881 Manistique. In 2013, Brown Environmental demolished the latter but records only exist in the city's building permits data. At some point in 2016, Homrich also demolished 3876 Manistique. As with 3881, the demolition does not appear in any current demolition records nor does 3876 appear in any backfill records. The only mention of the demolition is on the city's historic building permits site. Based on this review of the souces, the material used by Rickman to fill the hole at 14097 Marlowe may have passed the AKT aerial eye-test – Google - but that only confirms the "Residential" status and not the quality of the material Homrich or Brown used to fill either hole. Records show Rickman mixed 3884 dirt with five other addresses to backfill another 36 demolitions in 2016 and 2017. Rickman completed 26 more demolitions using 3,060 yd3 of material from the same area but listed the source as 14845 Mack, which has been a Marathon station since at least 2004.

This source category may hold similar repercussions for Detroit as Speculative but without clear indication of those processes these sources expressed other regional imbalances. New construction at the periphery continues to receive the de facto HHF excavation subsidy but new construction within the city limits also illustrates how an attention to a history of interventions and transactions can illuminate the conflicts and contradictions of the DDP. By working backward and uncovering a record of destruction at these sources, I have shown how the prevailing regulatory approach to demolition sees dirt as a feature and resource rather than a product of prior investments, processes, and displacements. The dirt used at 14097 Marlowe was not a natural resource extracted and delivered. The backfill was part of present and past spatial relations shaping dirt it into an asset (Swyngedouw, 1997). Profit and policy produced and then

commanded land at 3697. A process of exchange and destruction transformed 3697 Alter into a site for extraction that troubles the self-evidence of Detroit's land (Moore, 2015).

In *Concrete and Clay*, Gandy writes, "The design, use, and meaning of urban space involves the transformation of nature into a new synthesis (2002, 2)." While Duggan stood at a podium lauding the efforts of his administration, the Rickman crew attached a "10,000" banner on the site of 14097 Marlowe. Duggan declaimed, "Every time one of these houses goes down, we raise the quality of life for everybody else in the neighborhood." For the mayor and his coterie, the "houses go down" and the newly vacant land is ready for a future and its new beginning. By tracking the source of the 200 yd3 of backfill Rickman used there the question of importance is less where the city is headed and more where parts of Detroit have already been. Demolishing Detroit is not independent of the political and economic interests governing the DDP and backfilling Detroit is not separate from histories of the material sources used by contractors. The new synthesis of vacant land cannot escape the conditions of its creation.

Conclusion: Contaminating Soil Histories

In 2015, Tony Kashat of AKT Peerless observed, "The problem is a lot of these sites have a history to them." As I have shown, AKT's chief may have understated how history shapes the backfill program. Rather than simply a history of growth's harms – contamination from manufacturing, agriculture, and the hegemony of the automobile – backfilling Detroit is also embedded in the history and present of growth itself: the expansionist logics associated with the exchange and development of land. By categorizing backfill in ways sensitive to these relational traits – transaction, construction, and extraction – the DDP objective of demolition-dependent redevelopment becomes less inevitable. The EPA viewed the backfill program as too large and complex to fall under the purview of a public agency. From the outset, the DDP trusted

demolition contractors to draw on their own network of suppliers, resources, labor, and equipment to conduct demolitions and achieve the DDP's blight removal goals. This in turn enabled a regional geography of decline's hinterland in which property at the edges of Detroit became essential to the objectives of transforming the city's landscape through demolition.

Backfill is not a topographic or geological feature of the regional landscape or environment. Piles of dirt, gravel, sand, and concrete do not exist prior to their production within the homebuilding, aggregate, extractive, and hauling industries. Configurations of these industries and interests produce both the waste that becomes commodity and resource in addition to the market and material processes responsible for that transformation. The DDP, its boosters, and its contractors have stressed that sources are irrelevant if the material is deemed "clean" (Ferretti, 2019g)[123]. Treating backfill this way erases how these materials serve interests and benefit actors that 1) conflict with the objectives of "rebuilding" Detroit; or b) are not immediately visible as shapers of demolishing and backfilling Detroit. By introducing a different categorization approach to backfill origins I have challenged whether "clean" or "approved" are robust enough standards to grade sources while spotlighting the limits of an evaluative understanding of the intervention that makes demolition synonymous with destinations. The hinterland supporting the growth of Chicago in the 18th century has found a peer in the hinterland of dirt, sand, rock, and gravel that provides the resources to help produce decline in Detroit.

In this extractive hinterland, dirt is not a thing out of place but a way of making and probing place. As McClintock (2015) writes in "A critical physical geography of urban soil contamination," the study of urban soil illustrates the possibility for a "material politics of place." Soil is a hybrid of "socio-historical, pedogenetic, and climactic factors" that resists

[123] Brian Farkas' complete quote: "All that matters is whether it's been tested and approved."

simple testing for contaminants. Rather than apprehending isolated mechanisms, he encourages a research that addresses "the historical political economic forces that led to a particular land use in a particular place and time (82)." It is in that configuration that the relationship between valuation and devaluation becomes discernible. By interpreting the geography of backfilling as regional linkages between creation and destruction, demolishing looks less like the production of vacant land and more of an urbanization of a regional supply chain for discharging an asset.

The politics of place illustrated by these supply chains of backfill reveals a material companion for the valuation and regulatory capture of backfilling, a formation Mezzadra and Neilson (2019) describe as an *operation*, " a process with a beginning and an end; a process that accomplishes something without necessarily yielding a material thing; and a process that impinges on others, affecting possibilities and establishing multifarious and not necessarily predictable connections (67)." The demolishing and redevelopment of Detroit must involve itself with a region of backfill sources "messed up with dirt, extraction, and exploitation (244)." This operation not only moves the material from source to demolition but ensures that the regnant regional divisions of rich and poor, white and black, urban and suburban remain untouched. The metropolitan operation of backfilling calls to mind Galster's "housing disassembly line" and the persistent plundering of Detroit as population sprawls from core to periphery (2012). Each wave of construction destroying the previous. While the chain of moves building the next suburb drains people and resources, a parallel assembly line of demolishing ensures that even wrecking to rebuild Detroit still serves the interests of suburban markets and municipalities. Backfilling feeds this assembly line and ensures continued investment in the region's white communities.

Demolishing Detroit is not isolated at the house where contractors deploy excavators. A demolition is more than the endpoint for a pipeline of predatory lending, foreclosure,

speculation, and abandonment. Demolishing depends on a pipeline of backfilling shaped and commanded by builders, excavators, haulers, and mineral plants – producing values in places outside Detroit. Like the backfill transaction involving 8 N River, money, material, machinery and labor converge to ensure Detroit's demolishability. Alongside the political achievement of demolishing there is a material achievement dependent on backfilling. The largest urban policy project in the US has sought to erase the history and consequences of decline. However, by relying on a supply chain established and commanded by contractors, the DDP has assigned even more weight to a past where value and prosperity are differentiated. Demolishing Detroit was not after or outside the process of capitalist urbanization that continues to undo the city's built-environment. Instead, it was a continuation of the production of decline by other means.

Each demolition implicates its own chain of value in which contractors, excavators, haulers, developers, and aggregate producers position themselves to take advantage of the city's distress. The urgency of demolition – framed by local, metropolitan, state, and federal leaders as an emergency – enables construction industry actors to approach Detroit with the orientation of real estate actors. Rather than serving as a technical specialist for investors and speculators, this decline coalition exploits the Detroit property market and maximizes values by intensifying destruction. The imbalanced scales of capital and value did not tilt with the advent of the DDP. Instead, the DDP reinforced regional asymmetries by rewarding builders, developers, excavators, and haulers for the suburban real estate practices that have helped determine current Detroit's condition. In this particular variation of "parasitic urbanization" the suburbs continue to grow without limits partly dependent on a logistical mesh that transforms the waste of their expansion into a resource that reinforces class and race exclusion at the regional level (Beauregard, 2006).

Decline, then, might be more than the absence of development, a policy failure, or footloose capital. Growth as the sole objective of Post-Fordist development now appears insufficient for comprehending the conflicts and possibilities of decline in Detroit. Growth has depended on plural real estate interests mobilizing around the imperative of expansion to command a place's economy and convert use values into exchange values (Logan & Molotch, 1987). By shaping land use, this growth coalition wields enormous power to strip land of its communal character and transform it into a marketable commodity that serves accumulation and rentiership. But this analysis favors traditional city-builders unlocking values within mostly growing cities. Recognizing urban misfortunes entails defamiliarizing processes shaping and unlocking value through the built environment. Key among them, land is a social and material record transcending the last property sale or infrastructure project. In Detroit, demolishing and backfilling allows speculators, excavators, and haulers to generate incomes by transforming dirt into an asset. The dream of citybuilders buying up swathes of Detroit now relies on a terrestrial reality of contractors and suppliers circulating millions of cubic yards around the region.

The conditions of creation for demolishing matter for understanding its consequences and contradictions. Backfilling shows how frontiers of investment depend on more than the production of vacant land. The asset of empty land depends on the asset of backfill, a process that moves between suburban subdivisions, quarries, and crushed sidewalks. The relationship between backfill and speculative development calls into question the self-evidence of demolition unlocking development in urban cores. In the next chapter, I examine how backfilling and the process around creating and storing material clarifies local arrangements of land, labor, and capital. Demolishing may not have created the developable city but that does not mean the DDP was unproductive. Backfilling's relationship to property and investment goes beyond triggering

redevelopment and the next phase of accumulation. Destruction is not always devaluation and demolishing created opportunities to value abandoned buildings in new ways. Where the growth machine centers *land use intensification* to enable windfalls for developers and investors, a decline machine relies on *land use debasement* to control and extract value. The interaction of environment, resource, and land requires a rethinking of property in the post-crisis city.

CHAPTER 5

Backfill to the City Movement:

Land, Value, and the Properties of Demolishing

"The capitalists will take care of the rest." – John George, Motor City Blight Busters, 2014

"The reason we're tearing down is to rebuild." – Brian Farkas, Detroit Building Authority, 2016

In this chapter, I investigate and interpret the consequences of demolishing and backfilling for the built environment in Detroit's neighborhoods. I examine how the Detroit Demolition Program contributed to the redevelopment of vacant land and how demolishing and backfilling affected land use and valuation in the city. By addressing post-demolition property sales, Hardest Hit Fund liens, and the existing body of research drawing associations between demolition and value, I reconsider the outcomes of demolishing and question the process' recognized relationship to gentrification and austerity. Rather than an extension of the growth ideology or a strategy for rebirth, demolishing and backfilling can perform important financial, environmental, and logistical roles for a *land regime of decline* operating in Detroit. Demolishing may not manage decline, but it still produces landscapes and environments. In this land regime, occupation, ownership, use, and disposition take on new forms, objectives, and meanings. By focusing on backfilling as a process of land, logistics, and environment, I show how generating income from property is not exclusive to land-use intensification but is also a process of land-use debasement extracting value through decline.

Introduction

Although reporters have linked Detroit to demolition for decades (Saulny, 2010; Wilgoren, 2002), the fanfare around the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF) helped return demolition to the national mainstream policy agenda (Trickey, 2017; Davey, 2014; Badger, 2014). Growing and declining cities followed Detroit's lead and focused energy and resources on eliminating blight. In 2015, the city council of Jacksonville, FL established the Blight Initiatives Office complete with a six-figure budget, three permanent staff members, and Jaxcan, an anthropomorphic wastebasket donning sunglasses, a baseball cap, and a red cape

Figure 39: Jaxcan, mascot for Jacksonville, FL anti-blight initiative (Department of Neighborhoods, 2020)

encouraging Jaxsons to "Join the Blight Squad" (Micolucci, 2018). By the end of 2016, Lyda Krewson, the newly elected mayor of St. Louis City, approved the creation of a blight removal task force to develop a citywide plan for reducing vacant buildings (Office of the Mayor, 2018, 5). Within months, the new Vacancy Collaborative was coordinating partnerships to improve how the city's agencies approached blight removal. In 2017, Mayor Matt Pacifico of Altoona, PA created *The Blight Task Force* comprising policy officials, realtors, landlords, and community developers to address vacancy in a city with a 9% vacancy rate (Kibler 2017) [124].

[124] Observers at the time criticized Pacifico because Altoona did not have anything resembling blight problem. "But Altoona is better off than Johnstown at 17 percent abandoned housing, Harrisburg at 15 percent and Reading and York at 12 percent, city Community Development Director Lee Slusser told the commission. (Kibler 2017)"

Since 2015, the Center for Community Progress (CCP) reports state and local officials across the US have authorized 56 new land banks to transform "liabilities into assets (CCP, 2020)." Prior to 2012, only 72 operated. Blight removal is a keystone of land bank powers. That year, the Cleveland City Council announced public support for citywide demolishing, "Removing a distressed house creates significant value," and circulated a report including an infographic – *Figure 40* - of a seesaw of unlocked land value (2012, 3). Demolishing abandoned

Figure 40: Image from "Through demolition...Cleveland rebuilds value" (Cleveland City Council, 2012, 3)

properties appeals to both policy and development interests because it produces the raw material of stabilization and redevelopment*: vacant land* (Williams 2019; Livengood 2019). What was once a problem of oversupply is now a solution through innovation (Nissen 2019). Demolishing opens space to new investment, new possibilities, and new futures. The National Demolition Association (NDA) explains, "The demolition industry is making way for a better world, helping communities re-invent and re-imagine their future (NDA, 2019)." Whether in cartoonish or convenient fashion, blight removal returns "problem properties to productive use (CCP, 2020)."

With increasing policy popularity, scholars have newly scrutinized demolition's purpose in unlocking development by removing impediments to private investment (Rosenman & Walker ,2015) or decommissioning deserted urban neighborhoods (Hackworth, 2016). In both models, demolition is an engineering practice regulating vacancy and building supply for redevelopment

(Mallach, 2012). Demolishing should, then, succeed or fail at one of two goals: *redevelopment or eradication*. At the core of these approaches is demolition's link to increasing the value of land. If one of Detroit's "potentially greatest assets [is] abundant open space of undervalued urban real estate available for building and redevelopment (Legislative Policy Division, 2016, 3)," then how has the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP) contributed to transforming the city's land?

My research on the DDP and the backfill program suggests those scholarly approaches have not captured outcomes falling outside redevelopment or decommissioning. Demolishing is both a means for producing the raw material of redevelopment and a logistical, political, and environmental achievement itself. To enact and maintain the DDP, public and private interests have reformatted the institutional landscape to prioritize blight removal within rebuilding (Farkas 2016). Consequently, citywide clearance narrowed the goals of revitalization. Demolishing expressed the priorities of public authority through a constellation of agencies, institutions, and actors. Moreover, the valuation and geography of backfilling enabled contractors to generate income through rentiership on a public anti-foreclosure program. Backfilling became less the production of vacant land in Detroit for new development and more a chain of construction and destruction that assetized dirt to grab value. The question for researchers is what kinds of land use, property, and environmental transformation did demolishing Detroit enable and produce?

Regulation theory can illuminate the operations of state and capital in Detroit that have shifted these processes around value. Demolishing signals how decline can take an *institutional form* that provides order and meaning to production, consumption, and valuation in Detroit. An institutional form is a codification of social relations within a broader regime of accumulation – "the set of regularities that ensure the general and relatively coherent evolution of capital accumulation (Boyer & Saillard, 2002)." Institutional forms constrain and regulate behavior

within a decentralized economic system to ensure capital circulation, flow, and accumulation (Lipietz, 1988). Boyer (1990) defines five institutional forms[125], among these is the relationship between state and economy. That relationship serves as one pillar for a mode of regulation that reproduces social relations under capitalism but also provides room for adjustment by firms. These institutional forms are embedded within specific political-economies and geographies and rely on local or regional vernaculars of income-generation (Labrousse & Michel, 2018). These forms can distinguish the capitalism of Detroit from the capitalism of Chicago (Boyer, 2005).

Capital did not abandon Detroit; it only modified its accumulation strategies (Akers, 2013). Demolishing Detroit relies upon and reproduces the conflicts, struggles, and power asymmetries of a historically situated political economy of decline. As Seymour (2020) has shown through real estate sales, decline is an active process and can establish new asset classes and uses for property. The production of decline, therefore, depends on iterations of land, labor, and capital cultivating new relations and interventions to extract surpluses (Marx, 1992). Within demolishing, these articulate to generate income by valuing and regulating an asset: *backfill*. The necessity of dirt to demolishing houses is a principal driver of this asset class - DDP contractors acquire physical sites to process aggregate material and conduct their residential demolitions.

Less a locational seesaw in which land clearance tilts capital towards undervalued urban centers (Smith, 1982), the DDP and backfilling have contributed to a regional maze of supply, logistics, and land in which demolishing extracts value in ways inconsistent with legacies of footloose capital. The goals and consequences of capital's relation to land in declining cities are not self-evident – new strategies need new dispositions and occupations. As I show, rules and routines around land enables new forms to emerge and adapt. A land regime of decline

[125] 1) Money relation; 2) Wage relation; 3) Competitive relations between firms; 4) State-economy relation; 4) National economy-international economy relation (Boyer, 1986).

countenances those shifts in accumulation and rent extraction. Demolition's basic relation to the value and use of land provides a critical point of entry into understanding the character and consequences of such a land regime (Weber, Doussard, Bhatta, & McGrath, 2006). By replacing post-hoc evaluation of demolition with an ongoing tracing of its environments, assets, and pathways, I illustrate how operations of demolishing can reproduce decline rather than remedy it.

Decline – a feature of capitalism in Detroit – has supplied demolition contractors with space to command land in ways that fall outside class restructuring or welfare state withdrawal but provide institutional form to both the state's objectives and the interests of the market. In earlier chapters, I illustrated how contractors performed a more substantial role than clearing land for private development interests. Demolishing was not outside of property relations or the operations of capital. Instead, it expressed them in new ways unique to the declining city. In this chapter, I show how demolishing Detroit has not uniformly prepared land for redevelopment or exploited the hopes of land-use intensification to unlock potential values. The DDP is not Urban Renewal by another name (Gratz, 2010b). Demolishing may not be the local response that triggers redevelopment in Detroit but the DDP and contractors have reshaped land and its use by assetizing even the former's most basic elements, while helping sustain an uneven geography where suburban developments, speculative home-builders, and wrecking firms win out.

Gentrification, Austerity, and Post-Crisis Property: Relevant Literature

In this section, I present the contours of scholarship addressing responses to and conditions within the post-crisis or declining city. The first subsection presents the state of the literature on gentrification, especially as it relates to Detroit, MI, and cities with similar traits of economic instability and depopulation. In the second section, I identify the key texts describing austerity and the move by public institutions to restructure, retrench, and privatize services from

weak neighborhoods. Finally, in the third subsection, I address how scholars have mobilized the concepts of property and land to make sense of transformation in post-crisis and declining cities. I have chosen these bodies of literature and their constituent debates because demolition has recurrent significance within research on urban change, capital mobility, and property relations.

Gentrification

Since Glass' (1964) initial characterization of working-class neighborhoods giving way to middle class residents and their consumption preferences, gentrification has grown into the default prism through which many researchers, policymakers, and inhabitants frame and interpret investment into the built environment (Hackworth, 2019). Neil Smith (1979) pushed the study of gentrification into political economic terrain with "Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People." His Neo-Marxian approach to urban political economy moved beyond explanations of gentrification that relied on the changing consumption preferences of the middle class, concentrating instead on the production side of neighborhood change. Capital returned to the devalued inner-city in the hopes of closing the gap between present and potential land values. By focusing on the demands of gentrifiers, prior economistic approaches had ignored "the role of builders, developers, landlords, mortgage lenders, government agencies, real estate agents, and tenants (540)." Critical researchers drew on Smith's "simple and obvious" insight to interpret and confront how the process of gentrification remade neighborhoods by displacing people of color and working-class residents and also undermining incumbent communities (Zukin 1987; Slater 2006; Wacquant 2008; Slater 2017). In his own succeeding work, Smith positioned gentrification as the primary objective of public policy and no longer simply an effect of publicly neutral renewal strategies (Smith, 1996). These arguments laid bare a revanchist capital reclaiming the neighborhoods it had once abandoned and forsaken.

Parallel with and after these formative Neo-Marxian interpretations, housing and urban scholars have examined the limits of class-based explanations of gentrification. These oft-critical analyses problematized revitalization and depicted gentrification as a clash between identities and tenancies. These analyses treated economic class as one variable in the transformation of neighborhoods. In the last two decades, critical researchers have presented evidence linking gentrification and pornography puritanism (Papyanis, 2000), tourism (Gotham 2005), parks and greenspace (Checker, 2011), Yelp reviews (Zukin, Lindeman, & Hurson 2015), bicycling infrastructure (Flanagan, Lachapelle, El-Geneidy, 2016), brownfield redevelopment (Bryson 2012), pop-up businesses (Schaller & Guinand, 2017), healthy food (Anguelovski, 2015), microbreweries (Mathews & Picton, 2014), steamed milk beverages (Reese, Eckert, Sands, & Vojnovic 2017), and Airbnb rentals (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). The currents of academic research probing if new buildings (Davidson & Lees, 2010) or old buildings (McCabe & Gould Ellen, 2016) are stronger inducers of gentrification seems rivaled only by the back-and-forth pop urbanist debate over whether the lack of zoning (Schneider, 2018) or the presence of zoning (Yglesias, 2018) is more responsible for displacing incumbent working-class communities.

The merits or rigor of the above research are not in question here, but the surfeit of policy and academic work serve as a strong indication of the hegemonic status of gentrification in the interpretation of urban change. Concomitant with this abundance of work, parties to the debate continue to trade blows over the benefits and consequences of gentrification in American cities. Think-tank fellows and policy observers have described gentrification as an exaggerated threat and advocated attracting wealth is the difficult - but unavoidable - choice to preventing urban stagnation and decline (Berube, 2015). David Madden (2013) has scolded this absolutism, “The leading myth is that the only possibilities for neighborhoods are gentrification or urban decay.

Well-meaning liberals sometimes think cities face a choice between the bad days of the past and a gentrified future." In other currents, critics of gentrification have rendered it synonymous with white supremacy and contemporary forms of settler colonialism (Safransky, 2014; Coates, 2018; McElroy & Werth, 2019)[126]. In response, reformist scholars marginalize those conflicts and center improvements in quality of life and property values to justify demographic transformation of urban neighborhoods (Mallach, 2018c). Observers from this vantage suggest governments in Rust Belt cities should intentionally pursue gentrification-friendly policies to confront the more significant threat to neighborhoods: concentrated poverty (Grabinsky & Butler, 2015).

Importantly, the ascendance of gentrification as the general condition for critical urban studies cannot be misconstrued as an absence of contemporaneous critical approaches to land and urban change. Even Smith suggested concentration on gentrification could be at the expense of focus on other forms of displacement and dispossession. As he (1987) wrote, "Not all neighborhoods experiencing the rent gap may experience gentrification or redevelopment; some economic opportunities remain unexploited and specific local conditions may discourage the process (464)." Akers & Seymour (2018) have shown how the prevalence of evictions in Detroit neighborhoods do not fit the model of gentrifying areas. Landlords and contract-for-deed sellers cycle tenants through moldering residential structures to extract the maximum value before another wave of foreclosure or condemnation. Hackworth (2020) argues for stronger attention to racial prejudice for understanding decline and gentrification. By drawing attention to regional geographies of white supremacy, he concludes critical urban studies has failed to account for the racist policies that reproduce economic inequality and trap black neighborhoods in a death spiral.

[126] The "frontier" as an unexplored territory ready for white extraction of value.

However, critical urbanist sniping over the use and misuse of gentrification has served to obfuscate a more fundamental transformation of the urban environment. Gentrification as a process is illustrative of uneven development under capital producing and reproducing cities. This inequality evident in urban space is expressive of a fundamental tendency of capital to valorize and de-valorize the built environment in a back-and-forth process of accumulation (Smith 1982). The mobility of capital is a kind of locational seesaw in which the promise of returns from undervalued land justifies movements away from overbuilt areas where the low rate of return and high development costs combine to undermine confidence in the real estate market (Wilson, 2005). Knuth, Potts, & Goldstein (2019) argue devaluation is the underappreciated dimension of value, and in the context of brownfield redevelopment may enable a kind of "green" gentrification. In a prior analysis, Knuth (2017) invoked creative destruction to trouble the growth and development schema most scholars depend on to analyze the value-nature relationship. By centering destruction, Knuth and others have deepened a tradition of critical geography that views deterioration and despoliation as features of capital mobility and accumulation. From the ashes of the old, a new world (and market and nature) is built.

Notably, fixating on capital mobility in this way can serve to reproduce an illusory coherence to value. While the degradation of environments into wastelands may crack open new environments for capital accumulation, Bigger & Robertson (2017) recognize that valuation is an indeterminate social process that resists reduction into some simple mechanisms. Richard Walker (1978) elaborated on mobility as a source of uneven development that (consistent with capitalism's reliance on surplus) creates a "permanent reserve of stagnant places (34)." In contemporary parlance, Walker's "mosaic" of capital mobility approximates "gentrification" inasmuch "capital flows from place to place its components are altered in keeping with the

changing character of the accumulation process, the pieces…are constantly reshuffled (32)." The observation is not merely the province of critical planners and geographers conditioned to analyze the precarious city. One can scarcely keep up with whether Portland, ME is the new Brooklyn[127] or if Brooklyn is the new Portland, OR[128], or if Detroit is the new Portland, OR[129], or the next Brooklyn[130]. The "reshuffling" is an artifact of capital's devaluation-valuation process, but the narrow focus can reflexively make destruction a treatment for falling profit. For Walker, the uneven geography of capitalism is marked by the speculative "boomtown" but also the less mechanical, extractive "lumpengeography." In the latter, destruction does not automatically realize future capital accumulation, instead it is an iterative devastation ensnaring communities, neighborhoods, and cities in a persistent value-mining (or grabbing) operation.

Austerity

Austerity represents another process of uneven development proceeding alongside and with gentrification. Perhaps the most dramatic example of American urban austerity – or benign neglect - remains efforts by Roger Starr to implement his vision for "planned shrinkage," first laid out in *Urban Choices: The City and its Critics* (1966) in which he derided community solidarity as sentimentalism. Ten years after publication, Mayor Abraham Beame of New York City appointed Starr to Commissioner of Housing Preservation and Development (Wallace & Wallace, 2001). Armed with findings and recommendations from a RAND Institute report on the effective and efficient provision of local firefighting services (Blum, 1971), Starr pushed Beame to target firehouse closures in neighborhoods of color. Those strategic cutbacks could speed up

[127] https://bangordailynews.com/2015/03/26/living/from-park-slope-to-munjoy-hill-is-portland-the-new-brooklyn/
[128] https://www.wweek.com/portland/article-17831-the-portlandification-of-brooklyn.html
[129] https://www.sheknows.com/living/articles/1089521/reasons-detroit-is-the-next-hip-city-to-visit/
[130] https://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/the-daily-need/is-detroit-the-new-brooklyn/10290/

population loss and reduce city obligations to residents (Fried, 1976b)[131]. RAND had a receptive audience in NYC at a time when the scope of the city's debt obligations and fiscal crisis was beginning to come into view (Tabb, 1982) and neighborhoods like the Bronx were experiencing "unplanned" shrinkage. Mobilizing the military language of "triage," city hall supervised waves of firehouse closures throughout the 1970s in "distressed" neighborhoods (Aalbers, 2014).

Denounced by neighborhoods, Starr resigned from his $45,000/year position in 7/1976 (Fried 1976a). Despite his departure, firehouse closures eventuated predictable results: 120,000 fires/year in the Bronx. Along with an enduring mention by Howard Cosell during the 1977 World Series pitting Yankees against the LA Dodgers, the planned shrinkage agenda reduced schools, hospitals, and garbage services (Fowler, 1976). Cutbacks combined to destabilize neighborhoods and enabled the near erasure of census tracts in the Bronx (Gratz, 1989).

