VACANT LAND ADAPTATION IN DETROIT'S G7 NEIGHBORHOODS

by

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ABSTRACT

United by a shared history of depopulation and disinvestment, deindustrialized cities across the United States and around the world are engaged in a shared effort to develop holistic solutions to the complex challenges of vacancy, poverty, and blight. As the largest U.S. city to lose more than half its population, people around the world are looking to Detroit as they seek to understand the causes, symptoms, and solutions to urban decline. This legacy of decline is writ large across Detroit's sprawling landscape, where a surplus of vacant land contributes to declining property values, increased crime, decreased vitality of residential and commercial areas, and general decline of the physical environment, with negative implications for both mental and physical well-being.

While Detroit residents have long been transforming vacant land to improve their neighborhoods, the scale of the problem far surpasses the capacities of a dwindling population and tax base. Largely in response to these grassroots efforts, there is increasing interest in urban greening and productive landscapes as a means for addressing the complex social and economic challenges of depopulation and vacancy. As the city now begins to revitalize amid increasing public and private investment, Detroit has the opportunity to implement land-based solutions to improve public health and well-being, sustainability, and environmental justice.

Within this context, the City of Detroit's Gratiot and 7 Mile (*G7*) Neighborhood Framework Plan provides a platform for the testing and development of land-based strategies to transform vacant land into a community asset. Through the iterative processes of site analysis, community engagement, case studies, and literature review, this report identifies four primary goals for adapting vacant land in the *G7* Planning Area: [1] Healthy, Thriving Neighborhoods (promoting physical and mental well-being); [2] Safe and Activated Open Space (designing for visibility, presence, and care); [3] Sustainable and Productive Landscapes (enhancing ecosystem services); and [4] Resilient and Empowered Communities (building social capital). Each of these goals is accompanied by a number of recommendations that highlight strategies for adapting vacant land into a community and environmental asset. The aim of this work is to illuminate pathways toward improved quality of life and sustainability, not only for *G7* and Detroit, but for shrinking and legacy cities elsewhere.

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01 INTRODUCTION

"Detroit is a city shaped by possibilities"

[Sharon Howell and Richard Feldman]

As deindustrialized cities across the United States and around the world are grappling with the complexities of managing an abundance of vacant land, people are looking to Detroit as they seek to understand the causes, symptoms, and solutions to urban decline. Detroit is a city famed for many things: cars, music, the Underground Railroad and civil rights activism. In recent years, Detroit has become a sort of poster child for urban decline as economic, political, and social forces have driven mass depopulation, leaving the city with less than half its peak population. The landscape that remains abounds in vacant land, representing a great challenge and opportunity in a city that is beginning to revitalize in the wake of bankruptcy. Having long been at the forefront of change in our country, Detroit thus provides the opportunity to test and develop land-based solutions to improve public health and well-being, sustainability, and environmental justice.

Vacant land in the United States has traditionally been viewed as a 'problem', with the standard solution being efforts toward market-driven urban redevelopment (Pearsall et al., 2014). While parts of Detroit's urban core are currently being redeveloped, large expanses of the city remain untouched by recent revitalization efforts and are therefore unlikely to reap the benefits (Galster, 2017, p48). Here, where the complex challenges of vacancy, poverty, blight, crime, and flooding are the norm, conditions demand alternative solutions to stabilize and support existing communities. While Detroit residents and community organizations have long been transforming vacant land into community and environmental assets, the scale of the problem far surpasses the capacities of a dwindling population and tax base.

The City of Detroit's Strategic Neighborhood Framework (SNF) is beginning to provide a platform for working with communities to stabilize and improve neighborhoods beyond the urban core. The Gratiot and 7 Mile (G7) Planning Area in northeast Detroit is currently the site of collaborative planning efforts through the SNF, with vacant land adaptation being central to the development of a holistic approach to neighborhood revitalization. In support of the G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan, this report seeks to identify and propose land-based strategies for transforming vacant land into a community asset in the G7 Planning Area. Our approach integrates literature review, site analysis, case studies, and community engagement to develop recommendations to support planners, designers, and residents as they plan and implement neighborhood improvements over the coming years.The aim of this work is to illuminate pathways toward improved quality of life and sustainability, not only for G7 and Detroit, but for shrinking and legacy cities elsewhere.

VACANCY IN DETROIT: A BRIEF HISTORY

Detroit is the largest U.S. city to lose more than half its population, declining from its peak of 1.8 million people in 1950 to an estimated 673,000 people in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1950 & 2018). While the causes of this decline were already in the making, depopulation began in the 1950's, when technological advances in manufacturing and transportation literally paved the way for the post-war automobile industry to move outside the city (Sugrue, 2014). Those residents who were able to relocate followed the work, marking the beginning of a mass suburbanization that has continued to this day (Galster, 2017). Racial tensions accelerated this process and determined its spatial patterns. This first wave of population decline was facilitated by racist housing policies, driving a "government-financed white flight [which] quickly drained Detroit of its people, political power, and resources" (Ligon, 2017, p224).

This initiated a "fiscal death spiral" wherein the city government responded to a dwindling tax base by raising taxes and reducing public services, driving further depopulation and social inequity (Galster, 2017). This process has largely continued to this day, with a rise in austerity politics wherein public services are reduced and privatized to improve conditions for private investors at great cost to marginalized communities (Kreichauf, 2017). Street lights have been turned off, schools and recreational centers closed, and police and emergency services reduced (Kreichauf, 2017).

The subprime mortgage crisis of 2007 served yet another blow to the city, wherein long-declining housing values plummeted to new lows and mass foreclosures resulted in tens of thousands of vacant homes within a few years. While Detroit was not alone in this nationwide recession, it was hit hardest, with over 65,000 homes foreclosed on between 2005 and 2017, with an estimated 56% being blighted or abandoned (Akers, 2017). As can be seen in the historical aerials in Figure 1, much of the G7 Planning Area was severely affected by this process of depopulation.

This depopulation and deindustrialization are writ large across Detroit's sprawling landscape. There are at least 24 square miles of vacant land in Detroit, representing over 17% of the city's total area of 139 square miles (Detroit Future City, 2017). According to data provided by the City of Detroit, approximately 11 square miles of this vacant land consists of more than 72,000 parcels publicly owned by the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) and the city's Planning and Development Department (PDD). The condition of vacant land in Detroit varies significantly—while many vacant lots consist of open space, many parcels contain structures in varying states of disrepair, some of which are slated for demolition. This surplus of vacant land and blighted structures presents a significant fiscal challenge for the city, which must pay for open space maintenance and blight removal. As a result, the DLBA's stated mission is to return the city's blighted and vacant properties to productive use (Detroit Land Bank Authority, 2020b) through the sale of lots to private ownership.

An Increasingly Vacant Urban Landscape

This residential neighborhood near Gratiot and 7 Mile reveals the impacts of depopulation in Detroit's communities over time. As housing is vacated and demolished, the neighborhood becomes increasingly fragmented by emergent open space.

1949

1981

2018

(Source: Aerials of 1949 and 1981: Wayne State University Library; Aerial of 2018: Google Earth)

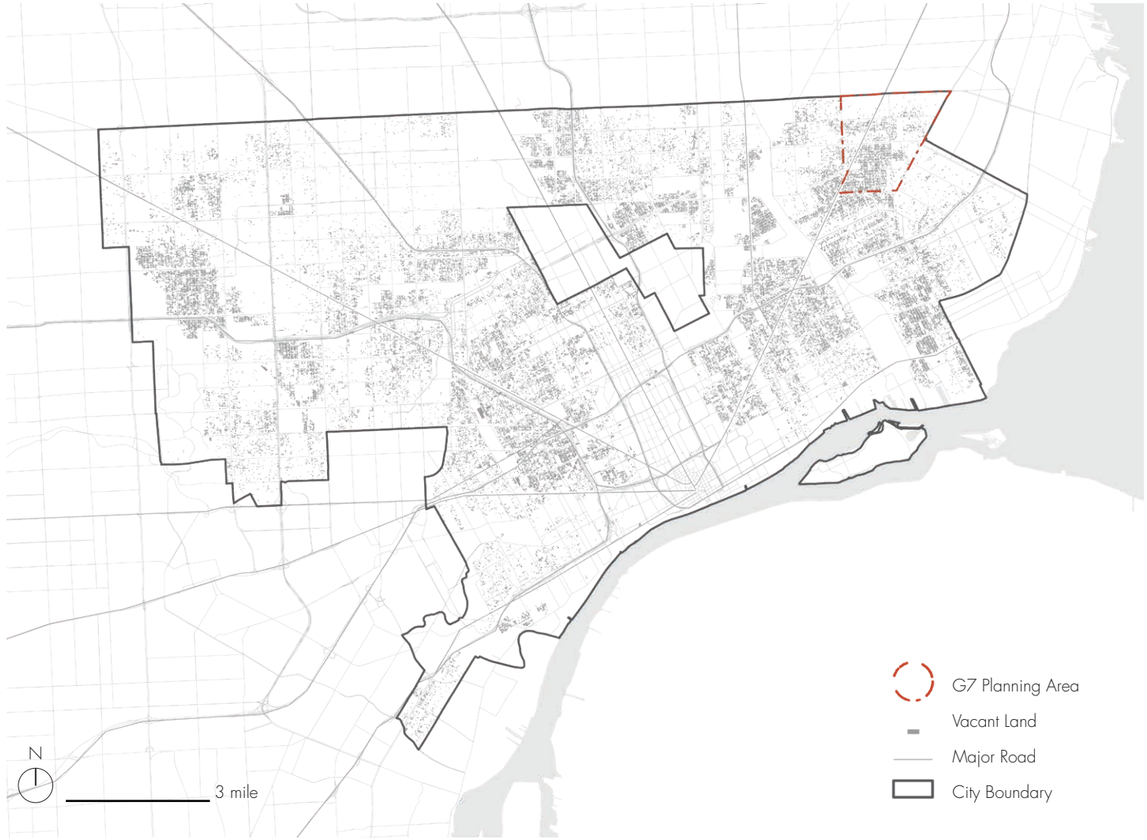
Figure 1. Gratiot/7 Mile Historical Aerials 1949-2018

Not long after the mortgage crisis, Detroit made international headlines in the summer of 2013 when it became the largest municipality in U.S. history to declare bankruptcy (Farley, 2017). The declaration of bankruptcy paved the way for urban revitalization that has been widely referred to by the media as Detroit's great 'comeback', 'revival', or 'renaissance' (Kreichauf, 2017; Foroohar, 2014). There are certainly signs that the decades-long trend of decline may be on the mend, with an apparent slowing of depopulation, new businesses and shopping districts, and improvements to streetscapes and open space. However, this reinvestment is concentrated within the city's Downtown, Midtown, and Corktown neighborhoods, while the vast remainder of the city continues along the trajectory of disinvestment and depopulation (Howell & Feldman, 2017). As George Galster describes, most of the city consists of:

> "residual neighborhoods characterized by generic, obsolete housing stocks, vacant buildings and land, high concentrations of African-Americans in poverty, and high crime rates. They have experienced continuation of the net population loss and concomitant deterioration and abandonment of residential and retail properties. It is this last group of neighborhoods evincing no change in the long-term disinvestment patterns that still predominates in Detroit" (Galster, 2017, p48).

These conflicting trends of growth and decline are resulting in what many refer to as an emergence, or perhaps a re-entrenching, of two Detroits: a densifying urban core for incoming white residents, and a much larger city surrounding it that remains poor, black, vacant, and blighted (Howell & Feldman 2017). The unequal distribution of vacancy is revealed by mapping Detrot's vacancy, as shown in Figure 2. In order for they city to achieve its vision of a "healthy and beautiful Detroit, built on inclusionary growth, economic opportunity and an atmosphere of trust" (City of Detroit, 2020c), it must ensure that the benefits of reinvestment are shared with those marginalized communities of existing residents who have long borne the brunt of Detroit's decline.

DETROIT VACANT LAND



Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; EPA.

Figure 2. Vacancy in Detroit, 2019

A SHARED STRUGGLE: **Legacy and Shrinking Cities Across the U.S. and World**

While Detroit is often seen as an extreme case, it is certainly not alone in its struggle, with cities across the country and globe sharing its story of depopulation and vacancy. The term 'shrinking city' has emerged in the global discourses of urban planning, design, and public policy to describe urban areas experiencing a significant, long-term exodus of industry and people (Mallach, 2017). Shrinking cities tend to share a common history of deindustrialization and sprawl, resulting in the common symptoms of joblessness, vacancy, and blight. Shared, too, is the challenge faced by governments as they seek to provide services and maintain infrastructure despite a dwindling tax base (Carlet, 2017).

Despite the clarity of the definition, the term 'shrinking city' has long been a point of contention, with academics, practitioners, and urban dwellers alike seeking alternative terms of less negative connotation. This resistance to the term has been particularly strong in the United States, perhaps because "shrinkage is, of course, the antithesis of growth, a value that occupies a central space in the American ideology" (Mallach, 2017, p109). As a result, the term 'legacy city' was coined in Detroit in 2011 and has emerged as the preferred alternative in the United States, accounting for both the positive and negative heritage of our nation's former industrial cities (Carlet, 2017). Again, while Detroit may be regarded as a sort of 'poster child' for legacy cities, it shares the title with many others, primarily concentrated in the Rust Belt of the Midwest and Northeast, but also scattered about the southern and western states (Dewar and Thomas, 2012). Other legacy cities include Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and New Orleans.

Regardless of the preferred term, shrinking and legacy cities share the many challenges associated with urban decline. Depopulation and vacancy contribute to a reduced tax base and reduction in city services, declining property values, increased crime, decreased vitality of residential and commercial areas, and general decline of the physical environment (Accordino & Johnson, 2000; Carlet, 2017). In turn, such environments are associated with social isolation, with implications for both mental and physical well-being (Giles-Corti et al., 2016). Additionally, legacy cities in the United States tend to share similar sociopolitical climates of austerity politics, concentrated poverty, and racial discrimination and segregation (Oswalt, 2005). Through this recognition of shared experience, cities are then empowered to learn from each other and work together to develop innovative solutions to an urban dilemma that is gaining attention in the public, private, and academic realms.

AN EMERGING CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE, LAND-BASED SOLUTIONS

Perhaps the most ubiquitous approach to addressing urban shrinkage is the practice and policy of 'rightsizing'. As a city's industry and population declines, it loses its tax base, but the geographic area of the city remains the same. With the same number of streets, parks, schools, and utilities, shrinking cities often find themselves unable to staff, maintain, and service these public amenities. Rightsizing is a process of reducing the urban footprint to a scale that matches the financial capacity of city government to provide services and maintain infrastructure (Ryan, 2012). Such a process is inherently fraught with difficulties as decision makers must choose which services will be cut, and where. Thus, rightsizing inherently raises issues of equity, as the neighborhoods targeted are typically highly vacant areas, often home to low-income and minority communities (Schilling & Logan, 2008). In Detroit, austerity politics reached a new prominence in 2010, when public officials proposed to relocate residents to more populated areas in order to raze or cut services to entire neighborhoods (Sugrue, 2014). These policies were met with significant pushback and prompted widespread mistrust of city planning efforts (Ligon, 2017), revealing that alternative, community-based solutions are necessary.

In the absence of effective or visionary governance, residents of Detroit have long been working to improve their environments and communities through the creative and productive use of vacant land. For decades, residents and community organizers have implemented community gardens, urban agriculture, pocket parks, tree planting, and public artwork as they seek to create a more resilient, sustainable and self-sufficient city (Howell & Feldman, 2017). As Grace Lee Boggs, the late Detroit resident and civil rights activist, once stated, "the thousands of vacant lots and abandoned houses not only provide the space to begin anew but also the incentive to make innovative ways of making our living" (Boggs, 2009, para. 1). Through the work of Boggs and countless others, Detroit has become a recognized leader within the urban agriculture movement, with a substantial network of growers working together to address food insecurity, poverty, and vacancy (Pothukuchi, 2017).

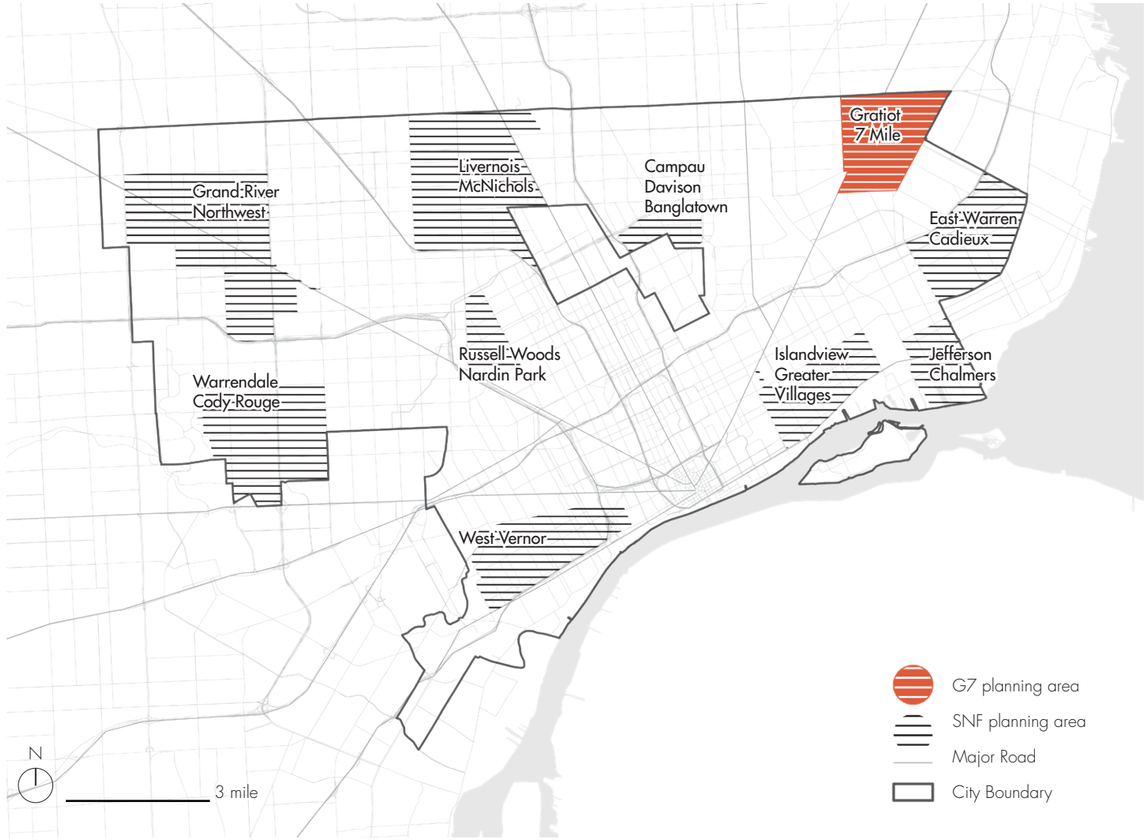
Largely thanks to such grassroots efforts in Detroit and other cities, there is increasing interest in urban greening and productive landscapes as a means for addressing the complex social and economic challenges of depopulation and vacancy (Carlet, 2017). As Schilling and Logan express, vacant land provides "fertile ground for neighborhood-scale and citywide greening strategies that can revitalize urban environments, empower community residents, and stabilize dysfunctional markets" (Schilling & Logan, 2008, p451). Research has shown that effective urban greening projects support community health and wellbeing by reducing crime and social isolation, improving environmental quality, and providing recreational opportunities (Bonham and Smith, 2008). Greening programs that are linked to community-based gardening and farming have been shown to effectively address issues of "food insecurity, unemployment, and hopelessness" (Sadler & Pruett, 2017). Despite the growing clarity and success of this vision for greener, more sustainable cities, no American shrinking city has yet employed urban greening to effectively rightsize itself at the city scale (Schilling & Logan, 2008).

