# 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.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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An Emerging Call for Collaborative, Land-Based Solutions The Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan

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As deindustrialized cities across the United States and native solutions to stabilize and support existing communiaround the world are grappling with the complexities of ties. While Detroit residents and community organizations managing an abundance of vacant land, people are lookhave long been transforming vacant land into community ing to Detroit as they seek to understand the causes, sympand environmental assets, the scale of the problem far surtoms, and solutions to urban decline. Detroit is a city famed passes the capacities of a dwindling population and tax for many things: cars, music, the Underground Railroad base. and civil rights activism. In recent years, Detroit has become a sort of poster child for urban decline as economic, 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.

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 landbased 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 alter-

# INTRODUCTION

"Detroit is a city shaped by possibilities"

[Sharon Howell and Richard Feldman]

# 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] guickly 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.

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.



1981

1949

2018

![](_page_5_Picture_11.jpeg)

2018: Google Earth ) Figure 1. Gratiot/7 Mile Historical Aerials 1949-2018

### An Increasingly Vacant Urban Landscape

(Source: Aerials of 1949 and 1981: Wayne State University Library; Aerial of

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# DETROIT VACANT LAND

Not long after the mortgage crisis, Detroit made internation- ing in what many refer to as an emergence, or perhaps al headlines in the summer of 2013 when it became the a re-entrenching, of two Detroits: a densifying urban core largest municipality in U.S. history to declare bankruptcy for incoming white residents, and a much larger city sur-(Farley, 2017). The declaration of bankruptcy paved the rounding it that remains poor, black, vacant, and blighted way for urban revitalization that has been widely referred (Howell & Feldman 2017). The unequal distribution of vato by the media as Detroit's great 'comeback', 'revival', or cancy is revealed by mapping Detrot's vacancy, as shown '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 result-

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.

![](_page_6_Figure_5.jpeg)

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services Larcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services 2.arcgis.com; EPA.

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

# AN EMERGING CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE, LAND-BASED SOLUTIONS

While Detroit is often seen as an extreme case, it is certainly not alone in its strugale, 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.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous approach to addressing urand abandoned houses not only provide the space to beban shrinkage is the practice and policy of 'rightsizing'. ain anew but also the incentive to make innovative ways As a city's industry and population declines, it loses its of making our living" (Boggs, 2009, para. 1). Through the tax base, but the geographic area of the city remains the work of Boggs and countless others, Detroit has become a same. With the same number of streets, parks, schools, recognized leader within the urban agriculture movement, and utilities, shrinking cities often find themselves unable to with a substantial network of growers working together to staff, maintain, and service these public amenities. Rightsizaddress food insecurity, poverty, and vacancy (Pothukuchi, ing is a process of reducing the urban footprint to a scale 2017). that matches the financial capacity of city government to provide services and maintain infrastructure (Ryan, 2012). Largely thanks to such arassroots efforts in Detroit and other Such a process is inherently fraught with difficulties as decities, there is increasing interest in urban greening and cision makers must choose which services will be cut, and productive landscapes as a means for addressing the comwhere. Thus, rightsizing inherently raises issues of equity, plex social and economic challenges of depopulation and vacancy (Carlet, 2017). As Schilling and Logan express, as the neighborhoods targeted are typically highly vacant areas, often home to low-income and minority communivacant land provides "fertile ground for neighborhood-scale ties (Schilling & Logan, 2008). In Detroit, austerity politics and citywide greening strategies that can revitalize urban reached a new prominence in 2010, when public officials environments, empower community residents, and stabilize proposed to relocate residents to more populated areas dysfunctional markets" (Schilling & Logan, 2008, p451). in order to raze or cut services to entire neighborhoods Research has shown that effective urban greening projects (Sugrue, 2014). These policies were met with significant support community health and wellbeing by reducing crime pushback and prompted widespread mistrust of city planand social isolation, improving environmental quality, and ning efforts (Ligon, 2017), revealing that alternative, comproviding recreational opportunities (Bonham and Smith, munity-based solutions are necessary. 2008). Greening programs that are linked to community-based gardening and farming have been shown to ef-In the absence of effective or visionary governance, resifectively address issues of "food insecurity, unemployment, dents of Detroit have long been working to improve their and hopelessness" (Sadler & Pruett, 2017). Despite the environments and communities through the creative and growing clarity and success of this vision for greener, more productive use of vacant land. For decades, residents and sustainable cities, no American shrinking city has yet emcommunity organizers have implemented community garployed urban greening to effectively rightsize itself at the city scale (Schilling & Logan, 2008). dens, 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

# THE GRATIOT/7 MILE NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMEWORK PLAN

# STRATEGIC NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMEWORK PLANNING AREAS

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 munity feedback. Finally, recommendations were devel-2015 to fund community-based planning in Detroit neigh- oped to align with both community desires and broader borhoods (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 comcity goals of crafting neighborhoods that are healthier and safer, more resilient, sustainable, and just.

![](_page_8_Figure_5.jpeg)

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services Larcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services 2.arcgis.com; EPA.

# 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.

# 02 SITE CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

# 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.

# G7 NEIGHBORHOODS

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

![](_page_10_Figure_5.jpeg)

![](_page_10_Figure_6.jpeg)

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services 1. arcgis.com; City of Detroit Planning and Development Department (PDD). Figure 5. Gratiot/7 Mile Planning Area Neighborhoods Map

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services 1.arcgis.com; EPA. Figure 4: Gratiot/7 Mile Planning Area Location Map

![](_page_10_Figure_10.jpeg)

# 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.

![](_page_11_Figure_3.jpeg)

# 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.

![](_page_11_Figure_6.jpeg)

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services 1. arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services 2. arcgis.com; Michigan's ArcGIS Online Open Data Portal, services3.arcgis.com; EPA.