Despite the disastrous effects, Starr's theorized approach to fiscal responsibility has persisted as a stubbornly intuitive program for managing declining neighborhoods (Marcuse 1982). A triage program for depleted St. Louis neighborhoods first proposed in 1975[132] remains a powerful touchstone for inhabitants and community leaders (Cooper-McCann, 2015). What first served as provisional remedies in moments of crisis have grown to occupy mainstream platforms in market fundamentalist ideologies of urban governance. Peck (2012) has linked a new urban politics of neoliberal belt-tightening in American cities – "extreme economy" – with severe consequences for residents and workers. By slashing amenities, services, and safety nets, city governments respond to pressures from neoliberal think-tanks, bondholders, and tax-averse

[131] Wallace & Wallace (2001) lay out how RAND's approach to available city data skewed the report towards reducing fire companies in the poorest neighborhoods of NYC.
[132] The "Team Four Plan" – named such because a local design firm drafted the memo – was in part informed by a 1973 report by RAND called "St Louis: A city and its suburbs" that suggested three possible futures for the rapidly emptying city – all of which predicted less power, fewer resources, and continued population loss.

interests to reproduce the hegemony of free enterprise, unrestrained markets, and liberty (629). Under this mode of regulation, an efficient government is a set of lean public-private partnerships that prioritize private wealth accumulation and redevelopment. This ideology transforms government's operating environment, grading municipal efficacy on servicing debts and not serving residents (Peck 2014). Proponents of austerity have installed these programs to rescale and restructure government's obligations to citizens in declining cities throughout the American industrial Midwest (Haase, Rink, Grossmann, Bernt, & Mykhenko, 2014).

Within the literature on austerity, demolition serves as an eraser for the areas rendered expendable by a narrow policy focus on stable and tipping-point neighborhoods. In Detroit, the Detroit Future City (DFC) framework formalized an approach in which neighborhood residential population determined land uses (Detroit Future City, 2013). Boosters of the approach lauded the unconventional zoning and regulation that would stud the city's neighborhoods with farming, recreation, and industrial activity. Critics disparaged the framework as a justification for blight removal initiatives that would right-size Detroit by reducing infrastructural loads carried by the public provision of streets, sidewalks, and sewers (Kirkpatrick, 2015). DFC also proposed new programs relying on resident management to maintain vacant lots (DFC, 2019). The 2016 report, "Open Space in Detroit," viewed vacant lots as raw material for a new kind of city (DFC, 2016).

DFC was not the first instance of Detroit serving as a petri dish for the supremacy of real estate market strength to determine the fortunes of cities (Akers, 2015). As described in Chapter 2, The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) generated a Market Value Analysis (MVA) that carved Detroit into discrete submarkets with coherent traits. The straightforward language of limited revenues and dwindling capacity promoted fiscal discipline. In Detroit and peer Rust Belt cities[133], the

[133] TRF has conducted MVAs in St. Louis, Baltimore, and Cleveland.

MVA routinized the logic of austerity to inform formal targeting strategies of public resources (Goldstein, 2011). For the Detroit submarket category of "Reclamation," TRF advised publicly funded demolition ne the city's highest priority, and as a prerequisite to both "conditions for market rebirth" and "preservation investments" in more stable neighborhoods (Goldstein, 2011, 16). This discipline towards depopulation and decline was not an abstraction. In 6/2012, Mayor Dave Bing announced layoffs for 164 members of the Detroit Fire Department (DFD), asserting "fiscal realities have made this untenable" (Click on Detroit. 2012). A week later, Bing closed 10 engine companies and 4 ladder companies (Meloni, 2012). By the end of 2012, DFD had fought over 5,000 arsons in the city – investigating only 20% of the incidents (Neavling, 2013a).

For those focused on the dangers of austerity, the rule of fiscal responsibility in times of economic distress has become a prevailing logic of discipline for governments (Roberts, 2009). Finance and banking industries privilege the urban built environment as a site of production and capital accumulation (Newman, 2009). Debt becomes the major vehicle for governments to finance services and individuals to access the trappings of the good life (Soederberg, 2014). As populations and revenues fall, cities accumulate bond debts to maintain barebones programs or sell-off assets to private interests that view airports, parks, and schools as untapped revenue streams (Davidson & Ward, 2014). The combination of indebted institutions and precarious homeowners manifests itself in financial emergencies and mortgage foreclosures. These strictures on public spending and the rollout of restructured services produce and aggravate urban inequalities that undermine tenancy and thwart neighborhood stability (Tonkiss, 2013).

The resultant *makeshift cities* force inhabitants to take on the challenges of maintaining and securing communities through personal grit or collective activism (Kinder, 2014). As a regime of accumulation, austerity brings with it a mode of regulation that generates and protects

value for a fraction of people (Ponder, 2019). Governments seek to stabilize coffers by downloading fiscal responsibility to owner-occupants in the form of rising property taxes; these policies coerce homeowners into choices that can result in foreclosure and eviction (Dewar, Seymour, & Druta, 2014). Faced with the prospect of neighborhoods unattractive to developers, city governments attempt to manage their decline by encouraging depopulation and shutting off remaining services (Rhodes & Russo, 2013). In sum, austerity urbanism acts as an accelerant in the process of uneven development that culminates in capital flowing across regional or national space and positioning itself to benefit from potential land values in disinvested neighborhoods. As in the case of devaluation, austerity is a state-led intervention on behalf of capital to establish space for the next round of income generation (Kim & Warner ,2020). In this way, austerity and gentrification serve as interactive geographic processes of capitalism's uneven development.

The relationship between austerity and demolition is not obvious. Governments often do not hold past owners responsible for dereliction and public largesse fills the space to finance wrecking. As a result, and in its twisted way, this "custodial" demolition is a significant state investment in the urban environment. As of 12/2019, the DDP had awarded $342,595,220.10 to contractors for demolitions in the city. The 2013 diversion of Hardest Hit Funds (HHF) to demolition relied on the principle that blight removal was an investment (Mallach, 2014). A fall 2019 push by the Duggan administration to place a demolition bond on a 2020 ballot depended on a similar claim about the return on investment. The city's Chief Financial Officer argued, "When you look at all the different capital investments we make, no other capital has the same return on investment as demo, in terms of property value increase, in terms of reduction in number of fires in the city or in terms of the overall impact on crime that recent studies have shown (Frank, 2019)." Demolition breaks from austerity when it represents one of the state's

most significant interventions in the built environment. On 4/20/2019, the Detroit City Council approved the 2020-2023 financial plan to fund city services. For 2020, the council set aside $73 million for demolition., while the figure for all other capital improvements was $32.5 million (Detroit City Council, 2019). The Detroit Auditor concluded DDP had spent over $500 million since 2014 with anticipated goals to spend at least $1 billion before 2025 (Stafford, 2019b).[134]

This review of the literature on gentrification and austerity framed and then complicated how these concepts are mobilized to understand the drivers of capitalist urbanization and how demolition relates to value. These processes are intertwined but their consequences are never axiomatic. I have attempted to show that the literature on gentrification and austerity do not provide comprehensive accounts of the decline and destruction in Detroit. In other words, neither austerity nor gentrification are the fait accompli of devaluation and uneven development. What we need is an account of decline that restores the significance of extractive processes generating incomes for a narrow fraction of capital. Rather than just an intervention on behalf of real estate capital and its return to Detroit, demolishing relies on assets, land, and regulation to extract value from the declining city. In cities like Detroit, surplus value within abandoned residential structures is converted into income through public ownership and private demolition firms.

Property and Land in Post-Crisis and Declining Cities

The tensions and conflicts in property and land illustrate the ways value and power are expressed and reproduced in the urban built environment. Historically, the enclosure of common land served as the primitive accumulation enabling new landholders to generate income from existing and future occupants (as well as their in-situ labor) (Marx 2004). The capitalist relation

[134] The only comparable investment is the Capital Improvement Program of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD). DWSD has plans to invest $500 million in sewer upgrades by 2022. This program is partially funded by a lease agreement between DWSD and the Great Lakes Water Authority.

emerged from this expropriation and the subsequent imbalance between the landed and the landless (Thompson, 1966)[135]. Harvey brings the Marxian process into the present by renaming the ongoing historical expropriation signaled by enclosure as "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2003). Rather than a foundational act of capitalism, Harvey argued enclosures of land and wealth were vital resources of the reproduction of capitalism at a global scale (Harvey 2009).

Land value and markets figure prominently in critical approaches to capitalist urbanization (Christophers, 2016). These interventions have challenged how capitalism treats land and nature as "free gifts." For Marx, land was entangled within relations of fictitious capital because its value extends into the future without moorings to a material commodity (Marx, 1993). Put another way, the value of land exists independent of any productive activity and is solely representative of capitalization on ownership – *money that can be made*. Polanyi extended the analysis to argue land – alongside labor an,d money - is not a real commodity because it is not produced for sale in the marketplace (Polanyi 2001). Land preexists its potential value as a commodity. In combination, these critiques serve to defamiliarize land as an on-demand site for capitalist production (Jessop, 2015). Land, labor, and capital were not raw features with purposes intrinsic to the presence of the market. Yet these same critical gestures to land's status as fictitious (commodity or capital) rarely reflect the production of land itself – how it goes from available to exploitable. For Marx and Polanyi, land preceded any attempts to exploit it and as a result it represented a vital strategy by capital to naturalize its domination of social relations.

Li (2014a) and Hall (2013) have wrestled with this question to varying degrees of success. For Hall, land is an artifact of a resource management tradition aimed at reducing conflicting claims in the name of effective central administration. This echoes scholarship that

[135] Thus, creating the "working class"

treats land as the political target of land grabbing governments and NGOs reproducing the enclosure and rent process consistent with Harvey's accumulation by dispossession (Bakker 2007). In less polemical terms, this might be described as accumulation-by-development in which the geopolitical imperative of a modern economy condemns the agrarian society to history (Oya, 2013). While these insights have weight for navigating land grabs and natural resource management, they do not afford much in the way of examining the *matter* of land's materialism. In Li's work on southeast Asia (2014b), the fundamental question of "what is land?" has opened space for consideration of maps, surveys, and grids employed by both policy and investors to engender land through official, administrative means. This material-discursive repertoire centers the contingent interactions of labor and capital to make land real for national governments and NGOs. She writes, "the axe, the spade, the plough, the title deed, the tax register, maps, graphs, satellite images, ancestral graves, mango trees – do more than simply record the presence of land as a resource: they are integral to assembling it as a resource for different actors (590)."

However, in her attempt to illuminate the social fundaments of land and the multiple meanings users and owners draw upon to understand their relation to land, Li draws a distinction between her materialist account of land and one that would confront the political-economic pressures within land's physical constituents. She puts bluntly, "Land is not like a mat. You cannot roll it up and take it away. (589)" As I have noted, Marx and Polanyi would agree with this assessment because land's value as a factor of production is preserved through a kind of Plato's Cave in which the performance of its productive value – potential and realized - becomes unquestioned. This is a sentiment shared by Harvey when he writes, "Land, unlike the improvements built on it, 'does not require upkeep in order to continue its potential for use' and thereby retains its potential value (Harvey, 1973, 158)." The geography and political-economy of

backfilling Detroit and other examples of reclamation – resort[136] and logistical[137] – suggest land is more flexible than a substrate for action or an administrated unit within spreadsheets. An op-ed appearing in *The New York Times* brought attention to a global shortage of sand that could prompt interstate conflict, illegal trading, and stall the global construction industry (Beiser, 2016). Land may be fictitious, but its production is part of a chain of valuation and regulation and these chains rely on extraction, circulation, and maintenance to sustain environments.

Li's focus on the material-discursive constituents of land echoes the work of Nathan Blomely (2003) on law and property. Property is freighted with the histories of colonialization and domination that enclosed and transformed indigenous land into a private asset available to white newcomers colonizing the North American continent. He homes in on the violence enacted by settlers as they imposed their ordering devices on the frontier and constructed "civilization" to counter and erase native "wilderness." Scholars have also linked the problematic association of property to notions of the self-possessive individual and the relationship between insider and outsider that gives order to the concept of citizenship or belongingness (Roy, 2003). For many neoliberal observers, the conversion of common use into private rights also represents the greatest hope for prosperity for precarious inhabitants in developing economies (De Soto, 2003). Despite those claims connecting property ownership to social stability, the subprime crisis in the US indicates the precarity of the "ownership economy" (Immergluck, 2011; Newman, 2009).

These relations between land and property, exchange and use, real and fictitious play out in the political economies of cities and the consensus about the achievement of growth. In cities

[136] Palm Jumeirah is a palm tree-shaped island off the coast of Dubai studded by luxury hotels and villas. Jumeirah is flanked by two other, smaller islands. The engineering project required dredging and moving 3 billion cubic feet of sand. Greenpeace derided it as a "visual scar." The islands are sinking. 2 inches per year.
[137] The Chinese military has used dredging to intensify its presence in the South China Sea. In 2016, a subsidiary of the Chinese Communications Construction Company initiated a multi-year "land reclamation project" creating space for housing, ports, and government offices. The US Military has balked at this extension of China's influence.

experiencing rapid growth, developers and builders recognize the value of converting vacant land and property into income-generating holdings. Logan and Molotch's (1987) growth machine framework homes in on the land-use intensifications through which rentiers and landowners produce value by shaping the urban built environment. Their analysis has become a default for comprehending the aims and objectives of local polities (Swanstrom 1985; Stone 1980). Coalitions of policymakers and city-builders work to exploit opportunities for the conversion of use values into exchange values (Levine, 1987). As mentioned in the prior chapter, this entrepreneurial process strips land of its communal value as it enters a marketplace in the commodity form. These coalitions thrive in political-economic contexts in which the pressures of austerity and the possibility of planned gentrification transform the logics of government (Harvey, 1989). In the contemporary city, the growth machine maps onto the gentrification process as the potential rents encrypted in undervalued land are deciphered by speculators, developers, and builders intervening in and shaping the production of the built environment.

However, the growth machine thesis has limited explanatory power in decentralized governing environments in which private or quasi-public entities control levers of change (MacLeod & Jones, 2011). In the "post-democratic" or "post-political" city, intermittent crises – terrorism, climate, crime, and blight – provide the grist for a splintered institutional landscape in which *the state* relinquishes or negotiates away political space to the wisdom of markets (Swyngedouw, 2009). Despite recent arguments to the contrary, Detroit's bankruptcy has not ushered in a "degrowth machine" prioritizing resident quality of life even as population and wealth shrink (Schindler, 2014). The re-valuation of land remains an essential component of the city's governing approach to both decline and revitalization. At the 2019 Mackinac Policy

Conference[138], Duggan described the city's 92,000 publicly owned parcels as a major asset (Aguilar, 2019). Riding both DDP and the CCP enthusiasm for land banks, Rust Belt boosters of market-fundamentalism encouraged local land bank authorities and other quasi-public or public institutions to sell abandoned properties to investors or the occasional owner-occupant to prime the local real estate market (Dewar, 2015). Hackworth (2014) has addressed the persistent dominance but limited success of these programs to return vacant land to viability in declining cities. The same could be said of the durability of the growth machine framework for making sense of the value of land and the political economic interests commanding declining cities.

Research Methods

In the previous chapter, I introduced a new typology for backfill sources based on the tensions and histories associated with each source property. I now turn my focus to specific sources and how these illustrate the relationship between land use and decline in Detroit. I develop a three-part argument to illustrate the limits of demolition-dependent redevelopment and the land regimes made possible by demolition. *How have demolitions in Detroit impacted the city's private property market? What forms of land ownership, occupation, and disposition are enabled by the DDP? How does demolishing reveal different dimensions of valuation in Detroit?*

Each section of this chapter depends on a different configuration of public data and records. Drawing on my analysis of Detroit property sales records, county land records, and interviews with demolition officials at the city and state level, I show how the placing of MSHDA liens on sites of HHF demolished properties calls into question the process by which demolition would unlock development. The presence of these liens - and the scant evidence that

[138] The Detroit Regional Chamber organizes the annual Mackinac Policy Conference at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. The conference is staunchly conservative and prioritizes market solutions for Michigan's economy. Organizers typically hosts several major Democratic figures each year (Duggan, Gretchen Whitmer, Stacey Abrams).

demolition has refreshed investor interest in many parts of Detroit - suggests the need to rework some of the dominant scholarly approaches to urban change and the seesaw of capital. Rather than adopt the explanatory power of "the growth machine" (and the centrality of land use intensification as value generator) for understanding the political economy of decline, I present evidence of a decentralized decline ensemble that serves its income generation interests through both rapid and incremental destruction. The demolition process produced a value for each demolished property that only contractors, haulers, and backfill suppliers were able to realize. As I mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, I describe this process as *land use debasement*.

This chapter begins with a synopsis of the HHF program - which I introduced in part in Chapter 2 - and then proceeds to connect the program to the city's grander redevelopment agenda. I show that MSHDA's application of liens on 16,000+ residential properties (and future properties) challenges if demolishing tilts the seesaw of capital in the city's favor. In earlier chapters, I argued Detroit leaders reshaped the institutional landscape to achieve demolition. In this chapter, I address how the institutional side and the destruction side reinforce each other to produce and shape the built environment. The relationship between land, capital, and value is not a fait accompli as prior research suggests. Finding that demolition in Detroit is a distinct undertaking when compared to growing cities means addressing what demolishing does accomplish in declining cities - not simply whether it is an effective intervention that achieves publicized policy goals. Despite the visuality of demolition suggesting a yes/no proposition[139], researchers should resist flattening demolition as an intervention with binary consequences.

I integrate previous findings on rent, regulation, and the regional geography of demolition with analysis of state-required HHF-demolition liens to consider the contradictions embedded in

[139] Yes/No: *Did the demolition remove the building*?

the landscape of redevelopment in Detroit. I address the robustness of research linking demolition to growth in home equity in Detroit, as well as research that links neighborhood quality to blight removal campaigns. While these findings appear to champion demolition, all three prompt concerns about study parameters and the tendency for policymakers to circulate research without accounting for context. I argue these studies have narrowed demolition as a form of land preparation where contractors serve as the muscle for city-builders, rather than part of a dynamic process embedded in regional economic and political space. Failing to consider those dimensions of residential demolition reinforces it as a transaction with either good, bad, or inconclusive outcomes. The evaluative approach – what demolition accomplishes – constrains demolishing as a technical precondition for future profits by property owners or developers. By shoehorning demolition to fit the judgments of these dichotomized assessments, the prevailing approaches flattens or conceals the operations of wreckers, builders, excavators, and haulers.

I illustrate a *land regime of decline* by examining six backfill-related properties within Detroit. These properties each demonstrate distinct ways in which configurations of the factors of production – with special attention to land and capital - transform the built environments of declining cities in a manner that is not reducible to gentrification or austerity. In many cases, policy institutions and demolition contractors are neither preparing Detroit for redevelopment nor switching off the lights on neighborhoods; there is a middle ground in which the value of land is determined by the twinned process of the backfill supply chain and the removal of the structure. The practices, processes, and strategies of demolition contractors I demonstrate how firms and DDP actors drew upon and leveraged the idea of "stockpiling" to justify property relations that enabled and accommodated rentiership within the city's demolition program.

Rather than a "rent gap" akin to uneven development by gentrification, contractors purchased and participated in property transactions that allowed them to use the city's land to grab value by employing policies and practices of the DDP itself. While contractors might operate within a political economy of land, the land's status as an exploitable commodity is not exhausted by its status within an idealized spectrum of use and exchange. In other words, land purchased, owned, occupied, or used within the DDP serves a valuation purpose beyond its marketability or developability. Land helped close the gap but for purposes of deintensification rather than redevelopment. Contractors were not building or speculating. By backfilling, contractors created a new capital asset class within Detroit. Occupying that land – and excluding others from its use – made it possible to establish bases of operation that accelerated demolishing Detroit and enabled backfilling to serve the income-generation interests of contractors.

Deconstructing Demolishing as Value-Creator

Stabilizing Home Values

Local and national journalists have popularized the visual of jubilant Detroit inhabitants celebrating while an excavator descends upon and devours a structure (Dahl, 2016). In these portrayals, the lumbering bulldozer is a symbol of stability and possibility. But inhabitant exuberance has not been matched by the intensity of evidence. In 2015, Dynamo Metrics, a three-person, Detroit-based spatial econometrics firm supported by a Dan Gilbert investment, conducted a study - *Estimating Home Equity Impact from Rapid, Targeted Residential Demolition in Detroit* - drawing associations between Hardest Hit Fund demolitions and home

values Dynamo released their findings as the Detroit Demolition Impact Report. Researchers observed a 4.2% increase in values within 500 feet of a demolition (Dynamo Metrics, 2015).

They concluded that each HHF dollar returned $8.35 in home equity gains. In a subsection

Figure 41: Dynamo's theory of change in Detroit (Dynamo Metrics, 2015)

labeled “Fueling the Machine,” the study authors write, “Recent efforts have shown that Detroit’s government is up to the task of rapid blight removal. With over 5,000 structures eliminated during the past 18 months, Detroit has demonstrated a capacity to remove blighted structures. (2015, 6)” Although policymakers and developers met these findings with undiminished enthusiasm, the study parameters complicate external validity and suggest a slightly different conclusion. Dynamo concentrated their analysis on the return-on-investment from the first round of HHF demolitions (HHF1), which targeted resources and rolled-out bulldozers into Detroit’s “strong” residential neighborhoods: Northend, Jefferson Chalmers, Southwest, Grandmont Rosedale, UDM/Marygrove, and Morningside/EEV/Cornerstone.

The presence of these stable neighborhoods in Dynamo’s study is not an accident, nor is it representative of the city. The Hardest Hit strategy document from 2013 identifies those six neighborhoods as *Eligible Area Targeted Neighborhoods* (City of Detroit, 2013). They met the standard of a strong neighborhood that could be fortified by strategic residential demolitions. Although these neighborhoods may demonstrate home equity appreciation, these jumps in value

correspond to more generalized improvements in neighborhoods as the city emerges from the mortgage foreclosure hangover. Critically, HHF administrators did not choose neighborhoods at random but relied on an undisclosed measure of "marketability for redevelopment investments." HHF1 disbursement concentrated demolitions in neighborhoods that would benefit by design. Put another way, the Dynamo Metrics study concluded historically attractive and already recovering neighborhoods in Detroit recover faster with additional resources. While Dynamo Metrics was not able to measure demolition impact in future HHF zones (HHF2-HHF5), findings from the 2014-2015 period do not have external validity for neighborhoods exhibiting greater housing insecurity. The HHF1 demolitions served as a smaller-scale redistribution of public wealth to protect private property and homeowner interests in those "desirable" areas of the city.

HHF zone expansion has continued apace since 2014 and culminated in the inclusion of 80% of Detroit neighborhoods. Despite conducting demolitions across the majority of the city's neighborhoods, HHF and demolition administrators still covet and publicize findings from the Dynamo Metrics HHF1 study to justify ongoing residential blight removal. The study's clear weaknesses are nudged aside by enthusiastic DDP leaders who treat the city's structural challenges as artifacts of blight itself and improvements as a direct result of demolitions (blight flight). Concerns about the study's generalizability have not discouraged leaders and developers from treating the study's limited findings as confirmation of demolition's return-on-investment (Spangler, 2015). Demolition officials – in Detroit and nationally - continue to deploy the Dynamo Metrics analysis and share supportive inhabitant anecdotes to maintain popular backing for demolition even in areas that do not fit the HHF1 neighborhood profile. Questions about demolition's benefits in other corners of Detroit – public safety, property values, and quality of

life – are expected to be addressed soon. According to MSHDA, researchers at Michigan State University will release an expanded study of HHF impact at the end of 2020 (MIRS, 2016).

Table 9: Total residential demolitions by funding in Detroit, MI as of spring 2019

Funding Source	**Count of Demolitions**
HHF	12338
Non-HHF	4398
Grand Total	16736

Producing Developable Land

The parallel argument to home value appreciation is demolition serves as the production of vacant and developable land. In short, demolition eliminates the need for development interests to exhaust resources eliminating impediments to investments. Demolition reduces barriers and realizes cheap land that can compete with untouched tracts in peripheral communities. Mary Townley, a MSHDA director overseeing demolition, confirmed the agency applies a lien in the sum of the HHF funds used on each address after demolition. The demolition liens are an extension of MSHDA and Michigan Homeowner Assistance Nonprofit Housing Corporation policy during the initial rollout of HHF. The state allocated support for owner-occupants of homes in which mortgages exceeded property value. By providing assistance to qualified homeowners in the form of interest free loans[140], the state's Step Forward Mortgage Assistance program aimed to maintain occupancy and stabilize neighborhoods. In order to prevent speculation and house-flipping, the loan repayment discounted 20% each year an owner-occupant remained at the address. After five years, the homeowner could sell the property. The HHF Blight Elimination Program kept this provision in place with little revision. MSHDA places

[140] Up to $30,000

a lien on each property with an HHF-funded demolition despite the DLBA owning the property (and the program being an award rather than a loan). Records with the Wayne County Register of Deeds show MSHDA has typically applied these liens within three months of each completed demolition[141]. To codify this lien provision, MSHDA (2018) adapted the existing Department of the Treasury language on homeowner assistance and added *Blight* to the second sentence:

> Loan will be for 0%, non-amortizing, forgivable over a 5 year term at 20% per year, as long as covenants are met; outstanding balance of loan will be due on sale, or transfer of the property, to the extent of net proceeds received. Any repayment of program funds will be re-invested back into the Blight program allocation. Special considerations may be made by MHA to release lien prior to 5 year term based on merit of request and to promote positive economic impact to community on a case by case situation. (B-5-3)

However, the total lien is typically larger than the demolition cost logged on the city's public demolition data portal. In *Table 10*, a sample of HHF liens drawn from 2014-2018 demonstrates the city's reported demolition price is on average 85% of the lien MSHDA places on a property demolished with the funds[142]. According to Townley, the gap between reported price and the lien

[141] Officially, the lien is listed as a mortgage between the Detroit Land Bank Authority and the Michigan Homeowner Nonprofit Housing Corporation.
[142] Wayne County Register of Deeds; www.waynecountylandrecords.com

Address	Demolition Date	City Demolition Price	MSHDA Lien	City/MSHDA
8421 Navy	5/13/2014	$7,000.00	$8,941.00	78%
9046 Trinity	2/26/2015	$16,377.55	$18,255.55	90%
8835 Stout	9/17/2015	$8,764.00	$11,089.00	79%
15865 Fielding	9/18/2015	$21,520.00	$24,052.00	89%
19510 Heyden	10/23/2015	$13,430.00	$15,282.00	88%
3059 Townsend	3/28/2016	$12,697.00	$16,139.64	79%
9135 Bishop	5/26/2016	$18,998.00	$21,155.83	90%
3929 Field	6/1/2016	$12,170.00	$14,115.00	86%
19303 Concord	6/22/2016	$16,450.00	$18,690.00	88%
19015 Charest	6/25/2016	$13,780.00	$16,100.50	86%
2700 Blaine	7/18/2016	$13,141.00	$14,406.00	91%
6761 Auburn	7/18/2016	$13,460.00	$15,804.12	85%
14097 Marlowe	7/19/2016	$23,930.00	$25,000.00	96%
2740 Calvert	4/11/2017	$22,999.50	$25,000.00	92%
12094 Longacre	5/9/2017	$9,830.00	$12,095.00	81%
19252 Moenart	5/16/2017	$9,475.00	$11,960.00	79%
8819 Neal	6/26/2017	$17,610.00	$19,889.00	89%
11739 Abington Ave	7/27/2017	$12,530.00	$14,905.00	84%
2413 Hudson	10/10/2017	$16,743.50	$19,098.50	88%
13116 August	4/4/2018	$18,011.00	$20,902.00	86%
15273 Park Grove	8/21/2018	$16,462.00	$18,941.00	87%
20403 Omira	11/28/2018	$29,405.00	$25,000.00	118%

Table 10: Sample of city-reported demolitions at Detroit addresses as percentage of the total HHF lien placed at each property, 2014-2018

amount is the sum of additional costs associated with administering demolition. These costs do appear in any DDP records. *Table 11* shows MSHDA will be seeking repayment of the demolition liens applied by MSHDA until 2025.