THE GRATIOT/7 MILE NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMEWORK PLAN

Having recently restructured its Planning and Development Department amid increasing public and private investment (City of Detroit, 2019c), the City of Detroit is now in a position to develop and implement citywide strategies for addressing the city's legacy of depopulation and disinvestment. The Strategic Neighborhood Fund, developed in 2015 to fund community-based planning in Detroit neighborhoods (City of Detroit 2019), provides a new platform for improving the physical realm of highly vacant neighborhoods. This represents a key opportunity for Detroit to link urban greening efforts with community engagement. The Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan is one of 10 plans across the city of Detroit to be funded through the second installment of the Strategic Neighborhood Fund (Figure 3).

Located in far Northeast Detroit, the G7 Planning Area is both geographically and economically distant from the urban revitalization occurring in Detroit's urban core. Like much of the city, it is an area characterized by high rates of vacancy resulting from a history of decline and disinvestment (Galster, 2017). Therefore, the area presents an essential opportunity to test and develop land-based strategies for transforming vacant land into a community asset. It is the goal of this report to support the Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan in this endeavor, with a focus on improving quality of life and sustainability. The SEAS Master's Project Team has conducted a site analysis through both field methods and geospatial data analysis. Community input is prioritized at all stages to ensure that resident experiences and opinions are being heard and thereby contributing to the planning process. A variety of land use typologies were proposed based on literature review, site analysis, and resident survey responses. These typologies were then refined and assessed through community feedback. Finally, recommendations were developed to align with both community desires and broader city goals of crafting neighborhoods that are healthier and safer, more resilient, sustainable, and just.

STRATEGIC NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMEWORK PLANNING AREAS



Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; EPA.

Figure 3. Strategic Neighborhood Framework Planning Areas

02 SITE CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

SITE CONTEXT

Site analysis and context is essential to the success of the design and planning process, for it enables planners and designers to identify and define the unique assets and challenges associated with a given site (Whyte, 1983).

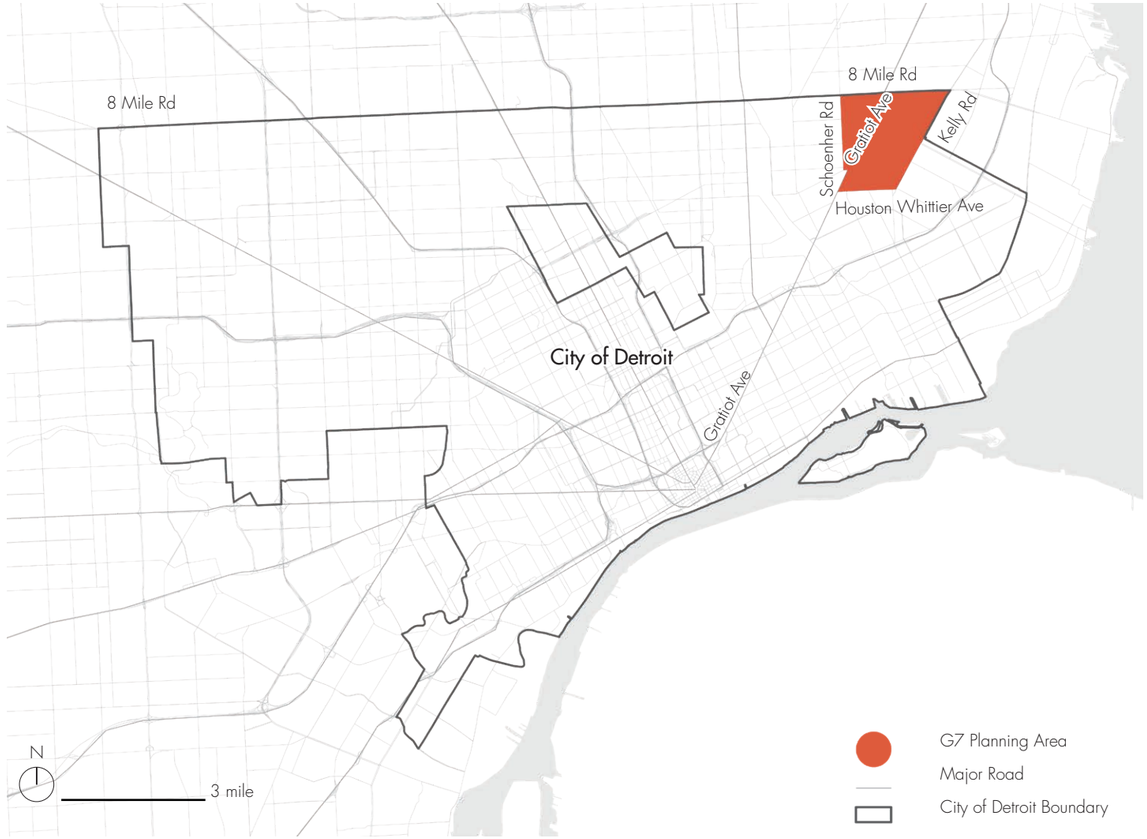
Following are the results of a site context and analysis achieved through site visits, geospatial analysis and mapping, and demographic data analysis. This process of site analysis was further informed by conversations with a variety of planners, policymakers, designers, stakeholders, and community leaders involved in the Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan.

The team conducted two site visits in September and November of 2019 to document existing conditions of the G7 Planning Area and surrounding neighborhoods through preliminary mapping and notetaking. Photographs were taken to document the housing and open space conditions of the G7 neighborhoods. Using input from public meetings, the G7 Planning Team, and community members, we employed geospatial data to develop a series of city- and site-scale analysis maps to better understand the social and environmental conditions of the site and its context. Finally, demographic analysis using data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau data are included in this section.

SITE CONTEXT

G7 LOCATION

Situated in far Northeast Detroit, the G7 Planning Area is bounded by East 8 Mile Road to the north, Kelly Road to the east, Houston-Whittier Street to the south and Schoenherr Road to the west (Figure 4). Gratiot Avenue, one of the city's main arterial roads, intersects the site and connects the area to downtown Detroit and the outlying suburbs.

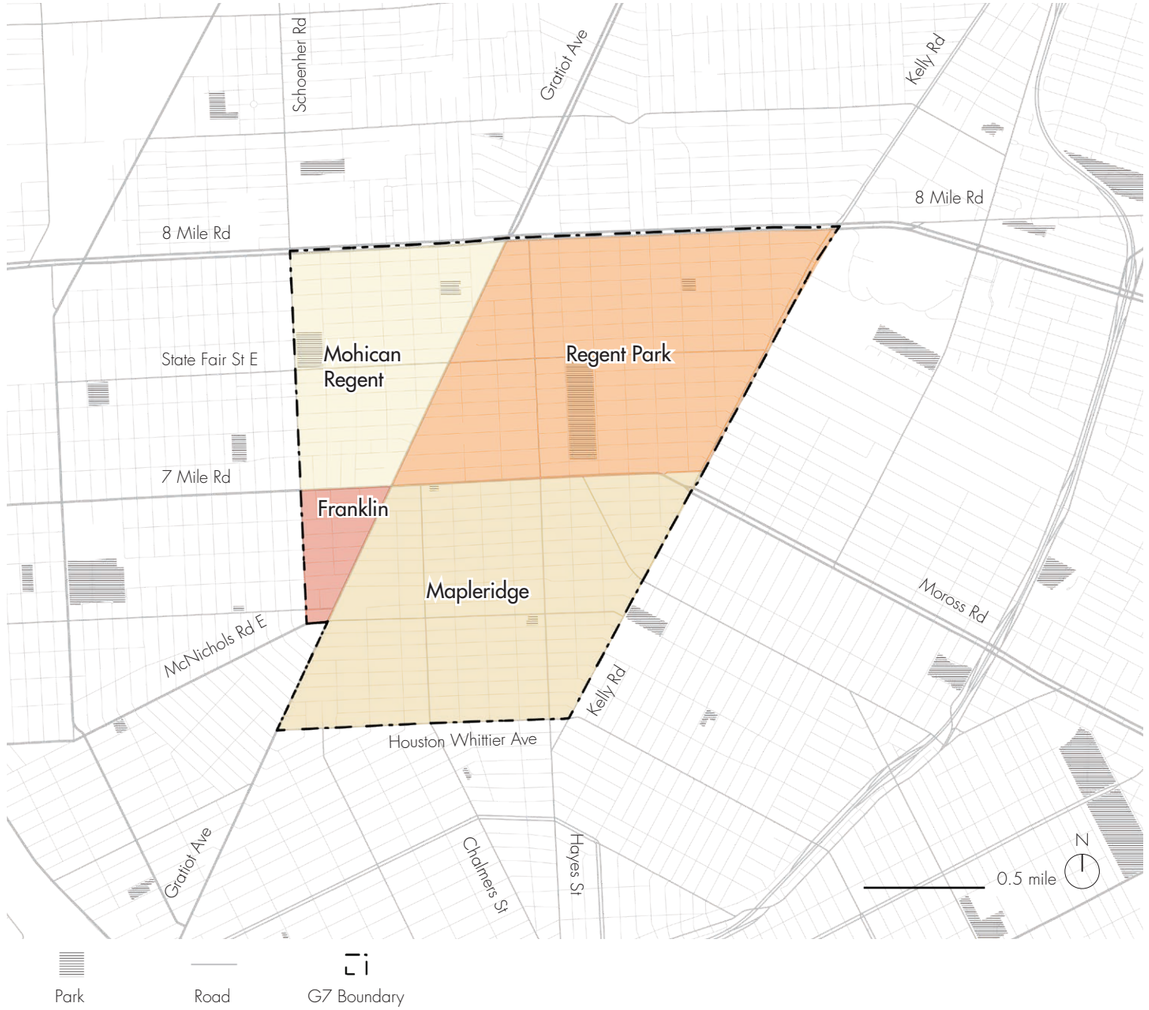


Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; EPA.

Figure 4: Gratiot/7 Mile Planning Area Location Map

G7 NEIGHBORHOODS

The G7 Planning Area includes the neighborhoods of Mohican Regent, Regent Park, Mapleridge, plus the eastern section of the Franklin neighborhood (Figure 5).



Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD).

Figure 5. Gratiot/7 Mile Planning Area Neighborhoods Map

SITE ANALYSIS

OPEN SPACE NETWORK

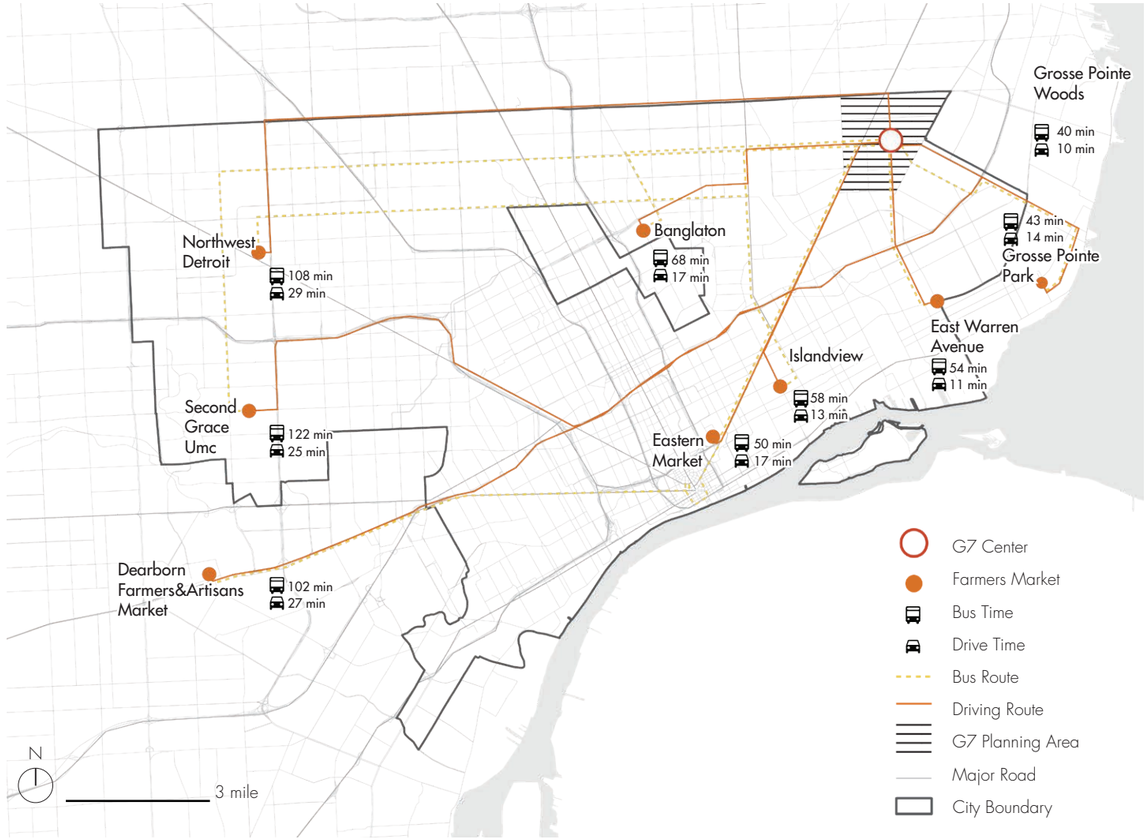
The G7 Planning Area is geographically distant from the city's large parks and open spaces, which are located along the Rouge River to the west and the Detroit River to south. The remaining public open spaces throughout the city consist of mostly scattered parks smaller than 5 acres (Figure 6). While G7 has one of Detroit's few remaining recreation centers, Heilmann Community Center, it lacks connections to the city's major open spaces, natural areas, and greenways. The large amount of vacant land in the area presents an opportunity for enhancing greenspace, ecosystem services, and connectivity.

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; Michigan's ArcGIS Online Open Data Portal, services3.arcgis.com; EPA.

Figure 6. Detroit Open Space Network Map

FARMERS MARKET

While Detroit is known for urban agriculture and the bustling Eastern Market, there is a lack of farmers markets in the northeast portion of the city. From the center of the G7 Planning Area, it takes over 10 minutes by car and 40 minutes by public transit to get to the nearest farmers market, with no farmers markets within walking distance (Figure 7). Therefore, there is an opportunity for the creation of a new local farmers market in G7 to support local growers and consumers.



Data Source: Google Map; SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; EPA.

Figure 7 Detroit Farmers Markets Map

VACANT LAND

As of March 2020, there are an estimated 2,800 publicly-owned vacant parcels in the G7 Planning Area, 97% of which are zoned as residential. This amounts to 282 acres of vacant land (Planning and Development Department, 2020). As illustrated in Figure 8, these parcels are primarily owned by the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA), with some owned by the Planning and Development Department (PDD). Rates of vacancy vary significantly by neighborhood, with the northern and eastern portions of the site being more occupied, while Mapleridge experiences a high concentration of vacant land. As a result, strategies for vacant land adaptation will vary by neighborhood.

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; Parcel Data Dashboard, City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD).

Figure 8. G7 Vacant Land Map

SOCIAL NETWORK

Landmarks such as community centers, churches, schools, and a public library help define neighborhood identity in G7 (Figure 9). Heilmann Park serves as a community hub, with three schools and a community center. The Matrix Center, located just southeast of the G7 boundary, serves as an essential social and recreation center. Gratiot Avenue serves as the main commercial corridor. Eastland Mall, just outside the city boundary in Harper Woods, is another key commercial area but has experienced some vacancy in recent years. The Planning and Development Department has identified three potential micro-districts to prioritize for improvements, indicated on the map as red circles. Public transportation is limited to buses that primarily service main thoroughfares.

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data; City of Detroit Open Data Portal; City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD).

Figure 9. G7 Social Network Map

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE INVENTORY

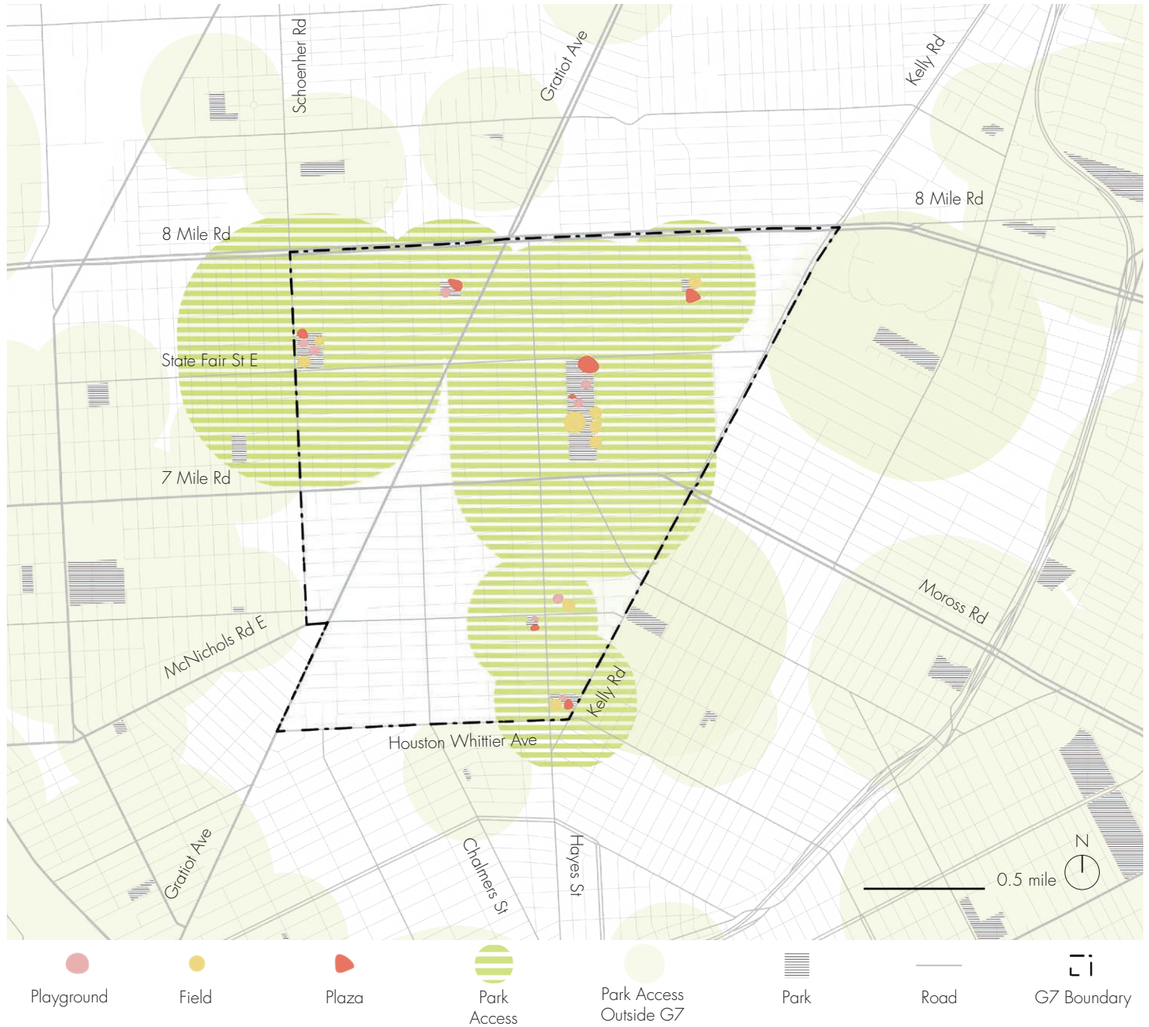
The G7 Planning Area contains 6 city parks: Heilmann Park, Wish Egan Field, Edmore Marbud Park, Bringard Boulder Park, Troester Hayes, and Commemoration Park (Figure 10). Heilmann Park is the largest and most central greenspace in the G7 Planning Area, serving as a community hub that contains the Heilmann Recreation Center, the Ford Resource and Engagement Center, and the Fisher Magnet Upper and Lower Academies.