Figure 6. Detroit Open Space Network 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.

![](_page_12_Figure_2.jpeg)

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

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.

![](_page_12_Figure_7.jpeg)

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.

![](_page_13_Figure_2.jpeg)

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.

![](_page_13_Figure_6.jpeg)

Data Source: SEMCOG Open Data, services 1.arcgis.com; City of Detroit Open Data Portal, services 2.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.

![](_page_14_Figure_2.jpeg)

![](_page_14_Figure_3.jpeg)

# 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.

![](_page_14_Figure_6.jpeg)

Data Source: Esri; USDA NRCS; SEMCOG Open Data, services 1.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).

# **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.

#### **Occupied in Good Condition**

![](_page_15_Picture_6.jpeg)

![](_page_15_Picture_8.jpeg)

11.01.2019

![](_page_15_Picture_10.jpeg)

11.01.2019

![](_page_15_Picture_13.jpeg)

![](_page_15_Picture_14.jpeg)

![](_page_15_Picture_16.jpeg)

09.21.2019

09.01.2019

Spaces with Community Activation

![](_page_15_Picture_19.jpeg)

![](_page_15_Picture_20.jpeg)

11.01.2019

Figure 15. Open Space Conditions in G7

![](_page_15_Picture_23.jpeg)

![](_page_15_Picture_24.jpeg)

Photo By Noah Stephens

(Source: Author )

(Source: Author, Unless Otherwise Cited) Figure 14. Housing Conditions in G7

#### **Spaces with Care**

![](_page_15_Picture_30.jpeg)

#### **Neglected Spaces**

# 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).

![](_page_16_Figure_3.jpeg)

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).

![](_page_16_Figure_7.jpeg)

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.

![](_page_16_Figure_14.jpeg)

Low

Data Source: gis.detroitmi.gov; SEMCOG Open Data. Figure 18. G7 Crime Heat Map

# CASE STUDIES

In order to inform the selection of design typologies and the development of recommendations, case studies were conorder 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.

![](_page_17_Picture_3.jpeg)

# **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, Liveó 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

![](_page_18_Picture_8.jpeg)

# 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.

![](_page_18_Picture_13.jpeg)

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

![](_page_18_Figure_17.jpeg)

(Source: ASLA,2017 ) Figure 20: Vacant Properties 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 Fitz-

gerald 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:

![](_page_19_Figure_4.jpeg)

• 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.

# Takeaway

The Fitzgerald Neighborhood and G7 Planning Area share Through strategic lot consolidation and placement of uses, the complex challenges of extensive blight and vacancy in it becomes possible to achieve a network of multi-functiona residential area. This project employs a holistic approach al greenspace that is collaboratively maintained to ensure to adapt vacant land for neighborhood-scale revitalization, long-term success. providing insight for how to employ vacant land for the creation of connected, multi-functional greenspaces.

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 Ma-This project serves as a model of creative approaches to community engagement both during and after the planpleridge neighborhood lacks such an amenity. Based on ning process. In addition to the conventional community the Fitzgerald Plan, a centrally located park in this area and stakeholder meetings, the Fitzgerald planning team may serve to enhance social cohesion, particularly if it is worked with the community to select a Community Develconnected to safe routes to schools and other greenspaces. opment Team that is tasked with implementing much of the plan. Local artists worked directly with community members As the G7 planning team looks to the Fitzgerald Revitalto install portions of the design, including a painted streetsization Project for inspiration, it is essential to remember cape and a mosaic wall at Ella Fitzgerald Park. Collectivethat community interest and needs in these areas may be quite different. Community engagement should listen to ly, these innovative approaches to community engagement illuminate pathways to planning decisions that reflect comthe unique experiences, concerns, and desires of every community. In addition, vacancy rate and distribution vary munity interest and help ensure long-term success through continued community engagement. significantly between these two study sites, and may reguire different strategies for the achievement of resident The Ella Fitzgerald Plan integrates innovative means of health and well-being.

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).

![](_page_19_Picture_15.jpeg)

(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.rack-cdn.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

![](_page_20_Picture_6.jpeg)

# Introduction

Detroit's Eastern Market is one of the nation's oldest and The Eastern Market Neighborhood Framework Plan covers largest farmer's markets, and is a significant destination for just over one square mile, incorporating the Eastern Market both residents and visitors alike (Figure 24). The surroundand the surrounding residential neighborhood. The goal is ing Eastern Market neighborhood is known for its vibrant to create a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood that empowers Eastern Market to become a hub of food production artwork, urban agriculture, and recent growth in local busiand distribution for the Great Lakes region. The plan seeks ness, particularly along Gratiot Avenue. As Detroit's urban agriculture movement continues to grow and consumers to increase neighborhood amenities, improve quality of life are driving fundamental shifts towards local, healthier, and for local residents, expand employment opportunities, and more distinctive food products, Detroit's food providers are leverage a district-wide approach to stormwater. seeking to adapt to evolving consumer demand, with the intention to expand Eastern Market to accommodate the 3 main interconnected goals proposed by the planning crowds that flock to the area every week (Figure 25) (Eastteam are shown below in Figure 26: ern Market Corporation, 2016).