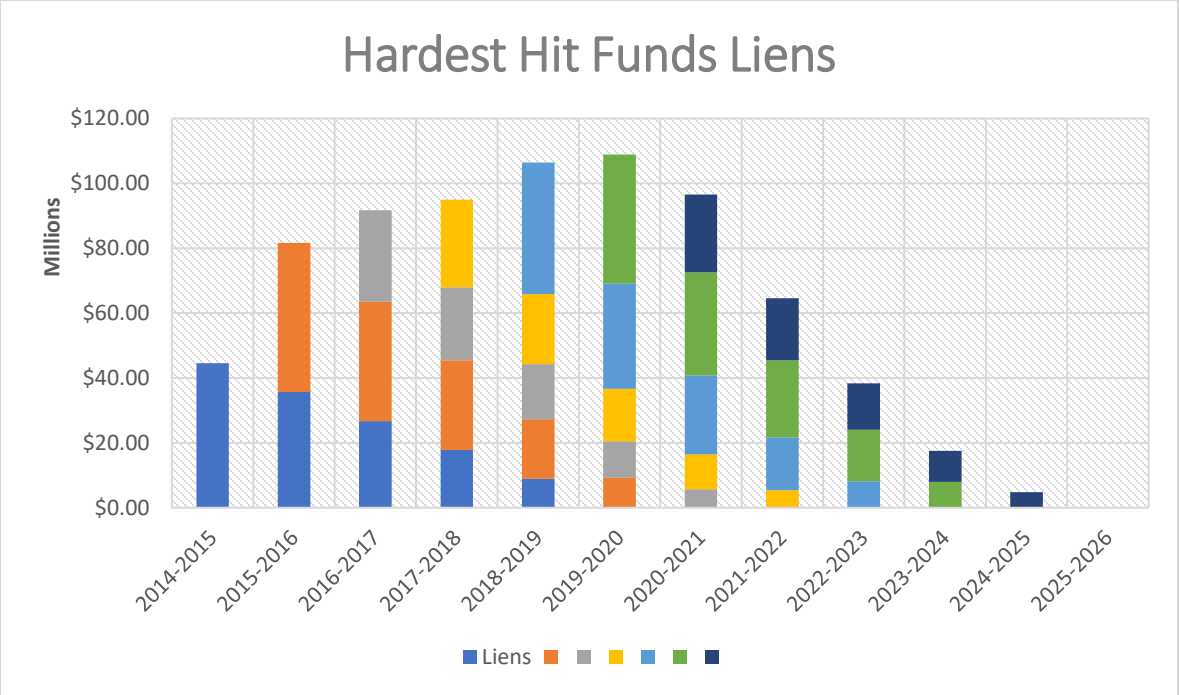


Table 11: A timeline of expiration of HHF liens on demolitions in Detroit, MI from 2014-2026

Sidelot sales are one way of bypassing the HHF lien. MSHDA allows the DLBA to sell these lots for $100 and extinguish the lien they place on each property. By the beginning of 2019, the DLBA had sold 1,098 side lots for a total of $109,800. *Table 12* shows sidelot sales based on the type of financing for the demolition. The Sidelot program is a major success of DLBA and represents the bulk of sales of vacant property in Detroit. However, the program also should not be misinterpreted as a signal of the inevitability of demolition-dependent redevelopment. These properties were the sites of a combined $15,753,575.43 in HHF demolition funding over five years. By the beginning of 2019, the DLBA had sold only 50

Funding Source	**Count of Sidelot Sales**
HHF	1098
Non-HHF	290
Grand Total	**1388**

Table 12: Sidelot sales by demolition type in Detroit, MI, 2014-2019

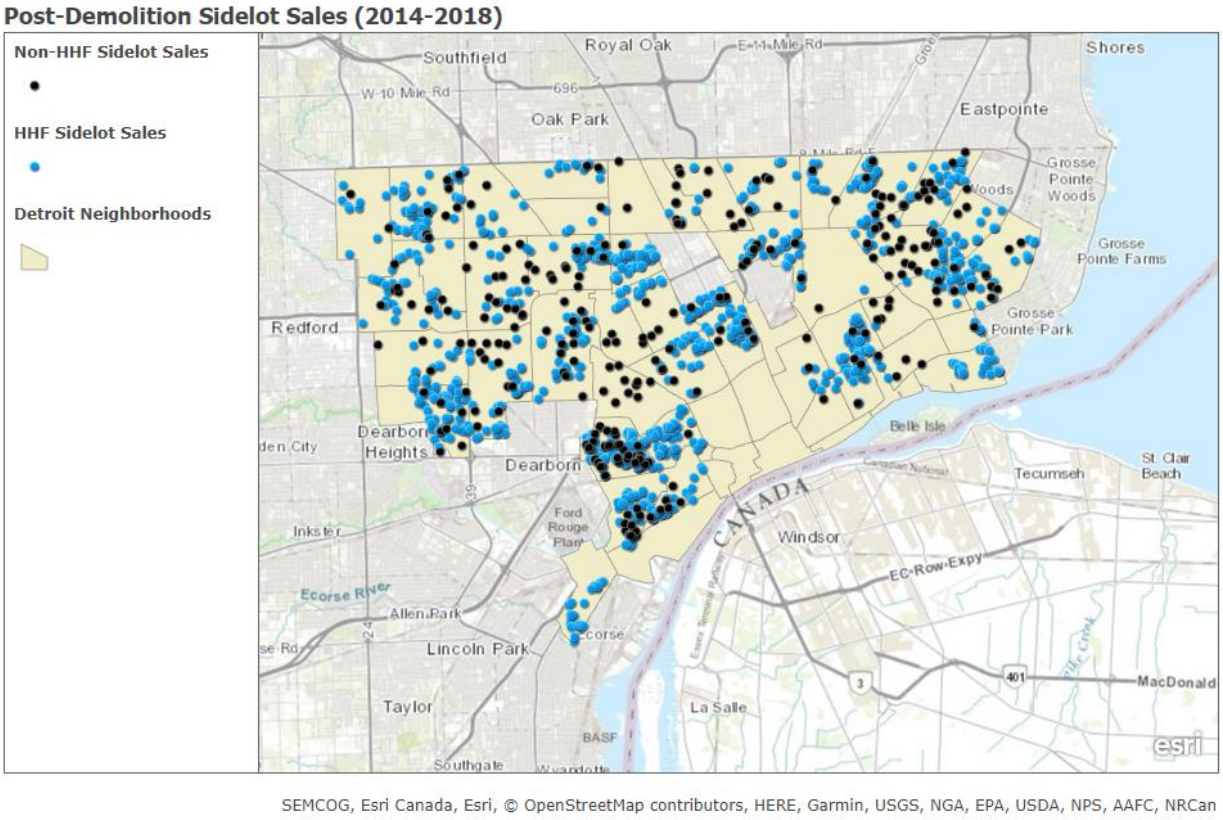


Figure 42: Location of sidelot sales of HHF-demolished sites in Detroit, MI, 2014-2018

vacant lots to other, non-Sidelot buying parties. Twenty-four non-HHF properties are now owned by industrial and commercial businesses. The twenty-six remaining HHF properties were sold for a total of $44,563 but were the sites of a combined $388,287.18 in HHF demolition funding. DLBA sold most of these properties to faith-based organizations and non-profits which, according to both city and state demolition officials, automatically discharges the HHF lien on the property. Of these 26 demolitions, only one property sale fits the profile of a combined price of the HHF demolition lien and the "fair market value" generated by DLBA.

Tammy Daniels, the Demolition Director at the DLBA, disclosed in an interview the DLBA had sold one property to a developer interest. Bernard Butris (of West Bloomfield, MI) purchased 20576 Syracuse on 6/20/2018 for $13,833. The demolition occurred on 12/23/2015 and DMC completed it for $14,026.00. The contractor sourced the backfill material from 14039

Grand River and recorded a cost of $1,515.12 for 250 cubic yards. MSDHA placed the HHF lien on the property on 3/17/2016 in the amount of $17,064. If MSHDA's discount rule applied to this property, then the lien discounted $3,412.80 per year. Based on this discount rate, the lien on 20576 Syracuse at the time of sale would be approximately $10,238.40, which indicates DLBA estimated the fair market value of the property to be $3,594.60. In the months following his purchase, Butris allowed cars to park on the dirt lot. On 4/23/2019, he applied to the City Planning Commission to rezone 20576 Syracuse from single family residential (R1) to Open Parking District (P1). The rezoned lot would provide additional parking for the nearby Flavors Detroit marijuana dispensary owned by Butris that opened in spring 2018. The Planning Commission approved the rezoning in late 2020. The site is currently an empty, gravel lot.

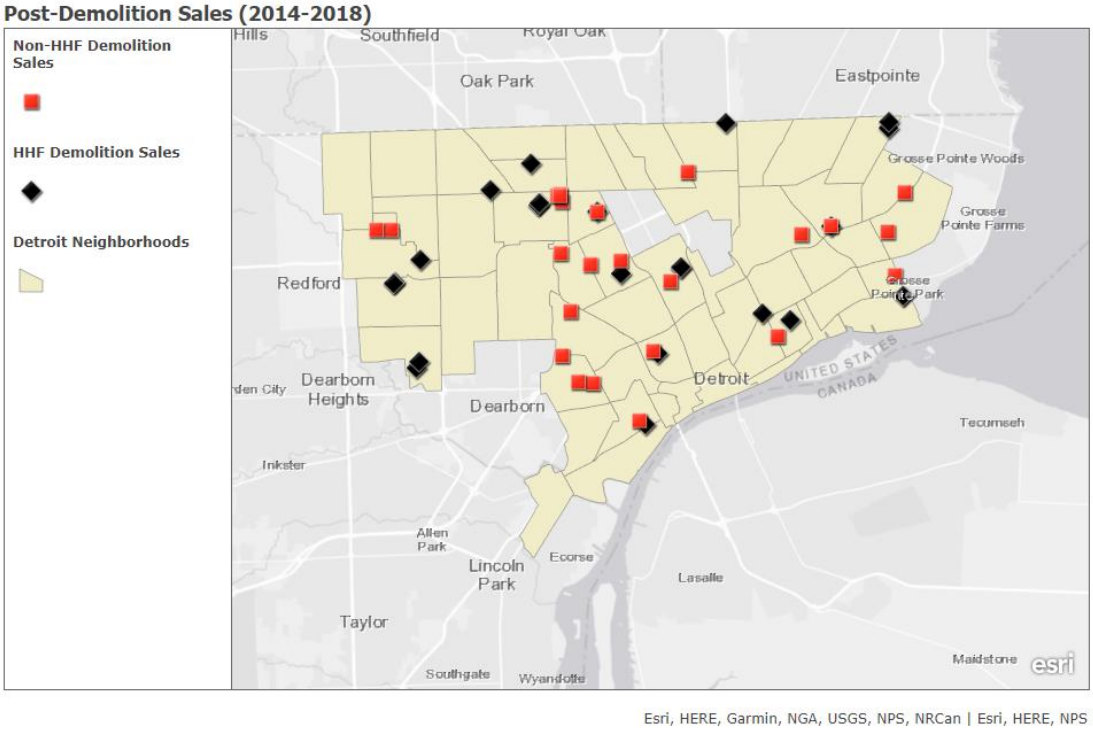


Figure 43: Post-Demolition Sales of Demolished Properties in Detroit to non-Sidelot buyers, 2014-2018

These HHF liens indicate a different pattern and mechanism of income-generation is possible within the DDP. The presence of the liens may have slowed the classic redevelopment process – wreck a derelict structure and build new on the vacant site – but has not prevented the

valuation of land. The lien policy has not signaled the failure of public largesse to reboot the property market in Detroit. Instead, it makes possible a form of income-generation outside the usual redevelopment process. Rather than illustrate how capital has returned to take advantage of newly empty land, the liens demonstrate the value grabbed by demolition contractors and their networks within the DDP. Evidence from these demolitions thus far does not suggest wrecking automatically unlocks development in Detroit. Another connection of land to value is at work.

The DDP provides contractors with an undervalued resource in the form of vacant structures. Contractors process the resource through demolishing and capture surplus value contained within the structure. This is the difference between demolition – a discrete, technical intervention – and demolishing – an embedded, regional process. The MSHDA lien policy complicates conventional reinvestment, but it also enabled an ensemble of actors - contractors, haulers, excavators - positioned outside traditional real estate capital to secure a place as shapers of real estate. The small portion of sales post-demolition in Detroit is not a signal of failure, but a feature of another process. The liens encourage an analysis balancing redevelopment goals with contractor priorities to generate income from the uneven development of the Detroit region.

Contrary to the publicized expectations of investment and institutional actors, Detroit's demolition program has not culminated in a continuous fire sale of publicly owned vacant land to speculative buyers interested in parking their money in depressed property markets (Farkas, 2016; Burke, 2013). These results also challenge critical approaches upbraiding demolition as the creative destruction behind gentrification and class restructuring (Jay & Conklin, 2020; Ehrenfeucht & Nelson, 2020). While the volume of sidelot sales into 2019 shows local interest in owning property in Detroit, these sales are restricted to adjacent homeowners in good standing with their property taxes. A series of five *Land Forums* in 2014-2015 organized by the Greening

of Detroit, an urban agriculture advocacy group, provided guidance and technical assistance to Detroit residents interested in purchasing vacant lots[143]. The workshops – in part guided by the DLBA - narrowed possible productive uses to home agriculture and recreation[144]. The Land Forum expected sidelot buyers to fence-in or provide frequent maintenance on their newly purchased lots. Organizers of the events focused their energies on supporting incumbent residents and owner-occupants that wanted to try their hand at cultivating cabbage, not enticing speculative capital. In 2014, Rosie Sharp, the founder of the Land Forum, observed, "It's about spending time outside with your community and being connected to the earth (Galbraith, 2014)."

The DDP, in this way, has had a stabilizing effect on neighborhoods once studded with abandoned structures. These improvements are consistent with research that suggests a link between demolition, green infrastructure, and inhabitant confidence in the future of their neighborhoods (Schilling & Logan, 2008). Demolition programs that offer a menu of options for post-demolition vacant lots can supply neighborhoods with new recreational amenities and infrastructure (Nemeth & Langhorst, 2014). Policymakers and non-profit advocates promote these greening approaches as a shift in the fundamentals of the urban ecosystem and how inhabitants use or benefit from their neighborhoods (Meerow & Newell, 2017). Studies from public health scholars have argued vacant lot greening is associated with reductions in crime and improvements in resident-reported sense of safety (Branas, South, Kondo, Hohl, Bourgois, Wiebe, & MacDonald, 2018; Garvin, Cannuscio, & Branas, 2012). This work matches findings linking vacant lot greening to increased values in adjacent properties (Heckert & Mennis, 2012).

[143] DLBA assisted with the workshop series and provided on-site consultations with interested buyers. Notwithstanding their attendance, the workshop was not limited to the sale of publicly-held lots and encouraged residents to explore other purchasing options by contacting the owners of privately-held property.
[144] I attended a Land Forum in Southwest Detroit in 2015.

Despite those positives, recent research suggests Detroit will not be rewarded for its demolition efforts in property tax value for another 50 years. (Paredes & Skidmore, 2017). Moreover, this work continues the tradition of reducing blight removal to a binary evaluation (good/bad; success/failure) rather than addressing its political-economic and geographic character in the remaking of neighborhoods. In this framing, demolition is a local response to the negative consequences of private property and economic change, not a continuation of those same spatial relations that undermine cities like Detroit. For many of the regnant voices on urban change, demolition or blight remediation are technical responses to depleted resident morale or undervalued neighborhoods. In a recent opinion piece contributed to *The New Yorker*, Eric Klinenberg synopsized findings by public health luminary Charles Branas that drew a significant association between remediating blight and reducing incidents of violence (2018).

Klinenberg's summary reproduces Branas' own exclusion of the forces and factors shaping the neighborhood itself. As a scholar in the neighborhood effects tradition, Branas grants considerable agency to neighborhoods to shape the life outcomes of residents: *your zip code determines your health, income, and educational attainment* (Sampson, 2019) In a bit of methodological localism, Branas and his colleagues marginalize the landlords, speculators, evictions, and foreclosures that produce and shape neighborhood contexts. Neither Branas nor Klinenberg (the more bracing act of this "localism") refer to how the neighborhood and its visual blight are nested within broader policy or property practices. As such, landscaping becomes an "upstream" or "macrolevel" intervention simply because the neighborhood masquerades as the structural context of real estate, public institutions, and regional segregation. Consequently, these scholars have sidelined or misinterpreted the social forces that shape neighborhood conditions.

A richer analysis of demolishing would address how it implicates a broader ensemble of interests and whether these interests are participating in a shared choreography of improvement. For instance, in Detroit, the DDP requires contractors reconstruct sidewalks as a final step in the demolition process. This extra infrastructural add-on is a service that has come under scrutiny as a waste of public funds (Ikonomova, 2019) but also as an onerous obligation required of wreckers (Livengood, 2017). Moreover, the scarcity of non-sidelot sales and the lack of new construction on those sites illustrates how the commonsense of demolition's virtues does not possess the explanatory heft to comprehend the coexisting land regimes in Detroit. As I have shown, research and the popular wisdom on demolition characterizes land clearance and blight removal as an essential step in the process of capital mobility that revaluates and refreshes the development potential of wastelands. In this characterization, demolition unlocks development by tilting the seesaw of capital towards disinvested neighborhoods. That demolishing Detroit has failed to uniformly enact that change gestures to the presence of other forms of value, land, and income-generation that have allowed demolishing to be a lucrative process. Today, demolishing Detroit is not synonymous with displacement, nor has it proven to be sufficient precondition for a regional spatial fix where capital begins to flow to a frontier with high potential incomes.

Challenging the analytic comprehensiveness of spatial-fix or gentrification in Detroit does not mean real estate capital has abstained from producing and exploiting the city's uneven development. The HHF liens and lack of property sales are not the final word on demolition's relationship to value. But relying on the explanatory authority of austerity and gentrification can cloud the different dimensions of Detroit's present condition – a condition to which demolishing and backfilling have made significant contributions. Class restructuring, high rents, and cultural transformations do appear in pockets of Detroit (Moskowitz, 2015). Downtown, Midtown, and

Corktown neighborhoods host blisteringly hot real estate markets apparent in breakneck conversions of both residential and commercial properties (Mondry 2018). Speculative steel and glass high-rises spring up on Woodward Avenue casting shadows on streetscapes where luxury national brands replace local shops (Runyan & Mondry, 2019). While gentrification is *a condition* within Detroit (Ocbazghi, 2019), it is not *the condition* of Detroit (Kurth, 2017a). Economies of non-gentrifying Detroit - evicting, foreclosing, demolishing, and backfilling - depend on the sustained creation of environments for value-grabbing (Seymour & Akers, 2019). Islands of Detroit's decay distract from the operative surface for the production of decline.

In the following sections, I present six examples of how decline, the DDP, and backfilling have yielded and relied on new configurations of land and value in Detroit. Each of shows ways in which institutions and industry rework the built environment without class restructuring or disinvestment. These configurations illustrate an economy of demolishing in which contractors, excavators, and haulers control land and extract value. Put another way, the relations exhibited by these properties show how the decline of Detroit and the uncertainties of its real estate market can camouflage forms of land use, occupation, and valuation that routinize rentiership through demolishing. These strategies for investment and intervention represent physical and financial extractions that conflict with demolishing as the precondition to urban rebirth or its demise. Demolishing was not a local response for managing and halting decline, it provided a way to reinforce the process of decline by creating new schemes for valuing the city's built environment. The processes shaping these properties illustrates how capital produces or mobilizes Detroit's vacant land to preserve its interests without contributing to redevelopment.

Stockpiling the Backfill Supply

The starting point for the DDP required reliance on an external network of actors to market, commodify, and haul material. Contractors dispersed across the region hunting for deals and discounts on backfill material. As I showed in Chapter 4, these deals and discounts often depended on the expansionist logics associated with speculative development, unclear origins, or value realization through new buildings or extraction. However, Detroit's unstable property market also engendered opportunities to buy, sell, and circulate dirt through physical emplacement within the city's boundaries. Contractors could locate operations within the city and reduce supply chain costs. By taking command of residential, commercial, and industrial properties, contractors found ways to establish control over what MSHDA internally termed "Dirt Costs" and generate incomes from the DDP (Ferretti, 2019b). Contractors and haulers used these properties to store, screen, and distribute backfill material to demolition sites in Detroit.

In a 12/23/2015 report to the Detroit City Council, the LPD (2015a) staff addressed opportunities and challenges associated with a stockpile approach to backfill. George Cushingberry, then Council President Pro Tem, requested LPD explain rising demolition costs and provide actionable recommendations on a possible stockpile ordinance. The subsequent LPD report outlined how the DDP used stockpiles and opportunities for expansion, "Soil stockpiles have been in existence in the city of Detroit in recent years. However, these stockpiles have only been permitted on a temporary basis and are typically project specific (3)." At that time, the City Council was amenable to a set of regulations allowing "soil stockpiles" as part of a new category of bulk solid material that would meet the same standards as petcoke (2). By institutionalizing stockpiles as part of the DDP's strategy, contractors could build reserves during slow seasons of construction and avoid competition for trucks. Several months earlier in 2015, DBA had applied

to MSHDA for HHF support to launch a pilot program of stockpile sites. MSHDA researched the viability of the stockpiling program "but never approved or funded." In its 12/2015 report, the LPD concluded "the payment structure of the program [HHF] would not allow for the implementation of a strategy such as this (3)." Nevertheless, the LPD identified three stockpiles in use as of winter 2015: 14800 Castleton, 14039 Grand River, and 11031 Shoemaker.

The debate on backfill ordinances appears immaterial because guidance in a 10/2015 RFP had already established regulations for stockpile locations (Duggan, 2015). DDP officials were relying on stockpiles as if they were already essential aspects of the supply chain. Owners of these properties must provide permission to contractors to store material. For their part, contractors must grant access to the owner of a stockpile site for inspection. The DBA also required contractors to incorporate dust control measures that included safe placement of piles and access to water sprayers to restrict particulate matter. The program's consideration of stockpiling regulation ends there. The DDP does not require testing of these stockpile sites unless the material has a proven industrial origin**.** In 10/2015, staff at AKT Peerless stressed the importance of stockpiling to maintain an efficient demolition program. At that time, Tony Kashat remarked, "We have one stockpile location. Two others are being considered. The Shoemaker location on the eastside: 11031 Shoemaker. It saves times. There's 50,000 (cubic) yards."

The DDP backfill records do not list 11031 Shoemaker as a source site for any of its demolition. However, aerial imagery shows the mounds and tire tracks consistent with frequent use by heavy machinery beginning in late 2014 until the middle of 2019. The City of Detroit owns 11031 Shoemaker and the Detroit Water & Sewerage Departments owns the adjacent property at 11081 Shoemaker. Detroit took possession of 11031 in the 1980s and demolished the on-site factory in 1998. In the early 2000s, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

(MDEQ) launched the Detroit Lead Assessment Project (DLAP) and focused a 2007 analysis on contamination in the neighborhood due to past activity involving a lead smelter (Weston Solutions, 2007). A ball bearings manufacturer previously owned and operated 11031 Shoemaker. As part of DLAP, contractors collected soil samples from thirteen sites near 11031. Their findings identified two off-site locations with potentially hazardous levels of lead concentration. Because on-site concentrations were low, DLAP decided against further action.

Even with conflicting guidance, contractors adopted the stockpile approach to lower transportation costs. The stockpiling took a variety of forms. Some contractors notified nearby residents while others simply dumped on empty lots. An WYXZ-ABC report in 5/2016 suggested that contractors were storing backfill in Detroit neighborhoods without prior DBA approval (Dahl, 2016b). At the time, Farkas of the DBA went as far as calling any stockpiling of demolition backfill in neighborhoods a form of illegal dumping. While that may have been the case in spring 2016, stockpiles remained a central element of contractor and DDP approaches to demolishing. A review of aerial imagery of several approved backfill sources with medium to large volumes (over 2000 yd3) indicates contractors used stockpiles in an unofficial capacity.

Stockpiling is not a damaging strategy for managing backfill. The practice can reduce bottlenecks and delivery times. However, in its efforts to establish guidelines for storing backfill on properties, the DDP approached backfill as a feature of the land rather than its relationship to environments, politics, and history. These stockpiles – large and small – were part of deceptive backfilling practices. Through stockpiling, the embedded elements of backfill as a resource and asset fell away to its present as a neutral input into the moment of demolition. Backfill's past no longer matters as contractors load and leave. By dumping tens of thousands of cubic yards of material on these sites, the DDP rendered parts of the city's land unusable beyond its status as

storage space. The benefits of stockpiling to costs remain inconclusive but controlling land this way has evolved from a rejected proposal to standard practice. The six properties in the next section are approaches to stockpiling that represent a local land regime of urban decline.

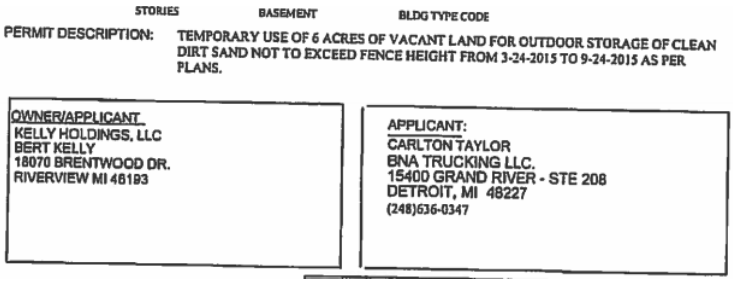
Dump: 14800 Castleton, Detroit, MI

The largest backfill stockpile site by volume neighbors I-96 as it enters Detroit's northwest corner. 14800 Castleton is a vacant, six-acre field encumbered by chain-link fence on its western and northern boundaries and abutting a parking lot and warehouse to the east. A tiny security trailer near a gravel road welcomes visitors in the southwest corner of the site. For most of its existence, Laramie Crane used 14800 to store its equipment and supplies. Laramie Terminals, the parent company, sold 14800 Castleton and an adjacent warehouse at 14801 Fullerton to Kelly Holdings LLC in 10/2012 for a reported $600,000. However, Detroit property sales records show the transaction was a "no consideration" and "not arm's length" sale. These terms of sale support an explanation that Laramie and Kelly had a preexisting relationship allowing the former to convey the pair of property deeds without any money changing hands.

The terms of the sale are important because one of the properties Laramie sold became an official backfill source within three years. DBA records show 14800 Castleton as the source site for 70 HHF demolitions supported by $261,250 over the summer of 2015. Homrich, a major demolition contractor that moved into the residential sector with the DDP, billed MSHDA $3,750.00 for every backfill transaction – *regardless of volume*. In 5/2014, Detroit's Buildings, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED) granted Bert Kelly, the owner of 14800 and the president of Kelly Holdings, a temporary land use permit to use 14800 as a storage yard for "clean dirt/sand." The DBA and AKT Peerless records do not show any backfill

transactions involving 14800 in the subsequent time. No aerial imagery from the period confirms activity related to Kelly using the approved variance. The permit expired in 11/2014.

