

REINVENTING

Detroit's Lower Eastside

A Summary Report of the Lower Eastside Action Plan— Phase I

January 2012



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introduction

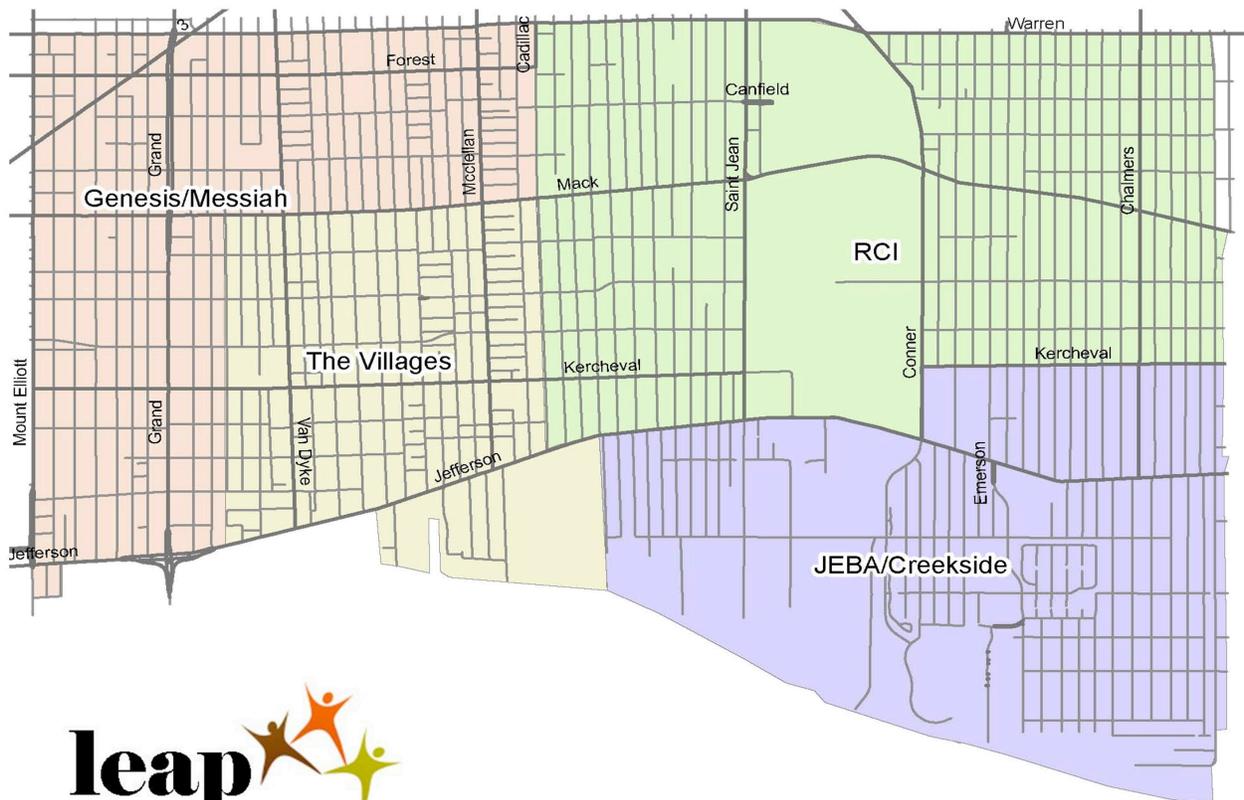
The Lower Eastside Action Plan, more commonly referred to as LEAP, began in the fall of 2009 with conversations among community development organizations serving Detroit's southeastern riverfront neighborhoods. Increasing economic challenges, declining population and sprawling acres of vacant land compelled these agencies to begin thinking critically and collaboratively on ways to begin addressing the crises facing the community they served.

According to the 2010 Census, the city of Detroit is roughly 139 square miles and has a population of 713,777. The Phase I LEAP area, bound by East Warren Avenue to the north, Alter Road to the east, the Detroit River to the south and Mount Elliott Street to the west, is roughly 10.5 square miles and has a population of 37,671, down 44% from the 2000 census. In the LEAP target community, there are over 10,000 vacant lots and structures, with over 50% being publicly owned. While this is a significant factor indicating alarming disinvestment in the area, it presents a unique opportunity to address a diverse range of issues facing the city and especially the lower eastside. With the largest amount of contiguous vacant open space in the city, active pockets of dense residential neighborhoods and close proximity to the Detroit River, the lower eastside is poised to reinvent how neighborhoods look, function and thrive.

LEAP has and continues to engage stakeholders in a process to address the growing amount of vacant land and property that blights lower eastside communities, fuels disinvestment and reduces the overall quality of life on the lower eastside. Based on the premise that significant population increases are unlikely, LEAP has worked toward developing short, mid- and long-term strategies to reverse the negative impacts within the community and stabilize active residential and commercial districts.

To deal realistically with these challenges, several eastside community development & service organizations partnered, and with the help of technical advisers and input of residents and business owners, worked together with the support of local government to develop a 10-year long-term vision and identify short-term development projects and programming to begin moving the community toward its planned future direction. Additionally, LEAP identified policy adjustments that support its plans and provide a model to address similar issues citywide.

The LEAP process addressed a broad range of topics affecting quality of life. This summary report focuses on land use, development and policy issues to which lower eastside community stakeholders and the City of Detroit can have a direct and immediate impact.



Project Target Area

Source: Community Legal Resources (CLR), LEAP Phase I Target Area/Engagement Zone Boundaries

part one | **the plan**

background

For years, as Detroit's population slid downward, leaving miles upon miles of barren land and dilapidated, vacant structures, the predominant citizen call has been for more housing.

If we build more houses, particularly affordable ones, people will come. And stay.

That was the prevailing wisdom.

But it didn't make sense, as was recently corroborated by bracing 2010 Census data: Detroit, once one of the nation's most populous cities, now has roughly 700,000 residents. The 25 percent plummet marks the largest percentage loss for any American city with more than 100,000 residents over the last decade.

While sobering, the statistics were not exactly shocking, either to the city's residents or to Detroit officials, which had begun plans to bring the city's landscape more in line with the changed demographic through its Detroit Works Project.

Likely least surprised were inhabitants of Detroit's eastside, which has more empty lots, businesses and houses than any other part of the city.

Clearly, the market will not bear an influx of new housing. This is evidenced by the growing number of new infill housing peppering neighborhoods that now stand vacant, vandalized and scrapped of salvageable construction materials.

So if building new houses is not the answer, what to do with all the empty spaces?

Two years ago, rather than wait for relief through larger citywide restructuring plans, a group of individuals and community organizations opted for an exercise of self-determination. Creating a steering committee to oversee the process, organize the project structure, coordinate outreach and designate working subgroups, these community leaders were ready to begin what was to become the Lower Eastside Action Plan.

piloting the CDAD strategic framework

LEAP leaders were introduced to the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Framework, produced by Detroit's community development trade organization, the Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD), which saw the need for a bold new vision for Detroit's neighborhoods. Both a planning process and set of neighborhood typologies, the CDAD Strategic Framework is a tool to help residents envision their neighborhoods' futures, describe that vision and achieve it.

As CDAD was looking for a neighborhood in which to test the Strategic Framework, the LEAP target area proved a viable option as conditions for each of the typologies were present in the current landscape. Paired with the commitment of LEAP leadership to create an authentic engagement process, where community input was not just collected, but valued and acted upon, piloting the CDAD Strategic Framework presented a unique opportunity. The anticipated outcome of this collaboration was to demonstrate how what LEAP does with the CDAD Strategic Framework tool can be replicated in other Detroit communities.

In addition to acknowledging the long-term reality of population loss, CDAD, comprised of community development organizations (CDOs) and professionals, posits that current conditions in Detroit's neighborhoods are socially, economically, and environmentally unsustainable. Created in 1995 to give voice to CDOs, CDAD, in early 2009, convened a Futures Task Force out of a conviction that Detroit required a maverick-like new vision for its neighborhoods. To wit, it believes that Detroit must reinvent itself.