![](_page_20_Picture_9.jpeg)

# Challenge & Goals

![](_page_20_Figure_14.jpeg)

(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 community feedback. 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.

![](_page_21_Figure_3.jpeg)

(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.

Lastly, the use of a phasing plan serves as a model of how to prioritize interventions for immediate, short-term, and longterm implementation. Notably, zoning was an immediate Additionally, the focus on the production and sale of food may serve as guidance for G7 as growers and city planpriority, given that it makes other land use change possible. The phasing also reveals how a network of greenways ners support the expansion of urban agriculture in the area. The work being done in Eastern Market shows that there and landscape improvements can be made over time, is an increasing demand for fresh, locally produced food, with highly trafficked routes (in this case, those that connect key businesses) being implemented first, then increasing and that farmer's markets can support economic well-being connectivity with additional, intersecting pathways in the and growth. Given that there is no farmers market within walking distance of G7, there may be an opportunity to future. Phasing is applied within each greenway, as well. expand upon the success of Eastern Market by creating a An initially narrow footprint fosters immediate movement, farmers market in G7 to support local growers and conthen expands as plantings and stormwater management are installed. sumers.

The community engagement surrounding green stormwater infrastructure provides insight into how Detroit residents

![](_page_21_Picture_10.jpeg)

# 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

![](_page_22_Figure_5.jpeg)

# **COMMUNITY** ENGAGEMENT

# **NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING SURVEY**

The City of Detroit created an online survey, available results of this survey are highlighted in the following pages through the Planning and Development Department's website (see Appendix A). As of December 2019, 135 resi- Detroit's Planning and Development Department. dents and 6 local businesses responded to the survey. The

(Figures 30 and 31). Graphs were provided by the City of

![](_page_23_Figure_3.jpeg)

![](_page_23_Figure_4.jpeg)

![](_page_23_Figure_5.jpeg)

Graphics provided by City of Detroit PDD Community Meeting #1 Presentation (City of Detroit, 2019). Figure 30: Neighborhood Planning Survey Responses

![](_page_23_Figure_7.jpeg)

that illegal dumping is a critical issue in this neighborhood.

![](_page_23_Figure_10.jpeg)

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 Com- The SEAS Master's Project Team identified those topics that munity Meeting #1 at The Matrix Center in the Franklin neighborhood. Over 125 residents attended and participated in the meeting. The G7 Neighborhood Frame- borhood Stabilization and Parks & Greenways categories work Plan was introduced to the community, including a provide community insight applicable to vacant land uses 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 neigh-• borhood 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.

were most relevant to vacant land to inform future community engagement and ideation. In particular, the Neighin the G7 planning area, as is indicated by the colored font on Figure 32.

#### Blight removal (homes, trash, grass & weeds) Walkability/safe routes to schools Re-purpose or sale of vacant lots Safety/crime Clean community (sweeping, abandoned cars, trash) Streets (potholes/drainage/water & sewer) Animal control Sidewalk repairs & ADA ramps . • Traffic (speed bumps) Street lighting ٠ • Homes (rehab/demo/infill) Public involvement/community engagement Mixed Use Redevelopment Affordability Senior Housing ٠ Multi-family Resistance Transitional housing Mixed use Burbank School Public involvement with re-development Gentrification ' Other Follow-up from City Communication w/ Citv • Business opportunities Public involvement

Neighborhood Stabilization

Trees (maintenance & increase canopy)

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

![](_page_24_Figure_11.jpeg)

# 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

The 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).

![](_page_25_Figure_18.jpeg)

![](_page_25_Figure_19.jpeg)

Figure 33. Vacant Land Use Survey Respondent Profile

![](_page_25_Figure_22.jpeg)

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

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:

	Negative Responses	Positive Responses
Opportunities to Acquire Lots	0	31
Playgrounds for Children	1	30
Walking Trails	1	30
All Ages Play & Exercise	3	29
Renewable Energy Production	1	28
Local Flower Production	4	27
Public Art	1	26
Places to Enjoy Nature	5	25
Social Gathering Spaces	5	24
Local Food Production	6	24
Community Gardens	5	23
Flood Prevention	5	22
Local Tree Production	8	17
Planting Trees	6	15

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.

# LAND USE RANKINGS

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

![](_page_26_Figure_9.jpeg)

![](_page_26_Figure_10.jpeg)

# 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 priori- in the word cloud (Figure 38), with text size correlating ty 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:

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 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.

#### 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).

![](_page_27_Picture_13.jpeg)

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

![](_page_27_Picture_15.jpeg)

Figure 37. Focus Group Photo: Mapping Desired Land Uses

![](_page_27_Picture_17.jpeg)

# 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

![](_page_28_Picture_5.jpeg)

![](_page_28_Picture_6.jpeg)

MAYBE

NO

e. Hard Surfaces

![](_page_28_Picture_8.jpeg)

#### b. Seating

![](_page_28_Picture_12.jpeg)

![](_page_28_Picture_13.jpeg)

d. Community Art

![](_page_28_Picture_15.jpeg)

f. Beekeeping

![](_page_28_Picture_17.jpeg)

![](_page_28_Picture_18.jpeg)

# Playground

Playgrounds are defined as structures designed specifically to provide space for children to recreate and play in urban creasingly advocating for natural playscapes that integrate 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 envi-

ronments that connect children to nature, designers are inplants, 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

![](_page_29_Figure_6.jpeg)

YES e. Artificial Mounds

![](_page_29_Figure_9.jpeg)