Four months later, the BSEED issued another temporary permit at 14800 Castleton. This time, the permit application was jointly filed by Kelly and Carlton Taylor, the owner and CEO of BNA Trucking based in Pontiac, MI. The pair requested a permit allowing "Temporary use of 6 acres of vacant land for outdoor storage of clean dirt/sand not to exceed fence height from 3-24-2015 to 9-24-2015 as per plans." Taylor incorporated BNA in 2006 and his state LLC application listed the official name as "Before and After Real Estate Development, LLC." At no point has Taylor conducted real estate business under this LLC. In 2008, Taylor applied to amend the LLC name to its current form to reflect his trucking aspirations. In 4/2011, the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) granted BNA a federal ID for intrastate hauling. USDOT authorized BNA to operate one vehicle with one driver. However, BNA has not maintained records with LARA since before 2/2014. Aerial imagery confirms a large volume of material appeared and then disappeared in spring 2015. The temporary land use permit expired in 9/2015


STORIES BASEMENT BLDG TYPE CODE

PERMIT DESCRIPTION: TEMPORARY USE OF 6 ACRES OF VACANT LAND FOR OUTDOOR STORAGE OF CLEAN DIRT SAND NOT TO EXCEED FENCE HEIGHT FROM 3-24-2015 TO 9-24-2015 AS PER PLANS.

OWNER/APPLICANT
KELLY HOLDINGS, LLC
BERT KELLY
18070 BRENTWOOD DR.
RIVERVIEW MI 48193

APPLICANT:
CARLTON TAYLOR
BNA TRUCKING LLC.
15400 GRAND RIVER - STE 208
DETROIT, MI 48227
(248)636-0347

Figure 44: Land use permit application for 14800 Castleton (Detroit Zoning Commission, 2015)

No records with Wayne or Oakland County illustrate a prior or ongoing relationship between Kelly and Taylor. Aside from a raft of property forfeiture in Oakland County, there is no evidence Taylor has remained active in real estate. Since the expiration of the temporary land use permit for 14800 Castleton in 2015, Bert Kelly has planted himself at the intersection of

land, policy, and infrastructure at least one other time. In 2004, Kelly purchased 6224 and 6266 W Jefferson from Benjamin Taylor for $100,000. From 2004 to 2014, 6224 was the base of operations for *Kelly's Recycling Service*[145]. In 2014, Kelly sold both properties for a combined $120,000 to MDOT. The former rendering facility is now a vacant lot awaiting the construction of the new US Point of Entry to serve traffic entering the country from the new Gordie Howe International Bridge. After selling to MDOT, Kelly relocated his rendering operations to 14800 Castleton (though 14801 Fullerton is the official HQ). Today, the site at 14800 Castleton gives no indication Kelly and Taylor once provided Homrich with enough backfill material for 102 transactions. At the site's southeast corner, a wooden sign stands bearing the name *Kelly Field*.

The Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (SIGTARP) has made 14800 Castleton a central focus of their continuing investigation of the DDP. Charlie LeDuff, a former reporter with *The Detroit News* and *New York Times*, provided one explanation for the source in an August 2018 post to *Deadline Detroit*. In his usual sardonic tone, LeDuff wrote, "Did the city intentionally create a dirt shortage so connected contractors could feed at your trough, Johnny? I don't want to get in the middle of battling bureaucracies, or mediate laboratory tests. That's your job. They're slippery around here. (LeDuff, 2018)" LeDuff claims contractors hid disqualified I-96 material at 14800 before using it in DDP demolitions. The explanation harbors serious implications for tracing the origin of the regional secondary market of backfill. Contractors manipulated the backfill supply to create and exploit resource scarcity.

Kat Stafford, the government watchdog reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*, pursued the same line of reasoning in an article examining accusations of contaminated backfill (Stafford, 2019h). She describes how the 816,000 yd3 of material excavated during the I-96 went from

[145] Kelly applied for a name change in 2013 from Kelly's Rendering Service. Kelly's Recycling Service is one of three businesses in Wayne County authorized by the state of Michigan to transport and dispose dead animals.

being the backbone of DDP's backfilling strategy to its seedy underbelly. In 2014, the DDP determined the I-96 material was "not suitable for residential use" but were not able to confirm the time period in which an environmental consultant would have performed the soil tests disqualifying the material. Stafford's investigation indicates contractors made this decision based on reported chloride levels that would have threatened nearby groundwater. However, based on backfill guidance crafted by AKT Peerless and the DDP, laboratory tests for chloride levels were not required in the approval process unless "located beneath parking lots only (DBA, 2014, 4)".

Diane Cross, a spokesperson with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), disclosed to LeDuff and Stafford that I-96 material went on to be used in infrastructure projects in suburban Detroit. MDOT maintains contracting records for the I-96 project under the code 82122. Although Dan's Excavating received the $148 million state contract to rebuild the 7-mile stretch of interstate, the project included at least a dozen partner firms responsible for electrical, hauling, concrete, and paving. Towards the end of summer 2013, Hard Rock Concrete, a contractor based in Westland, MI, initiated preliminary work under contract 82122-119057. State records report one level of subcontracting, but it is standard practice to rely on additional levels.

Figure 45: A hauler from late summer 2013 dumping material at 14800 Castleton (Google, n.d.)

Consequently, any number of firms could have hauled and unloaded the debris of I-96 at the Castleton site. *Figure 45* is Google Streetview from the period with at least one hauler dumping

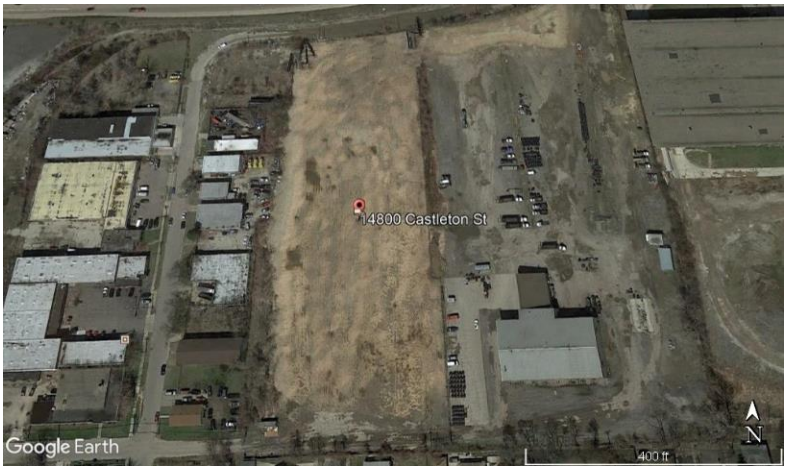
the material that became the approved backfill source. *Figures 46-47* show the presence of a large pile of material in 2015 and an empty lot at the same site in 2017. Identifying the main actor and responsible party for using the material is difficult. Subcontracting firms often exist long enough to serve the immediate hauling interests of more established companies. In some cases, these short-lived haulers may use older equipment still bearing logos or insignia of prior owners. If the truck in question was owned by Taylor (and BNA), it illustrates how a company with one driver and one truck can participate in a $150 million state-funded project.[146]

Questions about the composition or source of the material intersect with concerns about processes around costs. Mary Townley admitted to *The Detroit News* that Homrich had billed HHF a "self-determined average" for the backfill costs traced back to 14800 Castleton (Ferretti, 2019b). Homrich using I-96 material is less important than the existence of unanswered questions surrounding it. The ensemble of Kelly, Taylor, Dan's Excavating, I-96, and MDOT illustrate how treating demolition as a discrete intervention ignores the expansive supply chain – with its financial interests, property holdings, and income priorities – and masks the relationships grabbing value through demolishing. No property is simply a dumpsite for haulers or a stockpile site for wreckers, these properties are the outcome of histories of sales and transactions that implicate state agencies, contractors, haulers, excavators, and owners. 14800 Castleton provides a window into the invisible supply chains and property practices making the DDP possible.

[146] According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, BNA Trucking is "active" and has one vehicle and one driver. Info is available at: https://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/SMS/Carrier/1906305/Overview.aspx?FirstView=True

Figure 46: 14800 Castleton, Detroit, MI, 2015 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 47: 14800 Castleton, Detroit, MI, 2017 (Google, n.d.)



Bert Kelly did not purchase the lot at 14800 Castleton for the next housing development or industrial campus. The land use at the site reflects the ongoing interaction of ownership, occupation, and obeisance. No money changed hands in the conveyance of the property, but the chronology of rezoning, stockpiling, and distribution illustrate how Bert Kelly mobilized 14800 to meet his needs and those of Homrich. The material entered the regional reserves of backfill simply because it suddenly arrived at the site. The material at the site became “usable” and “approved” by virtue of BSEED accommodating Kelly and Taylor’s joint request to temporarily transform the industrial property into a residential material yard suited to the DDP’s own rules.

Dirt from nowhere became dirt from a residential material yard. Homrich then used it and conjured an average cost for each transaction. In the end, the quality or safety of the material used is peripheral to the chain of movements by agencies, occupant, and contractor to convert a fallow lot into space for storing and circulating the asset of backfill. 14800 Castleton became an exemplar of another valuable resource in the regional operations of demolishing: *a somewhere*.

Conceal: Stout Street, Detroit, MI

On 3/2/2015, Adamo Group demolished 18410 Stout Street in northwest Detroit. Adamo – a regional demolition firm with a national reputation in commercial and industrial structure removal – made quick work of the vacant 813 square foot home. Between 1991 and 2007, 18410 had only three owners. In the seven years prior to its HHF demolition, thirteen different owners held the deed. This ownership roulette allowed 18410 to ride the cresting and crashing wave of the Great Recession - occasionally occupied, always transferable. Banks, investors, speculators, and institutions each took their turn neglecting the property. In 2007, just as the first waves of foreclosures began to rattle the hull of the US economy, the Wayne County Sheriff seized 18410 from Redell Salter (the owner-occupant since 2001) and sold it to Argent Securities for $65,064.00. Less than a year later, Argent conveyed the deed to REO Nationwide Inc., which proceeded to dump its inventory along with the home to Izair Skender for $3,000.

Private ownership of the property culminated with CA-based Stone Crest Income & Investment Opportunity Fund 1 selling to CA-based Stonecrest Income & Investment Opportunity Fund 1 for $1,000 – representing a $64,064.00 loss of value in just three years. In 2012, Wayne County Treasurer foreclosed for unpaid property taxes. From there, 18410 Stout entered the inventory of the Detroit Planning and Development Department where it lingered

until the City Council countenanced the mass property transfer to the newly invigorated DLBA. The DDP then placed the property into the HHF-funded demolition process in 7/2014.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, contractors routinely skirted reporting backfill transactions. The absence of 18410 Stout from the record of backfill destinations should serve as the definitive word on its hereafter of emptiness - another casualty of neighborhood disinvestment and local regulatory dysfunction. A contractor tore it down and they dumped material. However, demolition backfill does not belong solely to destinations. In a strange turn, Adamo reported 18410 Stout as the backfill source for two demolitions in 2016: 17147 Ferguson and 19211 Curtis. AKT Peerless approved 18410 Stout as a source seventeen months after Adamo demolished the house on the site. Adamo knocked down 19211 Curtis on June 27, 2016 and billed $9,763.00. A day later, Adamo demolished 17147 Ferguson and billed $9,201.00. Adamo submitted the two transactions reporting 18410 Stout as the backfill source on August 29, 2016. The contractor used 72 yd3 of material to fill 17147 Ferguson and 168 yd3 to fill 19211 Curtis. For the backfill moved to Ferguson, Adamo billed $528.73. For the other, it billed $591.07. Somehow, Adamo had transformed a vacant lot into an asset within its demolition process. By linking the address into its supply chain, Adamo had turned 18410 Stout into a backfill source.

Despite the transaction record and the approval, 18410 Stout was never the original source for demolition backfill. No evidence suggests Adamo excavated one of its 2015 demolition sites to obtain backfill for two demolitions in 2016. DLBA never surrendered ownership to Adamo or an outside party, yet the DDP had approved the site as a source of material despite no tracking of the legitimate origin. The parcel did not need to change hands from public to private to generate income for the latter. Instead, Adamo used the residential address to comply by embedding its source in a neighborhood. As mentioned earlier, DDP and

AKT did not require soil testing or additional monitoring if contractors used material matching the residential category source standard. Rather than an origin, aerial imagery from summer 2016 shows Adamo used 18410 Stout to stage material before hauling to Curtis and Ferguson.

18410 is one of forty-eight *Illusive* backfill sources that indicate how dirt-washing is not an anomaly within the DDP. Whether a church parking lot or a temporary dirt pit, AKT and DDP demonstrated a pattern of approving a residential address despite no evidence corroborating the nature of its sourcing. These misleading records implicate largescale apartment developments and DLBA-owned vacant land like 18410 Stout. To wit, 18410 is not the only address on Stout turned into a logistical asset by Adamo. Seven other sources with a Stout address appear in the DDP backfill records. Two of these sources do not match any past or present address on file with the Detroit Assessor's office. One is currently an owner-occupied home. DLBA owns the other four properties - all property tax foreclosures. Despite the nature of ownership and the lack of development, Stout Street remained integral to how contractors extracted value in Detroit.

On Stout Street, contractors relied on a land regime to capture the DDP regulation and control the valuation of backfill. In sum, Adamo claimed Stout Street addresses contributed 2,072 yd3 of backfill to complete 13 demolitions. The contractor billed HHF $8,893.86 to cover the costs of material. Adamo reported using 192 yd3 from 17660 Stout to complete a demolition at 18424 Stout in 2016. AKT approved 18492 Stout as a source for five demolitions in June 2016. MSHDA placed HHF liens totaling $167,814.10 on these properties. Today, all five remain in the DLBA inventory. On 10/15/2018, Blue Star, a suburban demolition contractor, finally tore down 18492 Stout. A building sat at the address the entire time Adamo reported using the property as a source for material. The DDP reported the cost as $14,774.60. MSHDA placed a $16,713.60 lien on the DLBA-owned property that will not expire until 2023. While

small in scale, these transactions along Stout Street are instructive for understanding how vacant land takes on new potency in a city facing widespread abandonment. The land's value is not in its possible productivity for new property or redevelopment but in its potential value as logistical space occupied by backfill material enabling the mobilization of supply for other demolitions.

Destroy: 14411 Oakland, Highland Park, MI

Aside from a bronze marker in front of a derelict building at the northwest edge of Highland Park, MI, no evidence suggests the Kahn-designed structure helped usher in the 20th century. At its dedication in 1910, the Highland Park Ford Plant – nicknamed the Crystal Palace – was the largest factory in the world and its 102-acres of offices and plants represented an epochal shift in factory design. But the Crystal Palace's influence would soon surpass its campus design. In 10/1913, administrators at the facility instituted the first moving assembly line in automobile production. The (albeit primitive) assembly line accelerated production of the Model T car and the concomitant rise in labor productivity transformed the routines and conventions of manufacturing and the character of the broader economy. The Fordist mode of production would prove to be one of the footings upon which the American century of wealth and power was built.

Despite several attempts at upgrading the plant, Ford chose to move production to modern factories and idled the facility in 1973. Ford sold a bundle of parcels to HPF Associates, an investment firm, for $7,000,000. HPF sat on the property for sixteen years before selling to Woodward-Manchester LLC for $1 in 1997. Woodward-Manchester conveyed the deed to Model T Plaza Phase III in 9/2000. By 2006, both entities did not exist. In 8/2006, Forman Mills, a discount clothing retailer, opened a 55,000 square foot location adjacent to the Highland Park Plant. Within two months, Oakland Avenue Properties took control of the remaining properties.

Today, the factory on Woodward Avenue, where hundreds of Ford workers once produced thousands of Model Ts (later WWII tanks and then tractors), is a landscape peppered with vacant lots and decommissioned factories. But all is not quiet and undisturbed. Where assembly lines belched out cars, conveyor belts and tractor-trailers now provide a pop and hum to the 70 acres as Mid-Michigan Crushing & Recycling (MMCR) processes excavated basements to sell as approved DDP backfill. The presence of the contemporary operation suggests the Crystal Palace of Detroit in the Roaring 20s might be better suited to the sobriquet of the *Concrete Compound*. Where Fordism once signaled its influence over production, a different style of valuation and income occupies the land. Rather than one of growth based on austere standardization, mass production, and mass consumption, the parcel in Highland Park depends on the inscrutability of the region's land regime and the expendability of Detroit neighborhoods.

MMCR sprang from a sequence of regulatory shifts. Early DDP backfill guidance barred concrete from use as demolition backfill, but Kevyn Orr's 8/2014 emergency order allowed crushed basements to become official DDP policy. Although he initially rebuffed the description, Jon Grosshans, an USEPA staffer, confirmed Orr's declaration of a renewed blight emergency and MMCR's emergence was a "linear" process from EM order to crushing operation. Backfill records show MMCR – which moved its base of operations from Fenton, MI - has provided over 500,000 cubic yards of material to HHF demolitions in Detroit worth over $2.3 million in billings. MMCR is by far the largest provider of backfill material for HHF demolitions in Detroit (>2300). Homrich completed the first demolition with crushed basements from MMCR on 6/9/2015. The contractor wrecked 16503 Strathmoor for $15,300.00 and billed $3,750.00 to HHF for an unspecified volume of material[147]. The AKT Peerless platform shows contractors pursued

[147] Early on, many contractors would submit batches of transactions to DDP for review. Homrich included 12 other demolitions alongside 16503 Strathmoor and reported using a total of 840 yd3 from MMCR.

a Category 1 – Residential – approval for the backfill material created by MMCR at the Highland Park site. AKT approved 350,000 yd3 of backfill – designated “crushed aggregate” - for use by Able Demolition on 10/15/2015. Despite no evidence that Category 1 or 3 material is separated at the Highland Park site, MMCR also produced 8,561 yd3 of Category 3 backfill from the excavation for the new City Club apartments at the former Statler Hotel and another 23,576 yd3 from City Modern, the new mixed-use, multi-family condo project at Brush Park.

DDP backfill records list 14411 Oakland as the source of MMCR crushed material but the company’s online presence suggests the company operates out of an adjacent address at 15111 Oakland. The latter is an abandoned Highland Park High School football field directly northwest of 14411 and a chain of empty aggregate yards and unadorned warehouses. Assessor records with Highland Park show MMCR storing personal property at 15111, but aerial and site observation are contradictory. When presented with this information, Janice Bibbs, City Treasurer of Highland Park, remarked, “It’s even confusing to me.” Highland Park records for 14411 Oakland do not list an owner because the property was subjected to frequent partition into an archipelago of parcels with incongruent uses: storage, crushing, and commercial. However, WCA Assessing – a private firm handling Highland Park’s assessment – confirmed the property at 14411 remains in the inventory of Oakland Avenue Properties, LLC. Incorporated in 2006, Oakland Avenue Properties is a shell company of National Equity Corp., a developer of industrial, commercial, and retail property operating out of Bloomfield Hills, MI.

Martin Ross – the owner of both National Equity and Oakland Avenue Properties – was at one time sympathetic to local community efforts to build a Model T-themed history center at the site. In a 2013 article in Crain’s Detroit (Welch, 2013), organizers with Woodward Avenue Action Association remarked, “There is not a week that goes by that someone from Europe or

Asia doesn't arrive at the (complex) guard shack and ask how they can come in to see Ford Highland Park." Aerial imagery of the 14411 Oakland confirms a different fate for the property in the period immediately after Orr suspended and shifted backfilling requirements. *Figure 48* from 2015 shows evidence of stockpiled material but no visible equipment or dense activity. *Figure 49* from 2016 illustrates how MMCR moved its operations, obtained access to crushers and screening equipment, and ramped up production to take advantage of the DDP. By fall 2016, Oakland Avenue Properties had ditched the concept of a history center (Welch, 2016).

Figure 49: 14411 Oakland prior to MMCR operations, 2015 (Google, n.d.)

Figure 48: 14411 Oakland during MMCR operations, 2016 (Google, n.d.)

In a 2018 interview, a demolition contractor familiar with MMCR's crushing operation in Highland Park provided clarity on MMCR's production at the site. MCM Management, a demolition contractor ousted by the DBA in late 2014, allows MMCR use of its crushing equipment at 14411 Oakland for an unspecified fee. The Highland Park assessor corroborates this with records confirming MCM stores personal property at the site. At the onset of the DDP, MCM was considered one of the "big three" of demolition contractors in the Detroit area and

participated in the controversial bid-unit negotiations that sparked a federal probe and local audit. MCM completed 334 HHF demolitions worth $4,400,000 between 7/2014 and 10/2014. A late-2014 DDP review of MCM's performance (more precisely, its lack of production) culminated in Duggan and the DDP terminating its contract with the wrecker, leaving the contractor on the outside of the largest (and most lucrative) demolition project in US and regional history. The exact terms of the equipment arrangement with MMCR and MCM are unclear, but the relationship indicates MCM remains involved financially with DDP even if it is not a formal partner. The occupation of land by MMCR has allowed MCM to generate income from demolishing without knocking down a single DLBA-owned structure since mid-2014.

MMCR has streamlined the acquisition, production, and distribution process at 14411. Demolition contractors without access to their own crushing or screening equipment will haul excavated material to the site and waiting in a drive-up drop-off. At the same time, contractors and their haulers will purchase loads of approved backfill from MMCR. Every truckload in coincides with a truckload out. In effect, HHF allocates resources to address the same basement foundation twice – albeit in two very different ways. First, in the process of excavating and, second, by purchasing the crushed aggregate from MMCR. MMCR does not buy excavated materials from contractors, instead the company receives raw materials and transforms them into assets for the backfilling process. Orr's emergency order waiving backfilling restrictions established the policy environment in which MMCR became a lucrative enterprise. MMCR's Highland Park operations are representative of an emergency mode of production in which demolishing produces and assetizes backfill material. As Harvey argues, "Resources can only be defined in relationship to the mode of production which seeks to make use of them (2001, 51)."

Exploit: 19499 Derby, Detroit, MI

On 4/2/2014, Rita Robinson purchased 19499 Derby from Milton Schack for $600.00. Within three months, Echo Rental, LLC purchased the property from Robinson for $1,000. According to LARA records, Echo is based in Inkster, MI and owned by Nicholas Schubeck. Schubeck also owns NSS Construction, a firm specializing in excavation and concrete, and has his hand in at least two other LLCs. Beginning with 19200 Schoenherr on 9/29/2015, 19499 Derby served as a backfill source exclusive to 313 Construction, LLC. Sonya Pouncy incorporated 313 Construction on 5/15/2014. On its website, 313 describes itself as a "go-to demolition service provider" that "lays the groundwork for communities and neighborhoods to maintain re-establish themselves (313 Construction, 2019)." Between 7/2015 and 4/2016, 313 tore down 40 buildings in Detroit; HHF supported thirty-six and totaled $464,818.61. Aside from the 2,706 yd3 of material from 19499 Derby, 313 sourced 5,945 yd3 for another 37 backfill transactions from a mineral plant site in Northville, MI and the MMCR site in Highland Park.

All told, 313 Construction billed MSHDA $46,733.35 for backfill during their involvement with DDP[148]. The contractor has not completed a demolition in Detroit since 8300 House on 5/26/2016. For its part, 19499 Derby was involved in twelve of those demolitions and $12,000 in backfill costs. Despite the property being in arrears and forfeiture, Detroit's Housing and Revitalization Department paid Able Demolition $89,299.15 on 11/7/2017 to demolish a commercial building on the property[149]. The city had determined the building was a nuisance. On 9/18/2018, Judge Robert J Colombo ordered a demolition lien of $89,299.15 placed on Echo

[148] 313 Construction did not return a request for an interview about the Derby source and replied to an email, "The DBA has a Soil Manager which developed a database that all demolition contractors use to identify approved soil sources."

[149] Detroit's building permit data portal lists this department as the property owner even though Echo Rental was still holding the deed.

Rentals and 19499 Derby. On 3/30/2019, the Wayne County Treasurer issued a final judgement of foreclosure on 19499 Derby for unpaid property taxes[150]. Echo Rental had not paid taxes on a consistent basis but had avoided foreclosure through sporadic redemptions with the county.

In 11/2019, Wayne Country conveyed the deed for 19499 Derby to Derby St 19499, LLC, a shell company based in Grosse Point Park, MI. The new owner had operated under the name 19302 Blake St, LLC until 10/2019 despite never owning the property at that address. Currently, the Federal National Mortgage Association owns 19302 Blake as well as the property the LLC listed on its articles of organization (1085 W Lantz). Today, Big Dave's Tree Service, previously based in Southfield, MI, has expanded operations from a nearby warehouse at 19381 John R to include the site at 19499 Derby[151]. A series of site visits in late 2019 confirmed Big Dave's is storing equipment and clearing the property of trees and debris.

Although 19499 Derby is no longer in Schubeck's portfolio, the suburban excavator remains involved in Detroit real estate. In 12/2016, Schubeck moved NSS Construction from Inkster to 12838 Gavel in Detroit. Echo Rental, LLC purchased the warehouse from American Excavating Contractors for $175,000.00 (four months after AEC had redeemed unpaid property taxes with Wayne County for the second time). Nine days later, Echo quit claimed the deed to Foxtrot Properties, an LLC incorporated by Heather Taylor and Schubeck in 6/2016 and located at the same Inkster address as Echo Rental[152]. Four months later, Foxtrot conveyed 12838 to Taylor and then Taylor conveyed the property to Nicholas Schubeck in a land contract. On 10/27/2016, Taylor and Schubeck sought approval from LARA for the dissolution of Foxtrot. In sum, Taylor and Schubeck mobilized these LLCs to disguise their own credit history and shelter

[150] Civil Action 17-008808-CH
[151] Kimberly Marsack conveyed 19381 to Big Dave's in 12/2015.
[152] 25907 Trowbridge

the real estate purchases from scrutiny or taxation. As one lawyer observed of the transactions, "The most likely way that they were profiting is either tax evasion or avoiding litigation. Possibly they were using LLCs with cleaner credit or legal histories to purchase properties and get loans that they otherwise wouldn't have gotten individually[153]." The interlocking maneuvers of Echo, Foxtrot, and Taylor with Gavel demonstrates how Schubeck used 19499 to master the use of property sales and LLCs to take full advantage of Detroit's real estate market.

In late 3/2017, NSS Construction served as the contractor for the demolition of 16571 Harper. A few months earlier, a fire of still-unexplained origin broke out at the vacant building. Simon Zedan, a St Clair Shores-based speculator, and frequent presence in the Wayne County tax foreclosure auction, contracted NSS to tear down the empty warehouse he had purchased for $21,000.00 in a 2011 bank sale. NSS had not completed a demolition in Detroit prior to 16571 and has not since. At the beginning of 2019, Zedan placed 16571 on the market for $75,000. The listing states, "Over 10,000 SF of land available on Detroit's Eastside. Seller open to land contract (Realtor.com 2019)." As of September 2019, the property remains without a buyer.

This sensitivity to the lifecycle of property and those controlling these transactions deepens analysis of land and value in declining cities. The transactions at Derby are redolent of other more routine residential transactions in Detroit. Akers & Seymour (2018) describe how practiced buyers in Wayne County's tax foreclosure auction use the process to recycle their own tax delinquent properties. Oftentimes, the owner will purchase an REO property and then rent to an unsuspecting tenant in search of a deal in a tight market or arrange a contract-for-deed with a buyer who cannot obtain conventional mortgages. However, the tax arrears catch up, Wayne County forecloses, and the property goes to the annual auction. If the property is desirable, a

[153] Andrew Madras, JD, specializes in finance and compliance relative to real estate and accounting.

buyer will snatch it up during the initial round of the auction for the cost of unpaid taxes. If no buyer bites at that stage, Wayne County auctions the property for $500. The savviest LLCs and individuals use this provision to buy back their own properties for less than the taxes owed and frequently far less than the bank sale through which they first obtained the property. The cycle of tenancy then repeats. The goal of these LLCs and individual buyers is to extract the maximum value from a property without committing resources or keeping the property taxes current.