Along with an array of public and private agencies and institutions, CDAD created a consensus process to create neighborhood revitalization recommendations. These recommendations suggest a framework for a collaborative focus on revitalizing Detroit's neighborhoods, what strategies would be appropriate, and what role CDOs should play in their implementation.

CDAD reasons that current conditions analysis, i.e. mapping data indicating neighborhood changes, is a vital tool for determining how to effectively invest in neighborhoods. Parts of neighborhoods that have experienced disinvestment for years, and perhaps even decades, require significantly greater investment to restore them to their previous conditions. Other neighborhood segments that have remained largely intact, either through the efforts of private, governmental or nonprofit sectors, or all three, require relatively little investment to stabilize or even improve their condition. Basing neighborhood investment decisions on this cost-effective approach poses a major shift in Detroit's resource allocation policies.

CDAD's work looks not just at current conditions, but provides a set of neighborhood typologies to help determine an appropriate, sustainable and realistic future direction for each city area. The Strategic Framework describes a vision for every city land use type, including residential, commercial and industrial. It adds a fourth major category, Greenscapes, to encompass typologies for low- and no-density areas of the city that, according to indicators and practical knowledge, should be reinvented for different purposes.

By looking at current conditions for any given neighborhood using a data approach, everyone -- residents and businesses, their representative CDOs, funders, developers, and all government levels -- can make collaborative choices about the future direction of any given area. These same stakeholders can then decide, together, the most cost-effective and impactful allocation of resources.

This approach is a huge departure from the way Detroit and other municipalities operate, that is, to decide approaches and then offer them up for community input. By contrast, LEAP, using the Strategic Framework, is iterative and resident-driven. Residents and other stakeholders are involved in every step of the process, thereby creating community consensus and commitment to its outcomes.

The Strategic Framework outlines a set of suggested strategies to realize future directions. These strategies would be implemented by the various stakeholders: local government, residents and block clubs and associations, foundations, intermediaries and CDOs. Suggested CDO roles are highlighted; CDAD believes that, realistically, every area of the city must be addressed at the right time through the right intervention, even if that means the clearance of buildings and population. The key to successful intervention is the level to which all stakeholders are able to weigh in on these critical decisions.

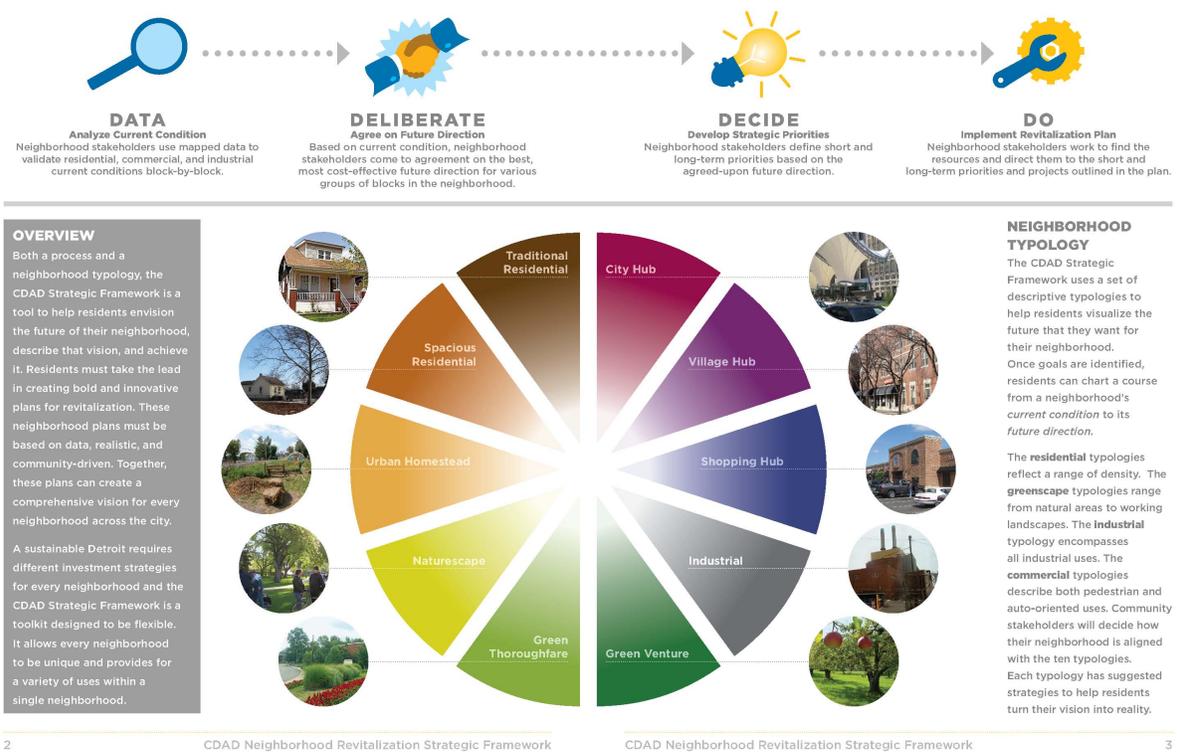
The Strategic Framework, which is a neighborhood-planning tool, is also meant to be flexible; priorities and plans are updated regularly as neighborhoods change.

Specifically, CDAD:

- Uses **DATA** to analyze current conditions. Neighborhood stakeholders use mapped and statistical data to validate existing residential, commercial and industrial conditions block by block;
- Engages stakeholders to **DELIBERATE**. Based on current conditions, neighborhood stakeholders strive for consensus on the best, most cost-effective and sensible future direction for various groups of neighborhood blocks;
- Calls on stakeholders to **DECIDE**. Stakeholders should include everyone from governing officials to grassroots organizations and local residents and businesses to work together to define short- and long-term priorities based on the agreed-upon future direction;

- Finally, stakeholders must **DO**, i.e. work to find the necessary resources (human, financial and political) and direct them to the implementation of the plan's short- and long-term priorities and projects.

Further, the Strategic Framework uses a set of descriptive typologies to help residents visualize the future that they want for their neighborhood. Once goals are identified, residents can chart a course from a neighborhood's current condition to its future direction.



Source: Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD)

the expert next door

Before LEAP began the processes outlined by the CDAD Strategic Framework, community partners were charged with engaging a substantial number of community members.

Through the development of the Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), a 125-member body comprised of community leaders, residents, business owners, LEAP endeavored to engage a diverse group of people to participate in the creation of its short, mid- and long-term strategies for the lower eastside. These “ambassadors” would also serve to bring awareness to and educate their neighbors that were not at the table to work to incorporate as much input as possible so that decisions were not made in a vacuum.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) included a diverse body of residents from varied economic, social, racial, age and geographic backgrounds. From September 2010 through October 2011, the SAG participated in nine workshops to help develop future directions for the lower eastside. Before any technical deliberation began, community stakeholders were given the opportunity to share their “vision” for the lower eastside through a series of open forum and “re-imagining” sessions to give LEAP leaders a sense of how the community saw itself and its future. Residents conducted a brief “perception” survey to gauge the attitudes of community members about issues related to the reuse of vacant land, repurposing of vacant structures, relocation and stabilization of neighborhoods. With over 4000 responses collected by lower eastside resident surveyors, LEAP was able to build on the survey data to begin the discussions with the SAG on what to do next.

Community members came to the table with many questions, concerns and ideas. The LEAP process not only allowed for this exchange, but promoted it as a means to create the most inclusive plan possible. Local coffee hours, porch chats, kiosks at local events, engagement of block clubs and social media were some of the mediums used by LEAP to bring both awareness and garner input from lower eastside stakeholders. Through a range of community outreach strategies, LEAP was able to galvanize community members in its iterative planning process and work towards sensible solutions for the lower eastside. The SAG sustained participation throughout the process and grew each meeting to a group of over 150 residents.

While working to engage community members, the LEAP steering committee also enlisted the help of technical advisers from several local firms to establish a “Technical Expertise Team”. This team of experts helped furnish, develop, collect, analyze and interpret data deemed useful for the creation of LEAP’s Phase I plan. Community members participated on the technical team, creating a balance of real-world and professional expertise.