MAYBE

NO

#### b. Natural

![](_page_29_Picture_13.jpeg)

![](_page_29_Picture_14.jpeg)

![](_page_29_Picture_15.jpeg)

YES

![](_page_29_Picture_16.jpeg)

f. Water Play

![](_page_29_Picture_18.jpeg)

![](_page_29_Picture_19.jpeg)

NO

# 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

![](_page_30_Picture_4.jpeg)

c. Exercise Trail

![](_page_30_Picture_6.jpeg)

e. Outdoor Game Area

![](_page_30_Picture_8.jpeg)

#### b. Basketball Court

![](_page_30_Picture_12.jpeg)

![](_page_30_Picture_13.jpeg)

d. Outdoor Exercise Equipment

![](_page_30_Picture_15.jpeg)

f. Skate Park

![](_page_30_Picture_17.jpeg)

![](_page_30_Picture_18.jpeg)

### 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

![](_page_31_Figure_5.jpeg)

![](_page_31_Figure_6.jpeg)

MAYBE

NO

YES

e. Hoop House

![](_page_31_Figure_8.jpeg)

b. Small Fruit & Vegetable Farm

![](_page_31_Picture_12.jpeg)

![](_page_31_Picture_13.jpeg)

d. Orchard

![](_page_31_Picture_15.jpeg)

YES

f. Beekeeping

![](_page_31_Picture_17.jpeg)

![](_page_31_Picture_18.jpeg)

# Natural Open Space

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 the G7 Planning Area. Therefore, images were selected 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 open spaces are relatively undeveloped areas that 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 to include vegetation of varying, form, height, and maintenance (Figure 43).

a. Woodland

![](_page_32_Figure_5.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Figure_6.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Figure_7.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_8.jpeg)

#### b. Mowed Lawn

![](_page_32_Picture_12.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_13.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_14.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_15.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_16.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_17.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_18.jpeg)

![](_page_32_Picture_19.jpeg)

# 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 gath- ing a range of materials (Figure 44). Picnic tables, paved ering spaces are strategically placed within community seating areas, event spaces, and shade structures were parks and gardens, and seen as an important component key design element images selected by the team to better 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 featurunderstand how residents perceive a variety of social gathering spaces.

a. Picnic/Grill Area

![](_page_33_Picture_5.jpeg)

![](_page_33_Picture_7.jpeg)

![](_page_33_Picture_8.jpeg)

![](_page_33_Picture_9.jpeg)

#### b. Paved Seating Area

![](_page_33_Picture_13.jpeg)

![](_page_33_Picture_14.jpeg)

![](_page_33_Picture_15.jpeg)

![](_page_33_Picture_16.jpeg)

### Stormwater Management

ture (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 water pond, a traditional stormwater pond and a stormwarain, domestic sewage, and wastewater all in one pipe. Under periods of heavy rain, the volume of water can be- The rain gardens were depicted at different scales with come 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.

Stormwater management using green stormwater infrastruc- 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) stormter pond surrounded by a more natural, vegetative edge. different surrounding vegetation contexts.

#### a. Temporary Stormwater Pond

![](_page_34_Picture_5.jpeg)

#### YES MAYBE NO c. Stormwater Pond with Natural Edge

![](_page_34_Picture_7.jpeg)

e. Rain Garden with Trees

![](_page_34_Figure_9.jpeg)

#### b. Stormwater Pond

d. Rain Garden

![](_page_34_Picture_14.jpeg)

MAYBE

NO

NO

f. Residential Scale Rain Garden

YES

![](_page_34_Picture_16.jpeg)

# 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.

# 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**

#### **RESULTS OF FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES**

![](_page_35_Figure_7.jpeg)

Figure 46. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Community Garden

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**

![](_page_36_Figure_4.jpeg)

# 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**

![](_page_36_Figure_8.jpeg)

![](_page_36_Picture_9.jpeg)

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

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**

![](_page_37_Figure_4.jpeg)

# 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**

![](_page_37_Figure_8.jpeg)

![](_page_37_Figure_9.jpeg)

Figure 50. Focus Group Typology Feedback: Natural Open Space

![](_page_37_Figure_11.jpeg)

![](_page_37_Figure_12.jpeg)

c2.

![](_page_37_Picture_15.jpeg)

![](_page_37_Figure_16.jpeg)

![](_page_37_Picture_17.jpeg)

![](_page_37_Figure_18.jpeg)

![](_page_37_Picture_19.jpeg)

# 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**

![](_page_38_Figure_5.jpeg)

![](_page_38_Picture_6.jpeg)

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.

![](_page_38_Figure_10.jpeg)

Figure 53. Focus Group: Desired Land Use Location Mapping

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 to be more successful in the production of food for pernegative 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 sonal 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)

![](_page_39_Figure_23.jpeg)

![](_page_39_Figure_24.jpeg)

# 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.

![](_page_40_Picture_5.jpeg)