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com.

Figure 10. G7 Public Open Space Inventory Map

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE SERVICE

While much of G7 is within walking distance to at least one park, the northeast corner and much of the southern portion of the site, in the Mapleridge and Franklin neighborhoods, lack sufficient park access (Figure 11). Walking distance is defined as 0.25 mile for small parks and 0.5 mile for large parks. Larger parks, such as Heilmann Park and Wish Egan Field, have more recreational amenities, especially for children and youth. The quality of landscape and amenities varies, revealing that some parks have potential for improvement.

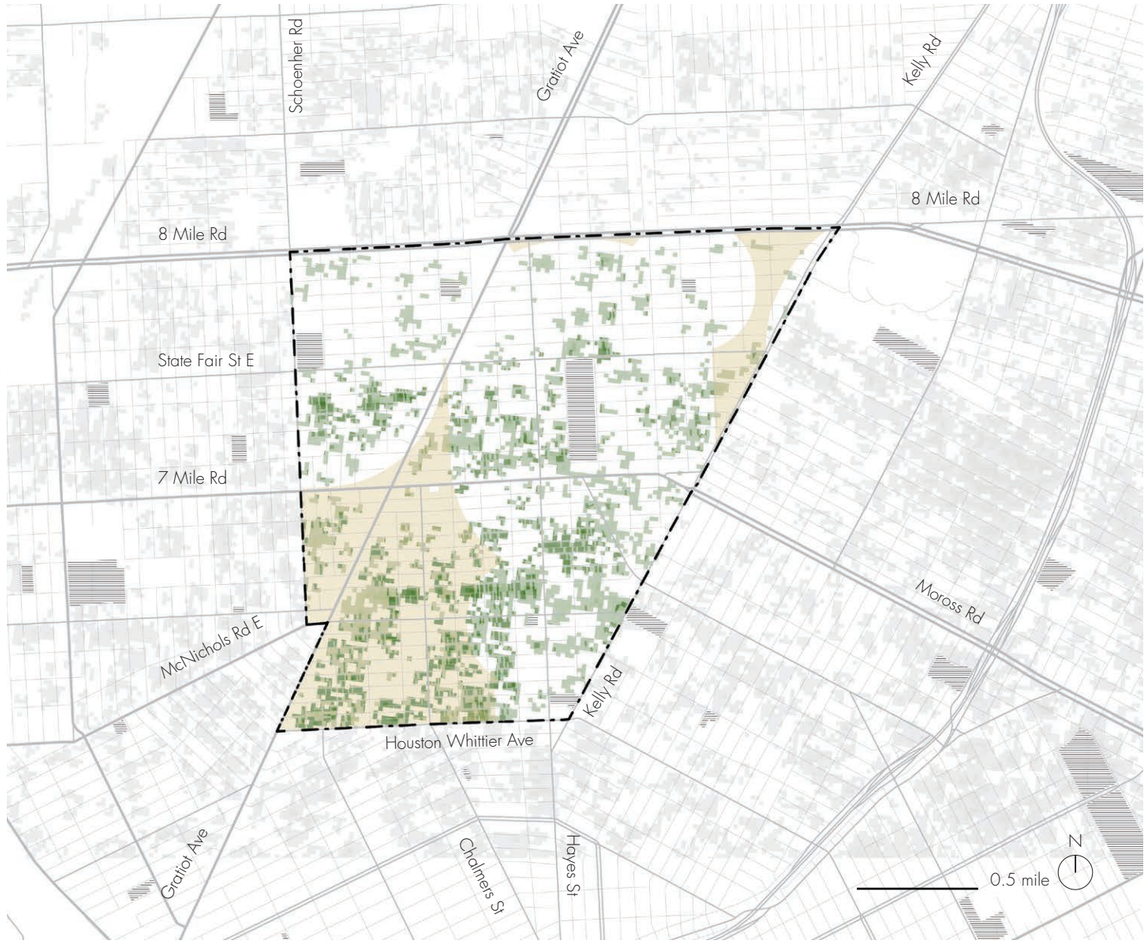


Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD).

Figure 11. G7 Public Open Space Access Map

URBAN FOREST PRESERVATION

Connected canopy contributes to the urban forest, which is beneficial to residents' physical health (Nowak et al., 2014) and mental well-being (Stigsdotter, 2005). By overlaying existing canopy coverage with vacancy, the team has identified vacant lots that have existing canopy, thereby indicating potential for urban forest preservation (Figure 12). Those areas that lack sufficient park access provide an opportunity for creating new, forested natural areas.

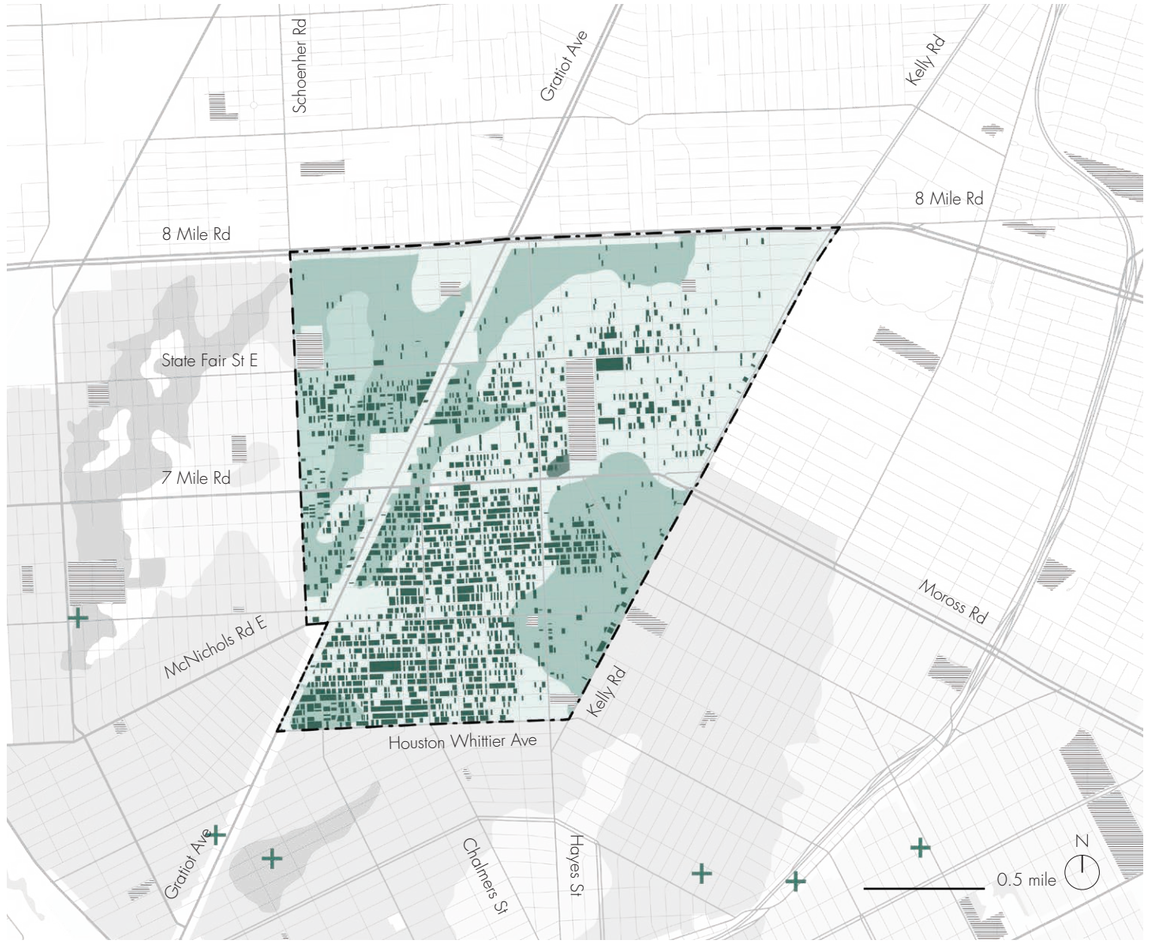


Data Source: NLCD, SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; Parcel Data Dashboard, City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD).

Figure 12. G7 Urban Forest Preservation Map

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

While there is no documented green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) in the G7 Planning Area, there is stormwater management occurring nearby (Figure 13). Soil drainage influences potential for stormwater management, with well-drained soils providing opportunity for infiltration (Minnesota Stormwater Manual, 2018). GSI can be constructed in G7 to alleviate flooding and remove pressure on the city's combined sewer system. In particular, there is an area southwest of Heilmann Park with well-drained soil, revealing potential for stormwater infiltration. The Mapleridge neighborhood, where vacancy is highest, is dominated by impermeable soil, indicating that this land may be more suitable for stormwater retention and detention.



Data Source: Esri; USDA NRCS; SEMCOG Open Data, services1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services2.arcgis.com; Parcel Data Dashboard, City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD).

Figure 13. G7 Stormwater Management Potential Map

SITE CHARACTERISTICS

HOUSING CONDITION

Housing conditions in the G7 Planning Area vary significantly. Many homes, particularly in the Regent Park and Mohican Regent neighborhoods north of 7 Mile Road, are occupied and in good condition with landscapes and patios, showing signs of care (Figure 14, top). There are a significant number of blighted homes throughout the G7 area, particularly concentrated within Mapleridge in the southern portion of the site. These blighted homes are in varying states of disrepair, with some in relatively good condition, while others are deteriorating, overgrown by vegetation, burned down, or collapsed (Figure 14, bottom).

Occupied in Good Condition

11.01.2019

11.01.2019

11.01.2019

Unoccupied in Blighted Condition

11.01.2019

Photo By Noah Stephens

09.21.2019

(Source: Author, Unless Otherwise Cited)

Figure 14. Housing Conditions in G7

OPEN SPACE CONDITION

Throughout the G7 Planning Area, a majority of vacant lots are currently devoid of structures, with the resulting open space varying in condition and use. While many vacant lots are not actively maintained, resulting in overgrown vegetation and dumping (Figure 15), some open spaces are regularly maintained and mowed by city employees or residents. In addition, some vacant lots are being utilized by residents for gardening, farming, or the creation of small social gathering spaces.

Spaces with Community Activation

09.01.2019

19.21.2019

Spaces with Care

11.01.2019

11.01.2019

Neglected Spaces

09.01.2019

11.01.2019

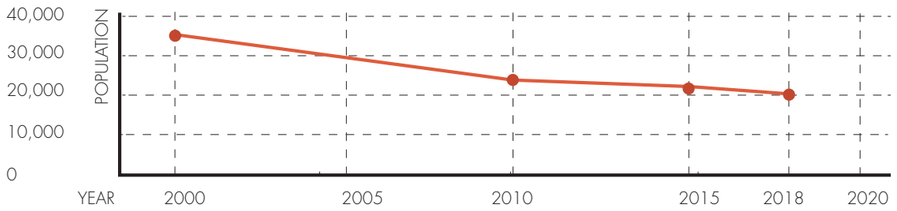
(Source: Author)

Figure 15. Open Space Conditions in G7

SITE DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION

As of 2018, the estimated population of the G7 Planning Area is 20,255 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). This marks a 43% decline since the year 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), revealing that the area experienced significant depopulation during the housing market crisis of 2007 (Figure 16).

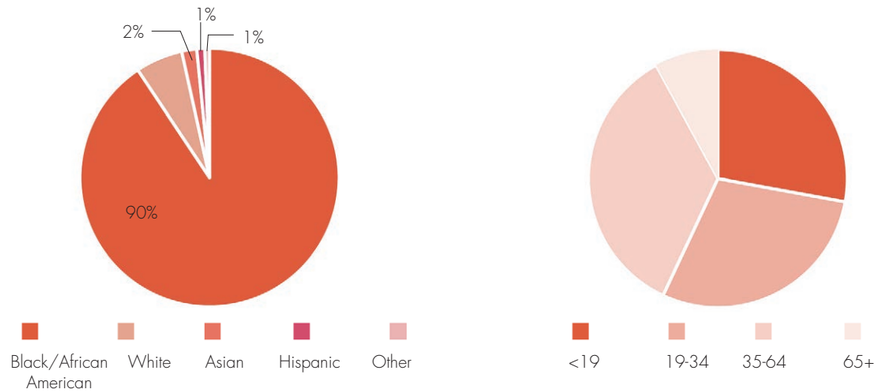


Data source: US Census Bureau, retrieved from Esri

Figure 16. G7 Demographics: Population Change 2000–2018

RACE & AGE

The racial makeup of G7 mirrors that of the City of Detroit as a whole: 90% of residents are black, 6% are white, and the remaining 5% consisting of Asian, Hispanic, or "Other" (Figure 17). There is a significant youth population in the area, with 28% of residents 18 years of age or younger. 8% residents are over 65 years old (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).



Data source: US Census Bureau, retrieved from Esri

Figure 17. G7 Demographics: Race & Age

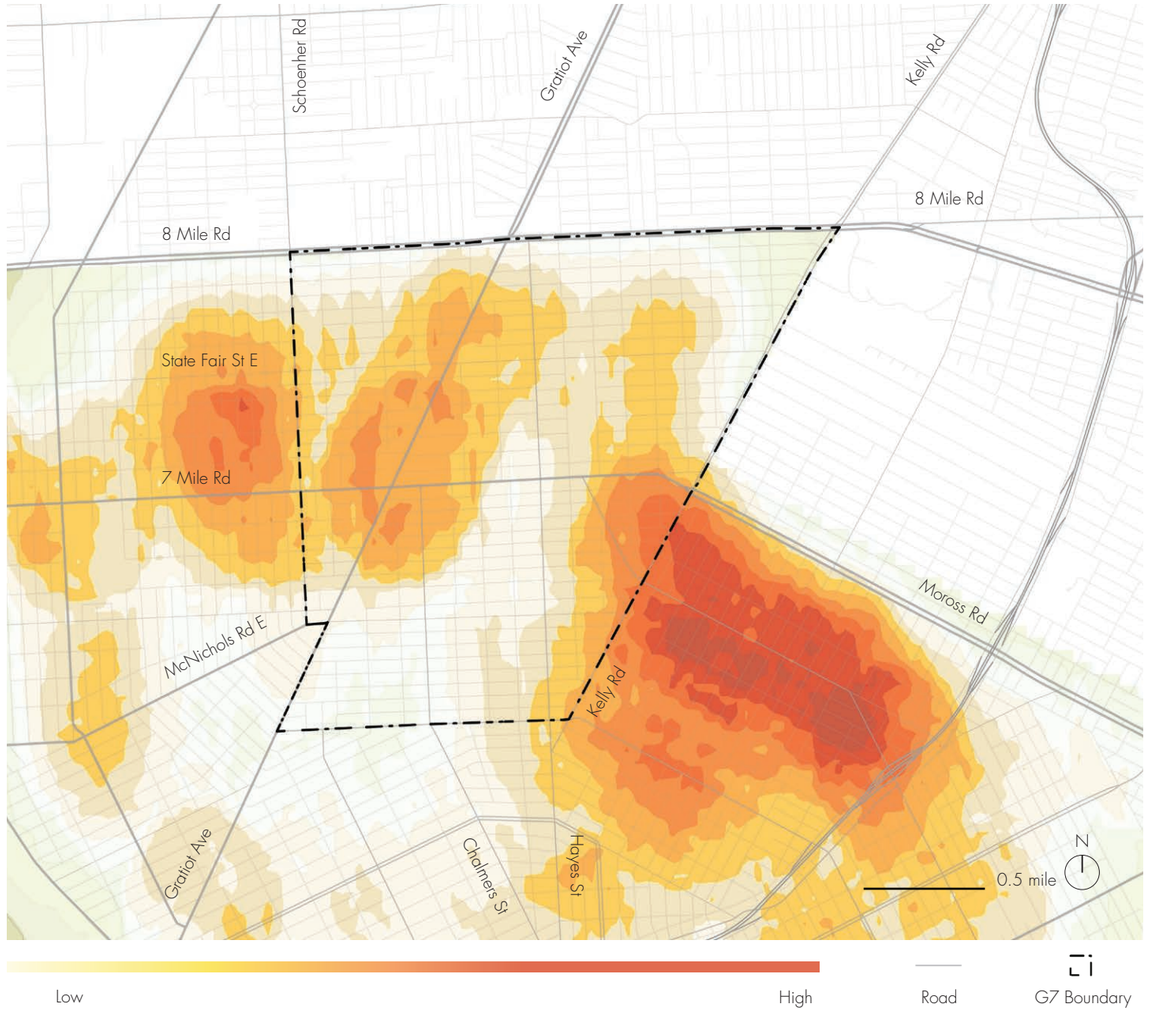
EMPLOYMENT & INCOME

According to the U.S. Census, an estimated 17% of households in G7 fall below the poverty level as of 2018. The unemployment rate is 13.6%. Median household income is $34,509 per year, which is higher than the citywide median income of $29,481 but significantly lower than the nationwide median income of $60,293 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Data Source: U.S.Census Bureau, Esri forecasts for 2019 and 2024, Esri Vintage 2019 Time Series.

CRIME

Figure 18 shows reported criminal offenses from 2016 to 2020, with red having a higher concentration of crime. In the G7 Planning Area, crime appears to be concentrated along the Gratiot corridor and along the eastern boundary with the Denby and Moross-Morang neighborhoods.



Data Source: gis.detroitmi.gov; SEMCOG Open Data.

Figure 18. G7 Crime Heat Map

03 CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDIES

In order to inform the selection of design typologies and the development of recommendations, case studies were conIn order to inform the selection of design typologies and the development of recommendations, case studies were conducted for two urban revitalization projects in the City of Detroit. These two case studies, the Fitzgerald Neighborhood Revitalization Project and the Eastern Market Neighborhood Framework Plan, were both funded through the Strategic Neighborhood Framework. Led by two different design firms, these cases provide insight into how the SNF can be adapted for different neighborhoods and design processes.

Each project is reviewed, summarized, and investigated through a framework of challenges, goals, strategies, and takeaways.