Technical advisers worked tirelessly with the LEAP steering committee to make sure data was user-friendly and able to be understood by everyday people. Working to translate common technical terms into language that was not offensive, dismissive or overly complicated helped to tremendously abbreviate the learning curve for community members. By the conclusion of LEAP community meetings, participants were often well-versed in the meaning and intent of planning terms and themes used in the CDAD Strategic Framework.

By early 2011, the SAG was fully engaged in the community-based research component of the process. With survey data collected and analyzed, SAG members began poring over technical information that would lead to the creation of future directions. Data Driven Detroit led resident surveyors through a commercial corridor survey, which inventoried the condition of each lot and structure along each the area’s thoroughfares. Joan Nassauer of the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment led third-year graduate students in a studio that proposed design interventions for a focal study area of 20 blocks (roughly 180 acres) on Detroit's lower eastside. The focal study area encompassed the Conner Creek Chrysler plant, Southeastern High School, Detroit Enterprise Charter School, two different commercial districts and a segment of the Conner Creek Greenway. The results were plausible design scenarios addressing ecological and property management dynamics of urban landscape recovery and regeneration, that helped community members envision innovative and creative uses for vacant land.



Source: Joan Nassauer, University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment, Metro Design Studio

2010

After months of deliberation, data review and education, LEAP moved to begin finalizing its land use plans. By late spring 2011, the LEAP process had amassed a wealth of public input and had begun to develop a number of land use and project ideas. The task for the steering committee became how to achieve integration of community input with the collected data for the purpose of creating sustainable future directions.

using suitability analyses to determine future directions

Determining viable Future Directions Typologies for land areas in Phase I of LEAP was a back-and-forth process that combined the insights and inputs of the community with technical analysis of mapped information. This combination led to both a community-driven and data-driven set of land use recommendations that is supported by the community and backed by thorough analysis.

The following describes the process used in developing the final recommendations map for Future Direction Typologies.

Community Input

The Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) participated in a series of five mapping workshops to assign plausible and desired Future Directions Typologies across the LEAP area.

SAG members began these sessions by reviewing and verifying mapped existing conditions indicators. These existing conditions indicators, created by Data Driven Detroit (D3), indicated how similar a particular area is in its current state to the Future Directions Typologies. This information was important for helping residents better understand what might be possible in the future based on realistic constraints. For example, areas with the highest vacancy would be most similar to Naturescapes or Urban Homestead typologies. Implementing Traditional Residential in these areas as a Future Directions Typology may require significant effort and investment that might be better spent elsewhere. The existing conditions indicator provided a reality check for community members to discuss feasible and realistic options.

In subsequent SAG meetings, SAG members assigned Future Directions Typologies to each census block across the LEAP area by engagement zone. In some cases, SAG members recommended multiple typologies. Following SAG meetings, the LEAP Steering Committee reviewed the maps and discussed any critical refinements or adjustments to the community maps. These refinements were brought back to the community members for consideration and verification.

A final map of SAG recommendations with Steering Committee approval was developed and labeled as the “June 30, 2011 SAG Recommendations.”

Suitability Analysis

Concurrent with SAG's mapping workshops, the LEAP technical team conducted an in-depth analysis of map data (Geographic Information System Data) to provide additional information on the suitability of different Future Directions Typologies across the LEAP area.

JJR worked with graduate students from the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment to conduct suitability mapping for the LEAP area. The UM research focused on the following topics:

- **Green Venture Zone** suitability, using the requirements for aquaponic industries and fuel pellet production as a prototypical green venture land use.
- **Spacious Residential** and **Urban Homestead** suitability, based on the level of "Blotting" (see below) occurring in areas of the LEAP district.
- **Naturescape** suitability based on potential for habitat restoration.
- Suitability for locating major stormwater management facilities.
- Park accessibility analysis, highlighting areas with relatively higher residents populations but a lack of adequate access to recreational and public space.

Three of these analyses (Green Venture Zone, Spacious Residential/Urban Homestead, and Naturescape), were advanced further by JJR and combined to provide a set of technical Future Direction recommendations. The following sections summarize the work on these analyses.

Green Venture Zone Suitability

The suitability of Green Venture Zones in the LEAP area was based on the assumption that Green Venture Zones are best suited to locations where existing buildings and infrastructure can support Green Venture Zone activities while minimizing potential impacts to residential areas (i.e. heavy traffic, noise, smell). The suitability analysis used the "weighting and rating" process combine individual criteria for suitable locations into a composite suitability score for Green Venture Zones. The following criteria were used:

- *The location and density of vacant industrial buildings.* The suitability of an area was determined by totaling the abundance of vacant industrial within a 330-foot distance of regular points across the LEAP area.
- *The location and density of vacant commercial buildings.* The suitability of an area was determined by totaling the abundance of vacant commercial within a 330-foot distance of regular points across the LEAP area.
- *The location and density of closed school buildings.* The suitability of an area was determined by totaling the abundance of closed school buildings within a 330-foot distance of regular points across the LEAP area.
- *The capacity and proximity of primary roads.* The largest primary roads (i.e. East Jefferson, Gratiot) were weighted more heavily than smaller primary roads (i.e. Kercheval, McClellan). Suitability of an area was determined by totaling the abundance of primary roads within a 660-foot distance of regular points across the LEAP area, adjusted based on the size of the roadway.

All four data layers were normalized (so the suitability scores range from 0 to 100) and then combined equally into a single suitability score for each census block. High, moderate, and low suitability categories were mapped. High suitability included census blocks with a score over 65%, moderate locations from 40% to 65%, low suitability from 25% to 40%, and not suitable below 25%.

Naturescape Suitability

The suitability of potential Naturescapes was based on the following assumptions: (1) Larger contiguous areas of vacant land provide the best opportunity for Naturescapes with genuine ecological value; (2) Historic stream corridors indicate depressed areas that may be more suitable for Naturescape and stormwater projects; (3) Major roadways can disturb and fragment habitat areas. As with Green Venture Zones, the suitability of Naturescapes was based on a weighting and rating scheme incorporating the following criteria:

1. *Density of vacant property.* The suitability of an area was determined by totaling the abundance of vacant land with a ¼-mile distance of regular points across the LEAP area.

2. *Density and proximity to major roadways.* This factor reduced suitability, and is based on the abundance of roads within a ¼-mile distance of regular points across the LEAP area.
3. *Proximity to historic stream corridors.* Based on the abundance of stream area within a ¼-mile distance of regular points across the LEAP area.

These three factors were normalized and converted into a composite suitability score based on equal weighting (33%) for all three factors. The average score within each census block was determined and high, moderate, and low suitability was determined. High suitability included census blocks with a score over 85%, moderate locations from 70% to 85%, low suitability from 55% to 70%, and not suitable below 55%.

Spacious Residential/Urban Homestead Suitability (Blotting Analysis)

A blot is more than a lot, less than a block. Blots occur where residents voluntarily maintain parcels adjacent to their primary property. In some cases, residents actually acquire ownership of these parcels, in other cases residents assume ownership even though they have not legally acquired the property. In both cases, blotting activity is indicative of community investment and stewardship, as it reflects locations where people are actively maintaining vacant property. Blotting activity is a useful indicator for LEAP in helping to decide whether a potential residential area may be viable from a Spacious Residential or Urban Homestead standpoint, or should transition to non-residential uses (such as Naturescapes).

The blotting analysis was conducted by first identifying adjacent residential parcels under the same or very similar ownership (where residents have legally acquired an adjacent parcel). These are called “de jure” blots. Next, an aerial photography and street level survey was used to identify parcels where residents appear to be maintaining adjacent vacant lands. These are called “de facto” blots.

The final step was calculating the percentage of area blotted within each census block. The results were again normalized and ranked according to high (over 50%), moderate (25-50%), low (10-25%) scores for blotting activity.