# **GRATIOT/7 MILE VACANT LAND ADAPTATION FRAMEWORK**

				Establish a continuous, well-maintained pedestrian and bicy Repair and maintain existing sidewalks Connect pathways to parks, public transit, and commercial Create mid-block pathways to reduce block length
			:	Install new playgrounds and sports fields in areas that lack of Enhance diversity of recreational amenities
GOAL 1	1a. Promote Active Mobility		Provide natural open space with paths and seating Enhance visual access to trees, woodlands, flowers, and op Provide opportunities for nature-based activities	
HEA THF NEIGHB	ALTHY & RIVING ORHOODS	1b. Provide Space for Recreation and Play     1c. Craft Restorative Landscapes	]I :	Increase the amount of public open space Distribute parks and amenities for equal access Provide a new public park in the western portion of Mapler
I TEIOTIE	CRICODO	1d. Provide Equal Access to Public Open Space		
PROMOT AND ME	ING PHYSICAL NTAL WELL-BEING		———————————————————————————————————————	Renovate salvageable vacant structures Demolish unsalvageable vacant structures Recycle and reuse materials from demolitions Design and activate open space to prevent dumping
		2a. Remediate Blight		Aggregate a diversity of land uses to increase traffic in publ Locate new public spaces near clusters of existing, occupied Program public space beyond implementation Promote activity throughout the day and through various sea
G( S/	OAL 2 AFE &	2b. Promote Eyes On the Space		Provide lighting in all new public spaces and pathways Enhance lighting throughout, prioritizing pathways and inter Design lighting to maximize safety and limit energy costs
ACT OPEN	TVATED N SPACE	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
		2e. Convey the Message of Care	— ] :	Limit view-obstructing vegetation near streetscapes and path Design shrub and perennial plantings in open arrangements
DESIGNI PRESENC	NG FOR VISIBILITY, E, AND CARE			Design and maintain landscapes for neatness and order Install gardens and landscaping along pathways and public Establish visible edges between types of vegetation Mow the edges of naturalized areas Install signage as a cue to care
		3a. Promote Food Production and Security		
G SUSTA PRO	OAL 3 INABLE &	3b. Explore Opportunities for the Production of Renewable Energy         3c. Implement Green Stormwater Management		Create community garaens for residents to grow tood Integrate farmsteads into existing neighborhoods Provide platforms for local growers to sell their crops Establish programs for agricultural training and education
LANI	DSCAPES	3d. Establish Multi-functional Natural Greenspaces		Create policies to support solar energy production Incorporate solar-powered amenities Implement pilot projects in biomass production
ENHANC SERVICES	CING ECOSYSTEM			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
			:	Preserve and enhance existing canopy Create pollinator habitat Select plant species for provision of ecosystem services and
G		4a. Connect Community Assets		Pair natural open space with education and recreation
EMPO	OWERED MUNITIES	4b. Employ Vacant Land As a Platform For Education and Skill Building         4c. Develop Strategies For Community-based Landscape Management	└_┩┊	Build lasting relationships with a diversity of stakeholders Empower residents to design and implement neighborhood Identify, conserve, and sustainably employ natural resources
BUILDING				Partner with community organizations to develop long-term e Provide agricultural job training and skill building Train and employ residents in housing deconstruction and re Link arconing offerts to any iconsected advication
				Expand opportunities for residents to acquire vacant lots Provide stipends for the maintenance of municipally oursed
Figure 55. (	Gratiot/7 Mile Vacant Lan	d Adaptation Framework		Support new and existing community gardening efforts Engage residents in the management of public open space
74	D I			0.0

ycle network I areas access

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ersections

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ic spaces

attractiveness

l improvements es for community benefit educational and skill building programs

habilitation

/acant lot

# GOAL 1: HEALTHY AND THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

PROMOTING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

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.

- Promote Active Mobility
- Provide Space for Recreation and Play

![](_page_42_Figure_6.jpeg)

- Craft Restorative Landscapes
- Provide Equal Access to Public Open Space

# 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 in these areas (Ewing, 1999).

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

# 1b. Provide space for recreation and play

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

# Strategies

- Install new playarounds 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

- 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

# 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" While places to enjoy nature were not ranked as a top 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 look-

ing vegetation, a diversity of species, the opportunity for activities, and a sense of entering another space (Stigsdotter, 2005).

priority in the Vacant Land Use Survey, a majority of respondents expressed that such places would be beneficial to their neighborhoods.

# 1d. Provide equal access to public open space

As improvements to public open space are made, it is Significant portions of the G7 Planning Area, particularly essential to ensure that residents have equal access to in the southwest quadrant of the site, lack sufficient access these. Research has shown that access to parks results in to public open space (Figure 11, p. 19). Focus group increased physical activity, for instance youth with access participants expressed that, due to this lack of access, resto parks with playgrounds have healthier weights (Rigoidents have to leave their neighborhoods, and even the lon, 2016). Communities of lower socioeconomic status city, to access quality open space and recreation. Through and minority populations tend to have poorer access to the mapping activity, the western portion of Mapleridge safe, well-maintained open space with amenities (Rigolon, emerged as a priority for the addition of new public open 2016). 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**

- 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

- 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 wel-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

![](_page_45_Figure_8.jpeg)

- Design Plantings to Enhance Visibility and Safety
- Convey the Message of Care

# Recommendations:

# 2a. Remediate blight

The remediation of blight is an essential step in the creation of safe and attractive neighborhoods, and is a high priority for residents of the G7 Planning Area. The Broken Windows Theory states that disorder of the physical environment communicates a lack of care, thereby inviting crime and dumping (Kondo et al., 2015). Blighted buildings have been linked to drug use, STD's, and premature death, as well as poor mental and physical well-being caused by a reduction in community cohesion, illegal dumping, and a sense of fear, stress, and anxiety (Kondo et al., 2015). Studies conducted in other legacy cities have shown that the remediation and greening of blighted lots results in improved perceptions of safety and reductions in gun violence (Garvin et al., 2013).