The above process of exchange, enclosure, and exploiting in land contracts harbors insights for 19499 Derby. While the vacant parcel was never meant for inhabitance or development, Schubeck and Echo Rentals, LLC still used the property to extract value from the DDP backfilling. The $1,000 purchase in 7/2014 returned $12,000 in backfill sales to 313 Construction. Schubeck bought vacant land, dumped valuable material, and sold the volume of backfill commodity without paying any of the taxes levied on 19499 Derby. By doing so, Schubeck illustrated how the supply chain and scarcity of backfill could be used to establish a new arrangement in which the land holds value as a staging ground for capitalizing on potential rents within the DDP. In this case, the enigmatic condition of land in the city contributed to the relative health of the DDP backfilling market. While Schubeck secured and enclosed the private property, it was by obtaining, securing, and enclosing the dirt itself as an asset within demolishing Detroit that enabled him and his LLC to extract value through the property.

Control: 14039 Grand River, Detroit, MI

One contractor's command of 14039 Grand River in northwest Detroit dwarfs the scale of efforts by Schubeck and Echo Rental. DMC Consultants, Inc (aka DMC Group USA) is a high-volume construction contractor based in Northville, MI, an affluent suburb of Detroit. Manish Chaudhary founded DMC in 2005 and continues to share executive control over the

firm's daily operations. Between 2014 and the end of 2018, the firm has demolished 1,921 residential structures as part of the demolition program. DDP has awarded DMC $29,728,469.37 to complete these demolitions. Of the total contracts, the city allocated $19,620,773.71 in HHF for 1,324 demolitions[154]. DMC has sourced nearly half of its backfill material from one source located at 14039 Grand River in northwest Detroit. The site is owned by 14039 Grand River LLC (GRL), a Michigan-based business for which LARA records date to 4/2014. GRL purchased the site from Sami Alfasih for $135,000 in 9/2015. Alfasih previously obtained the deed during the 2013 Wayne County property tax auction, paying $26,000 in 11/2013.

Based on aerial photography, 14039 Grand River served as storage and parking until mid-2015 when GRL, the new owner, began "selling" backfill material exclusively to DMC. State incorporation records indicate Manish Chaudhary, the President of DMC, also serves as the owner of GRL and the two companies share an address in Northville, MI. These details confirm 14039 Grand River is DMC's shell company and own backfill supplier. The timeline of transactions raises questions about the DDP's complicity with the property practices of Alfasih, DMC, and GRL. In 7/2014, GRL (14 months before owning the property) applied to BSEED for a "Change of use from factory/warehouse (vacant land with existing concrete slab) to outdoor storage of clean dirt/sand from 7-17-14 to 7-17-15 not to exceed fence height per admin hearing letter #12-14 as per plans (LPD, 2015a)." At that time and for the duration of the variance, Alfasih owned the property while GRL conducted its ongoing backfill business at the site. GRL and Alfasih worked out an arrangement in which the former determined the land's use. BSEED approved the application for a zoning change and set out provisions for regular renewals – which

[154] 66% of demolitions between 1/2014 and 1/2019.

DMC has pursued. 14039, like other sites scattered across the city, would serve as a designated stockpiling zone for use only by DMC in its residential demolitions for the DDP.

DMC completed its first non-HHF demolition as part of DDP on 1/14/2014. The city paid DMC $11,156 to tear down the residential structure at 17338 Bradford Avenue (a 2007 mortgage foreclosure with four owners since demolition). DMC would continue receiving only non-HHF contracts until 5/1/2014 when the city awarded it an HHF contract to demolish 15874 Inverness, 15902 Inverness, and 15922 Greenlawn for a total of $21,767.40. No backfill records associated with DMC exist until 9/3/2015 when DMC reported sourcing 26,150 yd3 of material from the 14039 Grand River site. Just over three weeks later, GRL purchased the property. DMC sourced 11,750 cubic yards from the site on 10/8/2015. Beginning with the demolition of 478 Algonquin on 1/16/2016, DMC sourced 78,061 cubic yards of material from 14039 Grand River in 2016 and 2017. As part of its shell company supplier relationship to DMC, GRL (and Chaudhary) received a considerable payout from backfill provision. DMC used material from 14039 Grand River to complete over 400 residential demolitions, 354 supported by HHF. MSHDA records suggest that by May 2017, 14039 Grand River had supplied a total of 115,961 yd3 of backfill material to DMC, generating nearly $700,000 in revenue from public funds. HHF alone contributed $616,524. Money meant to connect backfill supplier to demolition contractor became a payment DMC could make within its own family of companies without raising any red flags.

Over the last two years, DDP has scrutinized transactions involving DMC and the 14039 Grand River source. In 2/2019, DDP identified 70 demolitions in which DMC used unapproved material originating from 14039 (Ferretti, 2019b). DDP suspended DMC pending confirmation of safe backfill. The DDP also required DMC to present an action plan to assure it was not using unapproved material at future demolition sites (Stafford, 2019h). Farkas remarked then, “We are

giving DMC an option to develop a plan for having the soil tested at each of these demo locations to determine whether it is safe to remain there." Testing concluded soil was safe for use as backfill. As of 4/2019, DDP approved DMC's return to the program. Throughout 2020, the site at 14039 Grand River was an active backfill source but remained subject to scrutiny.

In an interview, Jon Grosshans dismissed the transaction history surrounding 14039 Grand River LLC as just another shell company speculating on an undervalued property. However, Grosshans simplification neglects how DMC maneuvered 14039 to serve as more than a simple real estate investment. It also ignores how DMC commanded the use of the property prior to formally owning the land at 14039. Land is a resource for development, yes, but it is also a resource for demolishing. By reducing it to a redevelopment process, officials and leaders with the DDP have ignored what GRL and DMC have produced at the site. DDP leaders have relied on a heuristic in which residential demolition prepares land for development rather than demolishing (and decline) giving rise to its own regime of use, regulation, and valuation. Today, DMC has transformed 14039 into an operation serving a foundational need of demolition: create backfill and manage the supply chain. The address on Grand River has provided DMC with a *somewhere* to serve as an origin of its backfill but also a corporate cover that supports a circle of rentiership. By doing so, DMC has allowed its property to move beyond use or exchange.

Enrich: Dubois Street, Detroit, MI

To the casual observer, the landscape between Chene and St Aubin in the eastside Poletown neighborhood shares more in common with a cratered natural satellite than an urban environment. Fifteen-foot mounds of rock and dirt pock vacant parcels between the handful of remaining occupied houses. To the north, a mass of greenhouses own by RecoverPark Farms stands frame-to-frame in a treeless landscape. However, the few hundred acres of land in this

area exemplify city's cloudy land regime. The DBA backfill records lists three addresses on Dubois as sources: 5200, 5042, and 5246. These three Dubois addresses were involved in 32 backfill transactions totaling 1,362 yd3 of material. Smalley Construction – the firm responsible for crushing and recycling material from the Sparton factory in Jackson, MI – handled the 19 residential demolitions between 10/2017 and 5/2018. The DDP provided backfill cost records for 10 of these demolitions. Those ten involved 684 yd3 of material at a cost of $8,675.00, an average of $12.68/yd3. The DDP recorded the nine remaining teardowns as emergency demolitions. Consequently, the DDP does not maintain records on costs to the same standard.

Each of the three Dubois addresses were sites in a federal infrastructure program called the Great Lakes Shoreline Cities Green Infrastructure Project (GLRI). Launched during the Obama administration, the GLRI is an initiative with an annual $300 million budget to "protect and restore the Great Lakes" by assembling 16 federal agencies to plan, design, and construct restoration projects near Lake Michigan, Huron, and Superior (US Army Corps of Engineers, 2019)[155]. In 2013, the USEPA funded the Detroit project along Dubois Street as part of its third focus area: "Nearshore Health and Nonpoint Source Pollution." A year later, DWSD commenced constructing "two green infrastructure projects within the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's Near Eastside Drainage District (USEPA, 2019)." In the initial arrangement, the DLBA would retain ownership of the properties on Dubois and RecoveryPark – leading 400 parcels from the city – would manage the infrastructure (Gallagher, 2015a)[156]. For the latter, the green infrastructure would capture rainfall that RecoveryPark would then pump through its own filtration system for use in a planned hydroponic facility just north at the corner of Dubois and

[155] Trump has threatened to reduce funding for the GLRI by 90% in every budget since arriving in office (Burke 2019).
[156] Gallagher writes, "The operation will pay $105 per acre per year in lease payments to the city and eventually buy the land for about $3,500 per acre."

Frederick. DWSD retained Tooles Construction to transform a chain of vacant, flat, and publicly owned parcels into grassy mounds surrounded by trenches that would channel the runoff.

For much of 2017 and 2018, the GLRI project stalled because RecoveryPark struggled to land financial support in the local investment and philanthropic community. Despite acclaim for its mission (Sands 2013), Gary Wozniak, RecoveryPark's founder and CEO, issued a public appeal in 3/2018 for $500,000 to provide short-term relief. He informed a reporter with Crain's Business Detroit, "We're not successful enough, yet, to get regular debt funding or straight up equity funding (Welch, 2018a)." In 12/2018, RecoveryPark secured stopgap financing from out-of-state sources to continue operations but decided to lay off five employees (Welch, 2018b). On the strength of that investment, RecoveryPark finalized the purchase of the city-leased parcels – including 5042, 5246, and 5200 Dubois. However, RecoveryPark's fortunes changed in the middle of 2019 when three local and national investment groups provided over $4 million to supplement two business loans backed by a pair of federal government agencies (Welch, 2019). Now on stable financial footing, RecoveryPark announced plans to move forward with its two-acre hydroponic complex at 2259 East Palmer, the site of a demolished Kroger[157].

The dirt, however, used by Smalley Construction was not from this initial construction of the GLRI. In late 2017, RecoveryPark contracted Smalley for additional site maintenance on the Dubois bioswales. Wozniak shared in an interview, "He got the soil and we got the berm reduction." RecoveryPark would collect thousands of gallons of water from the earthwork; Smalley would collect thousands of cubic yards of material for backfilling. The 1,362 yd3 carved off the mounds helped Smalley complete $245,200 in demolition contracts, including three

[157] Welch wrote, "The hydroponics greenhouse will be located in an Opportunity Zone, but the deferment of capital gains tax associated with those low-income zones was not a factor in attracting the initial investments to the greenhouse project, Wozniak said."

supported by HHF. Moreover, Smalley did not pay any material costs for the backfill. The $8,675.00 total Smalley billed for backfill – nine demolitions do not appear in any public records – does not add up as transportation costs for the few miles traveled by Smalley.

The federal government saw the land along Dubois as an investment in sustainable watershed practices that would lighten the load carried by the city's sewer system. RecoveryPark approached the land along Dubois as an opportunity to optimize its own resource use in service of its social mission to employ disadvantaged residents and establish a local food economy. Neither centered income-generation in their interaction with the empty lots. In contrast, Smalley converted the free waste of a "for-impact company" into an asset subsidized by pots of money provided by HHF and MSHDA. Land meant to be removed from the market – first as public green infrastructure and second as non-profit use-value – still produced income for Smalley as it wrecked vacant properties in Detroit. Demolition unlocked the value of land along Dubois, but only because the triad of GLRI, RecoveryPark, and DWSD combined to grant Smalley the opportunity to excavate and move dirt. The value was not in land's redevelopment, but by assetizing its outcomes to serve Smalley's goals and the needs of backfilling demolitions.

Materializing and Valuing a Land Regime of Decline

Approaching the DDP as a phase in an ongoing development or stabilization scheme simplifies the process into a discrete practice with a beginning, middle, and end. I have argued that by engaging demolishing as a process and achievement, the political, environmental, and logistical relations take on significance. The above instances of land use, property ownership, and the command of space illustrate how applying certain frameworks on decline and value can leave gaps in explaining the strategies and priorities of those involved in demolishing and

backfilling Detroit. These operations and their processes materialize and spatialize different regulatory and valuation arrangements for managing the city's land, property, and value.

In the masterly *Urban Land Rent*, Haila (2015) lays out a framework that differentiates four historical land regimes: indigenous; feudal; capitalism, and financialization. Each of these regimes encompasses power relations and development modes – they represent forms of economic, political, and geographical power. In the indigenous land regime, land – the commons - represents membership in a community, members of which are obligated to sustain balance with nature. Feudal land regimes rely on social bonds in which tenants pay rent to landlords and the fragility of tenure reproduces authority and hierarchy. For Haila, this feudal land regime established the fundaments for early municipal police powers serving the collective good.

The capitalist land regime - Haila's third category - enclosed land and transformed the commons into commodity. She writes, "With this process the meaning of land also changed: land came to mean a thing." A new class of owners used this system of enclosure to militate against feudal traditions, asserting liberty was an artifact of property ownership. The hegemony of the capitalist land regime in which property changes hands in pursuit of value enabled the development of a real estate market and the formation of an urban development industry. As Fishman (1989) illustrates, the unbridled suburban growth 20th century America relied on this ideology of commodity, price, and market to secure *the suburb* as the predominant built environment. Haila concludes her framework with financialization, a land regime in which land is indistinguishable from the financial instruments that render it an asset with securitized yields. The scale of property ownership balloons to include arrangements of global interests and vulnerable public institutions bend to exogenous economic pressures. These forces reduce cities to a configuration of returns on investment in which public policies hesitate to interrupt the

treadmill of value creation. Speculation becomes a significant structural determinant of both a city's and a neighborhood's fortunes. Proximity no longer shapes the disposition of land.

Haila's approach to these land regimes includes ideal types that resist easy application to any specific time or place[158]. However, the framework provides insights into the conflicts and contradictions that entangle land, property ownership, society, and urban development. More than a curve relating supply's association to demand, urban land reflects historic and contemporary social and economic asymmetries and the notion of the possessive individual. Like Valverde's (2012) analysis of urban zoning, land use is less about the institutionalization or application of the rules and more about how power – economic and social – interprets and applies those rules towards an income-generation goal. Haila concludes, "The land question is not only an economic question but also a moral, social and political question." For planners and geographers, the transition from indigenous to capitalist land regimes noted by Haila also maps onto the tension inherent to use and exchange - the binary of struggle providing parameters for land use intensification and commodification in the growth machine (Logan & Molotch, 1987).

Yet, in the *land regime of decline*, these tensions between private and common or use and exchange are clouded by public financing, regulatory capture, rentiership, and a local real estate market that is inscrutable at best. Land's value is not synonymous with the intensification of use nor the development of housing. Occupation of land can be just as productive as formal tenancy or ownership. The interaction of the factors of production do not automatically culminate in austerity or gentrification (or even growth). But revising the growth machine to reflect the tensions endemic to a land regime of decline should include resisting adoption of those twin poles of use and exchange and including a wider spectrum of property interests. This Castor and

[158] She insists these are Weberian ideal types.

Pollux of property as identified by Logan & Molotch captures a narrow range of the potential rights that structure ownership and disposition. The insistence on land as the salient (fictitious) commodity obstructs other configurations in which land and its use serve the interests of capital.

The question, then, is how does the integration of these other interests and agendas reshape the relationship between land, use, and value? What is property in a post-accumulation setting? By turning to the raw components of ownership, a more comprehensive typology – beyond use and exchange – provides a framework for probing a land regime of decline. When combined, these components might gesture towards the "bundle of rights" associated with property ownership and enjoyed by the holder. However, as legal scholar Henry Smith (2011) has argued, relying on this realist bundle – exclusion, possession, control, enjoyment, disposition – can occlude the ways, "Property as a system is marvelously multipurpose (288)." Taking his suggestion that our attention should be directed toward the "specialization of the parts" within the bundle, I have sketched a typology that accommodates these emergent links of land and use. This typology gestures towards a modular approach to private property in cities like Detroit.

Three models of use dominate understandings of property under conditions of decline: squatting, speculation, and service. In the first, occupants seeking housing security control vacant or abandoned space without the formal authorization of the property owner (Herbert 2018). In the second, predatory capital – often operating as a variety of LLCs - purchases and recycles land hoping a recovering property market will reward risk (Seymour & Akers 2019; Akers, 2013b). Third, owner-occupants will assume informal control of adjacent vacant lots or buildings – mowing, landscaping, finding responsible tenants for empty properties - to stabilize their neighborhood (Kinder, 2016). Although each of the three are commonplace occurrences in Detroit, they each fall somewhere along the growth machine continuum of use or exchange:

squatters and servicers operate outside the usual real estate market while speculators defer property maintenance or intimidate occupants with an eye on the return from future sale. Of the six above sites, only 14039 Grand River suggests a speculative relationship of impending exchange. However, its present use and ownership still gesture towards a geography of property in which land's value exceeds its potential developability. As I have shown, land outside that continuum of use and exchange has a significant position in city-building when the privileges afforded by that use do not align neatly with the constructs of inhabitance and ownership.

By disassembling the institution of ownership, three other forms of control and use emerge: abusus (destruction), usufructus (access), and fructus (beneficiary). In the case of 14111 Oakland, the present owner – Oakland Ave Properties – has made a calculated decision to forego memorializing the property's history (Model T production) and granted MMCR the right to destroy and consume the land. MMCR's current occupation renders the land undevelopable but not without exchange value in backfill production. This *abusus* is contrasted with the *usus* that describes the social bonds of servicers and squatters. The site at Castleton and those along Stout Street and Dubois Street suggest how a landholder may grant an occupant the temporary right to derive income from the land: *usufructus*. In the first, Bert Kelly sought zoning permission to allow BNA and Homrich to convert his land into a temporary backfill stockpile – use but not own. In the second, the DLBA owned Stout addresses but Adamo generated income by employing residential space to conceal backfill origins. In the latter, Smalley Construction altered the Poletown as part of a public purpose but turned the spoils into income by demolishing buildings. Finally, Echo Rentals and Schubeck converted 19499 Derby into a sales stand for transforming material produced by his excavation firm into backfill for 313 Construction. This *fructus* approach only required temporary ownership then rectified by tax foreclosure.

I have adopted the terms abusus, usufructus, and fructus because they provide part of the base of Roman Law upon which contemporary property is anchored. I have deployed these terms to describe these unofficial property relationships – they are not legally binding arrangements between those with ownership, access, or income interests. While drawing benefit from a property must have a formalization in law to be official– only Louisiana codifies usufruct relations – the letter of the law in these cases is less significant than the spirit of the action within these land regimes of decline. Who uses and why? Who abuses and why? Who destroys and why? This expanded matrix of property interests illustrates how different priorities and forms of occupation contribute to turning demolition into demolishing – a regional and logistical process of land, environment, and value that becomes an exercise in shaping and controlling a city.

Demolishing holds a formidable position in land use and value in the growth machine framework (Logan & Molotch, 1987). In that approach, demolitions have a Cartesian character in which contractors identify a point in space, arrive, intervene, and then depart. Demolition produces vacant land ready for the shovel and structure. Demolition's potency is a function of its power to unlock development (interest or income). The city-builders take over and command the use in a new round of development. Upon deeper scrutiny, the operations and consequences of demolishing are more than eliminating an impairment. Demolishing generates incomes from the built environment by structuring new arrangements for valuation and regionalizing supply chains that capture surpluses by debasing land-use. Contractors extract value by processing buildings and circulating backfill material. Rather than an outcome of a policy agenda, demolishing is a convergence of rents, policies, landscapes, and resources – *a chain of specialized parts*.

Demolishing Detroit makes valuation and incomes possible from decline. Backfilling casts light on the conflicts, ambitions, and tensions shaping land, value, and property in Detroit.

By following the backfill, a political economy of urban change emerges in which austerity and gentrification are strategies among many in the city's ongoing transformation. HHF liens may prevent developers and speculators from accumulating properties, but another branch of investment has produced an economy of demolishing. The environments and operations of backfilling Detroit is a lens for reading the regional geography of growth, obsolescence, and power. By revaluing through demolishing, a decline machine has captured a surplus created by destruction. It is a machine extracting rents through publicly-supported and privately-delivered land use de-intensification. Land within backfilling is embedded in pathways, regulations, uses, and assets that demonstrate the limits of conventional land regimes for understanding social relations with the production of decline. The patterning of land and its *debasement* suggests the future of the city depends less on gentrification and austerity then it does on how uneven development ensures demolishing produces nothing but new opportunities for grabbing value.

Conclusion: From Seesaws to Labyrinths

How do we relate demolition to land when the process may not enable valuation as predicted by established approaches to capitalist urbanization and redevelopment? By the end of 3/2020, the Detroit Demolition Program had awarded $364,4440,763.00 in contracts for 20,793 demolitions. Hopes for Detroit's demolition-dependent redevelopment remain open to debate. I have used this chapter to examine dominant understandings of land and value in American cities. In those conceptions, decline is a stage in the process of unlocking development potential. Here, capital flows across space to exploit devalued land, leaving behind a trail of gentrification and destruction. Demolition supports this circulation by opening wasted land to new investment. As Smith (1982) observes of this spatial restructuring under capitalism, "The logic behind uneven development is that the development of one area creates barriers to further development, thus

leading to underdevelopment, and that the underdevelopment of that area creates opportunities for a new phase of development (151)." Windfalls – like the built environments upon which they rely – can be unpredictable, lasting until capital destroys the value of those fixed investments.

The succession of growth, decline, and revival maintains tremendous power for making sense of uneven development in a fraction of cities, but it has also penned in how urban planners, and researchers address the built environment and valuation in "lumpengeographies" of capitalist urbanization: *the territories of recurrent extraction* (Walker, 1979). While Smith's 1982 approach applies to the Detroit region and how decline has reduced values, another perspective from Smith (1987) proves to be more illuminating for the production of decline in Detroit. He remarks in a response to Ley, "Not all neighborhoods experiencing the rent gap may experience gentrification or redevelopment; some economic opportunities remain unexploited and specific local conditions may discourage the process (464)." Smith's consideration of non-gentrifying spaces suggests theoretical room for circumstances in which decline is not a form of devaluation, nor demolishing just land preparation. Obsolescence not only allows value extraction in vacant space - obsolescence became a pipeline for value (Weber, 2002). Empty buildings were not a use value to be exploited for the next round of development; instead, contractors turned demolishing and backfilling into value-grabbing operations. The issue is not whether the locational seesaw or circuit model of capital is accurate, but how those depictions may provide only a partial explanation for the relationship of Detroit's land to demolishing. Relying on the binary outcomes of demolition can flatten land into a commodity rather than a contingent collection of assets and resources, each shot through with conflicts and priorities of policymakers, contractors, and users. In the case of Detroit, unlocking the potential value of land through demolishing obscured other forms of intervention, property control, and regulation that are shaping the city's landscape.

One interpretation would encourage an explanation rooted in why gentrification has not occurred - a survey of the unexploited opportunities. A different interpretation would seek to explain how these neighborhoods are shaped by an intersecting urban process under capital that provides a trajectory for valuation, devaluation, and revaluation without redevelopment. In Detroit, the DDP created value for land that depended on continued debasement rather than intensification. As I have shown, HHF-financed demolition transformed publicly-owned land occupied by houses with negative market value (such that they justified the HHF demolition subsidy) into overvalued properties with no substantial development interest (beyond parking for a dispensary). The demolition liens did not just furnish a barrier to income-generation or signal a policy failure; the liens became a crucial element within a parallel economy of income-generation. It was not a traditional developer or city-builder speculating and disposing land that experienced these windfalls from land use change, but an ensemble of contractors, haulers, excavators, mineral plants, and suburban speculators. As contractors realized the possible values of HHF-wrecked structures, they also transformed a separate class of vacant land into a new resource class fundamental to moving, stockpiling, producing, and regulating backfill material.

The demolished properties and the backfill sites combined to establish a land regime of decline that produced value without culminating in gentrification or the usual building frenzy associated with growth. But focusing on long waves leaves untouched the rearticulation of land's role in Detroit. The city's decline and subsequent demolition response has integrated land once considered outside the reach of capital. Whether through lease, ownership, or use, contractors control land in southeast Michigan to gird a valuation and rentiership process dependent upon destruction and unstable property markets. These are land uses and forms of exploitation where decline and demolition created value. Decline can serve these income generation purposes vis-a-

vis demolishing because haulers, excavators, and contractors command and control land within operations to establish and increase the value of backfill. By situating themselves within a logistical archipelago of destruction and production, contractors turned backfill into an asset enabling rent extraction from the DDP. As an asset, dirt becomes concentrated within a network of contractors empowered to control the spatial, financial, and regulatory dimensions of its production and its circulation. Backfilling, in other words, serves as capital-in-disguise that the operations of demolishing reinvests in producing the city's decline. Demolishing was never outside the production of decline; the production of demolition was yet another expression.

As I have shown in this chapter, the devalorization and valorization process of uneven development has configured land, labor, and capital to produce built environments in Detroit that are irreducible to gentrification and austerity. Capital did not return to Detroit; capital was shaping Detroit and valuation through new strategies, including demolishing and backfilling. Detroit boosters, policymakers, and developers claimed demolitions would eliminate the physical barriers to investment that frustrates the regeneration of the city’s neighborhood. In effect, they argued demolition could reduce the burdens placed on future developers to produce a new built environment (LPD, 2016). Demolition could conclude the devalorization process and help the city’s land return to a maximum potential (yet unrealized) value. However, the very process of Hardest Hit Funds demolition served to revalorize land. The destruction of the built environment – its land use debasement – established the conditions in which contractors, excavators, mineral plants, and haulers could extract a maximum value without resorting to ownership, speculation, or new construction. Demolishing turned uninhabitable structures that DLBA could not auction at bargain prices into parcels of land worth at most $25,000 and perhaps more when the DLBA

fair market value was included. The DDP converted buildings with no value into land with excess value and, importantly, it represented a form of value captured only through demolishing.

I have shown how contractors embedded Detroit's land into a regional production of demolition. For some policymakers, "blight costs," and "clearing it creates value (Cleveland City Council, 2012)." But value may not come from redevelopment. As I have argued, occupation, extraction, and destruction hints at property relations extending beyond the use and exchange of Logan & Molotch (1987). While they addressed urban political economy as the expression of real estate markets in which rentiers and inhabitants battled on the pitch of use and exchange values, the geography, policy, and economy of demolition backfill illustrates the limits of the dichotomy. Property is not reducible to its use nor exchange, nor is intensification the only pathway renewed value. By incorporating usufructus, fructus, and abusus, I have proposed a complementary land regime and decline machine that extracts value outside this binary. Instead of a narrow notion of policed access and exclusivity, property is a process of logistical command in which users, controllers, and owners mobilize that land for goals beyond simple ground rent.

At the heart of this debate is the character of land use and how to negotiate the shoals of confrontation and collaboration between policy and profit - as a shifting site between the public and private. This stance echoes calls by Wideman and Lombardo (2019) to renew the study of land use and its relationship to property, regulation, and intervention. For them, land use is not a neutral designation applied to parcels, lots, or properties. Institutions, industry, and investors command land to create new assets, resources, and spaces for value. Land use debasement has become a key outcome of the DDP and its reliance on HHF. In Detroit, properties with structures impeding capital mobility are not just disposable; they are overvalued. Demolishing transformed abandoned houses owned by the DLBA into reserves of value accessible only to contractors. In

turn, they controlled land to make the value grabs possible; land became part of the supply chain and logistical process, but its potential for income-generation was not driven by intensification.