CASE STUDIES

01 FITZGERALD REVITALIZATION PROJECT

DATE: 2016 - ongoing
LOCATION: Detroit, MI
TEAM: Spackman Mossop Michaels (SMM), Detroit Collaborative Design Center (DCDC), Larry Weaner Landscape Associates, Live6 Alliance, City of Detroit
SIZE: 160 acres (0.25 square miles)

Literature Cited:

ASLA. (2017). Fitzgerald Revitalization Project: Landscapes as the framework for community reinvestment. Retrieved from https://www.asla.org/2017awards/327798.html
Spackman Mossop Michaels. (2016). Fitzgerald Neighborhood Revitalization Project for the City of Detroit, Michigan. Retrieved from http://www.fitzgerald-detroit.com/wp-content/uploads/Final-Presentation_small.pdf
City of Detroit. (2016). Fitzgerald Neighborhood Revitalization Project: Productive landscape development RFP. Retrieved from http://www.fitzgerald-detroit.com/wp-content/uploads/CityofDetroit_RFP_ProductiveLandscape.pdf

(Source: ASLA, 2017)
Figure 19. Fitzgerald Revitalization Project Rendering

Introduction

The Fitzgerald Revitalization Project is a neighborhood plan developed to address blighted and vacant land in the Fitzgerald neighborhood of Detroit (Figure 19). The proposed 'landscape-driven' approach offers neighborhood-scale solutions rather than focusing on individual vacant or blighted properties.

Challenge & Goals

Blight and vacancy are the primary issues being addressed in this neighborhood revitalization project. The Fitzgerald Revitalization Project site consists of a 0.25-square-mile area situated between two universities, the University of Detroit Mercy and Marygrove College. The vacancy rate at the time of plan development was approximately 50%, comprising over 300 vacant parcels (Figure 20). The resulting landscape is characterized by low-density residential areas with an abundance of vacant open space (Figure 21). The goal of the plan is to create a sustainable, resilient neighborhood. The plan designates a significant portion of the vacant lots as greenway, park, and other greenspace amenities. The project also includes the rehabilitation of salvageable, vacant houses.

(Source: ASLA,2017)
Figure 20: Vacant Properties In Fitzgerald Neighborhood

(Source: ASLA, 2017)
Figure 21: Existing Conditions in Fitzgerald Neighborhood

Strategy

The project plan focuses on comprehensive neighborhood revitalization, rather than addressing vacant lots individually. Using this approach, "healthy landscapes become the framework that holds together the other initiatives in the neighborhood, from affordable housing to crime reduction, to improved health outcomes, to workforce development" (ASLA, 2017). Community engagement also occupies a central space in the planning process, from design development to construction. As shown on Figure 22, the Fitzgerald Revitalization Project transforms vacant land into a central park, a number of smaller neighborhood hubs, improved mobility networks, and a variety of productive and natural landscapes.

Through a collaborative process of community engagement and planning, four primary initiatives were proposed by the planning team:

- Ella Fitzgerald Park
a new, centrally-located community park supports activities for residents of all ages.

- Fitzgerald Greenway
a multi-use greenway provides non-motorized connection across the neighborhood, with linear tree plantings throughout.

- Landscape Stewardship Plan
vacant parcels are converted into pollinator meadows, community gathering spaces, and community gardens.

- Productive Landscapes Initiative
a public/private partnership supports productive, land-based businesses, including cut flower farms and hop production.

(Source: ASLA, 2017)

Figure 22. Fitzgerald Revitalization Project Framework Plan

Takeaway

The Fitzgerald Neighborhood and G7 Planning Area share the complex challenges of extensive blight and vacancy in a residential area. This project employs a holistic approach to adapt vacant land for neighborhood-scale revitalization, providing insight for how to employ vacant land for the creation of connected, multi-functional greenspaces.

This project serves as a model of creative approaches to community engagement both during and after the planning process. In addition to the conventional community and stakeholder meetings, the Fitzgerald planning team worked with the community to select a Community Development Team that is tasked with implementing much of the plan. Local artists worked directly with community members to install portions of the design, including a painted streetscape and a mosaic wall at Ella Fitzgerald Park. Collectively, these innovative approaches to community engagement illuminate pathways to planning decisions that reflect community interest and help ensure long-term success through continued community engagement.

The Ella Fitzgerald Plan integrates innovative means of achieving low-maintenance, affordable landscapes that support resident well-being, environmental quality, and sustainability. The design typologies proposed by the planning team point to a variety of means of creating landscapes that provide active and passive recreation, in addition to productive, income-producing uses (Figure 23).

Through strategic lot consolidation and placement of uses, it becomes possible to achieve a network of multi-functional greenspace that is collaboratively maintained to ensure long-term success.

A centrally-located park connected to multi-use greenways is a key component of the park. While the northern section of G7 already has one centrally-located park, the Mapleridge neighborhood lacks such an amenity. Based on the Fitzgerald Plan, a centrally located park in this area may serve to enhance social cohesion, particularly if it is connected to safe routes to schools and other greenspaces.

As the G7 planning team looks to the Fitzgerald Revitalization Project for inspiration, it is essential to remember that community interest and needs in these areas may be quite different. Community engagement should listen to the unique experiences, concerns, and desires of every community. In addition, vacancy rate and distribution vary significantly between these two study sites, and may require different strategies for the achievement of resident health and well-being.

(Source: ASLA, 2017; SMM Design, 2017)

Figure 23: Examples of Design Typologies (Community Garden; Crops; Meadow)

02 EASTERN MARKET NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMEWORK PLAN

DATE: Plan released November 2019
LOCATION: Detroit, MI
TEAM: Utile, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA), Detroit Economic Growth Corporation, City of Detroit
SIZE: 1.1 square miles

Literature Cited:

Utile Design. (2019). Eastern Market Neighborhood Framework & Stormwater Management Network Plan. Retrieved from: https://www.utiledesign.com/work/detroit-eastern-market-neighborhood-framework-plan/

Olin.Eastern Market 2025 Strategy Report. (2016). Retrieved from: http://9b32aa63de0c5aa2a1c4-ac3abd6e34c389d1c003fbc359fc9e18.r96.cf1.rackcdn.com/Final-Report-Digital-Lo-Res.pdf

City of Detroit. (2016). Fitzgerald Neighborhood Revitalization Project: Productive landscape development RFP. Retrieved from http://www.fitzgerald-detroit.com/wp-content/uploads/CityofDetroit_RFP_ProductiveLandscape.pdf

(Source: Utile Design, 2019)
Figure 24. Eastern Market Neighborhood Framework Plan Rendering

Introduction

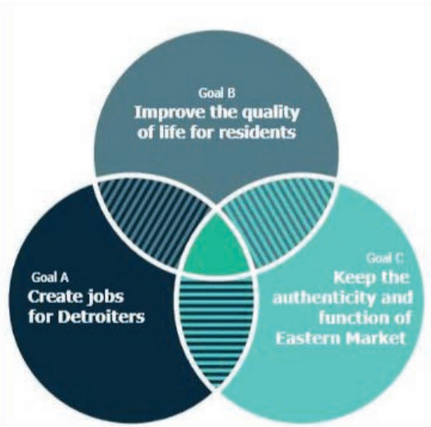
Detroit's Eastern Market is one of the nation's oldest and largest farmer's markets, and is a significant destination for both residents and visitors alike (Figure 24). The surrounding Eastern Market neighborhood is known for its vibrant artwork, urban agriculture, and recent growth in local business, particularly along Gratiot Avenue. As Detroit's urban agriculture movement continues to grow and consumers are driving fundamental shifts towards local, healthier, and more distinctive food products, Detroit's food providers are seeking to adapt to evolving consumer demand, with the intention to expand Eastern Market to accommodate the crowds that flock to the area every week (Figure 25) (Eastern Market Corporation, 2016).

(Source: The Architect's Newspaper, 2019)
Figure 25. Historic Eastern Market Entrance

Challenge & Goals

The Eastern Market Neighborhood Framework Plan covers just over one square mile, incorporating the Eastern Market and the surrounding residential neighborhood. The goal is to create a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood that empowers Eastern Market to become a hub of food production and distribution for the Great Lakes region. The plan seeks to increase neighborhood amenities, improve quality of life for local residents, expand employment opportunities, and leverage a district-wide approach to stormwater.

3 main interconnected goals proposed by the planning team are shown below in Figure 26:

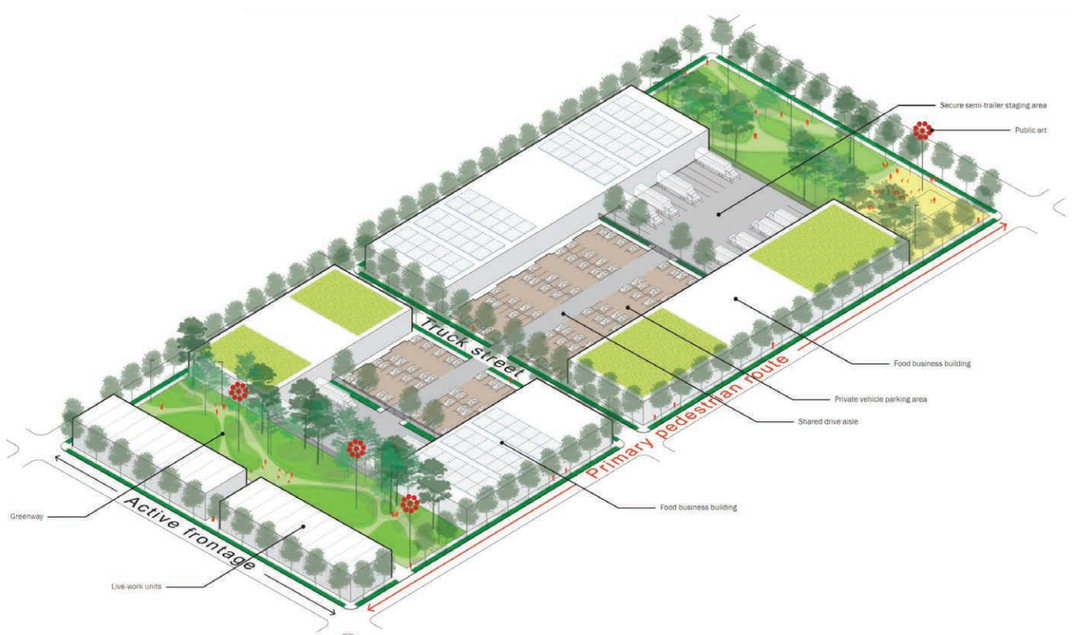


(Source: Utile Design, 2019)
Figure 26. Eastern Market Neighborhood Framework Plan Goals

Strategy

The Planning Team approached the site from two different perspectives to develop a comprehensive Neighborhood Framework and Stormwater Management Plan. In addition to improving and expanding on the existing market area, the plan seeks to repurpose vacant land and industrial areas for the development of new businesses and the creation of live-work spaces. To improve quality of life, the planning team proposes a mix of affordable housing and mixed-use development, while improving walkability and bike access by proposing bike lanes and pedestrian-oriented corridors. The team developed block prototypes to reveal how these improvements would be integrated on the existing landscape (Figure 27). In order to guide implementation, proposed interventions were organized into three phases, with action items designated for immediate (1 year), short term (5 years) and long-term (5+ years) implementation.

Given that the proposed new development will increase imperviousness and stormwater runoff, the team developed a Stormwater Management Network Plan to address stormwater management. This plan proposes a connected network of green stormwater infrastructure that provides a variety of social and environmental benefits. In addition to creating connected greenspace, these corridors include tree plantings to increase canopy cover above a mix of native meadow plantings, selected for easy maintenance and short stature (Figure 28). A connected path network is integrated to improve non-motorized connectivity. The planning team engaged the community in the design process by visualizing three design alternatives, and asking for community feedback.



(Source: Utile Design, 2019)

Figure 27: Eastern Market Mixed-Use Block Prototype

Takeaway

Despite the more centralized location and commercial nature of the Eastern Market neighborhood, the strategies of employing vacant land for enhanced quality of life, stormwater management, and low-management beautification can be used to inspire and inform decision making in the Gratiot/7 Mile Planning Area.

Additionally, the focus on the production and sale of food may serve as guidance for G7 as growers and city planners support the expansion of urban agriculture in the area. The work being done in Eastern Market shows that there is an increasing demand for fresh, locally produced food, and that farmer's markets can support economic well-being and growth. Given that there is no farmers market within walking distance of G7, there may be an opportunity to expand upon the success of Eastern Market by creating a farmers market in G7 to support local growers and consumers.

The community engagement surrounding green stormwater infrastructure provides insight into how Detroit residents perceive a variety of stormwater management options. Residents expressed preference for shallow swales combined with subgrade storage, providing a flexible approach to be adapted by individual property owners.

Lastly, the use of a phasing plan serves as a model of how to prioritize interventions for immediate, short-term, and long-term implementation. Notably, zoning was an immediate priority, given that it makes other land use change possible. The phasing also reveals how a network of greenways and landscape improvements can be made over time, with highly trafficked routes (in this case, those that connect key businesses) being implemented first, then increasing connectivity with additional, intersecting pathways in the future. Phasing is applied within each greenway, as well. An initially narrow footprint fosters immediate movement, then expands as plantings and stormwater management are installed.

(Source: Utile Design, 2019)

Figure 28. Eastern Market Multi-Functional Streetscape Rendering

04 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement, including public participation, is vital to the G7 planning process as laid out by the Strategic Neighborhood Framework. Research supports that public participation makes it more likely that a plan will be accepted and appropriate for future users (Brabham 2009). The G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan aims to integrate the input of residents throughout the entire process. By striving to make participants feel "heard, valued, and empowered" (City of Detroit, 2019b), this project seeks local local knowledge and perspectives that will bring invaluable insight into the planning process (Brabham, 2009).

Multiple modes of community engagement are essential to the G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan, including surveys, large community meetings, and focus groups. The SEAS Master's Project Team has supported this effort through the administration of a Vacant Land Use Survey and Focus Group (Figure 29). The University of Michigan's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to completing all community engagement. IRB approval was also obtained to use data from the City of Detroit's Neighborhood Planning Survey.

The following chapter summarizes the methods, results, and analysis of four community engagement touchpoints: (1) Neighborhood Planning Survey; (2) Community Meeting #1; (3) Vacant Land Use Survey; and (4) Vacant Land Adaptation Focus Group. It is important to note that most of the SEAS Master's Project Team's touchpoints occurred prior to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, which halted the G7 planning process and community engagement efforts in spring 2020.

Timeline

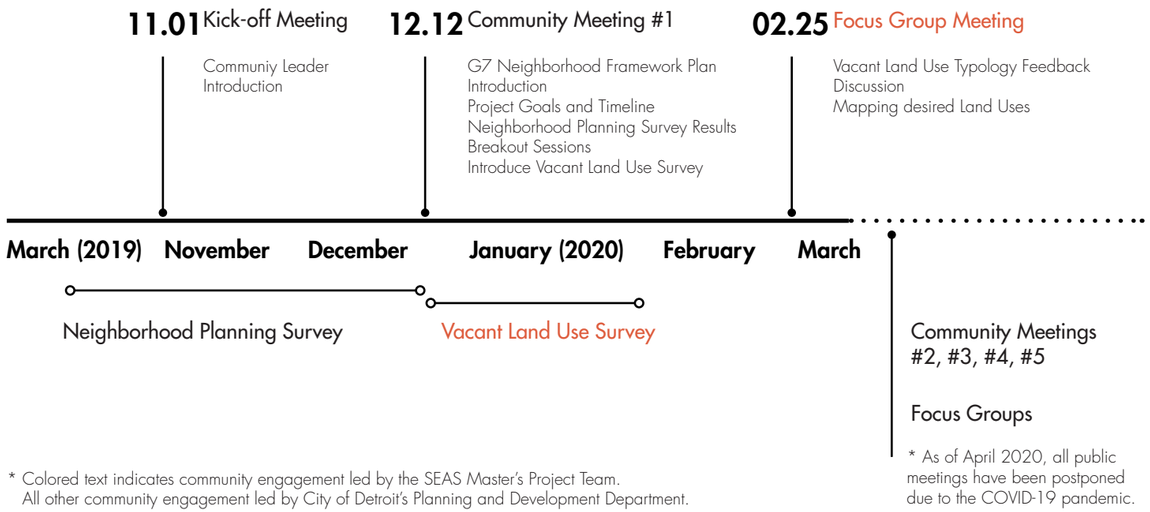
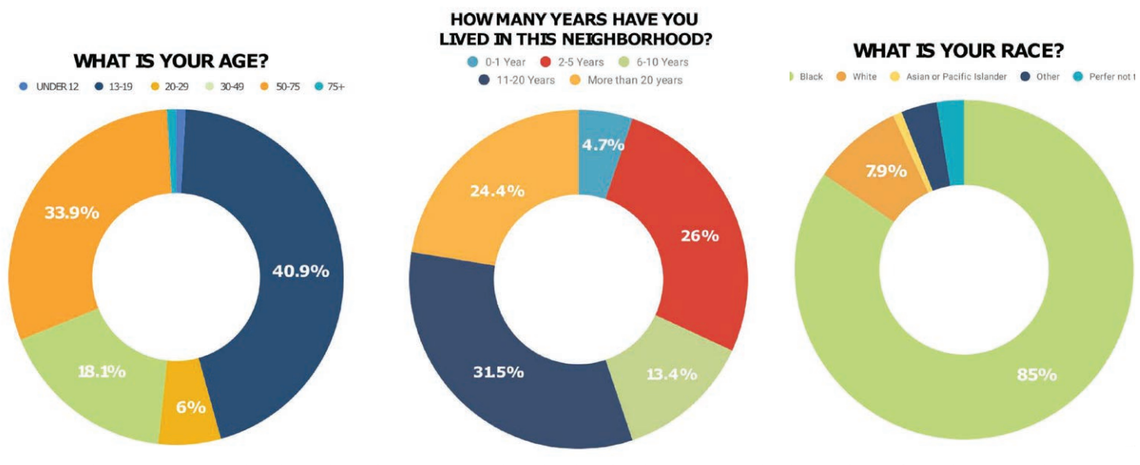


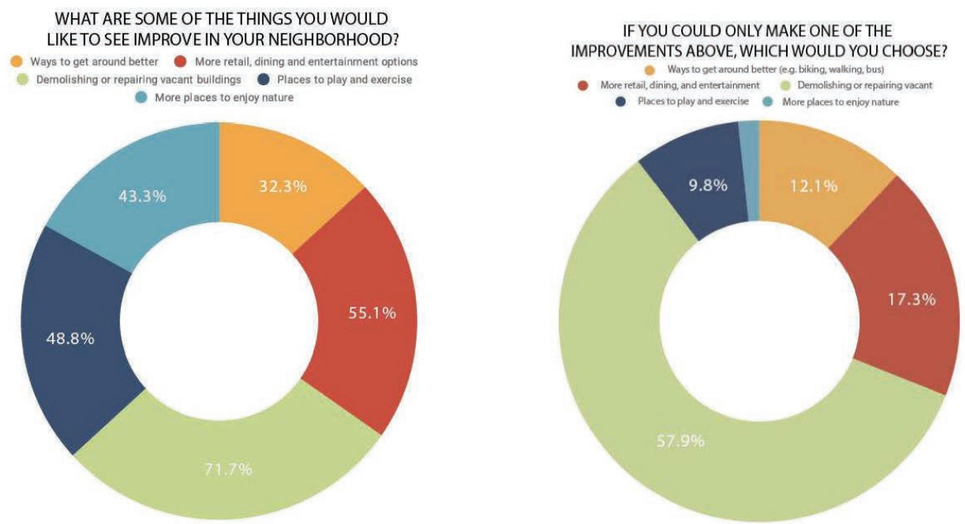
Figure 29. Community Engagement Timeline

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING SURVEY

The City of Detroit created an online survey, available through the Planning and Development Department's website (see Appendix A). As of December 2019, 135 residents and 6 local businesses responded to the survey. The results of this survey are highlighted in the following pages (Figures 30 and 31). Graphs were provided by the City of Detroit's Planning and Development Department.