Conventional demolition is a wasteful and unsustainable practice, resulting in the destruction of salvageable buildings and the costly disposal of valuable construction materials into landfills (Leigh & Patterson, 2006). However, blight remediation can become much more sustainable through the practice of deconstruction, defined as "the systematic disassembly of buildings to enable the reuse and recycling of the construction materials such as brick, con-

crete, steel, wood, and architectural elements" (Leigh & Patterson, 2006, p217). Deconstruction has a multitude of environmental and social benefits by reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills, reducing airborne pollutants released through demolition, providing job training opportunities, and building social capital through the engagement of residents in planning and salvage processes (Leigh & Patterson, 2006). Therefore, blight remediation efforts in G7 should strive to maximize sustainability and social benefits through the selective renovation and deconstruction of vacant structures.

As was expressed in the City of Detroit's G7 Neighborhood Planning Survey, the demolition and repair of vacant buildings is a top priority for over half of residents surveyed. Given that blight and dumping emerged as significant concerns through the Vacant Land Adaptation Focus Group, efforts should be made to remediate existing blight and to create environments that deter dumping. Osborn Neighborhood Alliance and LifeBUILDERS, neighborhood organizations based in G7, highlight examples of how the City of Detroit can support community-led efforts to remediate blight.

# 2b. Promote eyes on the space

In the 1960's, author and activist Jane Jacobs championed safer by aggregating a variety of activities and land uses. the idea of promoting "eves on the street", which has since Research has shown that this can deter crime and improve become an essential means through which urban planners perceptions of personal safety and well-being (Jansson et and designers promote the safety of urban neighborhoods al, 2013). For instance, residents expressed that by plac-(Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). Research has since supported ing a community garden and seating areas adjacent to these efforts by revealing that crime is less common in archildrens' playgrounds, there is a greater likelihood that eas where perpetrators are likely to be observed (Kuo & children will feel and be safer in that space. Research has Sullivan, 2001). Highly vacant, low-density communities shown that incorporating a variety of uses has the added are less likely to effectively observe the abundance of open benefit of reclaiming more vacant lots and thereby more space, making these areas more susceptible to crime and effectively stabilizing neighborhoods (Schilling & Logan, 2008). Participants also recommended that these new pubdumpina. lic open spaces be located in residential areas that have sufficient densities to establish a culture of community sur-Residents of the G7 Planning Area have advocated for veillance. Spaces can then be designed and programmed creating a culture of community surveillance. During Community Meeting #1, residents expressed that communities to extend the length of time that they are activated. need "more eyes" to observe their neighborhoods. Focus

group participants expressed that open space would be

### Strategies

- Aggregate a diversity of land uses to increase activity 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

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

# 2c. Light streetscapes, pathways, and public spaces

Research shows that people feel safer outdoors at night when spaces are well-lit, revealing that artificial lighting can both deter crime and improve perceptions of safety (Loewen et al., 1993). This, in turn, enhances the walkability and sociability of neighborhoods, promoting a culture of community trust (Francis et al., 2012). We heard the same urgent request through both Community Meeting #1 and the Vacant Land Adaptation Focus Group, wherein residents expressed that increasing lighting is essential to ensuring safety in their neighborhoods. Therefore, adding lighting is recommended on both streets and public spaces to increase visibility and residents' sense of safety and well-being.

Lighting should be thoughtfully selected and placed to maximize safety benefits while limiting implementation and energy costs. In particular, pathways and intersections that are well lit help to provide safe pathways at night, and have been linked to reductions in stress and improved psychological states (Sanders, 2016). Additionally, not all lights are created equal, with illuminance and light spectrum impacting perceptions of personal safety (Sanders, 2016). Walkways and greenways can be downlit to reduce light pollution and enhance feelings of safety (Sanders, 2016). By integrating white or light colored surfaces, the efficiency of lighting can be increased, thereby providing opportunities for greater impact with lesser cost (Sanders, 2016).

### **Strategies**

- Provide lighting in all new public spaces and pathways
- Enhance lighting throughout neighborhoods, prioritizing pathways and intersections
- Design lighting to maximize safety and limit energy costs Downlight pathways Integrate light-colored surfaces

# 2d. Design plantings to enhance visibility and safety

The selection, placement, and maintenance of vegetation view-obstructing trees are associated with increased crime, can have a significant impact on perceptions of personal whereas large canopy trees are associated with reduced safety (Jansson et al., 2013). Vegetation in residential arcrime (Donovan & Prestemon, 2012). Therefore, vegetaeas has been linked to a "greater sense of safety, fewer tion that reduces visibility at eye level should be avoidincivilities, and less agaressive and violent behavior" (Kuo ed, providing instead low-growing perennials and taller, & Sullivan, 2001, p349). However, vegetation should be canopy trees. Shrubs and tall grasses may reduce visibility selected and placed to allow for visibility and promote and perceptions of safety, so should be placed in open open views of the surrounding landscape, thereby improvarrangements and/or away from pedestrian routes such as ing perceptions of safety. Research has shown that smaller, residential streetscapes and greenways.