A decline machine secures windfalls by wrecking the city and leaving behind thousands of parcels following a second capture of values. First the banks, then the bulldozers. The record of property sales in the aftermath of demolishing suggest there is no wending and winding queue of new buyers waiting to purchase these cleared properties. Demolishing Detroit did support a redevelopment process but, as I illustrated in Chapter 4, it was suburban speculative change in conflict with the DDP's own public objectives. This emergent decline machine has occupied, mobilized, and exhausted property to serve logistical purposes within the backfill supply chain. Value can be created and extracted without the mobilization of Detroit's greatest asset: the inventory of vacant land. Detroit's land regime of decline arranges uses, resources, and space to make this possible. Stockpiling, excavation, dirt-washing, and crushing reveal the limits of gentrification and austerity as frameworks for understanding how *demolishing, backfilling, and value-grabbing* serve to sustain the production of urban decline in Detroit and its neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Remapping the Atlas of Shrinking Cities and the Operations of Urban Decline

In 2006, Philipp Oswalt and Tim Reiniets argued their *Atlas of Shrinking Cities* would "present shrinking processes and make it possible to understand them, to see them within the overall context of global developments so that their status can be assessed (6)." As the first compendium detailing this phenomenon of shrinking cities, their collection of maps, profiles, and data portraits provided "a global overview" that illustrated "how these processes affect local conditions (6)." In the fourteen years since publishing their atlas, *seeing* shrinking cities is no longer the standard. Today, the study of shrinking cities and urban decline has evolved from avant-garde interest and artistic speculation to a scholarly perspective. Recent research on vacant land and property, greening, demolition, land banks, triage, and right-sizing indicate a maturing point of view and literature that insists planning and policy practice must prioritize shrinking cities. Despite this growthin scholarship and relevance, many of the debates in this literature remain oriented towards the scalar divide described in 2006 by Oswalt and Reiniets. Extralocal scales make decline possible while the local is a stage for responding to decline by eliminating neighborhoods, demolishing buildings, and retrenching services. Then and now, global economic processes create place particularities where growth and decline sit side-by-side.

While "place" remains the main site of extraction for global capital (Immergluck, 2011; Newman, 2009), an atlas of shrinking cities is incomplete when scale does more to conceal the processes of decline. In existing research on shrinking cities, demolition is placed alongside

other policy and technical interventions as a local response to the exogenous pressures of economic restructuring and its effects on investment, markets, and public policy (Weaver & Knight, 2018; Ryan, 2012). As I have argued and illustrated, this received distinction between external processes and internal practices provides uneven clarity on the environmental and logistical operations behind triage, demolition, and right-sizing.

Recently, Berglund (2020) argued the existing corpus of work attached to the Shrinking Cities perspective has struggled to integrate political economy perspectives into its analyses of urban decline and depopulation. For her, this persistent omission allows these planning and public policy scholars to push market-friendly responses that address decline without identifying structural determinants. Research examining demolition policy is an exemplar of this approach to shrinking cities and decline. By framing blight removal as vacancy management or neighborhood stabilization, these scholars have marginalized what produces blight and destabilization in the first place. Berglund's challenge to the agenda of the Shrinking Cities literature is a welcome intervention in a body of research that often prioritizes policy evaluation.

This latest critique of shrinking cities literature, however, focuses on explanations for the absence of growth or failure of growth policies rather than the processes of decline. Despite highlighting more rigorous empirical and theoretical work from planning and geography that reconsiders decline as an active urban process under capital, the critique places public policy and markets firmly in the register of the growth imperative. Berglund writes, "the shrinking cities literature at times underestimates capitalism's demonstrated ability to adapt to new market conditions and underestimates the role of the state in enabling this exploitation of the conditions of decline (13)." This misinterprets the political economy of decline. Capitalism and its

processes remain an external force on market conditions and state or government actors take a reactive position, siding with continued capital accumulation over the quality of life of residents.

Berglund is correct to identify the insufficiency of existing approaches to decline, but her critique reproduces the global scale manifesting decline and the local scale as the geography of intervention. The dialectic relationship central to political economy disappears. Decline, then, appears to haunt cities separate from the conditions of its production. These dichotomies preserve an atlas of shrinking cities in which, as Aalbers and Bernt (2019) described, cities "deal with the situation" of decline. But this persistent analytical schism between scales does not explain pipelines and pathways of social relations under capital that shape neighborhoods and built environments. Rather than read urban decline off a script of local actors navigating the consequences of global restructuring, recent research on decline has embedded capitalist urbanization in the processes, properties, and policies of the declining city and its built environment (Seymour, 2020; Akers & Seymour, 2019). No longer a mistake, the declining city represents the contingent outcome of strategic shifts in capital accumulation (Akers, 2013).

Demolishing, then, is not a way to seal off a past of decline and launch into a phase of new development. More than a delivered service, demolishing is productive of property practices, industries, resources, and land-uses that can reinforce the production of decline. Demolishing creates and preserves processes that extract value whether or not the DDP meets its stated goals. In the vocabulary of Mezzadra and Neilson (2019), demolishing is an *operation* that is "a process that impinges on others, affecting possibilities and establishing multifarious and not necessarily predictable connections (67)." Their insistence capital must be studied based on how it "hits the ground (22)" provides continued justification for research on urban decline that scrutinizes production of these built environments instead of derivations of scale.

By focusing on demolishing as one such process, this dissertation has provided another way to move beyond geographies of decline that position local responses against global processes. I have shown how demolishing and backfilling Detroit manifested markets, assets, and environments that added to and complemented the production of decline. The process of demolishing created a regional space and "operative surface on which capital intervenes (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019, 3)." Contractors, haulers, suburban homebuilders, and excavators generated income from the city's built environment by capturing the remaining value contained in abandoned properties. Relations of capital did not adapt to the market of demolishing Detroit; these relations created the market and its valuation schemes alongside the administration of the Detroit Demolition Program (DDP). Demolishing was not a way to escape those dynamics.

This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that embeds decline in property practices, supply chains, forms of extraction, and policy. By focusing on the environmental and logistical production of demolition within the context of decline, I have provided another way to decenter "the city" in discussions of value and destruction. The production of decline approach transcends the epistemological distinction between local and broader scales that has been foundational to arguments within the shrinking cities literature. In place of overlapping or stacked scales, the production of decline provides room to identify and interpret the historically specific relations and processes formatting a political economy of decline. Scale gives way to operations with "spatial, social, legal, and political formations (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019, 3)," allowing for decline to be both produced and challenged locally while remaining critical of the broader urban processes under capital that shape the fortunes of cities like Detroit.

By promoting the Detroit Demolition Tracker as an undistorted gaze into the practices and consequences of the DDP, officials have reproduced demolition as a local response. "It's not

just a map looking at demolition," Farkas shared with a *Crain's Detroit* reporter, "You can see where the private sector is building in Detroit (Livengood, 2018)." Tracking demolition's relationship to investment is consistent with the city council's insistence the DDP must enable private redevelopment of vacant land (Legislative Policy Division, 2016). Detroit's policy sphere echoes two currents of recent scholarship inserting demolition between phases of accumulation (Jay & Conklin, 2020; Akers, Beal, & Rousseau, 2020; Rosenman & Walker, 2016) or institutional approaches to managing vacancy and decline (Weaver & Knight, 2018; Hackworth 2016; Rhodes & Russo 2013). In both cases, demolition serves to start the revaluation of the build environment, whether through dispossessive recapitalization (Herscher, 2020; Safransky, 2014; Mah, 2012) or green infrastructure that reuses land (Meerow & Newell, 2017; Schilling & Logan, 2008). But narrowing demolition as a practice of erasure or redevelopment is transparency by another name. Rather than grant weight to its own geographies and operations, these scholars have flattened demolition to privilege a relation to what preceded or followed.

However, by following the traces of what the tracker conceals, and the atlas omits, the process of demolishing comes into view and redraws the geography of the shrinking city. I have illustrated how this shift can recast an isolated demolition as part of the production of demolition. Such a move places demolishing Detroit on the map, along with its conflicts and contradictions. Pickles (2004) has critiqued how maps rely on strategic omissions and reductions to preserve power, "The world has literally been made, domesticated and ordered by drawing lines, distinctions, taxonomies, and hierarchies," he continues, "Through their gaze, gridding, and architectures the sciences have spatialized and produced the world we inhabit. (5)" By tracking the DDP to policies, regulations, valuations, environments, and supply chains driving its production, I colored in the map of demolishing Detroit that extended beyond the time and target

of demolition. Instead of binary outcomes – success or failure – I approached demolishing as the convergence of pathways and pipelines embedded in chains of regional valuation, rentiership, and accumulation. Demolishing encompassed and surpassed the contractor, the street, and the neighborhood. By focusing on backfilling and its potential for income-generation, I showed how demolishing was neither the moment of removal nor the preparation for redevelopment.

As one process within the production of decline, the production of demolition opens up analytical terrain by illuminating forms of value, logistical operations, and urban-environmental transformations. Analysis of demolition that grades its ability to create developable land is no longer sufficient for understanding its effects and relationship to blight. Linking blight to its production counters interpretations that hold tenants and occupants responsible for the city's decline. As Alan Mallach explained, "The reason houses are still being abandoned in Detroit is because people either can't maintain them or people don't want them. The reasons for that may have to do with poverty or because people who have any choice don't want to live in neighborhoods and just walk away from properties. (Kurth, 2017b)" Linking demolition to its production counters interpretations that place the DDP at the end or the beginning of accumulation. The process of backfilling relied on regional differentiation and property practices controlled and commanded by contractors and their networks. Dirt came from somewhere and as one contractor shared, "Dirt is a commodity. It has a price." Redrawing the atlas of shrinking cities can include the full roster of interests, environments, and systems in the production of demolition - providing room to challenge who and what has benefited from demolishing Detroit. This creates analytical space for challenging those local responses aimed at addressing decline but that as environmental and logistical processes serve to reproduce the production of decline.

Demolitions, Demolishability, and Demolishing

The circulation of backfill material and money between suburbs and city center typifies over 75% of all backfill transactions between 2014 and 2018. As I have illustrated and argued, demolishing Detroit is more than a technical intervention that culminates in blank space for redevelopment, stronger inhabitant morale, or more stable real estate markets. By analyzing and

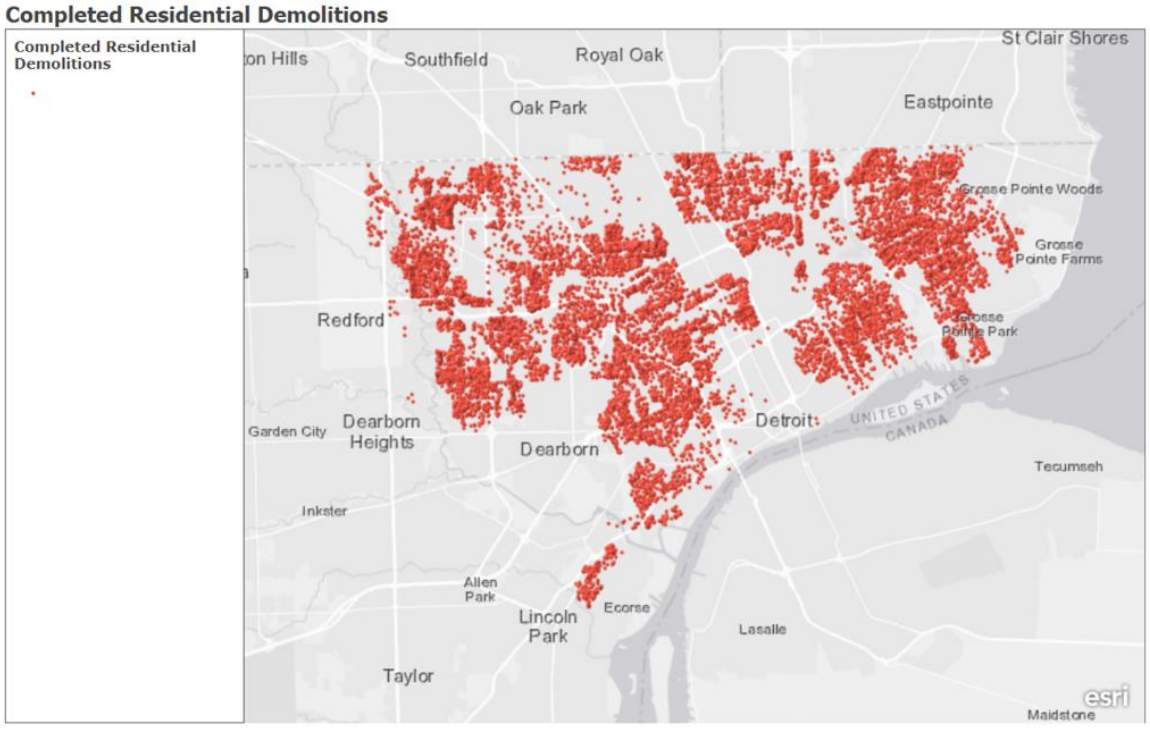


Figure 50: Map of completed DDP demolitions in Detroit, MI, 2014-2020

interpreting the DDP, I have shown how it is an environmental, political, and logistical process reshaping Detroit neighborhoods while depending on the ongoing transformation of the region. In my introduction I distinguished between demolition and demolishing. *The practice of demolition is an engineering intervention to remove an impediment to property value or neighborhood stability. It takes place at a specific coordinate, a point in space flattened into a citywide blight removal program and grafted onto a housing market.* Demolitions are moments of activity in space where contractor rigs arrive towing heavy machinery. Excavators roar

through walls and roofs. Laborers hose down debris to control dust. Diggers grip and rip out basement foundations. Bulldozers fill and grade open holes. The job is complete, grass seed sprouts, and a vacant lot is poised for another purpose in the next stage of accumulation.

Demolishing may rely on those components, but it is not reducible to them nor is it predestined to provide land for redevelopment. *The process of demolishing is an achievement of political, environmental, and logistical control embedded in local and regional property practices and forms of value*. This production of demolition maintains a supply chain and resource-shed for staging and shaping regional real estate, commodities, and development. Private, public, and philanthropic interests clash in institutional skirmishes to seize and wield command over demolishing. In the rush to wreck the city, regulatory approaches accommodated contractor practices that increase and maintain demolition production. In the latter, contractors, haulers, excavators, and mineral plants rely on the region's status quo of suburban expansion to transform dirt into a commodity, land into logistical space, and dereliction into value. But the production of demolition also depends on powerful parties transforming Detroit into a blight space – where demolishing is necessary. Detroit becomes a space where buildings are outside of history, neighborhoods outside of policy and investment, and the city independent of the region.

The Logistical and Environmental Production of Demolition

This dissertation analyzed the Detroit Demolition Program and demolishing Detroit without reducing demolition to stage one of redevelopment and reuse or a local intervention in quality of life for residents. I began this dissertation with a focus on the relationship between demolition and urban decline. I examined the political and material relations that produce demolition. I sketched an analytic framework to challenge the academic and policy approaches to demolition and its outcomes for value and revitalization. I argued a focus on production can

reveal the property relations and operations contradicting the flattened view of demolition as a local response to decline. I have focused on political, logistical, and environmental dimensions of demolishing Detroit and how treating it as a technical intervention or local policy conceals its consequences but also the conditions and contradictions of the DDP and its operations.

In line with recent work on the production of urban decline, I approached demolition as part of the urban process under capital that produces decline (Akers, 2013). My focus on the details and micro-interactions of demolishing allowed me to ground capitalist urbanization in the operations and processes of contractors, excavators, haulers, materials producers, and homebuilders. These interactions of the economic, the logistical, and the political show demolishing to be a regional process that mobilizes environments of extraction and destruction to preserve the interests of capital, and forms of spatial differentiation within and outside Detroit. I have illustrated how demolition fits within the production of decline. *Figure 51* shows blight and vacant land as part of this accumulation process. However, within this conceptualization,

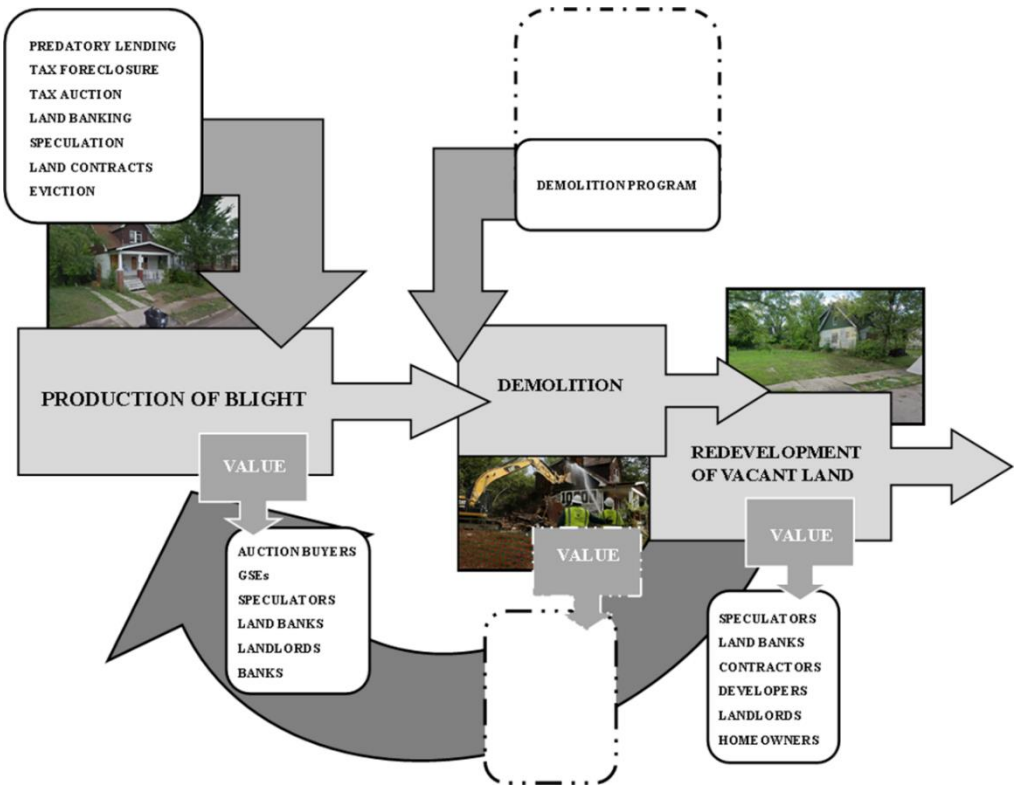


Figure 51: Demolition within the Production of Blight and the Redevelopment of Vacant Land

demolition is a discrete intervention that concludes the prior period of value-extraction while opening space for a new round of investment and profit by stabilizing or reusing vacant land. Contractors deliver demolition to a site and the process of redevelopment can begin.

In this dissertation, I push against that conceptualization by defamiliarizing demolition and the processes and operations that provide for its production. In *Figure 52,* I illustrate the production of demolition within the production of decline. This is the circulation of money, supplies, and materials, but it is also the circulation of power and control over the fortunes of Detroit neighborhoods. Demolition is a not a local *program*; it a regional process and an achievement by power and capital. The sources of demolition backfill are not simply found features of regional topography or geology; they are generated in the production of demolition. These 444 sources are embedded in property and policy practices of growth and decline that

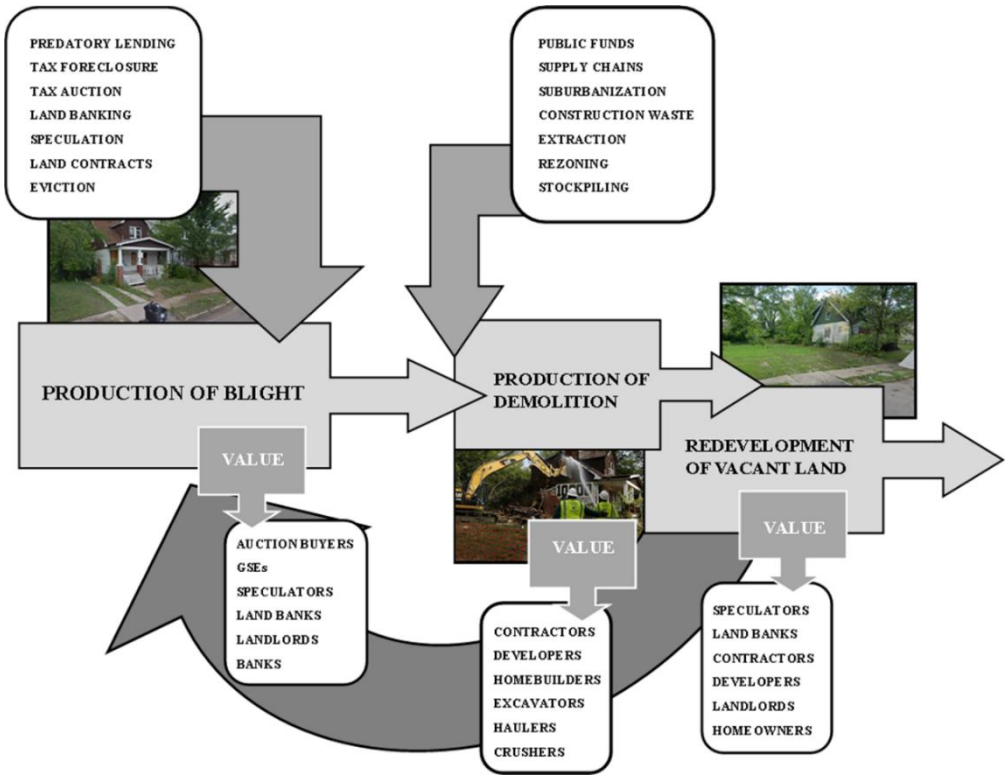


Figure 52: The Production of Demolition within the Production of Decline

create possibilities for income generation that conflict with the DDP's stated goal of rebuilding through reuse of vacant land. As Ken Buckfire, the president and managing director of investment banking firm Miller Buckfire & Co. told an audience of Detroit expats about vacant land, "I think that's the greatest strategic asset of Detroit (Livengood, 2019a)." But because demolishing is not an isolated local practice of engineering, its consequences for Detroit and its built environment extend beyond whether land is reused. Detroit's decline provides space for practices of rentiership and valuation that steer the DDP to maximize returns off continued land-use debasement. In parts of Detroit, private property is less exclusion and exchange than an asset in a secondary market of backfill, a market upon which the DDP depends. The DDP is not wrecking Detroit into the redeveloped city, but demolishing Detroit into the extracted city.

The drum beat of a blight-free Detroit plays on. In late 5/2019, Duggan appeared at the Mackinac Policy Conference with a new plan to realize a blight-free Detroit. Standing before a

swarm of reporters from across the state, he proposed a $200 million bond issue for the March 2020 ballot dedicated to wrecking and rehabilitating vacant property in the city (Gray, 2019). Duggan promised this new debt was a financial necessity to achieving his goal of eradicating residential blight by 2024. If approved by Detroit voters, the new source of DDP funding would close a funding gap created by the end of HHF. The bond would take pressure off local congressional representation to secure federal money while also preventing a slowdown in demolition. Combined with a reduction of DLBA's role in managing the program, the bond dollars would enable greater financial independence to match Duggan's and the city council's intensified political command of the demolition program (Stafford, 2019). Towards the end of 2019, the city council rejected Duggan's proposal on grounds the DDP had not operated with transparency and had dodged accountability (Kaffer, 2019). Duggan vowed to get a version of the bond on the 11/2020 ballot (Stafford, 2020). In 7/2020, city council approved a new ballot measure for a $250 million bond (Guillen, 2020). New grabs surely await the contractors.

Notwithstanding the unmatched volume of abandoned properties and the swell of public dollars flowing towards removing its blight, the underlying forces and relationships suggest Detroit is not unique. DDP is superlative, not sui generis. As I argued in the introduction, research on demolition restricts the practice as the beginning or the end of a separate process of administration or accumulation. Although the DDP has designs to wreck over 40,000 buildings, spend nearly a billion dollars of public money, and excavate and circulate over 10 million yd3 of backfill, its decentralization and incrementalism disguises its grandness as a megaproject before which scholars might salivate and inhabitants may tremble. I have shown how the micro, meso, and macro scales of property and policy can return focus to the production of demolition.

Demolishing Detroit was not incidental or peripheral to political-economic goals of redevelopment, authority, and value. Not only did DDP and city officials view backfilling as the precondition of redevelopment but the strategic urgency of backfill became an organizing principle for a coalition of builders, excavators, haulers, crushers, and wreckers. Backfilling was central to both the production of demolition, but also the perceived consensus around "the will to remove." But visions of a stronger Detroit developed on the resource of vacant land converged with the process of demolishing. Backfilling became an opportunity and an investment to exploit Detroit's landscape and capture remaining value from abandoned properties. The configurations of land and power that continue to produce Detroit's decline provide a window into urbanization processes and accumulation strategies beyond growth. Decline is not produced globally and addressed locally. The political, economic, and spatial contradictions of demolishing and backfilling Detroit indicate how the DDP was a continuation of the production of decline. Going forward, planners can confront the approaches to demolishing Detroit that mystify or marginalize the production of decline and maintain anti-Black and anti-poor regional geographies. Planners must challenge these processes that extract value by preserving this differentiation.

Future Work on the Logistical and Environmental Production of Urban Decline

Research on decline, its production, and its property practices remains essential to taking a stance that moves beyond scale to explain decline and policy responses. I am lucky enough to follow and work alongside scholars that have recast decline, blight, and destruction (Seymour, 2020; Akers & Seymour, 2018; Akers, 2013a; Dewar & Thomas, 2012). My future work will examine the logistical and environmental dimensions of local responses to decline. I believe my focus on the environmental and logistical production of decline provides an opportunity to further ground research on cities like Detroit in strategies of accumulation, rentiership, and

value-grabbing. Moreover, this work can identify, by virtue of the conditions of their creation and, how responses to decline can serve the contradictory purposes of producing decline.

I have three projects that build upon my dissertation. First, I will co-create and make available a *Detroit Backfill Atlas* to residents of the city's neighborhoods. This project will integrate information that expands the operation of the DDP to include: funding sources, names of subcontractors and haulers, time to complete the demolition, presence of lead or asbestos, dust suppression techniques, time to fill the hole, and the quality and source material used to fill the hole. My goal is to conduct soil testing on 444 sites in Detroit consistent with the number of backfill sources approved by the DDP and AKT Peerless. I will draw on this data to collaborate with neighborhood residents to examine ideas of public health, value, and the potential for democratic redevelopment. The second current will include continued engagement with the consequences of demolishing Detroit on both valuation, land-use debasement, and intensification. What new uses, occupations, and developments has demolished enabled?

I intend to shift my research focus onto other logistical and environmental processes within urban decline. One limit of this research project is the narrow focus on Detroit. Contributing to the future of shrinking cities research means theorizing broadly from the perspective of the production of decline. This requires identifying and scrutinizing supply chains, industries, and valuation schemes that serve important roles in the operations of capital but are not bound up in the usual atlas of shrinking cities that divides the local and global. St. Louis remains part of a national supply chain of recycled brick that has created formal and informal incentives to prolong the destruction of the city's neighborhoods (Gay, 2010; Reinhold, 1978). Despite that image of sustainability, St. Louis supplies the majority of recycled brick in southeast and western residential construction in both formal and informal ways (Meyerowitz, 2011).

Reducing the need to manufacture new building materials has not proven itself a strategy for preserving or sustaining St. Louis' neighborhoods. Today, local leaders celebrate the achievement of a demolishable St. Louis and reinvigorated support for demolishing St. Louis (Barker, 2019; O'Dea, 2019). But neither shift captures how demolishing and recycling brick reshapes the value and land-use in ways that produce scales of the city's decline. Demolishing St. Louis is not local. Presently, St. Louis brick can resell for $1 and an average house has over 15,000 bricks. By focusing on the logistical and environmental aspects of this brick reuse, we can identify supply chains linking destruction in St. Louis to expansion in the Sun Belt.