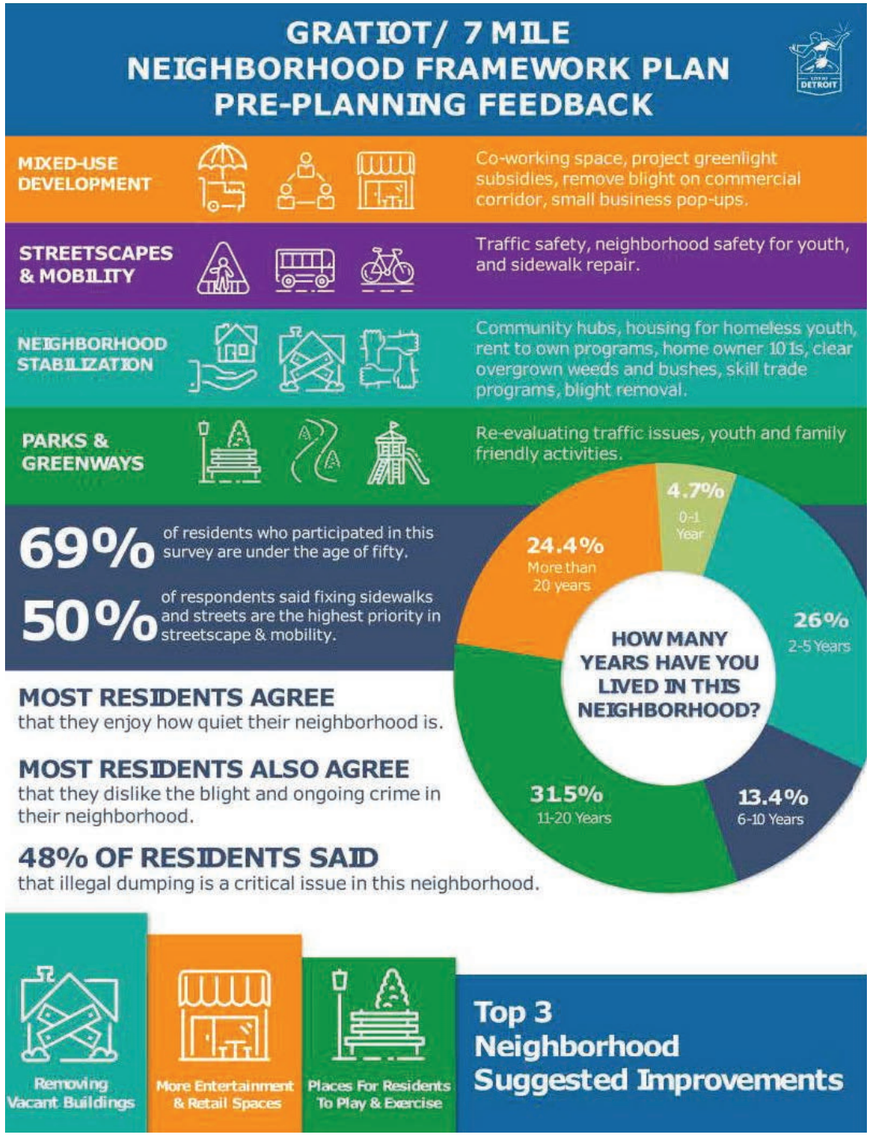


Because the survey was distributed in classrooms at local schools, there was a high number of youth respondents, particularly ages 13-19.



Graphics provided by City of Detroit PDD Community Meeting #1 Presentation (City of Detroit, 2019).

Figure 30: Neighborhood Planning Survey Responses



Graphics provided by City of Detroit PDD Community Meeting #1 Presentation (City of Detroit, 2019).

Figure 31. Neighborhood Planning Survey Summary

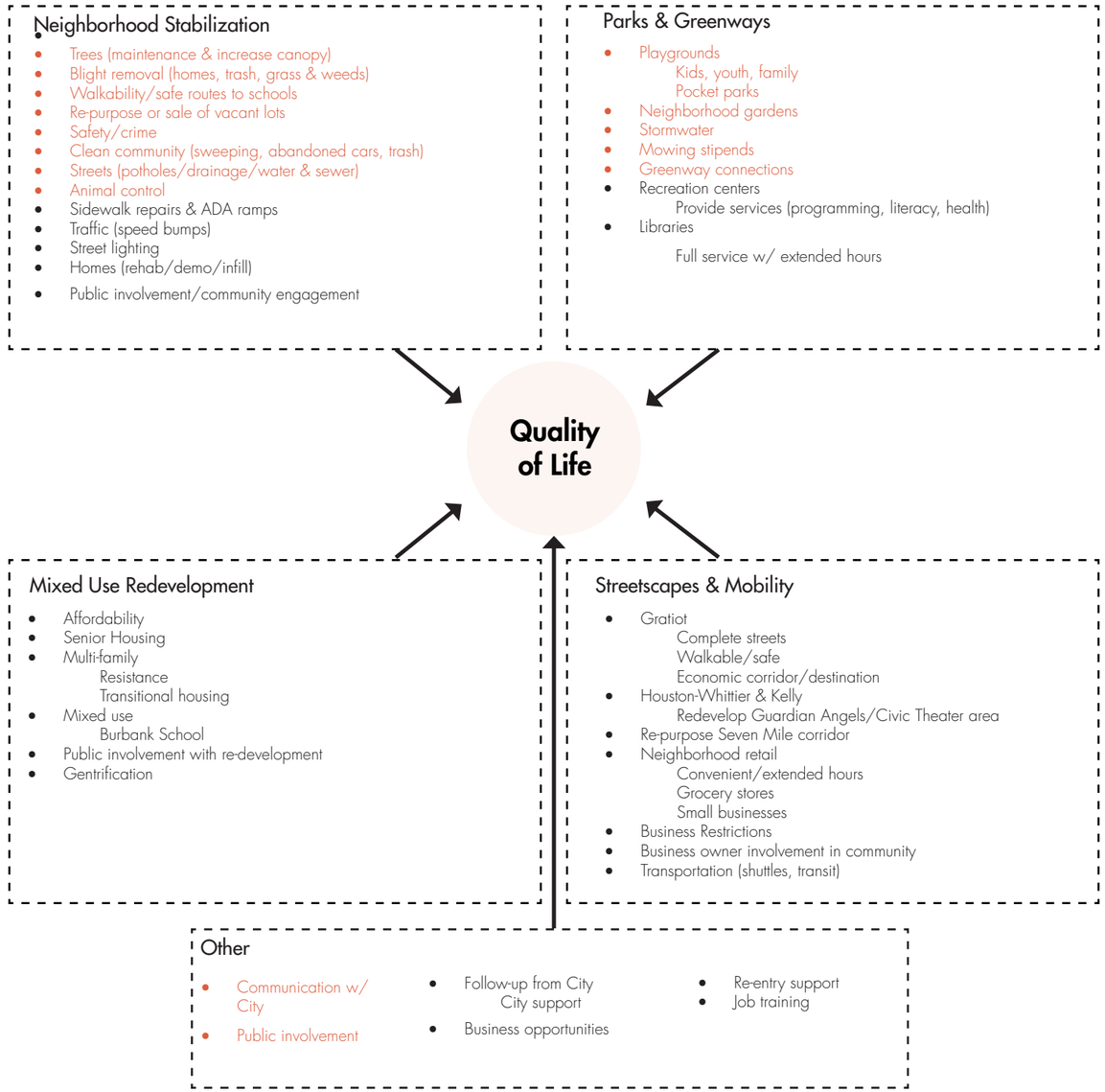
COMMUNITY MEETING #1

On December 12, 2019, the City of Detroit hosted Community Meeting #1 at The Matrix Center in the Franklin neighborhood. Over 125 residents attended and participated in the meeting. The G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan was introduced to the community, including a summary of project goals and timeline. The results of the abovementioned Neighborhood Planning Survey were presented. The G7 Planning Team then solicited feedback by administering breakout discussion sessions wherein residents were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are improvements you'd like to see happen in the next five years?
- What would make this plan successful?
- Do you have any other questions about the G7 neighborhood plan?

Feedback from Community Meeting #1 was transcribed, compiled, and summarized by the City of Detroit PDD and G7 Planning Team. Results were sorted into four key themes, defined by the City of Detroit PDD: (1) Neighborhood Stabilization; (2) Parks and Greenways; (3) Mixed Use Redevelopment; and (4) Streetscapes and Mobility.

The SEAS Master's Project Team identified those topics that were most relevant to vacant land to inform future community engagement and ideation. In particular, the Neighborhood Stabilization and Parks & Greenways categories provide community insight applicable to vacant land uses in the G7 planning area, as is indicated by the colored font on Figure 32.



Colored text indicates those topics relevant to vacant land adaptation.
Image adapted from City of Detroit PDD December 12, 2019 Community Meeting #1 Feedback Summary.

Figure 32. G7 Community Meeting #1 Feedback Summary

VACANT LAND USE SURVEY

VACANT LAND USE SURVEY

In order to inform future community engagement and typology development, the SEAS Master's Project Team developed a Vacant Land Use Survey (see Appendix B) to solicit feedback on a variety of vacant land uses:

- Community gardens
- Playgrounds for children
- Places for teens and adults to play and exercise
- Public art
- Social gathering spaces
- Places to enjoy nature
- Creation of walking trails
- Production of food by local growers
- Production of flowers by local growers
- Production of renewable energy
- Flood prevention
- Opportunities for residents to acquire adjacent lots

TThe survey was introduced at the December 12th Community Engagement Meeting #1, where paper surveys were distributed. The survey was also available online through January 2020, promoted electronically (linked by URL and QR code) through the PDD's website, social media, and email newsletter. Paper flyers (see Appendix C), also with URL and QR code, were distributed locally at the Franklin branch of the Detroit Public Library, the Matrix Center, and the Heilmann Community Center. The survey was completed by 35 residents of the G7 Planning Area. Questions were not mandatory, so the number of responses varies with each question.

Respondent Profile

The survey was completed by 35 residents. As shown in Figure 33, respondents were mostly middle aged or older, with 6% of respondents between the ages of 20 and 29, and 11% between the ages of 30 and 39. Almost all respondents were black, with one white participant. Nearly half of residents were from the Regent Park neighborhood, with 28% from Mapleridge and 21% from Franklin. There were no respondents from the Mohican Regent neighborhood. Most participants were long-time residents of the area, with over half living in their neighborhood for over 20 years. There were three newer residents of the area (2-5 years).

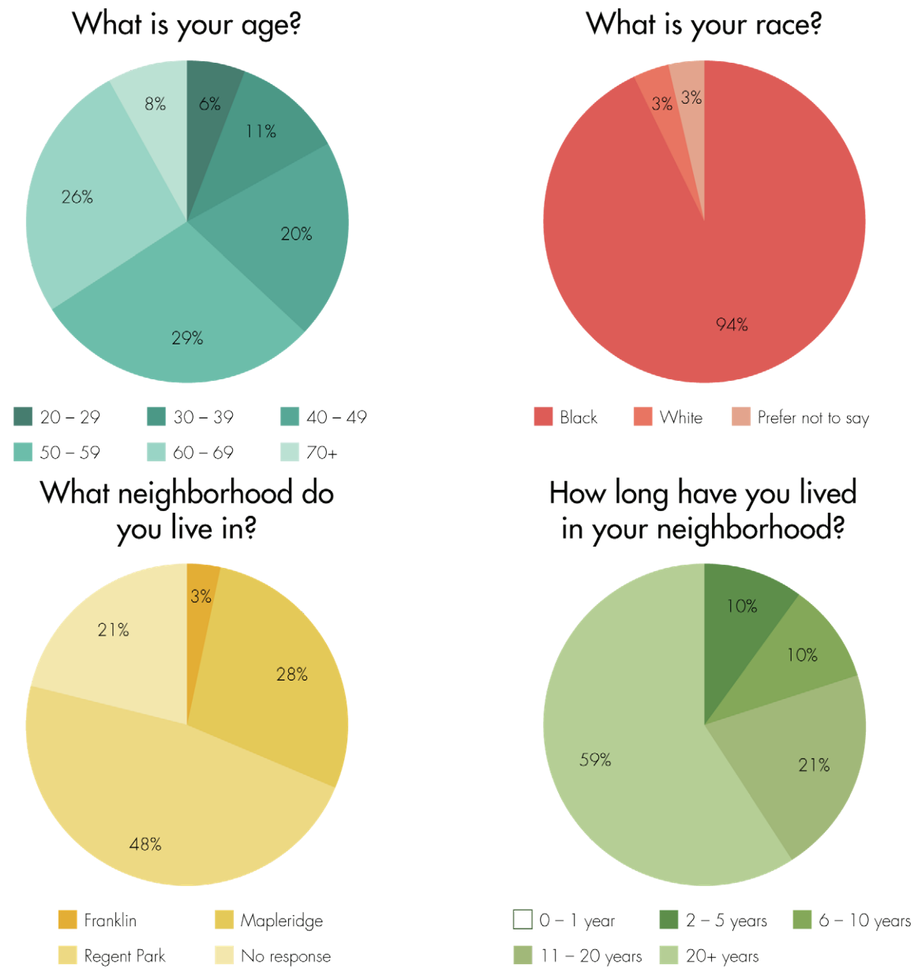
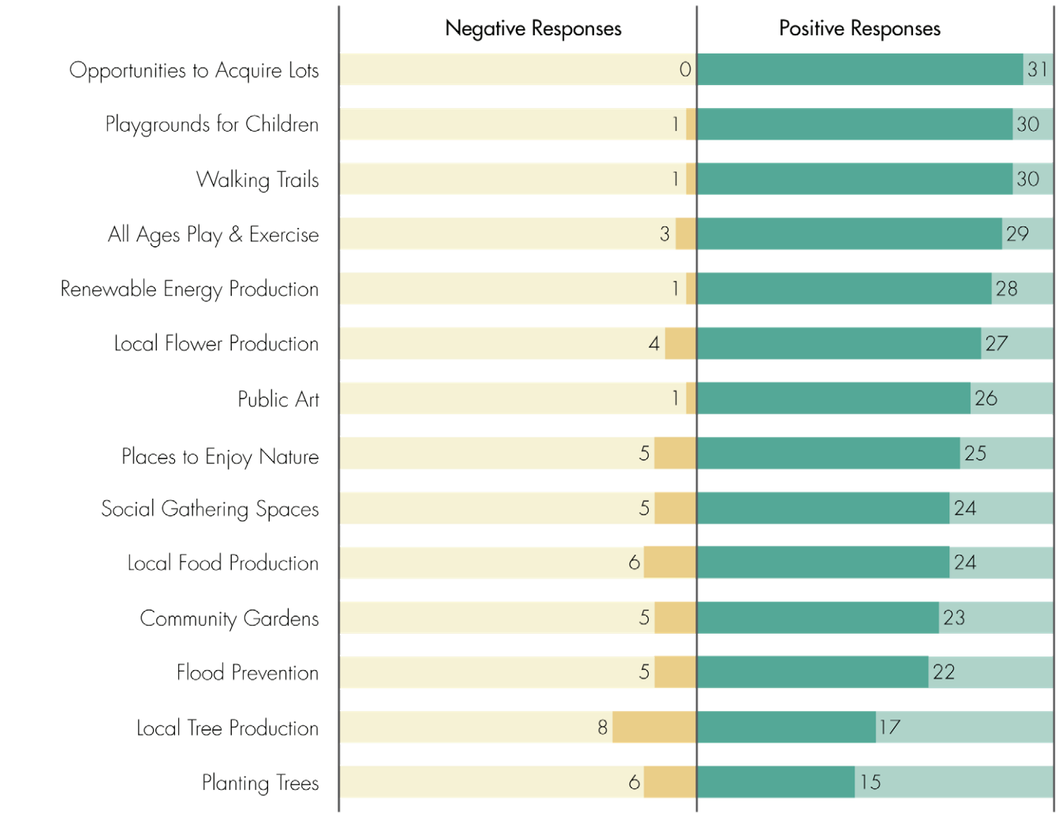


Figure 33. Vacant Land Use Survey Respondent Profile

LAND USE PERCEPTION

In order to understand how G7 residents perceive the proposed vacant land uses, the survey asked participants to respond to a variety of proposed vacant land uses.

Please indicate the extent to which you believe the following vacant land uses would be beneficial in your neighborhood:



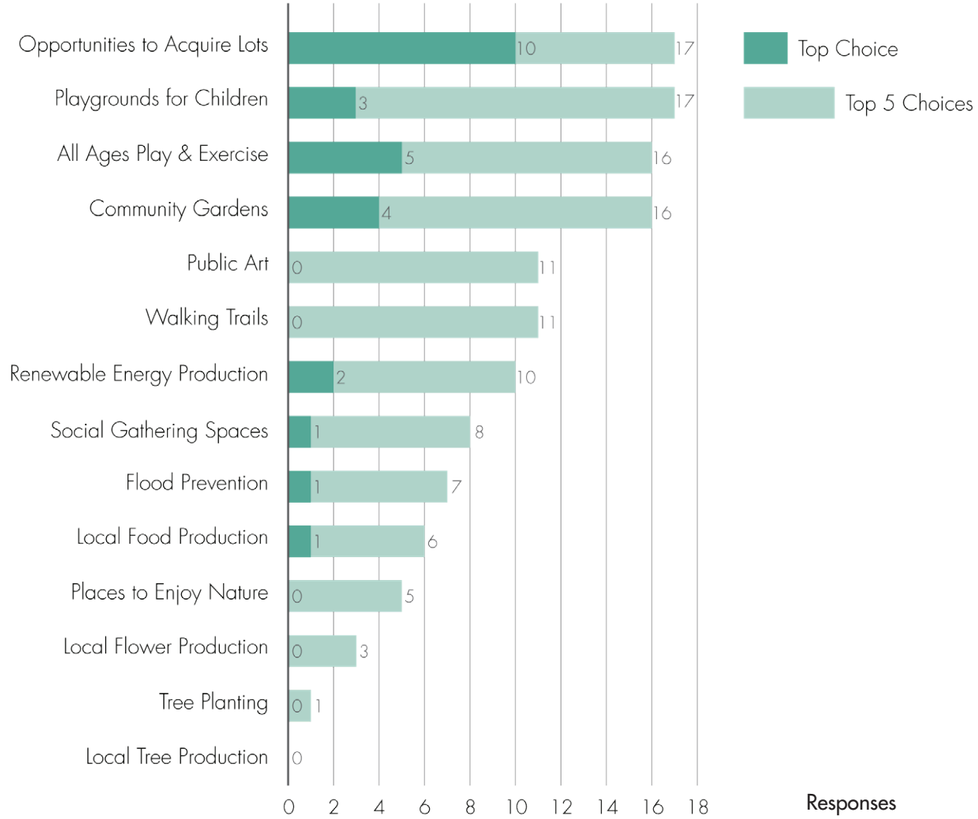
Respondents expressed generally positive feedback to all proposed land uses (Figure 34). Opportunities to Acquire Lots received the most positive responses, with not a single negative response. Playgrounds for Children, Walking Trails, All Ages Play & Exercise, and Renewable Energy Production also received very positive feedback, with very little negative response.