- 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

Given that neglected environments are associated with high crime rates and reduced perceptions of safety, neigh- abandonment (Nassauer & Raskin, 2014, p250). Cues to borhood improvements should display human activity and care can also have the added benefit of promoting sustaincare for the landscape. Joan Iverson Nassauer developed ability and environmental stewardship (Nassauer, 2011). the concept of "cues to care", defined as "landscape characteristics that visibly demonstrate human presence", with

research showing that cues to care discourage crime and Cues to care include, but are not limited to:

- neatness and order
- structures in good repair
- visible, crisp edges between different vegetation types
- fencelines
- trees, hedges, or other vegetation planted in a row
- mown turf (can include mowed edges of naturalized vegetation)
- colorful flowers
- lawn ornaments

• signs that identify those who occupy the property or suggest the ecosystem (refined from Nassauer, 2011; Nassauer & Raskin, 2014)

Public art and gardens also have the potential to convey should also be incorporated and encouraged throughout a message of care. These cues to care should be emphathe residential landscape. sized in spaces that are intended to attract people, but

- 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 Interpretive/educational signage Directional signage Welcome signs

# GOAL 3: SUSTAINABLE AND PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES

**Enhancing Ecosystem Services** 

for a variety of landscape interventions that could be impollination, carbon sequestration and infiltration, would be of multi-functional landscapes that enhance environmental beneficial to all members of the community. As expressed by Schilling and Logan, sustainable and productive landscapes can be integrated into a green infrastructure network that involves "the regeneration of vacant properties for new parks, community gardens, restored habitat, flood mitigation and storm water treatment sites, and urban agriculture plots linked with existing green spaces" (Schilling & Logan, 2008). Such a green infrastructure network has the potential to aid transition to a greener economy by converting vacant land to create new economic opportunities such as the production of renewable energies, the implementation of urban agriculture, and the provision of long-term carbon sequestration (Schilling & Logan, 2008).

The Fitzgerald Revitalization Project in Detroit provides an example of how these types of landscapes could be implemented in a neighborhood with high vacancy to create a resilient neighborhood (see Fitzgerald Revitalization Project, p28). Vacant land in the Fitzgerald neighborhood was utilized to create a green network consisting of a centralized community park, a greenway lined with trees, pollinator gardens, and community gardens, and a variety of pro-

The quantity of vacant land in the G7 Planning Area allows ductive, land based businesses (ASLA, 2017). While the needs of the G7 Planning Area will be different from those plemented in the neighborhood. Landscapes that provide in Fitzgerald, this project can serve as a model for how a range of ecosystem services, including food production, vacant land in Detroit can be transformed into a network and social sustainability.

- Promote Food Production and Security
- Explore Opportunities for the Production of **Renewable Energy**

![](_page_49_Figure_7.jpeg)

- Implement Green Stormwater Management
- Establish Multi-functional Natural Greenspaces

# Recommendations:

# 3a. Promote food production and security

food, food security, skill building, jobs, and community im- no farmers markets within the G7 Planning Area (Figure provements (Horst et al., 2017). Urban agriculture activities can encompass a diversity of crops, including "vegetables, medicinal plants, spices, mushrooms, fruit trees, and other productive plants, as well as the keeping of livestock for eggs, milk, meat, wool, or other products" (Carlet et al., 2017). While the keeping of livestock is not currently permissible within the City of Detroit, farmers in the city are ence of pollinators in the neighborhood, thereby benefiting working to change city ordinances to allow for this land local growers nearby. use (Mondry, 2019).

Community gardens can be "vital parts of the urban food system" (Vitiello, 2008, p267) by providing a source of fresh, healthy food to residents. In addition to providing food and increased self-sufficiency, community gardens also provide social benefits, such as increase in neighborhood cohesion (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006). Although there are some community gardens already present in the G7 Planning Area, there is enormous potential for this land use to be expanded. Feedback from community engagement shows support from the residents in increasing the sons, 2012). As the city and nation begin to prepare for amount of community gardens.

The farmstead typology (see Farmstead, pp.54-55) is being developed as a pathway for residents in the G7 Plan-

Urban agriculture can provide increased access to healthy ning Area to grow food for profit. Given that there are 7, p.15), the creation of a local farmer's market or other platform for selling produce would allow farmsteads to sell their crops for profit. The community at large would then have greater access to healthy, sustainably produced food and other goods. Beekeeping can also provide an opportunity for income production while encouraging the pres-

> Collectively, these forms of urban agriculture have the potential to enhance self-sufficiency and economic resilience in the G7 Planning Area. These alternative land uses may be even more beneficial during times of economic downturn, which is currently underway as the City of Detroit has become an epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic (Shah, 2020). Urban agriculture movements in the United States have historically grown during times of economic recession, including both the Great Depression of the 1930's, the Panic of 1983, and the 2007 mortgage crisis (Paran economic downturn of unknown proportion, urban agriculture has the potential to once again support self-sufficiency and economic resilience in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

# 3b. Explore opportunities for the production of renewable energy

In addition to urban agriculture, there exists the opportu- (Toland, 2007). Vacant lots could also be employed for nity to explore the production of renewable energy in the community-based renewable energy production, a land G7 Planning Area. As expressed by Schilling and Logan, use supported by G7 residents as expressed through the "green technologies present opportunities for vacant prop-Vacant Land Use Survey. While the policy pathways to erties to become sources of green energy" including but achieving these land uses are less clear, the G7 Planning not limited to the production of solar power, geothermal Area can become a site for pilot projects to explore and energy, and biofuels (Schilling and Logan, 2008, p455). develop their feasibility. There may also exist opportunities Pittsburgh has had significant success growing sunflowers to explore renewable energy on a smaller scale, through as experimental biofuel crops on vacant land (Zhao et al., the integration of solar-powered lights and amenities such 2014). Switcharass has also been used for this purpose as charging stations.