I also hope to apply lessons from my research backfilling, regional geographies of value, and extraction to two other cities facing the consequences of depopulation and decline. In New Orleans, LA, new nuisance abatement policies around landscaping have helped establish a powerful regional mowing industry that extracts value by monitoring grass height and reporting owner-occupants. New Orleans' Code Enforcement office applies liens on overgrown grass which can result in the property entering the Lien Foreclosure Program (Williams, 2019). The logistics of mowing and public policies meant to preserve and stabilize neighborhoods have targeted vulnerable residents and created opportunities for exploiting property and producing decline. In Cincinnati, OH, near-daily dumping of construction debris by contractors in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods has prompted local policymakers and officials to form a new Environmental Crimes Task Force (Thompson, 2019). My research on Detroit suggests the regional supply chain of illegal dumping could illuminate how neighborhoods, policymakers, and dumpers understand land, its use, and its value. By adding environmental and logistical dimensions to the study of the production of decline, these research projects examine how capital "hits the ground" and mobilizes new pathways of extraction and destruction in shrinking cities.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Emergency Orders

EMERGENCY MANAGER
CITY OF DETROIT

ORDER No. 15

ORDER SUSPENDING CERTAIN CITY WRECKING REQUIREMENTS TO ADDRESS BLIGHT

BY THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN THE EMERGENCY MANAGER
FOR THE CITY OF DETROIT
PURSUANT TO MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC ACT 436 OF 2012,
KEVYN D. ORR, THE EMERGENCY MANAGER,
ISSUES THE FOLLOWING ORDER:

Whereas, on March 28, 2013, Michigan Public Act 436 of 2012 ("PA 436") became effective and Kevyn D. Orr became the Emergency Manager ("EM") for the City of Detroit (the "City") with all the powers and duties provided under PA 436; and

Pursuant to section 9(2) of PA 436, the EM "shall act for and in the place and stead of" the Detroit Mayor and City Council; and

Section 9(2) of PA 436 also grants the EM "broad powers in receivership to rectify the financial emergency and to assure the fiscal accountability of the [City] and the [City's] capacity to provide or cause to be provided necessary governmental services essential to the public health, safety, and welfare;" and

Pursuant to section 10(1) of PA 436, the EM may "issue to the appropriate local elected and appointed officials and employees, agents, and contractors of the local government the orders the emergency manager considers necessary to accomplish the purposes of this act;" and

Section 12(1)(dd) of PA 436 authorizes the EM, "notwithstanding any charter provision to the contrary," to "[e]xercise solely, for and on behalf of the local government, all other authority and responsibilities of the chief administrative officer and

governing body concerning the adoption, amendment, and enforcement of ordinances or resolutions of the local government" as provided in the Michigan Home Rule City Act, Act 279 of 1909, Michigan Compiled Laws ("M.C.L.") §§ 117.1 to 117.38 (the "Home Rule Act"); and

Section 3(k) of the Home Rule Act requires that the City's charter provide for "adopting, continuing, amending, and repealing the city ordinances and for the publication of each ordinance before it becomes operative;" and

Section 12(1)(ee) of PA 436 authorizes the EM, "notwithstanding any charter provision to the contrary," to "[t]ake any other action or exercise any power or authority of any officer, employee, department, board, commission, or other similar entity of the local government, whether elected or appointed, relating to the operation of the local government. The power of the [EM] shall be superior to and supersede the power of any of the foregoing officers or entities;" and

Section 12-11-20.1 of City Ordinance 290-H establishes a board of examiners for wrecking contractors (the "Board of Examiners") and, pursuant to section 12-11-20.2 of City Ordinance 290-H, the Board of Examiners "is authorized to adopt rules and regulations necessary to make effective the wrecking contractor license provisions of [City Ordinance 290-H];" and

Section 12-11-20.4 of City Ordinance 290-H requires the Board of Examiners to "determine by written and oral examination the qualifications [of] an applicant" seeking to obtain a wrecking license for use in the City; and

Section 12-11-20.5 of City Ordinance 290-H requires contractors applying for wrecking licenses to show, among other things, "satisfactory proof to the [Board of Examiners] that [the contractor] has been actively engaged in the demolition and removal of structures for a period of at least three (3) years in a supervisory capacity;" and

Section 12-11-20.6 of City Ordinance 290-H classifies wrecking licenses as either a Class A License, which authorizes the contractor to "wreck all types [of] buildings or structures, including wood frame, masonry, steel frame and reinforced concrete buildings and structures [of] unlimited height," or a Class B License, which authorizes the contractor to "wreck wood frame and solid masonry buildings and structures not to exceed three (3) stories and thirty-five (35) feet in height;" and

The City's Buildings Safety and Engineering Department established a fee schedule, effective April 1, 2013 (the "Fee Schedule"), applicable to all licensed contractors working within City limits; and

Article 24 of Michigan Public Act 299 of 1980 ("PA 299"), M.C.L. § 339.101, *et seq.*, regulates, among others, occupations and activities relative to construction and wrecking activities; and

Section 2404(3) of PA 299 authorizes the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to issue a "residential maintenance and alteration contractor's license to an applicant who, upon examination, qualifies for a license, which authorizes the licensee according to the applicant's qualifications, crafts, and trades to engage in the activities of a residential maintenance and alteration contractor," including, among other things, house wrecking (the "Michigan Residential Maintenance and Alteration License"); and

Section 2404b of PA 299 authorizes the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to issue a residential building license to a contractor who, among other things, engages in "the construction of a residential structure or a combination residential [] structure who…undertake[s] or purports to have the capacity to undertake with another for the…wrecking of, or demolition of, a residential structure…" (the "Michigan Residential Building License"); and

The City is experiencing severe and widespread blight. Nearly one-third of the City's 139 square miles is empty or unused with some 80,000 vacant homes. This constitutes more than one-fifth of the City's housing stock. This blight is an ongoing health and safety risk to every resident, fosters and facilitates crime and unemployment, encourages resident flight from the City, depresses property values and discourages investment in the City; and

The EM has determined that the City's endemic blight creates a public emergency affecting life, health, property or the public peace and constitutes a "Blight Emergency;" and

The City receives funds from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in the form of Community Development Block Grants ("CDBG"). The regulations governing these funds expressly promote the elimination of slum and blight through a variety of activities, including, but not limited to, demolition of dangerous buildings. For fiscal year 2013-2014 the City received over $33 million in CDBG funds and intends to utilize approximately $3.3 million of these funds to address the Blight Emergency; and

Further, to assist the City in addressing its Blight Emergency, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (the "MSHDA") has earmarked a portion of the $100 million of Troubled Asset Relief Program funds provided by the United States Department of the Treasury to combat the City's Blight Emergency through MSHDA's Hardest Hit Fund program (collectively, the "HHF Funds"); and

The Blight Emergency also is ameliorated in part under M.C.L. § 500.2227, which requires insurers to withhold a certain amount of real property insurance proceeds otherwise owed to insureds to be escrowed and retained by the City where the "loss to insured real property [located in the City is] due to fire, explosion, vandalism, malicious mischief, wind, hail, riot, or civil commotion" (such withheld insurance funds, the "Insurance Escrow"). M.C.L. § 500.2227(7) authorizes the City disburse Insurance

Escrow funds to "secure, repair, or demolish the damaged or destroyed structure and clear the property in question, so that the structure and property are in compliance with local code requirements and applicable ordinances" of the City (the "Insurance Funds"); and

The City established the Neighborhood Stabilization Program 3 ("NSP-3") Plan to utilize funds released by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to stabilize the City's neighborhoods most affected by foreclosure and abandonment, reverse the decline of housing values, eliminate blighted and abandoned structures and stimulate other investment in and around targeted neighborhoods (collectively, the "NSP-3 Funds"); and

The EM was appointed to, among other things, safeguard and assure the financial accountability of the City; provide or cause to be provided the necessary services essential to the public health, safety, and welfare; and prescribe remedial measures to address the City's financial emergency. This requires the EM to address the City's Blight Emergency as part of the City's overall financial and operational restructuring; and

The EM has determined that compliance with certain aspects of City Ordinance 290-H imposes unnecessary costs and delays, which needlessly prolong the Blight Emergency. Additionally, the EM has determined that certain aspects of the Ordinance 290-H do not allow the City or contractors to quickly and efficiently combat the Blight Emergency, which further contributes to the public emergency affecting life, health, property or the public peace; and

The EM believes, at this point in time, that to more effectively address the Blight Emergency it is in the City's best interests to allow holders of either a Michigan Residential Maintenance and Michigan Alteration License or Residential Building License (collectively, the "State Contractor") to obtain a temporary license from the City for purposes of wrecking blighted and abandoned structures subject to the limits contained in this Order; and

It is hereby ordered that:

1. Notwithstanding City Ordinance 290-H, the City's Buildings Safety and Engineering Department and Board of Examiners shall issue a temporary Class B License to any State Contractor that presents both: (a) a valid and effective Residential Maintenance and Alteration License for house wrecking or Residential Building License (the "State Licenses"); and (b) a certified letter from the State Land Bank Fast Track Authority, Detroit Land Bank Authority, the Purchasing Division of the City's Finance Department or Detroit Planning and Development Department indicating that such contractor has been awarded a contract that receives either CDBG, HHF Funds, Insurance Funds or NSP-3 Funds. Possession of the State Licenses is hereby deemed to satisfy the requirements of City Ordinance 290-H for purposes of obtaining a temporary Class B License pursuant to this Order.

2. Consistent with paragraph 1 of this Order, notwithstanding City Ordinance 290-H, the City's Buildings Safety and Engineering Department and Board of Examiners shall not subject a State Contractor to oral or written examination of qualifications pursuant to section 12-11-20.4 to obtain a temporary Class B License from the City.

3. Consistent with paragraph 1 of this Order, notwithstanding City Ordinance 290-H, the City's Building Safety and Engineering Department and Board of Examiners shall not require a State Contractor to submit satisfactory proof that, among other things, it has been engaged in the demolition and removal of structures in accordance with section 12-11-20.5 of City Ordinance 290-H to obtain a temporary Class B License from the City.

4. Before issuing a temporary Class B License to a State Contractor, the City's Buildings Safety and Engineering Department and Board of Examiners shall require each State Contractor to pay any applicable fees in accordance with the City's Fee Schedule.

5. All temporary Class B Licenses shall expire each year on December 31. Any State Contractor that wishes to continue its activities in the City must obtain a new temporary Class B License in accordance with the terms of this Order.

6. Except as expressly provided in this Order, all other City ordinances, regulations and requirements related to the receipt of a license or other authorization to conduct construction, wrecking, demolition or related activities shall remain in full force and effect.

7. If any component of this Order is declared illegal, unenforceable or ineffective by a court of competent jurisdiction, such component shall be deemed severable so that all other components contained in this Order shall remain valid and effective.

8. This Order is effective immediately upon the date of execution below and shall remain in full force and effect until the City's financial emergency has been rectified in accordance with section 22 of PA 436.

9. The EM may modify, amend, rescind, replace, supplement or otherwise revise this Order at any time.

10. This Order shall be distributed to the Mayor, City Council members and all department heads.

Dated: August 29th, 2013

By: _____
Kevyn D. Orr
Emergency Manager

EMERGENCY MANAGER
CITY OF DETROIT

ORDER No. 33

ORDER SUSPENDING CERTAIN CITY DEMOLITION REQUIREMENTS TO ADDRESS BLIGHT

BY THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN THE EMERGENCY MANAGER
FOR THE CITY OF DETROIT
PURSUANT TO MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC ACT 436 OF 2012,
KEVYN D. ORR, THE EMERGENCY MANAGER,
ISSUES THE FOLLOWING ORDER:

Whereas, on March 28, 2013, Michigan Public Act 436 of 2012 ("PA 436") became effective and Kevyn D. Orr became the Emergency Manager ("EM") for the City of Detroit (the "City") with all the powers and duties provided under PA 436; and

Pursuant to section 9(2) of PA 436, the EM "shall act for and in the place and stead of" the Detroit Mayor and City Council;" and

Section 9(2) of PA 436 also grants the EM "broad powers in receivership to rectify the financial emergency and to assure the fiscal accountability of the [City] and the [City's] capacity to provide or cause to be provided necessary governmental services essential to the public health, safety, and welfare;" and

Pursuant to section 10(1) of PA 436, the EM may "issue to the appropriate local elected and appointed officials and employees, agents, and contractors of the local government the orders the emergency manager considers necessary to accomplish the purposes of this act;" and

Section 12(1)(dd) of PA 436 authorizes the EM, "notwithstanding any charter provision to the contrary," to "[e]xercise solely, for and on behalf of the local government, all other authority and responsibilities of the chief administrative officer and

governing body concerning the adoption, amendment, and enforcement of ordinances or resolutions of the local government" as provided in the Michigan Home Rule City Act, Act 279 of 1909, Michigan Compiled Laws ("M.C.L.") §§ 117.1 to 117.38 (the "Home Rule Act"); and

Section 3(k) of the Home Rule Act requires that the City's charter provide for "adopting, continuing, amending, and repealing the city ordinances and for the publication of each ordinance before it becomes operative;" and

Section 12(1)(ee) of PA 436 authorizes the EM, "notwithstanding any charter provision to the contrary," to "[t]ake any other action or exercise any power or authority of any officer, employee, department, board, commission, or other similar entity of the local government, whether elected or appointed, relating to the operation of the local government. The power of the [EM] shall be superior to and supersede the power of any of the foregoing officers or entities;" and

Section 12-11-19.10 of City Ordinance 290-H establishes certain requirements with respect to demolition of residential properties and filling of excavations. Such requirements include specifying the type of fill to be used. The specified fill procedures impose severe financial burdens on efforts to address the City's Blight Emergency, as described in Emergency Manager Order No. 15 and continuing today, specifically, they require the City, its Departments, and the City of Detroit Building Authority (the "DBA") and the Detroit Land Bank Authority (the "DLBA") to spend approximately $6,000 on fill for each residential demolition; and

The EM was appointed to, among other things, safeguard and assure the financial accountability of the City; provide or cause to be provided the necessary services essential to the public health, safety, and welfare; and prescribe remedial measures to address the City's financial emergency. This requires the EM to address the City's Blight Emergency as part of the City's overall financial and operational restructuring; and

The EM has determined that compliance with certain aspects of Section 12-11-19.10 of City Ordinance 290-H, as discussed above, imposes unnecessary costs in connection with the demolition of blighted structures which needlessly impair the City's efforts to address the Blight Emergency. The EM has determined that the adoption of alternative fill procedures is a means to reduce the cost of fill for each residential demolition by up to fifty percent and will allow the City to more efficiently and cost-effectively address the Blight Emergency; and

The EM has determined that the adoption of the following alternative fill requirements will further enable the City to address the Blight Emergency: The entire basement, including foundation, basement walls, flooring and any adjacent flat concrete surfaces, shall be excavated. The excavated materials, together with any other available concrete excavated materials, shall be crushed into pieces no larger than 8 inches (the "Crushed Materials"). The Crushed Materials may then be utilized to fill the excavation, but no higher than 3 feet below grade. The remainder of the excavation shall be filled

with clean fill. The foregoing procedures are referred to in this Order as the "Alternative Fill Procedures;" and

Consistent with Emergency Manager Order No. 15, the EM believes, at this point in time, that to more effectively address the Blight Emergency it is in the City's best interest to adopt the Alternative Fill Procedures; and

It is hereby ordered that:

1. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in Section 12-11-19.10 of City Ordinance 290-H, demolition contractors engaged by the City, its Departments, the DBA, and the DLBA shall adopt the Alternative Fill Procedures in connection with the demolition of blighted residential structures in the City of Detroit.

2. Except as expressly provided in this Order and Order No. 15, which remains in full force and effect, all other City ordinances, regulations and requirements related to the demolition of blighted structures shall remain in full force and effect.

3. If any component of this Order is declared illegal, unenforceable or ineffective by a court of competent jurisdiction, such component shall be deemed severable so that all other components contained in this Order shall remain valid and effective.

4. This Order is effective immediately upon the date of execution below.

5. The EM may modify, amend, rescind, replace, supplement or otherwise revise this Order at any time.

6. This Order shall be distributed to the Mayor, City Council members and all department heads.

Dated: August 21st, 2014

By: _____
Kevyn D. Orr
Emergency Manager
City of Detroit

cc: Mayor Mike Duggan
Members of Detroit City Council
Director, Building Safety and Engineering Department
Director, Detroit Building Authority
Director, Detroit Land Bank Authority

Appendix B

Detroit Hardest Hit Fund Strategic Plan

Detroit Hardest Hit Fund Strategic Plan

BACKGROUND

"Mortgage Meltdown." On February 13, 2008, CNNmoney.com reported that Detroit was the top activity center for troubled homeowners according to a new study. The study showed that nearly 5% of the city's households entering some stage of mortgage foreclosure, which was, at the time, 4.8 times the national average according to Realtytrac. Those were the good old days.

Since 2008, the city of Detroit has seen mortgage and tax foreclosures explode exponentially. According to available public records, there have been over 125,000 tax foreclosures alone in the city of Detroit. During this same period, the number of bank foreclosures has also significantly increased. Coupled with the realities of population decline in Detroit since its peak of approximately 2 million people in the 1950s, to just over 713,000 people (per the 2010 U.S. census), the impact of these trends has become quite clear. Specifically, there are over 78,000 structures, according to a report released by the Detroit Emergency Manager's office in connection with published accounts of the July 18, 2013 Detroit bankruptcy filing indicate.

The new reality in summer 2013 is that we have now pushed a reset button at the government levels to stabilize and motivate the market to do what it does best. Catalytic change is possible, and the market needs the signal to perform. Private sector involvement in the market is crucial toward the city's resurgence. This is most evident in a burgeoning small business sector, the 7.2 Sq. Miles comprising the Greater Downtown Detroit. A Hudson Weber Foundation report released in February 2013, 7.2 SQ MI| A Report on Greater Downtown Detroit, tells a positive and encouraging story of Detroit through a sophisticated data analysis detailing the growth of the Greater Downtown Detroit area. This area is comprised of a collection of eclectic historic district neighborhoods including, Woodbridge, Cork Town, Eastern Market, Lafayette Park, Midtown and New Center. While, overall, Detroit lost 25% of its population during the first decade of the 2000s, this downtown area declined just at 13%.

This area of the city is bouncing back stronger than any other in the city today, due primarily to the steady infusion of small business investments. The Hudson Weber Foundation report notes that since 2006, over $6 billion has been invested in real estate development projects in the Greater Downtown Detroit area, and the area accounts for over 40% of the total employment in the city. With such momentum in the business sector, we now need to leverage that energy and make attractive housing accommodations both for the new employers and employees coming into town, as well as for those that have remained through the years.

The Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) was quite cognizant of this optimal moment and seized the opportunity afforded it under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) to create such attractive yet affordable housing accommodations in two strong neighborhoods in the city. Both neighborhoods, the Boston Edison Historic District (which is an area that is an extension of the Greater Downtown Detroit area just off the Woodward Corridor) and the East English Village area, are unique and self-contained markets. The DLBA invested over $10.5 million in these areas and created a significant increase in property values over the course of 16 months of activity, with all 29 rehabilitated units selling out. At the beginning of the program, housing prices were ranging from $7,000 to $30,000. Sales prices range now from $65,000 to $145,000 across both neighborhoods. During the same NSP time frame, since 2009, the City of Detroit Buildings and Safety Department demolished close to 7,000 properties across the city.

What remains is to clean up around the targeted investment so that new growth in market-rate housing or new uses such as public green spaces, have an opportunity to flourish. The starting point for continuing to reinvigorate the market is the clearance of the decades-old signs of disinvestment in the area. This is the strongest way to solidify the investments made over the last two to five years and encourage newcomers and pent up demand to take the risk and become involved in the market.

This state-led effort to deploy $100 million dollars from the Hardest Hit Fund (HHF) into distressed cities across the state for the purpose of reducing blight and spurring economic activity is such a critical factor in

Northend:
The Northend area contains a mix of housing markets, from Boston Edison and Arden Park which are some of the strongest in the city, and have seen recent investment from NSP-1, NSP 2 and NSP-3. In addition, the southern half of the target area is included in the "Live Midtown" incentive program which provides employees at several institutions incentives to rent, purchase, or renovate housing in the area. The Northend is also projected to see improvements in transit over the next several years with the construction of the M-1 rail and Woodward Bus-Rapid-Transit, which has the potential to spur development and economic growth in the area. Please see the map within Exhibit 1, entitled "Northend".

Jefferson Chalmers:
Located between Jefferson Avenue and the Detroit River on the far eastside of Detroit, Jefferson Chalmers is home to some of the strongest housing markets in the city. The area has seen recent development and the temporarily stalled development of Jefferson Village is located at the west end of the target area. The Jefferson Avenue corridor provides the opportunity for continued commercial development. While the relative strength of the housing market and strategic location provide opportunity, the area is interspersed with vacant housing and a large concentration of vacant parcels that threatens the stability of the area. Please see the map within Exhibit 1, entitled "Jefferson-Chalmers".

Southwest Detroit:
The Southwest Detroit target area extends from the edge of Corktown in the east to the city limits at the west. This area is well known for the strong resident Hispanic community. The area has been a target for the State of Michigan's Pathways to Potential with four schools (Bennett Elementary, Harms Elementary, Clemente Academy, and Neians Elementary), and NSP-3. The area is transected by Vernor Highway, one of the most vibrant commercial corridors in the city. The neighborhoods are interspersed with vacant housing units and tax foreclosures that threaten the stability of the area. Please see the map within Exhibit 1, entitled "Southwest".

MorningSide – East English Village-Cornerstone:
Located on the City's eastside, the MorningSide neighborhood has been one of the areas hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis in the city. The area has seen high levels of mortgage foreclosure that has lead to an increase of abandonment, and the encroachment of tax foreclosure that is now threatening the strongest housing markets in the area. Over the past several years these neighborhoods have been the target of public investment, through NSP-1, NSP-2, and NSP-3, with considerable activity by the Detroit Land Bank Authority. East English Village Academy and Clark Academy have also been targets for the Pathways to Potential Program. Please see the map within Exhibit 1, entitled "Morningside-East English".

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AREAS THAT ARE IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO MUNICIPALITY THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED

This is not applicable to the Detroit submission.

III. *IDENTIFICATION OF PROPERTIES BY ADDRESS THAT ARE LIKELY CANDIDATES MEETING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA*

The HHF Operations Team is comprised of City of Detroit Buildings and Safety Engineering and Environmental Department (BSEED) staff and MLB demolition staff working jointly on the effort. They are amassing specific parcel and condition data on all eligible demolition candidates through reviewing their systems and conducting new field surveys during this planning process. Clearly, the need for demolition resources in the City is huge and outweighs the available resources. Reconciled data indicates that there are at least 8,000 dangerous buildings being tracked by BSEED in the six focus areas. And recent inspections reveal that the total number could actually be much higher. **It should be noted that the DLBA will maintain oversight of property selection criteria to ensure that no historic properties are demolished with this funding, whether in local, National, designated or eligible districts, or, on or eligible for listing on the National Registry. We do believe these target areas contain ample eligible structures for this demolition funding.**

shoring up the local investments in neighborhoods, particularly in Detroit where positive signs are starting to be seen. But a successful and long-lasting approach to neighborhood stabilization, blight elimination and economic development has to be holistic. Strategic demolition needs to be complemented by strategic reinvestment and rehabilitation. Blight removal does not necessarily mean demolition and can also include successful reinvestment in certain properties. Additionally, it is critical that local stakeholders support one another and have a good working relationship with the state to get the job done.

Locally, the market needs a one-stop shop for land control related to redevelopment. As an entity working on behalf of the city, the DLBA is poised to take up the mantle of serving as that one-stop shop. In partnership with the Michigan Land Bank (MLB), we can truly operate as a full-service redevelopment arm for the city by integrating the MLB's demolition management expertise. Developers and community groups would no longer need to seek out several different agencies or departments all acting separately on narrow agendas. A one-stop shop is what this venture offers, and that approach will provide a powerful difference in how blight would be reduced a practical level by focusing these efforts through one agency. To effectively capture and continue the existing momentum, the city needs an agile high performance agency with the breadth and depth of knowledge in this redevelopment space.

As such, we have assembled a team of experts at data assembly, demolition and redevelopment to fashion this plan. The partners engaged in this plan are the City of Detroit's Office of the Emergency Manager, DLBA, MLB, and Detroit Future City. We offer the following proposal response for your consideration.

I. DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL PROJECT AREAS, STREET BOUNDARIES, AND RATIONALE FOR THE SELECTION

The City of Detroit is one of the state's five cities designated for targeted investment as part of the HHF program. Within Detroit, we have broken down sectors and targeted the blight reduction investment across six strategic, strong neighborhoods in the city. Based on the Detroit Works/Detroit Future City effort, the city identified the strongest areas with marketability for redevelopment investments. Six of those targeted areas have been chosen to receive a multi-faceted mix of reinvestment strategies including blight reduction and elimination through the HHF program. To meet the goals of the program sponsor and create immediate impact this fall, we have identified the following priority areas for the demolition effort. Northend, Jefferson Chalmers, Southwest, Grandmont Rosedale, UDM/Marygrove, Morningside/EEV/Cornerstone. Please see the maps attached here as Exhibit 1, for each of the Eligible Area Targeted Neighborhoods.

The Detroit Future City team has focused an intensive effort over the last three years to develop a comprehensive analysis of all of the city's neighborhoods. That analysis created the basis and rationale for the selection of the six target areas for the HHF program. A brief narrative on each target area follows.

Grandmont Rosedale:
Centered around the Grandmont Rosedale Historic District, this area has traditionally been one of the strongest in Detroit, both in market value and in community capacity. Unfortunately, over the past decade the housing market in this area has degraded; however, in spite of the current market weakness it remains one of the stronger areas in the city. The neighborhood is characterized by low rates of public ownership and tax foreclosure, but these rates have been increasing over the past several years. Grandmont Rosedale received a small public investment of NSP2 funds, and is set to receive a $2 million allocation for housing stabilization under NSP3. Please see the map within Exhibit 1, entitled "Grandmont - Rosedale".

UDM – Marygrove:
The area surrounding the University of Detroit Mercy and Marygrove College, two strong anchor institutions, contains a mix of housing market conditions. The northern half of this target area contains some of the city's stronger housing markets, while the southern half is made up of distressed markets with a considerable amount of publicly-owned parcels. Passing through the area is Livernois Ave, which is currently a target area for retail development. The area has also been a target for NSP-1 and Pathways for Potential. Please see the map within Exhibit 1, entitled "UDM/Marygrove".

Appendix C

Legislative Policy Division Report

David Whitaker, Esq.
Director
Irvin Corley, Jr.
Executive Policy Manager
Marcell R. Todd, Jr.
SeniorCity Planner

LaKisha Barclift, Esq.
M. Rory Bolger, PhD, AICP
Timothy Boscarino, AICP
Kemba Braynon
Elizabeth Cabot, Esq.
Janese Chapman
Tasha Cowan

City of Detroit
CITY COUNCIL
LEGISLATIVE POLICY DIVISION

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David Teeter
Theresa Thomas
Kathryn Lynch Underwood

TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division (LPD) Staff

DATE: July 6, 2016

RE: Demolition Standards and Land Use

During the discussion of amending the City Code's demolition standards at the Public Health and Safety Standing Committee on June 27, 2016, the Committee directed LPD to report regarding implications of the proposed new standards for land use.[1] This is LPD's preliminary report, regarding this rather broad public policy question.