Local Tree Production and Planting Trees received the least positive and most negative responses, indicating that these land uses may be less likely to receive community buy-in. This is aligned with anecdotal knowledge that Detroit residents are skeptical of projects involving tree planting and production.

Figure 34. Vacant Land Use Survey: Land Use Perception Results

LAND USE RANKINGS

Please indicate your top 5 vacant land use choices, beginning with the most preferred:



When respondents were asked to rank their top 5 vacant land use choices, Opportunities to Acquire Lots again emerged as a top priority by survey respondents (Figure 35). Playgrounds for Children, All Ages Play & Exercise, and Community Gardens also emerged as top priorities. Other land uses, such as Tree Planting, Local Tree and Flower Production, and Places to Enjoy Nature were less prioritized. This may reflect a desire for active landscapes that encourage movement, creativity, and social interaction.

Figure 35. Vacant Land Use Survey: Land Use Ranking Results

VACANT LAND ADAPTATION FOCUS GROUP

In order to gain additional feedback on vacant land adaptation strategies, a focus group was held on Tuesday, February 25, 2020, at the Ford Resource and Engagement Center (FREC) in the Regent Park neighborhood. Residents were invited from across the planning area, with priority given to those participants referred by local community leaders. Six participants attended the focus group, with representation from the Regent Park and Mapleridge neighborhoods, plus one community leader who lived just west of the G7 boundary. Focus group participants included local growers, community leaders, and parents of young children. The focus group centered around one guiding question:

How can vacant land be adapted into a community asset in G7 ?

Participants were first asked to individually provide feedback on a variety of images associated with seven vacant land uses, developed from results of the Vacant Land Use Survey, Community Meeting #1, and conversations with the G7 Planning Team (Figure 36). The proposed vacant land uses were:

1. Community Garden
2. Playground
3. All-Ages Sports & Play
4. Farmstead
5. Natural Open Space
6. Social Gathering Space
7. Stormwater Management

These land uses and associated images then served as the foundation for a 90-minute conversation. In particular, participants were asked to provide feedback on the use, appearance, location, and maintenance of vacant land in their neighborhoods. Participants were also asked to place color-coded stickers on a map of the G7 Planning Area, indicating locations where they would like to see the vacant land use typologies implemented (Figure 37).

The resulting conversation was rich and engaging, lending significant insight into concerns, strategies, and benefits of vacant land adaptation, as perceived and expressed by G7 residents. Words from the discussion are depicted in the word cloud (Figure 38), with text size correlating to the frequency with which words were mentioned by participants. Feedback from the focus group discussion is discussed more thoroughly in the following sections. Participant feedback was coded and analyzed to inform future ideation, planning, and design. This section presents, analyzes, and reviews the outcomes of this analysis.

Figure 36. Focus Group Photo: Responding to Vacant Land Use Typologies

Figure 37. Focus Group Photo: Mapping Desired Land Uses

Word cloud adapted from focus group word count (see Appendix D).

Figure 38. Focus Group Word Cloud

TYPOLOGY SELECTION

Community Garden

Community gardens are neighborhood spaces "designed, developed or managed by local residents" (Francis, 1984, p.1) and can be an effective way to reclaim and reuse vacant land. Community gardens abound in Detroit and other legacy cities, where residents have long created such spaces on vacant land. According to both the Vacant Land Use Survey and Community Meeting #1, community gardens are one of the most preferred land uses for vacant land adaptation in the G7 Planning Area.

Research indicates that community gardens can offer both ecological benefits and social benefits. Community gardens are an attractive way to create urban habitats and provide ecological services. Flowers, vegetables, and crops planted in community gardens can attract pollinators such as bees. "Planners and designers, buoyed by the growing body of research, promote community gardening as a way to address not only vacancy but also food security, cultural knowledge, neighborhood revitalization, and economic development." (Lawson & Miller, 2013, p.17). Community gardens can increase social cohesion and connection (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006). Community gardens can also serve as leisure spaces for interactions between culturally diverse groups and people of different ages (Shinew et al., 2004) Finally, community gardening as an activity has positive impacts on health and well-being by promoting physical activity and connections to nature. (Kingsley et. al., 2009)

Community gardens can vary widely in their aesthetics, amenities, and materiality. Images were selected to understand what residents would like to grow (food, flowers), what features would be beneficial (seating, community artwork), and material preference (hardscaping vs. naturalized) (Figure 39). Additionally, because beekeeping was proposed as a vacant land use through the Vacant Land Use Survey, an image of community beekeeping was included to gain further insight into how residents perceive the land use and activity.

a. Flowers

YES MAYBE NO

b. Seating

YES MAYBE NO

c. Food-growing

YES MAYBE NO

d. Community Art

YES MAYBE NO

e. Hard Surfaces

YES MAYBE NO

f. Beekeeping

YES MAYBE NO

Figure 39. Focus Group Typology Response Form: Community Garden

Playground

Playgrounds are defined as structures designed specifically to provide space for children to recreate and play in urban areas, typically located adjacent to schools or within public parks. Playgrounds for children emerged as a priority for G7 residents through both the Vacant Land Use Survey and Community Meeting #1, and therefore became an essential topic for the focus group discussion.

Decades of research indicate that physical activity and play promotes childrens' physical and mental well-being, with positive impacts on "cognitive development, social development, language development, physical fitness and health, learning, and coping with trauma" (Frost, 2009, p202). Notably, children in poverty are less likely to have access to safe and positive play experiences (Frost, 2009). Well-equipped playgrounds are lacking in the G7 Planning Area, particularly in the Mapleridge and Franklin neighborhoods leaving residents without access to play spaces in reasonable walking distance.

While all of the existing playgrounds in the area are small, traditional play structures, there is potential to integrate other types of playscapes and environments for children to play. Motivated by a desire to create more interactive environments that connect children to nature, designers are increasingly advocating for natural playscapes that integrate plants, hills, rocks, and other natural elements (Hamarstrom, 2012). This design approach is already occurring elsewhere in the City of Detroit, notably through the playscapes designed for the upcoming West Riverfront Park (Neavling, 2019). Water play is also popular, particularly for hot summer days. Images were selected to understand how G7 residents perceive and prioritize a variety of play environments. The images presented to the focus group included images of a range of playgrounds, including both traditional playgrounds and more natural play structures (Figure 40).

a. Traditional

YES MAYBE NO

b. Natural

YES MAYBE NO

c. Semi-natural

YES MAYBE NO

d. Grass Mounds

YES MAYBE NO

e. Artificial Mounds

YES MAYBE NO

f. Water Play

YES MAYBE NO

Figure 40. Focus Group Typology Response Form: Playground

All-Ages Sports & Play

Sports and play areas provide space for activities that promote physical and mental health. Physical exercise promotes long-term health and well-being through the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and many other chronic diseases (Morris, 2003). Exercise is also beneficial for mental health, including improved mood and self-esteem, and reductions in stress and anxiety (Raglin, 1990). In order to promote physical activity in urban areas, urban designers and planners should ensure that all residents have access to quality spaces to exercise, move, and play. These spaces have been shown to provide relaxation, refreshment, escape from the everyday, and opportunity to socialize (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000).

Through the Vacant Land Use Survey, all-ages sports and play emerged as a most preferred land use among G7 residents. Images were selected to solicit feedback on a variety of sports and play areas, including more traditional play areas (sports field, basketball court, exercise trail, outdoor exercise equipment) and less traditional and modern activity spaces (outdoor game area, skate park) (Figure 41).

a. Sports Field

YES MAYBE NO

b. Basketball Court

YES MAYBE NO

c. Exercise Trail

YES MAYBE NO

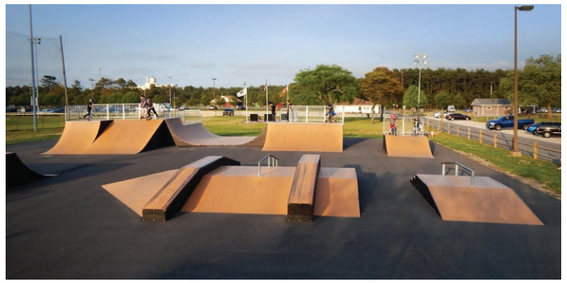
d. Outdoor Exercise Equipment

YES MAYBE NO

e. Outdoor Game Area

YES MAYBE NO

f. Skate Park



YES MAYBE NO

Figure 41. Focus Group Typology Response Form: All Ages Sports & Play

Farmstead

A farmstead is an owner-occupied plot of land where local growers live on and farm the land for profit. It is aggregated from approximately 6-10 vacant lots, including one home, ideally with a garage to employ as a workshed, toolshed, or barn. The farmstead typology has been primarily devised by Keep Growing Detroit (KGD), an organization that supports growers and promotes food sovereignty in Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park (Keep Growing Detroit, 2020). The City of Detroit and Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) are exploring the farmstead as a means for bundling and selling vacant lots across the city, with hopes of developing pilot farmsteads as part of the G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan.

This typology emerges from the belief that small-scale agriculture adds value and helps to stabilize high-vacancy neighborhoods by reusing vacant land, generating income and jobs, and enhancing food security. By growing food within G7, residents could gain improved access to quality, fresh food that is purchased either on-site or at local markets. Urban planning research confirms that urban farming in legacy cities such as Detroit, Philadelphia, and Cleveland enhances the availability of local food, thereby enhancing urban sustainability and food security (Carlet et al. 2017). Urban farming can also be of significant economic value. For instance, a vegetable farm on a sub-acre lot in Philadelphia has grossed over $67,000 per year by growing salad greens and vegetables (McLaughlin, 2008). A single-acre farm in Milwaukee, filled with "greenhouses, tilapia tanks and poultry pens" grosses over $200,000 per year (McLaughlin, 2008). The farmstead, therefore, has potential to enhance public health, sustainability and economic stability in the G7 Planning Area.

Despite these benefits, there may be community resistance to promoting for-profit agriculture. For instance, a study in Baltimore found that residents may reject urban farms due to lack of familiarity with urban farming, concerns about the appearance, fear that farms will attract rodents or other pests, and distrust of farm projects run by 'outsiders' (Poulsen et al., 2014). Detroit's PDD and the G7 Planning Team seek to understand if G7 residents are supportive of urban farming in their communities and appropriate design standards that would make it more appealing. Therefore, images were selected to elicit resident responses to a variety of agricultural crops, scales, and amenities (Figure 42).

a. Large Fruit & Vegetable Farm

YES MAYBE NO

b. Small Fruit & Vegetable Farm

YES MAYBE NO

c. Flower Farm

YES MAYBE NO

d. Orchard

YES MAYBE NO

e. Hoop House

YES MAYBE NO

f. Beekeeping

YES MAYBE NO

Figure 42. Focus Group Typology Response Form: Farmstead

Natural Open Space

Natural open spaces are relatively undeveloped areas that provide opportunities for interacting with nature, environmental education, and passive recreation. In contrast to the active recreation supported by playgrounds and sports areas, passive recreation includes walking, biking, bird watching, reading, meditating, photography, and other low-impact activities (Woolley, 2003).

Natural open space and passive recreation have been linked to restoration and improved mental health by providing rest, relaxation, and a sense of "getting away from it all" (Woolley, 2003). Research has shown simple exposure to the natural environment promotes physical, mental, and spiritual health and well-being, enhances personal and social communication skills, and fosters an aesthetic awareness (Morris, 2003). Natural open spaces also provide environmental benefits such as air and water cleaning, climate regulation, flood mitigation, and the provision of wildlife habitat (Woolley, 2003).

Natural areas vary significantly, ranging from forests to open woodlands to grasslands, and even mowed lawn. The design and management of these spaces can have a significant impact on perceptions of safety (Lorenc et al., 2012; Nassauer, 2011), which is a significant concern in the G7 Planning Area. Therefore, images were selected to include vegetation of varying, form, height, and maintenance (Figure 43).

a. Woodland

YES MAYBE NO

b. Mowed Lawn

YES MAYBE NO

c. Meadow

YES MAYBE NO

d. Meadow with Pathways

YES MAYBE NO

e. Mowed Lawn & Meadow Edge

YES MAYBE NO

Figure 43. Focus Group Typology Response Form: Natural Open Space

Social Gathering Space

Social gathering spaces are here defined as physical spaces that encourage social interaction among people, such as seating areas and event spaces. Typically, social gathering spaces are strategically placed within community parks and gardens, and seen as an important component within the neighborhood open space framework.

Research shows that social gathering spaces are important for community building and prosperity of the neighborhood. "A number of architects, urban designers, and sociologists have long investigated public space attributes that facilitate social interaction" (Francis, et al., 2012, p. 402). Public spaces foster a sense of community by facilitating chance encounters between neighbors (Talen, 2000). The findings of a 2002 study show that perceived safety and sense of community are linked to neighborhood cohesion (Brown et al., 2003). It was also reported that social ties with neighbors counteract the effects of neighborhood disorder on fear and mistrust (Ross & Jang, 2000).

The presented images include different types of social gathering spaces targeted at different activities and featuring a range of materials (Figure 44). Picnic tables, paved seating areas, event spaces, and shade structures were key design element images selected by the team to better understand how residents perceive a variety of social gathering spaces.

a. Picnic/Grill Area

YES MAYBE NO

b. Paved Seating Area

YES MAYBE NO

c1. Amphitheater/Event Space 1

YES MAYBE NO

c2. Amphitheater/Event Space 2

YES MAYBE NO

d1. Shade Structure 1

YES MAYBE NO

d2. Shade Structure 2

YES MAYBE NO

Figure 44. Focus Group Typology Response Form: Social Gathering Space

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management using green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) techniques can be implemented in many forms, including rain gardens, ponds, and swales of different scales. Detroit has a combined sewer system which collects rain, domestic sewage, and wastewater all in one pipe. Under periods of heavy rain, the volume of water can become greater than what the combined sewer system can handle, resulting in untreated sewage being discharged to bodies of water, streets, and private properties. Flooding occurs regularly throughout the City of Detroit (City of Detroit, 2020a), including within the G7 Planning Area. Stormwater management techniques can minimize local flooding as well as provide other benefits to the neighborhood.

In addition to providing stormwater benefits, research also indicates that rain gardens can provide social benefits and perceived safety benefits in a neighborhood. Well-maintained neighborhood rain gardens can encourage residents to spend time outside and create opportunities for improved social networks (Nassauer and Feng, 2018). Furthermore, rain gardens that are perceived as being cared for and regularly maintained with open views and defined boundaries can discourage dumping (Nassauer and Feng, 2018). Green stormwater infrastructure can also be beneficial to other species by selecting native plants and other perennials to increase pollinator habitat.

The images presented to the focus group included images of stormwater ponds and rain gardens (Figure 45). The stormwater pond images include a temporary (dry) stormwater pond, a traditional stormwater pond and a stormwater pond surrounded by a more natural, vegetative edge. The rain gardens were depicted at different scales with different surrounding vegetation contexts.

a. Temporary Stormwater Pond

YES MAYBE NO

b. Stormwater Pond

YES MAYBE NO

c. Stormwater Pond with Natural Edge

YES MAYBE NO

d. Rain Garden

YES MAYBE NO

e. Rain Garden with Trees

YES MAYBE NO

f. Residential Scale Rain Garden

YES MAYBE NO

Figure 45. Focus Group Typology Response Form: Stormwater Management

TYPOLOGY FEEDBACK

Community Garden Feedback

During the focus group, residents expressed generally positive feedback on the community garden typology, with unanimous support for both flower gardens and food production (Figure 46). Participants expressed that seating is important, particularly for the elderly and for creating social spaces that promote safety and community. While beekeeping received less positive feedback through the typology feedback booklets, two residents voiced strong support of the land use, expressing that beekeeping provides an array of benefits, including the potential for selling honey. Residents in Regent Park are currently looking for lots to purchase for this purpose.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

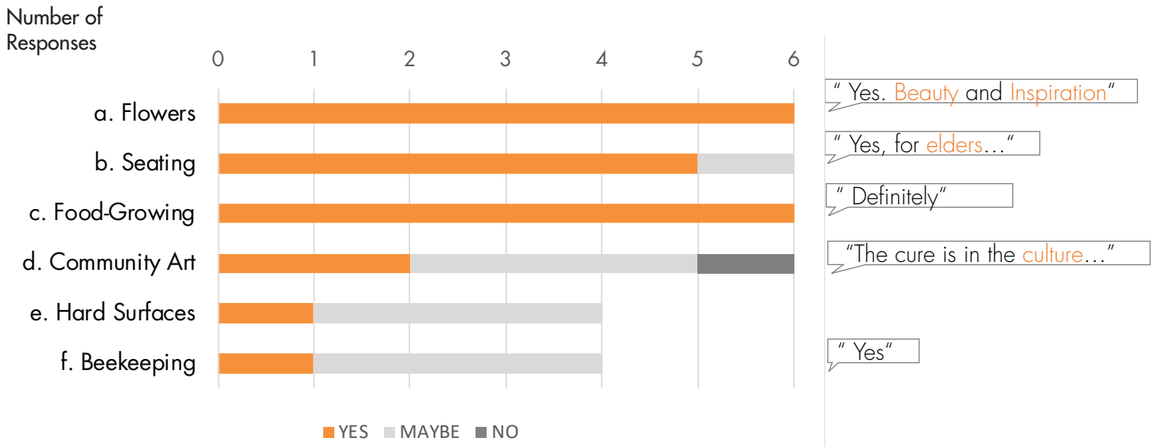


Figure 46. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Community Garden

Playground Feedback

Focus group participants responded positively to all three structure-based playground options, and vocalized no strong preference for traditional vs. natural playgrounds (Figure 47). Play mounds, a grading intervention, appeared to be less preferred, while water play elicited generally negative responses through both written and verbal feedback. Participants unanimously agreed that safety must be considered when designing and implementing playgrounds, with an emphasis on providing safe pedestrian routes to playgrounds. Lighting was also mentioned as a means for ensuring safety. Existing and former schools were recommended as sites appropriate for playgrounds.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

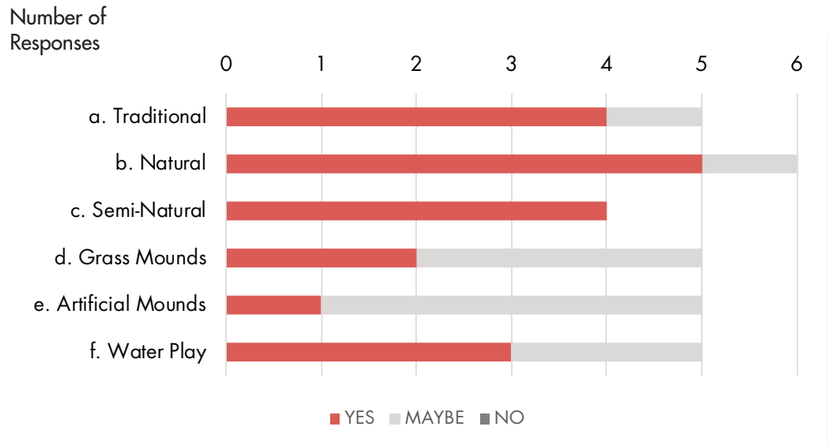


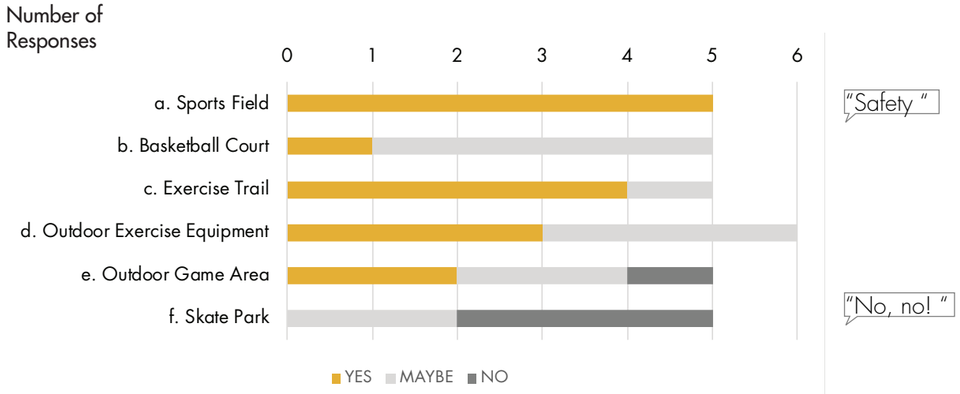
Figure 47. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Playground

All-Ages Sports & Play Feedback

Through the typology feedback, sports fields emerged as the most preferred sports and play area (Figure 48). Exercise trails and exercise equipment also received favorable responses.The basketball court and outdoor game area were less preferred. However, it should be noted that basketball courts emerged as a desired land use through both the Vacant Land Use Survey and the Neighborhood Planning Survey. The skate park received an overall negative response, both through individual responses and group conversation. Residents expressed that it would likely remain unused. This belief is supported by the fact that there is an existing skate park at Heilmann Park that does not appear to be in use.