Integrating the Suitability Maps + SAG Maps

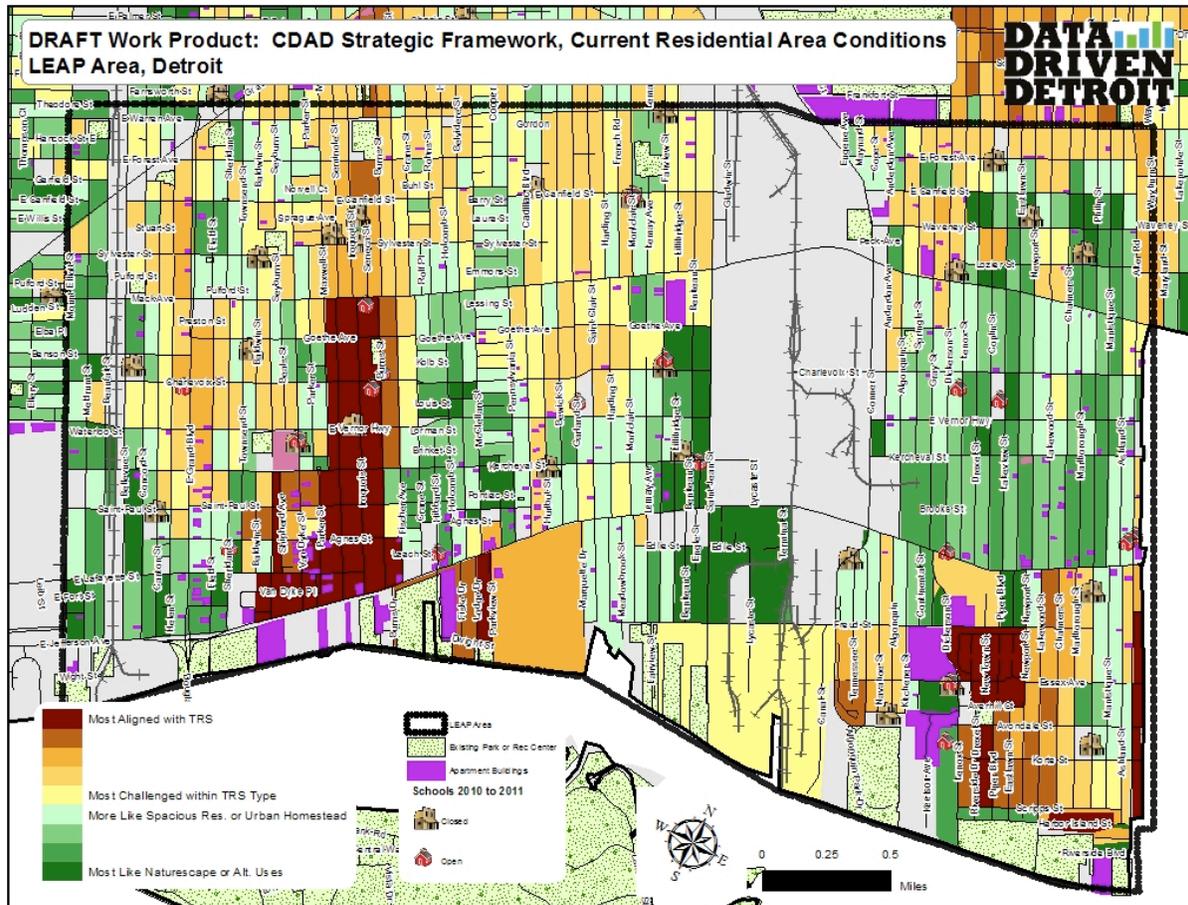
The three suitability analyses were combined into a single map at the census block level. This map identified high and low suitability scores for all three analyses (Green Venture, Naturescape, Blotting) in each census block and highlighted which suitability score was most suitable in a given census block. In a few instances, multiple land uses were equally suitable, and these locations were identified as well. This map became the "JJR Recommended Future Directions" for the LEAP area.

The next task required combining the recommendations from the community and those from the technical analysis to create a refined and balanced final set of Future Direction Typology recommendations. All census blocks where the Future Directions Typology differed between the "June 30, 2011 SAG Recommendations" and the JJR Recommendations were highlighted. These areas of conflict were listed in a data table that identified the conflicting SAG recommendation and the JJR recommendation. Through a series of SAG meetings and Steering Committee meetings, a decision was made on which recommendation was most appropriate to advance for each conflict given the interests of the community and the feasibility of implementation. In some cases, multiple and equally viable recommendations were proposed for a given area.

The full data table for the LEAP area identifies all census blocks across the LEAP area and lists each of the recommendations made census blocks over the life of the project. This data table provides a record of past and final decisions.

determining a future for every part of the lower eastside

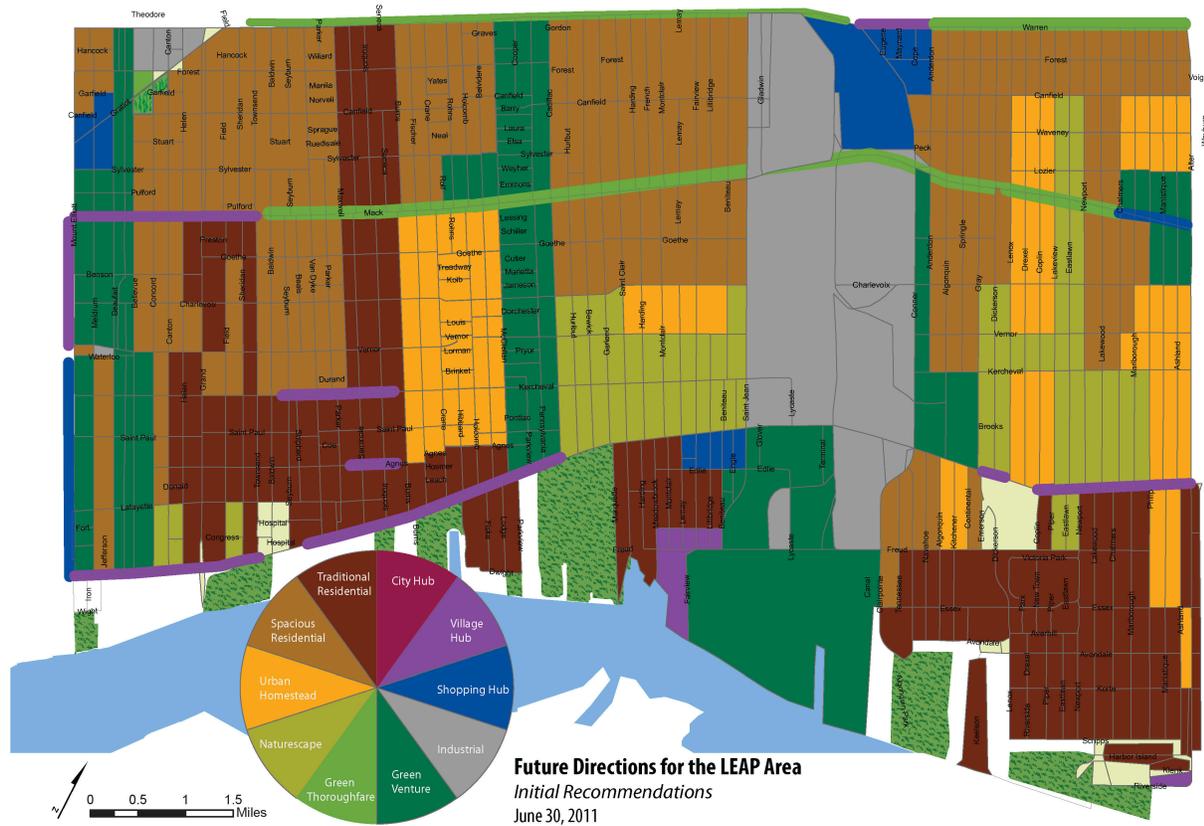
Data Driven Detroit created neighborhood typology indicators that helped LEAP stakeholders get a data-based picture of the obvious challenges that prompted this study. Reviewing the data layers of those composite maps was one of the initial tasks of LEAP participants. These maps posed a critical question: where are we now and where can we go from this point?