Background

It should be noted that, on April 21, 2015, LPD provided the attached brief report - in the context of EM Order No. 33 and the Detroit Building Authority (DBA) Demolition Management Agreement. That report outlined the **underlying issue of what requirements apply to City building demolitions in terms of how the underground basement, walls and debris are to be treated, whether crushed or left in place underground in some form, or completely removed from the property underlying the demolished structure.**

As discussed during the committee meeting on June 27, 2016, the DBA and the Law Department are now offering amendments to the City Code, Ordinance 290-H, which would "modernize the provisions regarding backfill materials and procedures". (attached) LPD concurs with the Law Department and the administration, to the extent that it is preferable to apply "uniform procedures" to all demolition and fill projects, insofar as possible, rather than applying some standards sometimes and "alternative fill procedures" on other occasions. Serious confusion involving the alternative procedures, both as to what they actually required and when they should

[1] The discussion is archived at: **http://www.detroitmi.gov/Government/City-Council/Meeting-Video-Archives/ArticleID/884/Detroit-City-Council-Session-Public-Safety-June-27-2016**, beginning at 1:12:00.

be applied, was a major impetus for LPD's attached April 21, 2015 report. Moreover, the requirements for erosion control, and that backfill materials be free of toxic contamination, are obviously desirable.

The new proposed amendments to Ordinance 290-H – in the words of the Law Department – "provides flexibility by allowing the demolition contractor the option of using alternative fill materials, including crushed concrete and masonry..." At the June 27, 2016 committee meeting, the administration and the Law Department stated that a principal reason for allowing this flexibility would be to save on landfill disposal costs of the demolition program.

Salient provisions of the proposed amended Ordinance 290-H, in terms of future land use concerns, state that "The portion of the hole or excavated area more than 3 feet below grade shall be filled with clean soil[2], hard fill[3], or combination fill[4], at the option of the permit holder." Between 3 feet and 6 inches below grade, the proposal must be "either clean soil or combination fill," at the permit holder's option; the top six inches only is required to be filled with clean soil. (Sec. 12-11-19.10 (b) 2-4)

LPD is concerned, as previously expressed in April 2015 and on other occasions, that the proposed policy of allowing demolition contractors to fill excavated areas with 40-100% rock, concrete, brick, block, or masonry, crushed to between 1.5 and 8 inches in diameter, beginning only 6 inches below grade, may not be in the best interests of the City from a land use perspective.

Discussion

As noted verbally by LPD during the committee meeting on June 27, 2016, while the additional clarity and simplification provided by the new amended language are beneficial from an expediency perspective, it raises serious concerns about the long term effects of "alternative" – i.e., cheap – fill standards and procedures for completing demolition projects, **in terms of their effects on adaptive reuse and future development of the City's land.**

If demolition contractors operating under the new amendments to Ordinance 290-H are saving money by backfilling the basements and foundations of demolished structures with crushed concrete aggregate, and covering the debris with a thin layer of clean fill, but these "alternative" standards leave the real property parcels after the demolition in no condition to be cost-effectively redeveloped, are they enacting procedures that are 'penny-wise and pound-foolish', so to speak? The oft-expressed scarcity of available clean fill must be factored in; however, long term environmental concerns must at the very last be carefully assessed, and

[2] "... topsoil or clean earth composed of soil such as crumbling yellow clay, sand, or loam. To qualify as "clean soil, the soil or clean earth must be inert material soil with an organic content of no more than 20%."

[3] "...rock, concrete, brick, block, or masonry that qualifies as inert material and that is crushed or reduced to no larger than 8 inches in diameter."

[4] "...a mixture of a minimum 60% clean soil and a maximum 40% hard fill that is processed through crushing equipment to no larger than 1½ inches in diameter. The materials for combination fill may, but need not be, taken from the demolition site."

records must be preserved so that excavation is not required in order to determine what lies beneath the top soil.

Because if developers and construction companies seeking to rebuild the City on those parcels then must incur greater costs to finish the job contracted to the demolition company, before any new building or development can be done, then no real saving would be achieved. Indeed, on the contrary, the intentional creation of even greater economic and physical barriers to such redevelopment would be wasting one of the City's potentially greatest assets in the form of its abundant open space of undervalued urban real estate available for building and redevelopment. Council may wish to thoroughly explore this challenging public policy issue in its deliberations of the proffered ordinance.

One important study of this issue is the United States Environmental Protection Agency's 2013 report ***"On the Road to Reuse: Residential Demolition Bid Specification Development Tool"***.[5] It states flatly: **"Current demolition practices may leave an unfortunate legacy of land contamination when house debris is used as fill material as part of the current demolition process. There are significant environmental, liability, and redevelopment issues with this demolition practice."** (emphasis added)

A subsequent page directly addresses the specific issue raised by this proposed amendment, "Backfill Quality". It states: "When a home is demolished there is often a depression or hole left behind that must be filled. The **backfill soils that have been used have been inconsistent in nature. An outdated and inadequate demolition practice involves filling the site with the demolition debris itself and/or using low quality soil.** Sources of backfill soil may not be free of contaminants or may have high clay contents that inhibit the infiltration of stormwater. Some **backfills may contain rocks, broken concrete, or other deleterious material that leaves sites in a poor condition for future reuse.**" (emphasis added)

Continuing: "**Land reuse issues emerge when cities choose to fill the basement excavation with the demolition debris itself. This common demolition practice leaves sites in poor condition for future reuse. While this practice may save operational costs, it has cost impacts to future users and the existing neighborhood. These indirect costs far outweigh the operational savings from dropping the house into the basement and it is recommended that cities instead use proper backfill soils.**" (emphasis added)

Further, looking forward from the demolition to future prospects for land reuse: "The routine removal of basements and foundations not only reduces the future cost to developers but creates a level of certainty that underground site issues have been addressed. **Many cities and developers have encountered demolition legacy issues[6] when digging into the subsurface in the course of site reuse.**" (emphasis added)

---

[5] Quoted excerpts from the report are attached. The entire 81-page report is available from LPD upon request, or at: https://www.epa.gov/large-scale-residential-demolition/road-reuse-residential-demolition-bid-specification-development

[6] Council may wish to inquire regarding Detroit's experience in brownfield redevelopment, which has included such "legacy issues" from many decades in the past, when debris was routinely plowed under into basements, beforte more modern requirements to haul away such debris were imposed – the very requirements this proposal now envisions abandoning.

The subject of demolition and land use practices, technical requirements, cost minimization and optimization for reuse is a potentially vast one, as to which this preliminary report only scratches the surface. It involves many important issues that have not been addressed in this report. At a minimum, Council may wish to carefully examine measures advocated on the basis of alleged cost savings, when foreseeable considerations like those referenced here may well wipe out the hoped-for savings.

If Council has any other questions or concerns regarding this subject, LPD will be happy to provide further research and analysis upon request.

Appendix D

Freedom of Information Act Correspondence

Re: Fwd: FOIA Request A17-03239 (Email from FOIA)

Ellen HA HAELL@detroitmi.gov via umich.edu
to me, cbien

Mr. Koscielniak:

The DBA, like the DLBA, is a separate legal entity, with its own legal counsel.

Currently, the DBA processes its FOIA requests through its attorneys at Lewis Munday, PC.

As such, I am copying Mr. Clark Bien, attorney for the DBA on this email.

Thank you,

Ellen Ha
Chief of Staff
City of Detroit Law Department

Bien, Clark D. cbien@lewismunday.com via umich.edu
to me

Dear Mr. Koscielniak,

I believe this is what you are looking for.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if I can be of any other service.

•••

THE ALLEN LAW GROUP

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION

Attorneys & Counselors

April 18, 2018

Via Electronic Mail

Michael RJ Koscielniak

[redacted]

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request Dated April 3, 2018

Dear Mr. Koscielniak:

Our office represents the Detroit Building Authority (DBA). The DBA received your email request dated April 3, 2018, for information pertaining to demolition production, the Detroit Blight Strike Force, and backfill data. Pursuant to the Michigan Freedom of Information Act, MCL 15.231 et seq, on April 10, 2018, our office requested an extension until April 24, 2018. This correspondence shall serve as the DBA's official response to your request.

1. Comprehensive demolition records regarding DBA activity in the City of Detroit can be seen on the City's website at www.detroitmi.gov/demolition. This is a very robust work site involving approximately 14,000 demolition projects.

2. The DBA does not compile or maintain records regarding, the Detroit Blight Strike Force.

3. Your request for backfill data is very general, nonetheless, I am unaware of the DBA compiling data regarding this subject. However, DBA contractors are required to backfill as reflected in the attached sample, Scope of Services.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this response, please feel free to contact our office at fallen@alglawpc.com and nhunter@alglawpc.com.

Sincerely,

Floyd E. Allen, Esq.

cc: Tim Palazzolo
Ron Crawford
Nicohole Hunter, Esq.

2500 Fisher Building | 3011 West Grand Blvd. | Detroit, Michigan | 48202-3030

www.alglawpc.com | T 313.871.5500 | F 313.871.0517

Helping Michigan's Hardest-Hit Homeowners
A step forward when you're a step behind

July 2, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL (mkosciel@umich.edu)

Michael RJ Koscielniak
[redacted]

Re: Freedom Of Information Act Request regarding records on Detroit Blight Removal using Hardest Hit Funds and Total Costs Associated with Each Demolition

On April 30, 2018, the staff of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority ("Authority") received your requests for information under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"). The Authority forwarded the request to the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Nonprofit Housing Corporation ("MHA").

MHA granted your request as to existing, non-exempt records determined to fall within the scope of the request.

MHA's Freedom of Information Act Procedures and Guidelines are available at https://www.stepforwardmichigan.org/en/foia-request/.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Tracey Hammond at hammondt@michigan.gov or at (517) 373-2409.

Sincerely,

Richard Norton
FOIA Coordinator

RN/tch

THE ALLEN LAW GROUP

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION

Attorneys & Counselors

July 19, 2018

Via Electronic Mail

Michael Koscielniak

[redacted]

RE: Freedom of Information Act Requests

Dear Mr. Koscielniak:

Our office represents the Detroit Building Authority ("DBA") in certain legal matters. This letter serves as DBA's response to your request for information and public documents pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Your request was received by the DBA on June 28, 2018, with an extension granted until July 19, 2018.

Your request states: "I'd also like records on backfill costs and estimates. How much does the city estimate backfill costs (per cubic yard) and how much do contractors usually spend sourcing that material." With respect to this request, please find enclosed copies of the related documents for your review.

Should you any have questions, please feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,
THE ALLEN LAW GROUP, PC

Floyd E. Allen

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THE ALLEN LAW GROUP

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION

Attorneys & Counselors

July 19, 2018

Via Electronic Mail

Michael Koscielniak
[redacted]

RE: Freedom of Information Act Requests

Dear Mr. Koscielniak:

Our office represents the Detroit Building Authority ("DBA") in certain legal matters. This letter serves as DBA's response to your request for information and public documents pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Your request was received by the DBA on June 28, 2018, with an extension granted until July 19, 2018.

Your request states: "I'd also like records on backfill costs and estimates. How much does the city estimate backfill costs (per cubic yard) and how much do contractors usually spend sourcing that material." With respect to this request, please find enclosed copies of the related documents for your review.

Should you any have questions, please feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,
THE ALLEN LAW GROUP, PC

Floyd E. Allen

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THE ALLEN LAW GROUP

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION

Attorneys & Counselors

September 26, 2018

Via Electronic Mail

Michael Koscielniak

[redacted]

RE: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Mr. Koscielniak:

Our office represents the Detroit Building Authority ("DBA") in certain legal matters. This letter serves as DBA's response to your requests for information and public documents pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Your requests were received by the DBA on September 5, 2018.

Your requests state, in pertinent part:

1. "Please provide me with documents separating costs between purchasing demolition backfill material and hauling the demolition backfill material."

   Your request has been denied because, after a diligent search for the requested records, we have determined and certify that the records do not exist.

2. "Please provide me with records associated with the environmental consultant AKT Peerless and the firm's management of the city's demolition backfill program and soil management platform. These records will include AKT's responsibilities, fee for services, procedures, and supervisory protocols.

   Your request has been denied because, after a diligent search for the requested records, we have determined and certify that the records do not exist.

3. "Please provide me with emails including the following: Michael Koscielniak, RJ Koscielniak"

   The DBA hereby requests an additional seven business days to answer to this request, as the DBA had to refer the search for such documents to the City of Detroit's Information Technology Department.

4. Please provide copies of written certifications mentioned in the DBA's Backfill Guidance document for 2014 to the present.

2500 Fisher Building | 3011 West Grand Blvd. | Detroit, Michigan 48202-3030
www.aglawpc.com | T 313.871.5500 | F 313.871.0517

Your request has been denied because, after a diligent search for the requested records, we have determined and certify that the records do not exist.

If you believe that your request has been improperly denied you have the right to do one of the following:

(1) Submit to the Director of the DBA a written appeal that specifically states:

(a) the word "appeal" where it is clearly visible;

(b) identifies the reason or reasons for reversal of the denial of the public records by this office; and

(c) directed to:
Detroit Building Authority
Attention: Director
1301 Third Street, Suite 328
Detroit, Michigan 48226

(2) Commence an action in Wayne County Circuit Court to compel the DBA to disclose the public records within 180 days of the DBA's final determination to deny your request.

If after judicial review the circuit court determines that DBA has improperly denied your request, you may be entitled to receive attorneys fees and damages as provided in Section 10(7) of the Michigan Freedom of Information Act.

Should you any have questions, please feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,
THE ALLEN LAW GROUP, PC

Monifa K. Gray

Appendix E

Detroit Building Authority Backfill Guidance

Detroit Building Authority

Guidance for Backfill Material Evaluation and Testing
City of Detroit Demolition Program

December 18, 2014

The Detroit Building Authority (DBA) has developed Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) guidance to properly manage and monitor backfill material and relocation to end use locations. This guidance was reviewed and approved by the Detroit Buildings, Safety Engineering and Environmental Department (BSEED) Environmental Affairs, and reviewed by MDEQ and EPA. On September 24, 2014, AKT Peerless was retained by the DBA to manage and administer its Backfill Material Program.

This guidance supersedes any previously issued DBA's HHF Soil/Backfill Procedures. Prior written approval of backfill materials under this previous guidance is grandfathered, and therefore, approved as interim until further notice. Further, any activities conducted under this previous guidance and in progress, but not yet approved by the DBA in writing, will be considered for review and approval. For reference, a list of the interim approved sources of backfill material is attached.

This guidance is intended to support the City of Detroit and any of its operating entities during its managed residential and commercial demolition related activities, specifically as it relates to review and approval of "Clean Fill" for backfill activities conducted by Contractors. Furthermore, these guidelines have been established to ensure that backfill material used by Contractors is "Clean Fill", and safe for use in residential and/or commercial demolition areas.

The objectives and outcomes of this guideline are designed to provide safe communities, achieve Federal and State regulatory compliance, and implement effective and streamlined procedures.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide the City of Detroit and its Demolition Contractors with guidance for approving and relocating backfill materials from the following Category sites:

Category 1: Residential Construction and Residential Landscape Yard Sites
Category 2: Virgin (Native) Commercial Borrow and Sand/Gravel Pit Sites
Category 3: Commercial, Utility, and Road Construction Sites; Commercial Landscape Yards, and Agricultural Sites
Category 4: Industrial Construction Sites;
Category 5: River and Lake Dredge Sites;
Category 6: Other

At this time, Category 4, 5, and 6 Backfill soil materials from these type Sites are prohibited for use as backfill materials for residential demolition projects. However, these and other Categories are under review and may be included in any future guidance document.

Backfill Material Sample Collection and Laboratory Analysis

Backfill materials proposed to be relocated for backfill material by Contractors must adhere to the following requirements as it relates to the following Category Sites:

Category 1: Residential Construction Sites; Residential Landscape Yard Sites
Category 2: Virgin (Native) Commercial Borrow and Sand/Gravel Pit Sites

At this time, no chemical testing is required for excess soil relocated from Category 1 or 2 Type sources. Further, excess soil relocated from Category 1 or 2 sources will be considered acceptable as backfill material at demolition sites provided the following conditions are met:

1. For Category 1 Sites: A written certification from the Contractor to the DLBA.
2. For Category 2 Sites: A written certification from the Owner/Operator.

The written certification must include at a minimum the following affirmative statements:

- the origin of the backfill material and address location
- no evidence of known or suspected sources of environmental contamination that may have impacted the proposed backfill materials
- the backfill materials are from a native soil source and are homogeneous in nature and general composition
- the backfill materials are free from debris, large rocks, concrete, or other conditions which would make the material unsuitable for use as backfill, and meet the backfill specifications established by the City of Detroit

Contractors must provide the following information (in an email to DBAs designated Backfill Program Manager) before relocating backfill material from a Category 1 or 2 Type source:

1. Provide affirmative statements as described above
2. Proposed end use location (property address(es), block addresses, or lot numbers) of the relocated source of the backfill material

Approval and relocation of Category 1 and 2 Type Backfill Materials are conditioned upon submittal of the information described above. Notification must be provided electronically and in advance to DBA or its designated Backfill Program Manager:

Julie Barton, Backfill Program Manager; bartonj@aktpeerless.com
DBA Document Repository, AKT Peerless; DLBAsoilbackfill@aktpeerless.com
John Prymack, Director, Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority, prymackj@gdrra.org

For Category 1 Type Backfill Materials, the Contractor will be notified immediately of approval. Contractor shall submit as appropriate weekly backfill tracking logs electronically showing end use location, quantities, etc. as in the attached.

For Category 2 Type Backfill Materials, DBA or its designated Backfill Program Manager will review the information provided within 24 hours or less of the request, and either approve the backfill materials for use at DBA sites, request additional information, or deny the proposed backfill material source. Upon approval, DBA or its designated Backfill Program Manager will issue a certificate of approval to the Contractor, and the Contractor shall to submit weekly backfill tracking logs electronically showing end use location, quantities, etc. as in the attached.

Category 3: Non-Residential: Commercial, Utility, Road, and Construction Sites; Commercial Landscape Yard Sites; and Agricultural Sites

Contractors are required to retain a qualified Environmental Professional to conduct an evaluation of the proposed Category 3 backfill material as described below.

Small Scale Backfill Soil Volumes (up to 10,000 cubic yards)

For Category 3 Sites with volumes up to 10,000 cubic yards, three (3) discrete soil samples are required with additional composite samples as volumes increase from 2,000 cubic yards to 10,000 cubic yards. For each additional 2,000 cubic yards, 4 samples (one per 500 cubic yards) may be composted, representing one (1) additional sample for laboratory analysis. See table below for a summary of the samples required for backfill materials up to 10,000 cubic yards.

Soil Volume (Cubic Yards)	No. of Discrete Soil Samples Required	No. of Composite Samples allowed for each additional 2,000 cubic yards	Total No. Samples required for Laboratory Analysis
2,000	3	0	3
4,000	3	1	4
6,000	3	2	5
8,000	3	3	6
10,000	3	4	7

All samples should be submitted for laboratory analysis as described below (see Sample Methodology and Laboratory Analysis). See Deliverables for submittal requirements.

Large Scale Backfill Soil Volumes (10,000 cubic yards or more)

For Category 3 Sites with volumes greater than 10,000 cubic yards, seven discrete soil samples are required with additional composite samples as volumes increase from 10,000 cubic yards. For each additional 10,000 cubic yards, 5 samples (one per 2,000 cubic yards) must be collected and may be composted, representing one (1) additional sample for laboratory analysis for each additional 10,000 cubic yards of backfill material. See table below for a summary of the samples required for backfill volumes greater than 10,000 cubic yards.

Soil Volume (Cubic Yards)	No. of Discrete Soil Samples Required	No. of Composite Samples allowed for each additional 10,000 cubic yards	Total No. Samples required for Laboratory Analysis
20,000	7	5 samples composited into 1	8
30,000	7	10 samples composited into 2	9
40,000	7	15 samples composited into 3	10
50,000	7	20 samples composited into 4	11
60,000	7	25 samples composited into 5	12
70,000	7	30 samples composited into 6	13
80,000	7	35 samples composited into 7	14
90,000	7	40 samples composited into 8	15
100,000	7	45 samples composited into 9	16

All samples should be submitted for laboratory analysis as described below (see Sample Methodology and Laboratory Analysis). See also Deliverables for submittal requirements.

Independent Evaluations

As an alternative to the above sampling strategies for commercial backfill sources, the Contractors qualified Environmental Professional may propose an independent evaluation of the proposed backfill material and gain approval for an alternate sampling plan from DBA prior to sampling and testing. Sampling frequency, methodology, and strategy must be detailed and designed to demonstrate that the proposed backfill materials meet Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Part 201 Cleanup Criteria for Residential Use. After work plan review and approval by DBA or its designated Backfill Program Manager, the Contractor's Environmental Professional will be required to implement the work plan and prepare a complete deliverable package as described below (see Deliverables) for review and approval.

Upon receipt of complete information, DBA or its designated Backfill Program Manager will review the information provided within 48 hours or less of the request, and either approve the backfill materials for use at City of Detroit sites, request additional information, or deny the proposed backfill material source.

Upon approval, DBA or its designated Backfill Program Manager will issue a Certificate of Approval to the Contractor. These certificates must accompany all trucks transporting the approved material. In addition, the Contractor shall submit weekly backfill tracking logs electronically showing end use locations, quantities, dates, etc. as in the attached.

Sampling Methodology and Laboratory Analysis

The DBA requires contractors to use Environmental Professionals to perform soil sampling; thereby ensuring that DBA's guidance is strictly adhered; including, proper sampling techniques, sample preservation and preparation methods, and handling. DBA reserves the right to reject any sampling and testing data that does not strictly adhere to its proper Sampling Methodology and Laboratory Analysis best industry practices.

For each discrete soil sample collected, laboratory analytical parameters and methods shall meet the following requirements:

- Volatile organic compounds (EPA Method 8260) – Note: No backfill with detectable concentrations of volatile organic compounds are allowed in the imported fill materials.
- Semi-volatile organic compounds (EPA Method 8270)
- Polychlorinated biphenyls (EPA Method 8082)
- Michigan metals (arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, mercury, selenium, silver, and zinc) (EPA Methods 6020, 7470/7471)
- Chloride (add for road construction projects or soils located beneath parking lots only) (EPA Method 9056)
- Herbicides and pesticides (add for agricultural or commercial landscape yard property) (EPA Method 8081/8082)

Soil sampling methodology is most often contingent upon physical characteristics of the medium to be sampled, in most cases, simple hand tools will suffice. The EP must adhere to best industry practices for sample collection, preservation, container packaging/shipment, and chain of custody requirements.

Deliverables

Contractors seeking review and approval of Category 3 backfill materials, (see requirements above), must provide the following information electronically:

1. Address of the proposed source material.
2. Volume of proposed source material.

3. Source and composition of backfill material (e.g., sand, gravel, etc.).
4. A scaled site map or Google Earth type aerial photograph depicting key property features, including, adjacent roads, and sample locations in relation to the area of soil proposed for relocation.
5. Photographs representative of soil backfill piles proposed for relocation, or soil boring logs of proposed soil backfill excavation area.
6. Description of Sampling Methodology
7. Required analytical data, including laboratory QA/QC, from a National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) accredited laboratory with proper chain of custody documentation.
8. Provide tabulated data as compared to MDEQ Part 201 Residential Cleanup Criteria.
9. The following certification statements from an Environmental Professional:
    - On behalf of **CONTRACTOR**, **CONSULTANT** has completed its evaluation of approximately **XXXX** cubic yards of stockpiled backfill materials located at **SITE ADDRESS**. Based on the analytical results, these soils are not contaminated above MDEQ Part 201 Residential Cleanup Criteria. Furthermore, in **CONSULTANTS** professional opinion, the materials are suitable for relocation to City of Detroit residential and/or commercial demolition sites to backfill basement excavations.
    - **CONSULTANT** understands that the Detroit Building Authority is depending upon the overall completeness, accuracy and conclusions in this report and hereby provides reliance on the contents and conclusions presented in the report. No information has been deleted, omitted, or changed that would otherwise have caused the Detroit Building Authority to reach a different conclusion.

For Contractors that propose an alternate sampling plan which deviates from the prescribed methodologies described herein, Contractors Consultants must also provide the following:

1. A copy of **CONSULTANTS** professional errors and omissions liability insurance in the amount of no less than $1M per occurrence and $2M aggregate which identifies the Detroit Building Authority located at 65 Cadillac Place, Suite 3600, Detroit, Michigan 48226, Attention Mr. James Wright, as a certificate holder.

The Detroit Building Authority reserves the right to reject backfill materials generated if these deliverables are not completed properly and in their entirety. **No material will be transported to residential backfill sites prior to City of Detroit written approval, except from Category 1 Sites.** Furthermore, The Detroit Building Authority reserves the right to perform periodic backfill soil testing at demolition locations. In the event this backfill testing shows that the material does not meet specifications and/or is contaminated above a Part 201 residential standard, the Contractor will be required to remove all backfilled materials within forty-eight (48) hours, and supply acceptable backfill with test results from an accredited laboratory prior to backfilling.

In all cases, Contractor is required to submit weekly backfill tracking logs showing end use location, quantities, date, etc. as in the attached. These weekly tracking logs must be submitted electronically to DBA Document Repository, DLBAsoilbackfill@aktpeerless.com.

Please direct all correspondence, questions, and backfill material submittal packages electronically to DBA's Program Manager and representative as follows:

Julie Barton, Backfill Program Manager
AKT Peerless, 313-212-9558
bartonj@aktpeerless.com

DLBA Document Repository
DLBAsoilbackfill@aktpeerless.com

John Prymack, Director
Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority, on behalf of DBA;
313-876-0141; prymackj@gdrra.org

Appendix F

MSHDA Blight Elimination Manual

BLIGHT ELIMINATION PROGRAM OPERATION

MANUAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

Stage 2 - Demo in Process: This will then send the file back to the Blight Partner, where they will upload documents to Stage 2; they must include the asbestos and/or environmental inspections which contains chain of custody fully executed signatures by inspector and receipt by lab if applicable, also include the Waste Manifest forms that can be loaded into miscellaneous documents, acquisition of property with a sales price reflected on the Closing Disclosure, confirmation that property has been checked for historical significance, copy of the "open hole" on- site inspection that passed by state or city inspectors, all post demo photos, post demo inspection report, the completed invoice sheet, any and all change orders, and the two attestation forms (Partner and Contractor forms) along with any/all demolition expenses to be included in reimbursement.

As an additional measure to make sure that all blight partners are following environmentally safe practices and using clean dirt, our office will accept the following process for backfill material testing:

- Residential usage- If dirt used for back fill is from a residential site or gravel pit, the only documentation required is a written statement from contractor as to the source material is free of environmental contamination, is from a native source, and free of debris, concrete and other unsuitable substance. This written statement must be uploaded in each file.
- If backfill source is from a commercial or industrial site, laboratory testing must be conducted and results approved by the building authority managing demolition activity. All city, state and federal guidelines must be followed to ensure environmentally safe back fill is being used. This laboratory testing must be maintained in the blight partner office and copies may be requested at anytime.

These dirt testing requirements are effective for new RFP's posted after issuance of blight manual update.

Due to our inability to adequately monitor other funding sources that Cities and Blight Partners obtain, we will be prohibiting HHF funds to be used in cases where other funds are obtained for specific addresses. Example; City received funds from Fire Department for demolition on 123 Main Street. This address would be prohibited from HHF funding.

In cases where total demolition costs are $35,000 and Blight Partner would be allowed to use general operating funds from the city/county to make up the difference between our maximum funding of $25,000 and $10,000 from their sources named. This scenario would be acceptable since the funds to be used are not address specific. This change in policy is to avoid duplicative funding on properties. At no time will we fund over our maximum of $25,000 per structure.

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