Through verbal feedback, focus group participants expressed that winter activities are lacking in the area. While ice skating received positive responses, the creation of a sledding hill was particularly emphasized as a community desire.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES



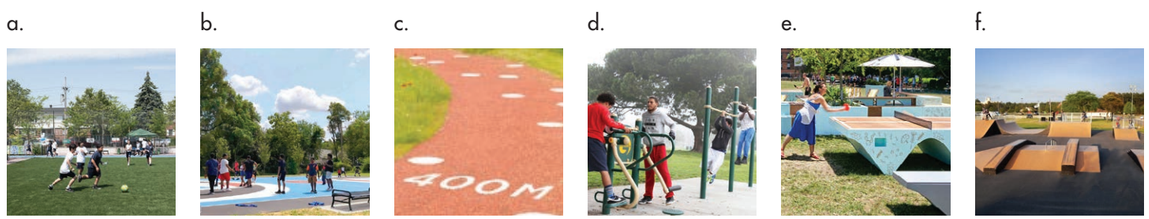


Figure 48. Focus Group Typology Feedback: All Ages Sports & Play

Farmstead Feedback

Overall, participants responded favorably to the farmstead land use, with particularly strong support of the orchard (Figure 49). There appears to be uncertainty regarding beekeeping, although two participants vocalized strong support of beekeeping and its many benefits (pollinators, honey to sell, educational opportunities). There was also uncertainty regarding hoophouses, with some initially negative responses. However, it was revealed through discussion that some participants were unaware of their function: upon learning that they are used to grow crops for an extended growing season, this uncertainty seemed to diminish. There were no aesthetic or visual objections to hoophouses. Participants also expressed that urban farming initiatives should be partnered with agricultural education and skill training for existing residents, enabling them to own and operate farmsteads in their own community.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

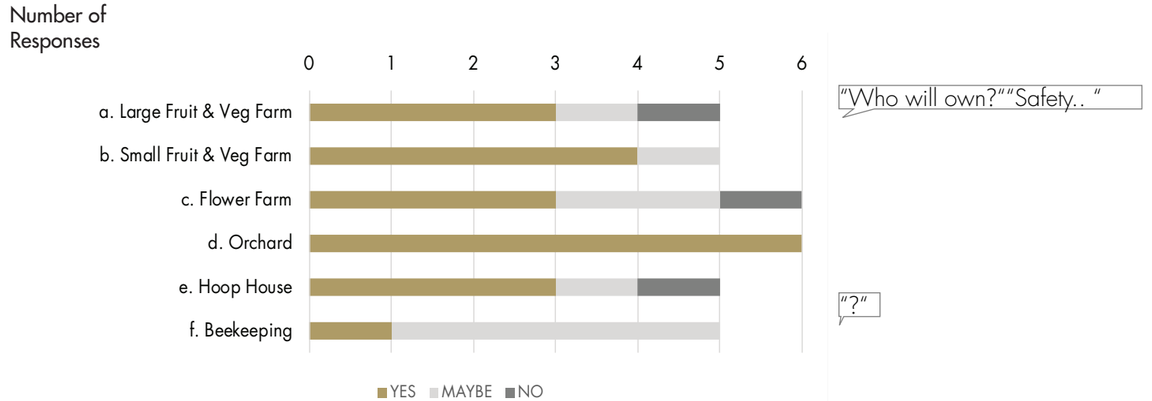


Figure 49. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Farmstead

Natural Open Space Feedback

Focus group participants expressed concerns with safety in regards to creation of natural open spaces, with particular concern about woodlands and tall grasses (Figure 50). Participants also expressed concern over attracting wildlife to woodland areas. Meadows with and without mowed pathways received a mixed response, with participants expressing concern that meadows may become sites for dumping. However, it was also noted that meadows are good to pair with stormwater infrastructure improvements.

Mowing appeared to be the most favored strategy for open space. The participants noted that mowing frequency on vacant lots could be increased to deter dumping. Some residents in the community already take it upon themselves to mow the vacant lots more frequently, regardless of ownership.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

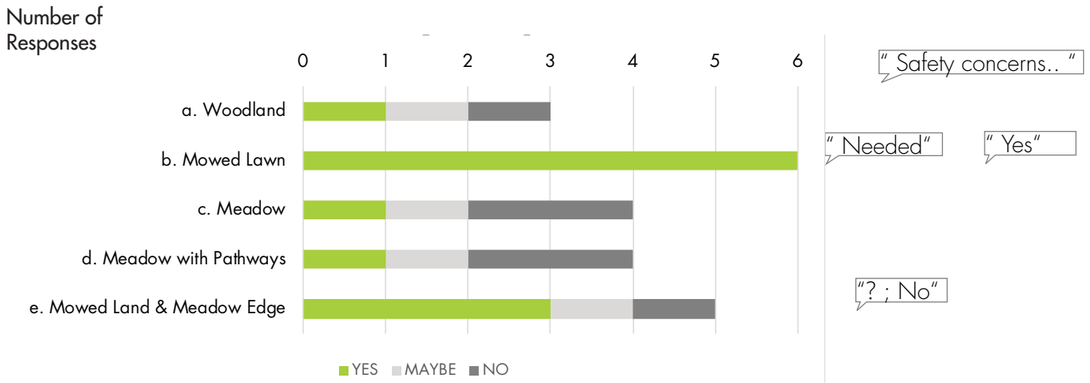


Figure 50. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Natural Open Space

Social Gathering Space Feedback

Overall, responses to the social gathering spaces were favorable (Figure 51). There was a strong preference for the more traditional shade structure compared with the non-traditional shade structure. A general concern about maintenance of these spaces was voiced during the discussion. One resident expressed a preference for the first amphitheater image (c1). This resident felt strongly that it would be an innovative and very beneficial project for the neighborhood by providing a platform for art and performances for both talented youth and adults in the neighborhood.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

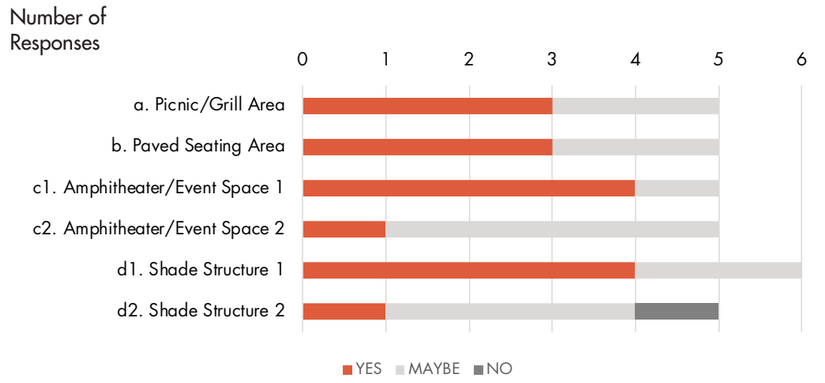


Figure 51. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Social Gathering Space

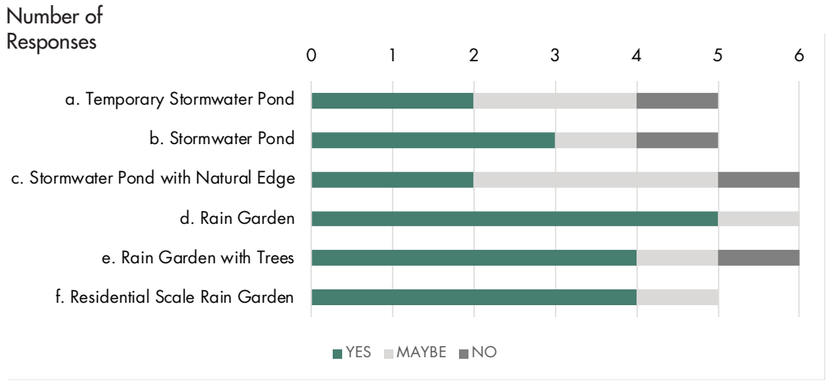
TYPOLOGY FEEDBACK

Stormwater Management Feedback

While the importance of stormwater management was recognized and understood by participants, the landscape images provided received mixed results (Figure 52). Rain gardens, which are typically of smaller scale, received positive feedback. In particular, the rain garden with interpretive signage received the most positive responses. Stormwater ponds received mixed feedback, implying that larger-scale stormwater interventions may be less likely to receive resident support.

Due to time constraints, the stormwater management typology was not directly discussed during the focus group. However, participants independently expressed the importance of stormwater management. In particular, participants discussed the multiple benefits of rain gardens, including beautification and pollinator habitat in support of urban agriculture.

RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES



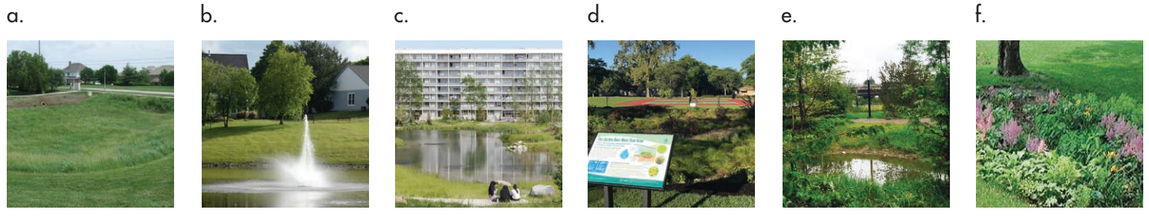


Figure 52. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Stormwater Management

MAPPING DESIRED LAND USES

Through the interactive mapping activity, focus group participants were asked to indicate ideal locations for the proposed vacant land uses. The results of this activity are summarized below in Figure 53. Participants clustered many of the proposed land uses in the area surrounding Heilmann Park in the northeast portion of the G7 Planning Area. In particular, multiple land uses were concentrated along 7 Mile Road, at the border of the Regent Park and Mapleridge neighborhoods, indicating that this may be a good location for the implementation of new, multifunctional landscapes. Gardens, flowers, and streetscapes with improved landscaping were also recommended for Regent Park. Features in Mapleridge were primarily clustered around concentrations of vacant land, with particular attention to the currently vacant school site nearby.

Figure 53. Focus Group: Desired Land Use Location Mapping

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Overall, feedback from the focus group discussion was positive. As indicated in through the above discussion of individual vacant land use typologies, the majority of the proposed typologies were perceived favorably or at least neutrally. Skateparks, however, received a unanimously negative response, with residents expressing it would not be used in the G7 Planning Area. Meadows and meadows with pathways also received mostly negative feedback, particularly due to concerns about dumping in these spaces. However, upon further discussion, they seemed receptive to "strategically placed" meadows.

In addition to gaining insight on typology image preferences, the focus group conversation also gave further insight into broader individual and community perspectives on vacant land uses throughout the G7 Planning Area. Although concerns were raised regarding blight, dumping, and safety, participants also gave thoughtful input regarding potential strategies to improve the G7 Planning Area. Residents also expressed a variety of benefits that the various land use adaptations would provide, thereby lending insight into the values and priorities of G7 residents.

The focus group discussion was manually coded and categorized into three main themes that arose from the conversation regarding potential land uses in the G7 Planning Area, as illustrated in Figure 54, reflecting the number of times each code was mentioned during the focus group conversation. The chart at the bottom sums up the total counts for each theme. The three codes that emerged from the conversation are:

- **Concern**
- **Strategy**
- **Benefit**

Concerns that were discussed included aesthetic and safety concerns. However, additional concerns were raised including environmental and mobility issues, lack of income, and distrust of government planning efforts. In terms of government distrust, residents were concerned that new projects may conflict with existing community group projects and spaces already present in the neighborhood.

The bulk of the focus group conversation centered around strategies of vacant land adaptation. Strategies that were discussed included both physical interventions and social interventions, such as education, skill building, and pathways to ownership. Participants expressed that education and skill building for existing residents would enable them to be more successful in the production of food for personal consumption or for sale. One particularly notable strategy that emerged from the discussion was the idea of stacking functions. Participants expressed the importance of creating spaces with more than one land use. For example, residents recommended placing a community garden adjacent to a playground. Participants believe that congregating activities in this way will help ensure that a space is more active and populated at various times of the day, thereby helping to deter crime, improve safety, and ensure long-term success of projects.

Benefits expressed by residents also expressed a variety of social, environmental, and economic factors. Vacant land adaptations were perceived to have potential to improve aesthetics, promote income production, enhance food security, and foster social interactions. There was an interest in opportunities for entrepreneurs to grow food as a means of income production and providing a source of local food. Participants also expressed interest in opportunities for community members to come together. The benefits of pollinator habitat (beauty, pollinating urban agriculture, environmental benefits) were mentioned multiple times.
Other specific land use features that that were mentioned by participants during the focus group discussion that were not included in the proposed typology images included:

- Flowers and improved landscaping
- Market
- Food bank
- Playground with tall slide
- Safe passages/routes
- Improved sidewalk paving
- Consideration for winter activities, particularly a sledding hill
- Dog park
- Skillbuilding and educational programming
- Native plants
- Increased mowing (by City or residents supported by a stipend)

Figure 54. Focus Group: Feedback Coding Diagram

05 RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the iterative processes of site analysis, case studies, community engagement, and literature review, we have determined four primary goals for adapting vacant land in the G7 Planning Area:

Goal #1: Healthy, Thriving Neighborhoods
Goal #2: Safe and Activated Open Space
Goal #3: Sustainable and Productive Landscapes
Goal #4: Resilient and Empowered Communities

Each of these goals is accompanied by a number of recommendations that highlight a variety of strategies for adapting vacant land into a community and environmental asset in the G7 Planning Area, summarized in the Gratiot/7 Mile Vacant Land Adaptation Framework (Figure 55, pp. 74-75).

What follows is an in-depth exploration of these recommendations and strategies, providing insight into the associated benefits and challenges. Each of the four goals is paired with an illustration to express a vision for how they can be implemented in the G7 Planning Area (Figures 56, 57, 58). These illustrations are not intended to express precise locations or designs, but rather are adaptable to the conditions and needs of a diversity of sites. The aim is for these recommendations to provide the G7 Planning Team with a platform through which to develop more conclusive, site-based solutions through further community engagement, site planning, and design. Implemented together, these recommendations provide a holistic vision for safe, healthy, and sustainable landscapes that are collectively fostered by an engaged and active community.

GRATIOT/7 MILE VACANT LAND ADAPTATION FRAMEWORK

GOAL 1
HEALTHY & THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

PROMOTING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

1a. Promote Active Mobility
- Establish a continuous, well-maintained pedestrian and bicycle network
- Repair and maintain existing sidewalks
- Connect pathways to parks, public transit, and commercial areas
- Create mid-block pathways to reduce block length

1b. Provide Space for Recreation and Play
- Install new playgrounds and sports fields in areas that lack access
- Enhance diversity of recreational amenities

1c. Craft Restorative Landscapes
- Provide natural open space with paths and seating
- Enhance visual access to trees, woodlands, flowers, and open water
- Provide opportunities for nature-based activities

1d. Provide Equal Access to Public Open Space
- Increase the amount of public open space
- Distribute parks and amenities for equal access
- Provide a new public park in the western portion of Mapleridge

GOAL 2
SAFE & ACTIVATED OPEN SPACE

DESIGNING FOR VISIBILITY, PRESENCE, AND CARE

2a. Remediate Blight
- Renovate salvageable vacant structures
- Demolish unsalvageable vacant structures
- Recycle and reuse materials from demolitions
- Design and activate open space to prevent dumping

2b. Promote Eyes On the Space
- Aggregate a diversity of land uses to increase traffic in public spaces
- Locate new public spaces near clusters of existing, occupied housing
- Program public space beyond implementation
- Promote activity throughout the day and through various seasons

2c. Light Streetscapes, Pathways, and Public Spaces
- Provide lighting in all new public spaces and pathways
- Enhance lighting throughout, prioritizing pathways and intersections
- Design lighting to maximize safety and limit energy costs

2d. Design Plantings to Enhance Visibility and Safety
- Engage residents in the selection and design of plantings
- Plant trees with tall canopies
- Remove or prune lower-growing trees and shrubs
- Limit view-obstructing vegetation near streetscapes and pathways
- Design shrub and perennial plantings in open arrangements

2e. Convey the Message of Care
- Design and maintain landscapes for neatness and order
- Install gardens and landscaping along pathways and public spaces
- Establish visible edges between types of vegetation
- Mow the edges of naturalized areas
- Install signage as a cue to care

GOAL 3
SUSTAINABLE & PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES

ENHANCING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

3a. Promote Food Production and Security
- Create community gardens for residents to grow food
- Integrate farmsteads into existing neighborhoods
- Provide platforms for local growers to sell their crops
- Establish programs for agricultural training and education

3b. Explore Opportunities for the Production of Renewable Energy
- Create policies to support solar energy production
- Incorporate solar-powered amenities
- Implement pilot projects in biomass production

3c. Implement Green Stormwater Management
- Install rain gardens on new and existing public space
- Investigate opportunities for larger stormwater management
- Design GSI with open views and defined boundaries
- Establish programs and funding to maintain GSI

3d. Establish Multi-functional Natural Greenspaces
- Preserve and enhance existing canopy
- Create pollinator habitat
- Select plant species for provision of ecosystem services and attractiveness
- Pair natural open space with education and recreation

GOAL 4
RESILIENT & EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

4a. Connect Community Assets
- Build lasting relationships with a diversity of stakeholders
- Empower residents to design and implement neighborhood improvements
- Identify, conserve, and sustainably employ natural resources for community benefit

4b. Employ Vacant Land As a Platform For Education and Skill Building
- Partner with community organizations to develop long-term educational and skill building programs
- Provide agricultural job training and skill building
- Train and employ residents in housing deconstruction and rehabilitation
- Link greening efforts to environmental education

4c. Develop Strategies For Community-based Landscape Management
- Expand opportunities for residents to acquire vacant lots
- Provide stipends for the maintenance of municipally-owned vacant lots
- Support new and existing community gardening efforts
- Engage residents in the management of public open space

Figure 55. Gratiot/7 Mile Vacant Land Adaptation Framework

GOAL 1:
HEALTHY AND THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

PROMOTING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

- **Promote Active Mobility**
- **Provide Space for Recreation and Play**
- **Craft Restorative Landscapes**
- **Provide Equal Access to Public Open Space**

In response to the increased recognition that urban design and policy have implications for the health and well-being of urban residents, there has emerged a call for collaboration at the intersections of public health, planning, and urban design (Badland & Schofield, 2005). The World Health Organization is leading this call by recommending that health and health equity be placed at the forefront of city governance and planning (Giles-Corti et al., 2016). The City of Detroit's Office of Sustainability has responded to this call in its Sustainability Action Agenda (SAA), by establishing "healthy and thriving people" as an essential goal of achieving a sustainable Detroit (City of Detroit, 2019a). The SAA highlights actions to achieve this goal, including: improving access to quality food, green spaces, and recreation opportunities; improving air quality and reducing pollution; and providing equitable access to economic opportunity (City of Detroit, 2019a).