Source: Data Driven Detroit, Current Residential Area Conditions for the LEAP area

When participants reviewed these maps, it helped provide a more realistic picture of the immediate challenges as well as a basis for what strategies were needed to have the greatest impact. LEAP participants were also presented data on parallel projects, such as the East Jefferson Corridor Collaborative and GREEN Task Force Greenway plans so their decisions were made in consideration of these and other ongoing efforts.

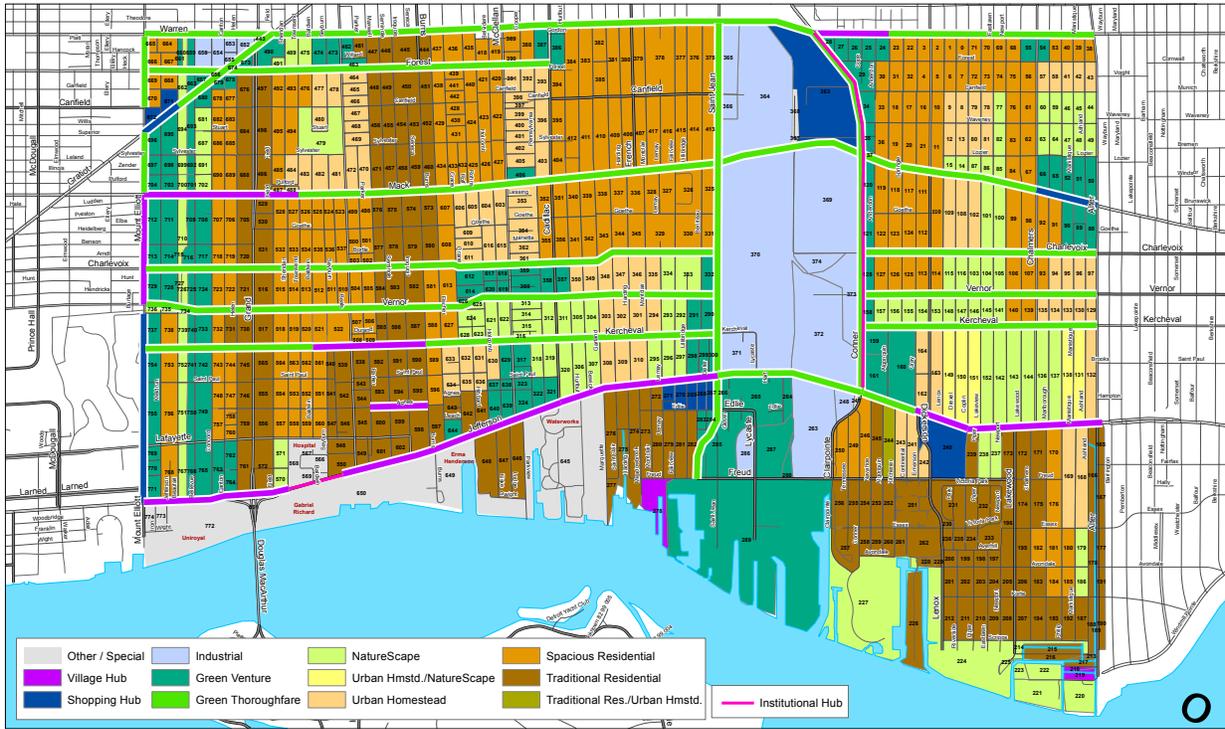
With support from the technical advisers and CDAD technical assistance, LEAP participants began the process of establishing future directions for each part of the target area. An initial draft was created and taken out to the community through intensive outreach to capture feedback on these resident-driven solutions.



Source: LEAP, Future Directions for the LEAP area, Initial Recommendations (June 2011)

Over a two-month period, SAG members and LEAP leaders talked at length with community members who were completely alien to the process to get their input on the initial recommendations. Explanations of the LEAP process and what the “colors” (typologies) meant precluded every conversation. Going door-to-door throughout the LEAP area, surveying at citywide festivals and events, setting up kiosks at Eastern Market, hosting smaller interactive sessions in many of the LEAP area neighborhoods, and residents hosting events in their homes were some of the tactics employed to both get the initial recommendations to the community and get their input on these resident-driven ideas. It was important that LEAP give residents the charge of collecting this data, to share and discuss the concepts they created “neighbor to neighbor”. Some surveys took up to one hour to complete, as residents were very inquisitive about the plan, its implications for them and what it would accomplish today, not just 10 years from now. The overwhelming amount of interest, some enthusiastic, some skeptical, further demonstrated the need for open dialogue on community planning initiatives. This second round of “surveying” on the initial recommendations brought new community members to SAG meetings looking to learn more about LEAP and weigh in on the directions for their neighborhoods.

LEAP continued to stretch its timeline to unhurriedly address issues emerging from this second round of surveying, new community input and evolving technical analysis that dictated a need to reevaluate some recommendations. Community members were led through a series of “reconciliation” activities to resolve conflicts with chosen directions and to evaluate alternative options that were more plausible given the current condition of the area. By October 2011, community members had validated its final set of recommendations.



leap Future Directions for the LEAP Area
 LOWER EASTSIDE ACTION PLAN Final Recommendations (Phase I)
 November 30, 2011

0 0.1250.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Map Prepared by: **JJR**

Source: LEAP, Future Directions for the LEAP area, Final Recommendations (November 2011)

part two | **the projects**

a plan of action

One of the deliverables of the Lower Eastside Action Plan was to identify actionable projects, i.e., short-term development, that could make immediate impacts on the lower eastside and support the future directions proposed for the LEAP area. In order to meet this goal, the LEAP steering committee created a working subgroup, the Opportunity Workgroup, that was comprised of executive leadership of each of the community partners. The Opportunity Workgroup recruited, researched and vetted economic development opportunities that were most closely aligned with the goals of LEAP and its proposed future directions and that, if implemented, would advance the goals of the plan.

The Opportunity Workgroup created a project assessment form, that was submitted for each proposed project. The workgroup reviewed these project assessments submitted by community groups, entrepreneurs and business owners from May 2011 through September 2011. During that time, the proposed projects were presented at SAG meetings to allow developers an opportunity to share information, field questions and take input from community stakeholders. SAG members devised additional evaluation criteria for the Opportunity Workgroup to weigh proposed projects. At the conclusion of this iterative process, the Opportunity Workgroup identified six short-term development projects that had received support from the SAG, were aligned with the proposed future directions and could be implemented within one to three years.

The CDAD Strategic Framework outlined implementation strategies for each typology, which included the role that residents, local agencies and government play in establishing future directions in the short-, mid- and long-term. However, more specific are the roles of neighborhood-based community development organizations, as the CDAD Strategic Framework suggests that these groups are uniquely positioned to address conditions in each neighborhood at the most appropriate time, with the most appropriate interventions and with the appropriate partnerships.

Project sponsors attended SAG meetings, presenting their project concepts for resident feedback. Residents were largely concerned with ensuring that the projects did not cause further disenfranchisement or displacement. LEAP worked to create an environment where residents and developers could interact and give residents space to learn about new and innovative opportunities that could potentially transform their neighborhoods in a positive way. Residents were able to inform the development of these projects by generating a list of concerns, to which the project sponsors responded. Based on feedback from the Stakeholder Advisory Group, the LEAP Opportunity Workgroup established criteria by which each potential project would be evaluated:

1. *Neighborhood Stabilization*
2. *Benefit to the Community*
3. *Economic Benefit*
4. *Environmental Impact*
5. *Benefit to the City*

Neighborhood Stabilization

Short-term interventions regarding neighborhood stabilization were top priority among residents. Projects were to demonstrate the quantity of vacant land and property to be repurposed. The visual evidence of increased foreclosure, depopulation and unemployment varies from neighborhood to neighborhood, being imperceptible in some and blatantly obvious in others. Some neighborhoods within the LEAP area have relatively higher concentrations of population and are enclaves of stable, vibrant neighborhoods with active resident associations and block clubs. Conversely, there are relatively large vacant areas interspersed with well-kept homes and active businesses. With that, it was important to identify projects that could both advance stabilization initiatives and address the need for immediate interventions for large swaths of vacant land. Projects were also to consider how neighborhood appearance might be improved and residential and commercial density could be increased if implemented.