Landscape design and planning can be employed to promote human well-being by crafting environments that support "physical and mental health, and social and cultural vibrancy" (Jackson, 2003, p191). The recommendations in this section highlight pathways toward achieving healthier and more environmentally just neighborhoods in the G7 Planning Area.

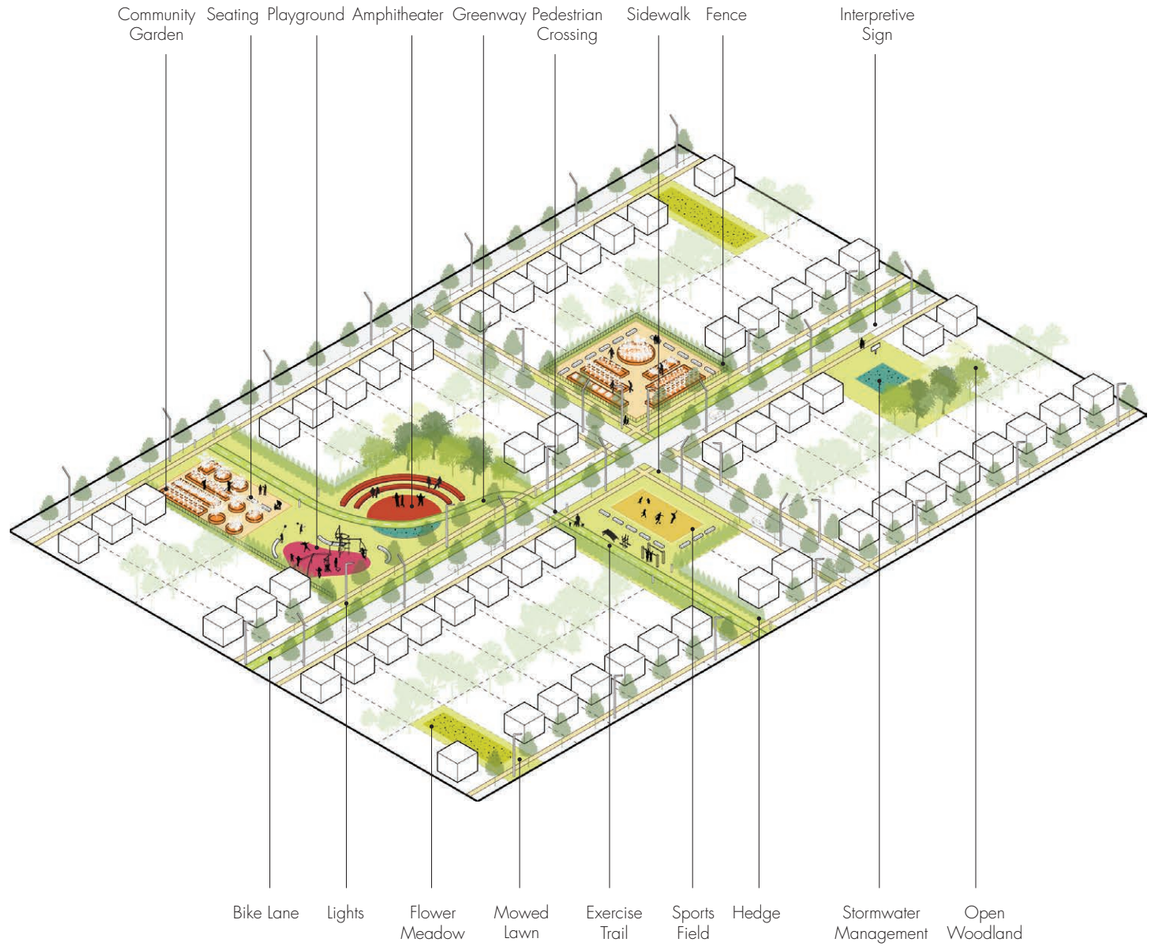


Figure 56. Recommendations: Healthy, Thriving Neighborhoods

Recommendations:

1a. Promote active mobility

Research has shown that active modes of transportation, such as walking and cycling, have positive impacts on human health and well-being, with local streets serving as the "most common place for engaging in physical activity" (Badland & Schofield, 2005, 178). Research has shown that perceptions of safety lead to increased rates of walking and cycling, particularly for women and children (Giles-Corti et al., 2016). More specifically, the provision of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, such as sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, and bicycle routes, results in increased rates of active transit (Badland & Schofield, 2005). This relationship has been confirmed in Detroit's low-density and low-income neighborhoods, where a study found that walking is more likely in neighborhoods with well-connected streets and pedestrian routes (Wineman et al. 2014). Additionally, the convenience of active transportation is enhanced by ensuring that pathways are free of obstacles, forming a "continuous and integrated network that allows linkages between destinations, public transport, shops and parks" (Pikora et al., 2003).

During the focus group meeting, residents expressed that perceptions of safety and poor access to pedestrian infrastructure limit the desire of residents to walk in their neighborhoods. Residents expressed particular concern at the lack of sidewalks and the poor condition of existing sidewalks, thereby limiting active mobility. Additionally, the G7 Planning Area is characterized by "superblocks" that are larger than typical city blocks and lack pedestrian routes. For instance, the area just northeast of Gratiot and 7 Mile has blocks as long as 2,000 feet. Reducing the length of blocks through the addition of mid-block pedestrian and cycling routes can improve the convenience of active mobility in these areas (Ewing, 1999).

Strategies

- Establish a continuous, well-maintained pedestrian and bicycle network
- Repair and maintain existing sidewalks
- Connect pathways to parks, public transit, and commercial areas
- Create mid-block pathways to reduce block length

1b. Provide space for recreation and play

Providing safe spaces for children to play leads to an increase in children's physical activity (Farley et al.,2007). While there are some existing playgrounds and sports fields within the G7 Planning Area (Figure 11, p. 19), residents have expressed desire for better access to a greater variety of such amenities. Places to play and exercise were identified as top priorities through the Vacant Land Use Survey. Focus group participants also noted the abundance of children in their neighborhoods and the need for additional playgrounds closer to their homes.

Strategies

- Install new playgrounds and sports fields in areas that lack access
- Enhance diversity of recreational amenities, including but not limited to:
    - exercise equipment and trails
    - community gardens
    - amphitheater
    - winter activities
    - sledding hill

1c. Craft restorative landscapes

Urban green spaces provide people with mental restoration and contribute to improved air quality (Nowak et al., 2014). Research shows that immersion in urban green spaces can relieve stress (Stigsdotter, 2005). Restorative potential of landscapes increase with "the number of trees and presence of flowers or water" (Wang et al., 2019). In addition, simply viewing urban forests has been shown to improve mental health (Tsunetsugu et al., 2013). Preferred characteristics of urban green spaces include natural looking vegetation, a diversity of species, the opportunity for activities, and a sense of entering another space (Stigsdotter, 2005).

While places to enjoy nature were not ranked as a top priority in the Vacant Land Use Survey, a majority of respondents expressed that such places would be beneficial to their neighborhoods.

Strategies

- Provide natural open space with paths and seating
- Enhance visual access to trees, woodlands, flowers, and open water
- Provide opportunities for nature-based activities, including but not limited to:
    - Nature trails
    - Natural play spaces
    - Community gardens

1d. Provide equal access to public open space

As improvements to public open space are made, it is essential to ensure that residents have equal access to these. Research has shown that access to parks results in increased physical activity, for instance youth with access to parks with playgrounds have healthier weights (Rigolon, 2016). Communities of lower socioeconomic status and minority populations tend to have poorer access to safe, well-maintained open space with amenities (Rigolon, 2016).

Significant portions of the G7 Planning Area, particularly in the southwest quadrant of the site, lack sufficient access to public open space (Figure 11, p. 19). Focus group participants expressed that, due to this lack of access, residents have to leave their neighborhoods, and even the city, to access quality open space and recreation. Through the mapping activity, the western portion of Mapleridge emerged as a priority for the addition of new public open space and recreation. As improvements are implemented in the G7 Planning Area, efforts must be made to ensure that all residents have open space within walking distance of their homes.

Strategies

- Increase the amount of public open space
- Distribute parks and amenities for equal access
- Provide a new public park in the western portion of Mapleridge

GOAL 2:
SAFE AND ACTIVATED OPEN SPACE

Designing for Visibility, Presence, and Care

Community engagement has revealed that safety is a significant concern for G7 residents, who express that landscapes should be designed to promote safety and visibility in their neighborhoods. Crime is not uncommon in the area, with residents reporting both violent and nonviolent crimes, including drug use, drug dealing, prostitution, assault, robbery, and vandalism. The creation of safe spaces is essential to the livability of urban environments, with safety serving as a key determinant of human health and well-lbeing (Lorenc et al., 2012). Research has shown that perceptions of safety impact the psychological development of children and youth, with fear of crime being linked to low levels of physical and mental health (Zuberi, 2018). Perceptions of safety also impact the level of physical activity among older adults, as people are less likely to be active in spaces where they feel unsafe (Tucker-Seeley et al., 2009).

The form and quality of physical environments have a significant impact on crime rates and perceptions of safety (Lorenc et al., 2012; Nassauer, 2011). Therefore, physical improvements to neighborhoods have the potential to prevent crime and promote human safety and health (Garvin et al., 2013). The greening of vacant land, then, can serve as an essential strategy for the creation of safe environments. Greening programs in Philadelphia have been linked to reductions in crime and improved health through stress reduction and increases in physical activity (Kondo et al., 2015). In particular, well-cared-for landscapes that aid visibility discourage crime, improve perceptions of safety, and enhance the social character of neighborhoods (Nassauer & Raskin, 2014; Troy et al., 2016).

Vacant land adaptation in G7 should strive to create environments that both reduce crime and enhance perceptions of safety, thereby encouraging social interaction and physical activity. The following recommendations lend guidance on how to thoughtfully design, activate, and maintain open space to create safer, more social neighborhoods.

- **Remediate Blight**
- **Promote Eyes On the Space**
- **Light Streetscapes, Pathways, and Public Spaces**
- **Design Plantings to Enhance Visibility and Safety**
- **Convey the Message of Care**

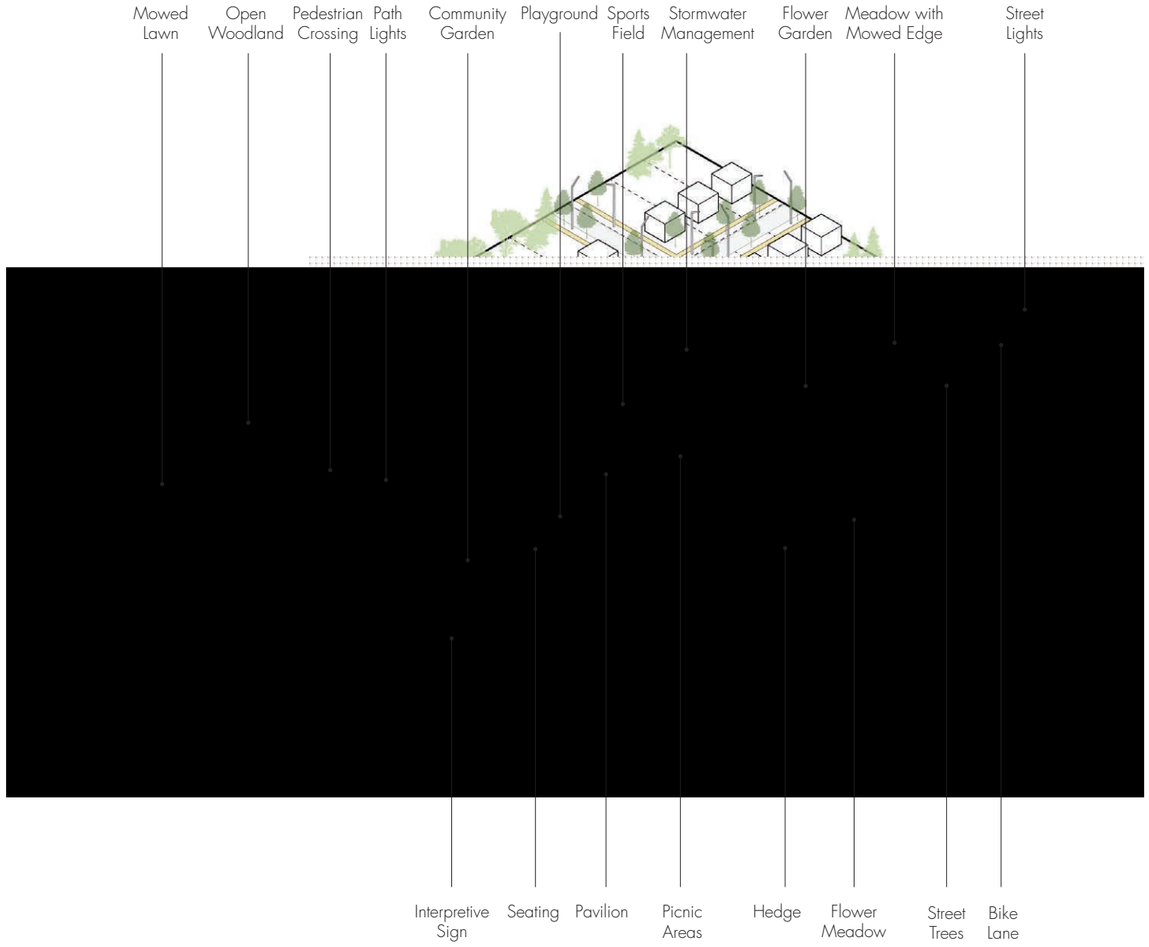


Figure 57. Recommendations: Safe and Activated Open Space

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TYPOLOGY IMAGES

Community Garden
a. Flowers
https://www.fpconservatory.org/explore/gardens-collections/community-garden-campus/
b. Seating
http://green-change.com/2011/11/17/kiama-primary-school-permaculture-garden-tour/
c. Food-growing
Keep Growing Detroit provided image
d. Community Art
https://www.modeldmedia.com/features/yorkshire-woods-primus-060918.aspx
e. Hard Surfaces
http://landezine.com/index.php/2019/04/green-classroom-at-galilei-primary-school-berlin-by-gruppe-f/
f. Beekeeping
http://vancouverhoneybees.com/school-programs/

Playground
a. Traditional
https://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/parks-facilities/houston-jessie-ma-park
b. Natural
https://myk-d.com/projects/chicago-botanic-garden/
c. Semi-natural
https://www.earthscapeplay.com/project/ella-fitzgerald-park-piano-tower/
d. Grass Mounds
SLA provided image
e. Artificial Mounds
SLA provided image
f. Water Play
https://www.littleguidedetroit.com/guide-to-metro-detroit-splash-parks/

Sports/Play
a. Sports Field
https://www.flickr.com/photos/nycwater/albums/72157665273772525/page1
b. Basketball Court
https://archinect.com/news/article/150154228/landscape-architects-spackman-mossop-michaels-turn-vacant-detroit-parking-lots-into-thriving-parks
c. Exercise Trail
SLA provided image
d. Outdoor Exercise Equipment
https://gfoutdoorfitness.com/trail-sample-package-1/
e. Outdoor Game Area
https://www.interiorzine.com/2016/02/22/temporary-park-on-sydneys-waterfront-by-aspect-studios/
f. Skate Park
https://www.njgrind.com/single-post/2018/05/17/Bayville–SkatePark

Farmstead
a. Large Fruit and Vegetable Farm
https://detroit.curbed.com/2016/12/1/13807672/urban-agrihood-detroit-mufi
b. Small Fruit and Vegetable Farm
Keep Growing Detroit provided image
c. Flower Farm
https://blog.mayesh.com/interview-sarah-pappas-of-fresh-cut-detroit
d. Orchard
SLA provided image
e. Hoop House
SLA provided image
f. Beekeeping
https://msuriseblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/18/farming-in-detroit-a-photo-exploration/

Natural Open Space
a. Woodland
https://www.dbusiness.com/business-features/urban-nutrient/
b. Mowed Lawn
https://twitter.com/hashtag/wursterpark
c. Meadow
https://xerces.org/blog/small-farms-big-impact-pollinator-habitat-in-midwest
d. Meadow with Pathways
SLA provided image
e. Mowed Lawn and Meadow Edge
https://archleague.org/article/temporary-landscape-and-urban-meadow/

Social Gathering Space
a. Picnic/Grill Area
https://www.locoscout.com/location_detail.php?location_id=604&print=true
b. Paved Seating Area
https://www.experiencegr.com/blog/post/picnic-places/
c1. Amphitheater/Event Space 1
http://www.siteworks-studio.com/manassas-park/0m0br4p14vqtv8vdnuu1v5v0t56t1z
c2. Amphitheater/Event Space 2
http://www.play-scapes.com/play-design/natural-playgrounds/garden-city-park-richmond-canada-space-2place-2008/
d1. Shade Structure 1
https://worldlandscapearchitect.com/redfern-park-creating-playground-experience/#.XjwxTMhKhPY
d2. Shade Structure 2
SLA provided image

Stormwater Management

a. Temporary Stormwater Pond
https://www.lenexa.com/government/departments___divisions/rain_to_recreation/learn_more/green_infrastructure

b. Stormwater Pond
http://www.dupagerivers.org/author/admin/page/3/

c. Stormwater Pond with Natural Edge
SLA provided image

d. Rain Garden
https://medium.com/ensia/as-floods-increase-cities-like-detroit-are-looking-to-green-stormwater-infrastructure-a1c-290ca4588

e. Rain Garden with Trees
SLA provided image

f. Residential Scale Rain Garden
https://clevelandlandscapegarden.com/where-is-your-rainwater-going/