Benefit to the Community

The creation of and access to jobs ranked second highest on the list of criteria for project consideration. Additionally, residents wanted to know how each project might contribute to and promote local entrepreneurship. Other benefits to the community focused on how the project would reduce or eliminate blight and its impacts and benefits to public health and safety.

Also important was how open, green and natural spaces would be maintained. The SAG discussed how while these typologies were desirable, the concern was with the long-term maintenance of these areas, specifically, who would be responsible for maintaining them to make sure no further instances of blight occurred and no significantly higher expense would be generated for the care of these spaces.

Economic Benefit

Other evaluative criteria included the creation of jobs for local residents, i.e. first rights of employment for residents of areas where proposed projects would be developed. Additionally, residents inquired about the potential for the proposed project to spur auxiliary businesses that could provide goods and services.

Environmental Impact

Residents determined that each project was to consider several important criteria related to environmental impact, including:

- a. *To what extent will the project require residential and/or commercial relocation?*
- b. *To what extent will the project accommodate residential and/or commercial coexistence?*
- c. *What are the potential impacts of air, noise and water pollution?*
- d. *What are the potential increases/decreases to the following traffic levels:*
 - i. *Auto/Vehicular Traffic*
 - ii. *Truck Traffic*
 - iii. *Rail Traffic*
 - iv. *Non-motorized Traffic*

Benefit to the City

In considering the feasibility of each project, the potential benefit to the city was to be defined, as it related to:

- a. the potential tax generation (e.g. personal and real property taxes, business-related taxes);*
- b. the potential impact on existing infrastructure and whether project-associated uses will increase or decrease infrastructure costs;*
- c. the project reducing or eliminating the city's responsibility for land management;*
- d. the project reducing or eliminating the city's responsibility for land maintenance;*
- e. the project transferring and/or assuming property ownership from city.*

Project Descriptions

Each of the projects identified by LEAP are at varying stages of readiness for implementation. Some await action at the government level to be implemented; others are in early stages of development. However, each present plausible options, that if implemented, could have demonstrable short-term impacts toward reinventing the lower eastside and creating scalable, sustainable models of new and emerging industries that can be evaluated for implementation in similar neighborhoods throughout the city and beyond.

Community-based Food Processing Business Incubator

Project Sponsors: Eastern Market Corporation and Genesis HOPE Community Development Corporation

Project Description & Scope: Utilize Former and Current School Buildings as Community-based Food Processing Business Incubators to Create Jobs and Improve Detroit's Food Security System. Pilot the reuse of one decommissioned Public School and one active Public School, taking advantage of their space and kitchen facilities, to create a small business incubator that "grows" several small businesses engaged in various forms of food

processing. “Food Processing” is taking raw locally-grown food and converting it to a food product through processes such as packaging, freezing, or producing items like jams. Food growing is dramatically increasing in Detroit, causing a gap and therefore creating demand for more food processing to bring more locally grown food items to market.

Proposed Location: The original Marcus Garvey School, now empty, off Gratiot at Sylvester and Sheridan and the existing Marcus Garvey School at Van Dyke and Kercheval

Role of LEAP: Facilitate site control and logistic arrangements with Detroit Public Schools; help recruit funding to EMC and Genesis HOPE through USDA and other sources; assist with a community education/outreach component regarding nutrition and cooking; help recruit entrepreneurs.

Role of Government: Assist with adaptive rezoning; expedite acquisition and transfer of city-owned land; facilitate necessary health department licensing/permitting; liaise for LEAP and appropriate city departments (e.g. Buildings, Safety & Engineering); leverage private resources; assist with identification & resolution of relevant zoning, site and building issues

Stormwater Infiltration Forests

Project Sponsors: The Greening of Detroit

Project Description & Scope: Utilize Vacant Land Parcels to Create Forests for Stormwater Infiltration to Reduce City of Detroit’s Stormwater Management Costs and Improve the Environment. Plant up to 300 trees each (of various species) on three (3) vacant land sites of 1.5 acres each to create tree canopy and natural systems that improve stormwater infiltration in the Conner Creek Watershed. Provide three years of careful nurturing of the trees to assure their viability. During the initial three-year phase, create a community land trust or land conservancy in partnership with the City of Detroit and potential nonprofit land owners, to assure the ongoing maintenance and enjoyment of the forests.

The Greening of Detroit will provide maintenance for three (3) years.

Proposed Location: Sites to be determined by City of Detroit

Role of LEAP: Assist in obtaining site control as necessary by identifying local nonprofits that may own parcels; set up the conservancy or land trust over the initial three-year period to take effect at the end of The Greening of Detroit's maintenance term.

Role of Government: Allow use of city-owned land; work with LEAP to establish necessary conservation easements, purchase and/or transfer of development rights; leverage private resources

Mack Avenue Green Corridor Project

Project Sponsor: Warren Conner Development Coalition and Eastside LAND, Inc.

Project Description & Scope: Convert a Blighted and Inactive Commercial Corridor to a Green Thoroughfare. Pilot the process of converting a blighted and inactive commercial corridor to a Green Thoroughfare. Activities would include a) expediting demolition of abandoned commercial buildings; b) planting low/no-maintenance foliage on vacant lots; c) identifying a process to help the few local businesses that operate on the corridor move to a more dense area of Mack Avenue; d) installing way-finding signage that directs travelers to the more active areas of Mack Avenue and to various nearby residential neighborhoods.

Proposed Location: Mack Avenue between Conner Avenue and Chalmers Street

Role of LEAP: Advocate for expedited demolition of abandoned commercial buildings; facilitate dialogue with local businesses that would move to more active commercial areas on Mack; help identify resources to help businesses move.

Role of Government: Expedite condemnation proceedings for abandoned structures; allow use of city-owned land; leverage resources to facilitate development.

Horticultural and Hydroponic Commercial Farm

Project Sponsor: Hantz Farms

Project Description & Scope: Utilize Inactive Residential and Commercial Parcels for a Commercial Farm Operation to Create Jobs and Position Detroit as a Global Center for Hydroponic Agriculture Research and Development. Utilizing land purchased from the City of Detroit, and any privately-owned property that owners wish to voluntarily sell to Hantz

Farms, a commercial farm of up to 500 acres growing only horticultural products will be established and operated to include orchards, Christmas tree farms, commercial forests and indoor hydroponic growing sites. Education, tourism and a retail/restaurant operation will be part of the project.

Proposed Location: Sites to be determined by City of Detroit

Role of LEAP: Advocate with Detroit City Council for approval of the project; facilitate a Community Partnership Agreement with Hantz Farms; support resident engagement in the project area; serve on the Hantz Farms Community Advisory Council

Role of Government: Approve project at the legislative level (City Council); establish development agreements, conservation easements, zoning and other permissive development tools as appropriate; expedite the sale/transfer of city-owned land; leverage private resources

Villages Neighborhood Stabilization Initiative

Project Sponsor: The Villages Community Development Corporation, Genesis HOPE Community Development Corporation, Church of the Messiah Housing Corporation

Project Description & Scope: Stabilize Active Residential Neighborhoods through Home Repair, Housing Rehabilitation and Marketing to Welcome New Residents. Sponsoring CDOs and local community groups have already banded together and formulated a plan for the East Village, Indian Village, West Village and Islandview Village communities. Plans include a vacant home rehabilitation program; developer and good landlord incentives; home repair for existing homes; greening and alley reconstruction projects; and commercial revitalization.

Proposed Location: Mack (north) to Jefferson (south) to Crane (east) to E. Grand Blvd. (west)

Role of LEAP: Advocate for the stabilization of this neighborhood and the welcoming of new residents and businesses from less active neighborhoods.

Role of Government: Establish a CDBG Task Force to reorganize Housing Rehabilitation Program to create a delivery system—LEAP partners will assist in an advisory capacity to develop specifications and identify properties for a streamlined and expedited transfer of ownership (to nonprofit agencies) and remove those homes from the demolition lists; leverage private resources; expedite transfer of city-owned land

Jefferson/Chalmers Neighborhood Stabilization Project

Project Sponsor: Jefferson East Business Association

Project Description & Scope: Stabilize Active Residential Neighborhoods through Home Repair, Housing Rehabilitation and Marketing to Welcome New Residents. Working in partnership with technical service providers and consultants, local residents & community groups will develop a vacant property re-use and stabilization plan. This plan will identify ownership of bank-owned properties, conduct an assessment of all vacant properties and lay the framework for developing a more robust housing and commercial renovation and improvement program.

Proposed Location: Jefferson (north) to Detroit River (south), Alter (east) to Conner/Clairpointe (west).

Role of LEAP: Advocate for the stabilization of this neighborhood and the welcoming of new residents and businesses from less active neighborhoods.

Role of Government: Establish a CDBG Task Force to reorganize Housing Rehabilitation Program to create a delivery system—LEAP partners will assist in an advisory capacity to develop specifications and identify properties for a streamlined and expedited transfer of ownership (to nonprofit agencies) and remove those homes from the demolition lists; leverage private resources; expedite transfer of city-owned land

part three | **the policies**

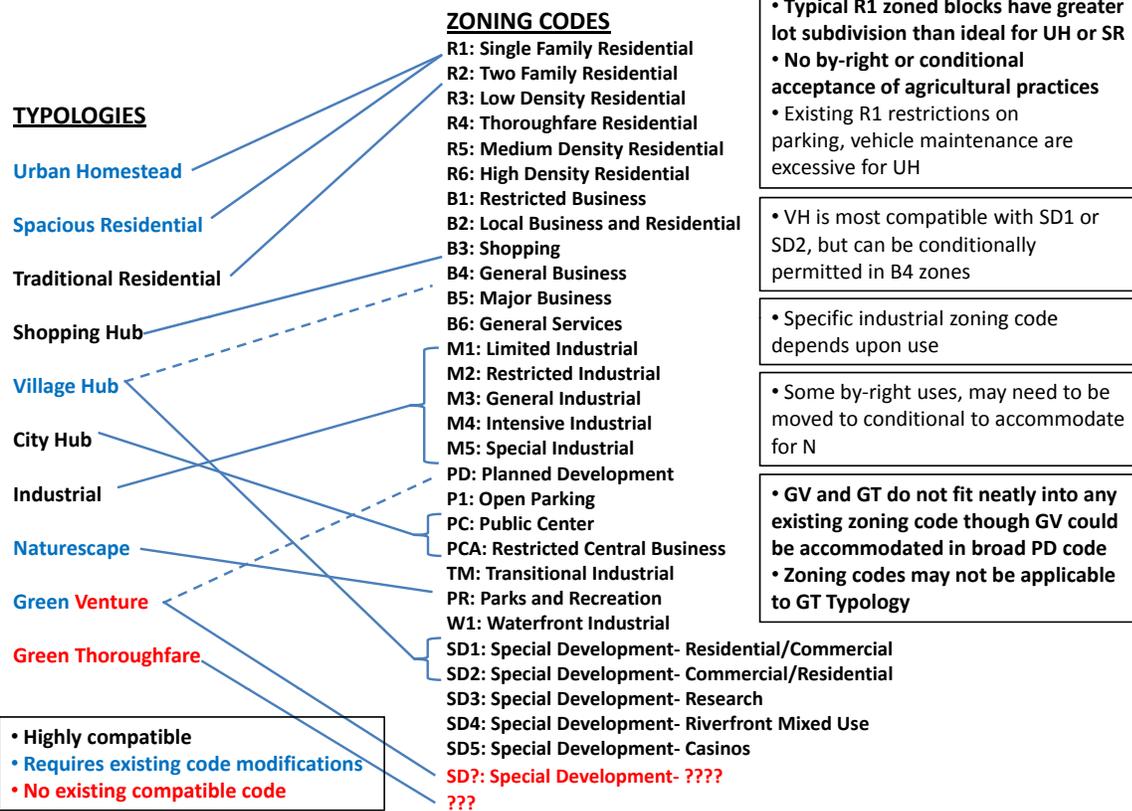
In order to implement any community plan, the necessary policy measures and programs to facilitate and implement it must be in place. Support and cooperation at the government level is crucial.

LEAP established a working subgroup to research, evaluate and recommend policies to support the development and implementation of its community-based land use plan to address vacant land and property on the lower eastside of Detroit. Additionally, this “policy team” was charged with drafting strategies and tools that educates residents and encourages their involvement in the advocacy process. The policy team would also consider factors related to the alignment of incentives for land use adaption, the roles of CDOs, nonprofits, residents, government, business interests and others in implementation, economic analysis as well as best practices from other “rightsizing” efforts. Equally important was facilitating conversations and ideas that would support an organic restructuring of neighborhoods, initiated by residents and supported by neighborhood-based community groups.

making land use recommendations a reality

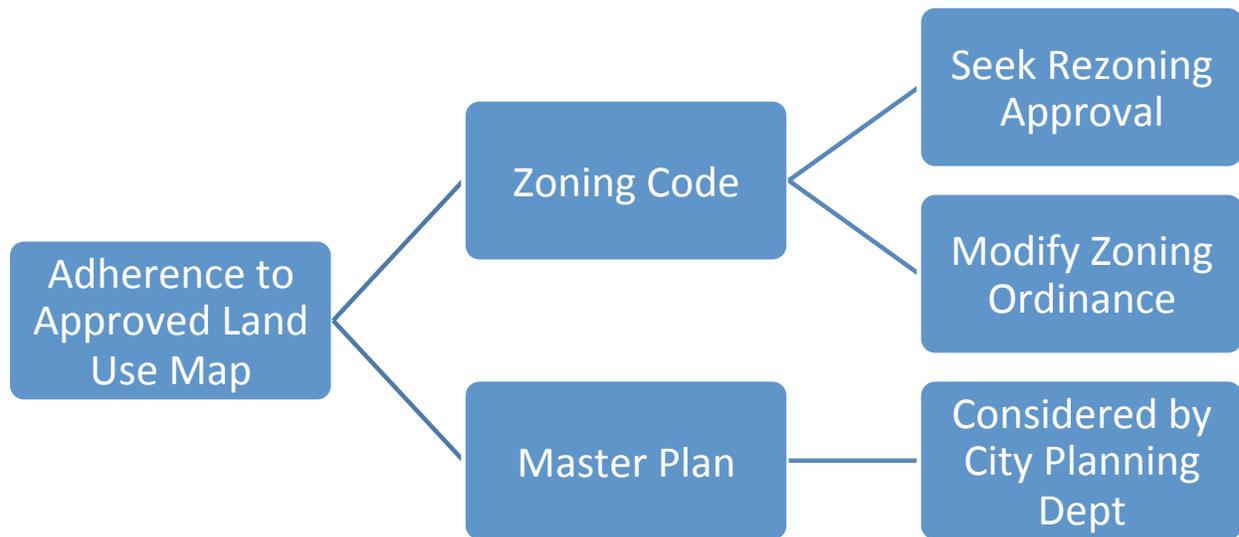
The policy team agreed that the initial challenge to implementing the LEAP plan was determining how its proposed uses fit within the current land use and zoning codes. The team compared each of the CDAD Strategic Framework typologies to existing zoning codes to check for areas of compatibility and conflict.

Typology and Zoning Compatibility



Source: Nathan Brown, University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

Further consideration was then given to the merit of advocating for widespread zoning changes versus master plan amendments; while the zoning code held more legislative force, changes to it would be cumbersome and lengthy. Conversely, changes to the master plan could be more easily achieved, but would hold less weight than wholesale zoning code enforcement.



Source: Nathan Brown, University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

One of the team's tasks was to identify potential impediments to the proposed plan. LEAP began to focus more sharply on policy, as each would affect each typology differently.

Programs: Side Lot Disposition

During the process, residents discussed many issues, including those related to policy and programmatic changes, that would support the LEAP recommendations and goals of transforming vacant land and property. A major impediment to the implementation of those recommendations was how land is assembled and acquired. One of many recurring policy changes suggested by residents from the LEAP process pertain to side lot disposition. Some of the most critical feedback included:

1. the length of time it takes to purchase property
2. the cost of purchasing property
3. the confusion about who owns the land and gaining access to it

Detroit-based vacant/tax forfeited properties are held by multiple agencies, including the City of Detroit, Wayne County Treasurer, State of Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority

and the Detroit Land Bank Authority. This is in addition to privately held properties. Streamlining this process by establishing collaborative administration processes could help make the process much more accessible and user-friendly for residents desiring to acquire adjacent vacant lots. Expediting this process to a 30-60 day closing period could move more vacant property back onto the tax rolls and into care.

There are several national, regional and local models for “alternative payments” for side lot purchases. One example is Ohio’s “Mow To Own”, a program that factors previous and ongoing care and maintenance into the purchase cost of side lots. Because many potential applicants have already demonstrated these in-kind investments in Detroit-based land, this could be a basis for establishing a model that helps make side lot purchases more affordable and desirable.

Knowing who owns the vacant land and property surrounding both residential and commercial lots could potentially help community stakeholders, organizations and governing agencies a) develop strategies to hold negligent property owners accountable for care and maintenance and b) help community stakeholders, organizations and governing agencies work collaboratively and efficiently to develop more comprehensive vacant land remediation strategies. Because identifying negligent property owners is so difficult, it often muddles the process of acquiring side lots not currently held by semi-public or governmental agencies (i.e. land banks, county treasurer, municipalities, etc.). Furthermore, working to create a process where city-based groups are given priority in notification and purchase of available properties would help support more comprehensive community planning and development.

Additional Programs

The following programs are suggested to support and facilitate Strategic Framework community-based plans.

Open Space Maintenance Agreements

Establish a maintenance structure for open, public and quasi-private greenspaces (in Naturescape, Green Venture Zone, Green Thoroughfare areas), establish agreements between local government and developer/business owners that reduce upfront costs for

long-term maintenance of property surrounding business/development.

Voluntary Relocation Advocates

Establish a team of “advocates” working on behalf of residents and business owners currently residing or operating in areas designated for future directions incompatible with residential and/or commercial uses (e.g. Naturescapes). The advocates would work to ensure the most favorable and equitable outcomes for those seeking relocation assistance and incentives. The team would be comprised of an attorney, a resident/business leader from the neighborhood being relocated into and a social service agent. The team would be facilitated by a community development (or service) organization.

Community Advisory Councils

Establish resident and business councils that work with local government and developers to ensure that a.) existing community-based plans are considered and aligned with proposed developments and b.) help draft any necessary community benefits agreements.

part four | **conclusion**

The LEAP experience provided many insights to the concept of “rightsizing” Detroit, how we must simultaneously balance the immediate and urgent need to properly align limited resources while still supporting quality of life needs. The math makes this an even greater challenge; Detroit has significantly more space (land) than people to live in it, take care of it and pay for it. Less population equals less tax revenue, and not just in a property tax sense; state and federal revenue sharing is inextricably tied to population. With more people leaving the city than coming in, the constraints on government service delivery are clear and present. Coupled with a sorely crippled educational system and colossal deficiencies in mass transit, the city of Detroit, as an urban metropolis, is undeniably in a flux.

All this begs the question then, how do we bring our city back from the brink?

This was the guiding question for the LEAP process. Eastside community leaders summoned themselves around this question in an attempt to answer it earnestly and realistically. First was to hold themselves accountable for how to deal with very real-time issues that no long-term plan could solve alone, then collectively look for a healthy balance of viable immediate and short-term opportunities that amounted to more than a band-aid for the ails of their communities. At this point, collaboration was no longer a novel idea, it was mission call. Finding a way to leverage the human, social, political and financial capital each organization brought to the table became imperative to deal with this issues surrounding rightsizing, relocation and revitalization. Fraught with the structural and organizational challenges of convening multiple community and technical agents, as there was no local model for this kind of up-taking, eastside community leaders vehemently forged ahead to do what was necessary for the sake of the community where they live, work and serve.

It was no question that this was to be a process that included the people most affected by the city’s plight: residents. LEAP leaders recognized from the onset the need to have this

conversation with residents, not simply about them or for them. It was not lost on LEAP leaders, from their experiences in the community and through their individual organizational efforts, that there was much apprehension about what was to happen on the eastside through any citywide rightsizing plans. Instead of shying away from the question with overly optimistic and idyllic talk, LEAP leaders asked it upfront. Early conversations with the community included not only what the apparent problems were, but also the not so obvious issues, and ultimately the vision residents had for their neighborhoods. Although the process had a timeline for completing its plan, there was great care not to rush the community to make decisions without first dealing with real concerns about what the immediate future held for them, their homes and their neighborhoods.

LEAP leaders listened. Before any maps were shown or prognoses offered, LEAP engaged residents. This was a critical component of the process, not one often touted in conventional community planning processes. However, it was critical to building trust and consensus among those leery and skeptical about yet another community plan. Without this crucial piece, it is doubtful residents would have been able to, or even wanted to, contribute in the monumental way they did to creating a vision for their neighborhood. One of the resounding and consistent pieces of feedback from residents was to have their opinions valued and included in the plans for their neighborhoods. This was not a factor taken lightly by LEAP leaders. The result of this fact is the extent to which a community banded together to make a plan of action, that is not filled with pie-in-the-sky ideas, but innovative strategies that if supported, nurtured and fulfilled, can become a model of success in a city seeking to reinvent itself.

appendix

LEAP Area Map

LEAP Phase I Engagement Areas

LEAP Vacant Property Map (CLR)

LEAP Suitability Analysis

University of Michigan School of Natural Resources & Environment Metro Studio Designs

LEAP Policy Matrix

LEAP Phase I Final Recommendations Map

LEAP Phase I Actionable Projects Matrix

LEAP Phase I Project Timeline

LEAP Planning Timeline

LEAP Phase I Perception Survey Results

LEAP Phase I Future Directions Survey Results

LEAP Phase I Area Current Conditions

Residential

Commercial

Industrial

LEAP Phase I Meeting Agendas

Steering Committee

Stakeholder Advisory Group

Opportunity Workgroup

Technical Expertise Team

CDO (Community Development Organization) Liaison Roundtable

LEAP Surveyor Corps Training

LEAP Commercial Corridor Property Survey

LEAP Perception Survey

LEAP Future Directions Survey

LEAP Community Workshops Electronic Survey Results

Community Development Advocates of Detroit Neighborhood Revitalization Strategic Framework

Typology-based Policy Recommendations

LEAP Long-term Framework

LEAP Organizational Chart

LEAP Resident Facilitator Training Guide

LEAP Logic Model

LEAP Promotional Material Samples

LEAP Stakeholder Advisory Group Member Overview

contributions

The Lower Eastside Action Plan is a community-driven project designed to engage people in a process to transform vacant land and property into uses that improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods and surrounding areas.

LEAP is funded by The Erb Family Foundation, Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and is a collaborative planning project among the following community development and service organizations: Creekside Community Development Corporation, Fellowship Nonprofit Housing Corporation, Genesis HOPE Community Development Corporation, Jefferson East Business Association, Church of the Messiah Housing Corporation, Rebuilding Communities Incorporated, The Villages Community Development Corporation and the Warren Conner Development Coalition.

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Many thanks are extended in grateful appreciation of the enthusiastic commitment and support of all the residents, business owners and other community members who participated in this process.

For more information on LEAP Phase I, Phase II and overall project progress, join us at www.facebook.com/leapdetroit or visit our online file sharing & discussion forum at <https://sites.google.com/site/leapdetroit/>

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