### Strategies

- Create policies to support solar energy production Powering community centers, libraries, other municipally owned facilities Farmsteads
- Incorporate solar-powered amenities Lights Charging stations
- Implement pilot projects in biomass production

- Create community gardens for residents to grow food
- Integrate farmsteads into existing neighborhoods
- Provide platforms for local growers to sell their crops Farmers market Farm stands
- Establish programs for agricultural training and education

### 3c. Implement green stormwater management

Rain gardens and other green stormwater infrastructure GIS analysis of the G7 Planning Area (see Stormwater techniques can provide both ecological and aesthetic benefits to the G7 Planning Area. Through the Vacant Land Use Survey, Community Meeting #1, and the Vacant Land Adaptation Focus Group, G7 residents have expressed that flood prevention would be beneficial to their neighborhoods. Residents expressed particular interest in the construction of rain gardens of varying scale. As with other land uses, maintenance essential to the long-term function and appearance of areen stormwater infrastructure (Nassauer & Feng, 2018). Rain gardens that feature cues to care and are regularly maintained with open views and defined boundaries can discourage dumping (Nassauer and Feng, 2018). Interpretive signage near stormwater infrastructure can also provide environmental education by informing residents of the benefits and functions of the rain troit, 2020b). gardens.

Management Potential, p. 21) showed an area of well drained, higher infiltration soil near the intersection of Maddelein and Brock Avenues that may be particularly well suited for stormwater infiltration. In order to maximize the flood mitigating potential of stormwater infrastructure, these features should be placed to eliminate site specific flooding. While larger-scale stormwater infrastructure was less supported by focus group participants, they may be essential to alleviate flooding in the area. As stormwater management is planned and implemented in the G7 Planning Area, planners and designers should seek opportunities to collaborate with the City of Detroit's Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) and align with their goal of reducing pressure on the city's combined sewer system (City of De-

### **Strategies**

- 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

quality improvements (Barron et al., 2019). Additional tree canopy, in the form of street trees and urban woodlands can further increase long-term carbon sequestration (Shilling and Logan, 2008). Other ecosystem services provided by trees include improved air quality, decreased stormwater runoff, mitigation of the urban heat island effect, and beautification (Green et al., 2016; Barron et al., 2019). Tree plantings can also be designed to provide refuge from the sun by creating cooler, shaded areas for residents to access and enjoy (Barron et al., 2019), which is increasingly important in the context of a changing climate. As is expressed in Recommendation 2d, tree plantings must be maintained to enhance perceptions of safety and residents should be engaged in the selection and design of these natural greenspaces (see p. 87). Given that tree species vary in their ability to provide ecosystem services and attractive, safe environments, there exists an opportunity to develop design guides for tree plantings within and beyond the G7 Planning Area.

Natural greenspaces have the potential to provide a wide variety of environmental and social benefits. For instance, meadows and pollinator gardens provide habitat for pollinators essential to the success of community garden and farmstead crops. Additionally, meadows and pollinator gardens composed of native plants have deep roots that increase infiltration and provide stormwater benefits, while reducing the need for mowing (SEMCOG, 2013). If designed and maintained with care, pollinator gardens have the potential to deter dumping. Although focus group participants expressed concerns with tall vegetation (safety and wildlife), they were amenable to natural open spaces paired with mowed edges or other cues to care. The G7 Planning Area has a number of trees on vacant lots, including many large and attractive canopy trees. Large, mature trees should be preserved for their beauty and environmental benefits. Large trees sequester more carbon and provide more benefits such as shade and air

- 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 AND EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES**

**Building Social Capital** 

ing, and shared values and behaviors that bind the mem- community and social capital by connecting and engaging bers of human networks and communities" (Cohen & Prusak, 2001, p4). In order to maximize impact and ensure environments. Opportunities abound for linking governlong-term success of neighborhood improvements, it is recommended to build social capital by developing networks of people devoted to the continued improvement, activation, and maintenance of landscapes across the G7 Planning Area. Research has shown that social capital enhances neighborhood stability and social cohesion (Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008).

Many of the above mentioned, land-based strategies to neighborhood improvement promote social capital by enhancing opportunities for social interaction and recreation. Interventions such as lighting and blight remediation enhance perceptions of safety and walkability, thereby promoting social interaction and community trust (Wood & Giles-Corti, 2008) and building social capital. Community gardens encourage social interaction and collective, creative action. Centrally located, multi-functional landscapes attract people of different incomes, ages, and genders to promote face-to-face interaction and instill a sense of community (Hester, 2006). However, it is essential to develop other, non-spatial strategies for building social capital, to pair with and activate these land-based interventions.

Social capital is defined as "the trust, mutual understand- This section highlights key strategies for the building of people to imagine, implement, and manage their shared ment, organizations, residents, and landscapes to a shared vision for more active, healthy, and stable communities.

# Recommendations:

### 4a. Connect community assets

Urban greening efforts are more meaningful and impactbusiness owners, residents, and community leaders. As ful when they engage a diversity of stakeholders to dethe planning process continues, efforts should be made to velop partnerships with "public and private entities, other identify and connect community assets, setting in motion nonprofits, and community residents" (Schilling & Logan, relationships that will continue into the implementation and 2008, p457). By integrating the diversity of voices, the management phases.Community members should be supcommunity is better able to develop holistic solutions to imported in the crafting their own institutions, thereby building proving livability, health, and sustainability in the G7 Plansocial capital, instilling a sense of ownership and neighning Area. Work by Kretzman and McKnight has shown borhood identity, and increasing likelihood of long-term the efficacy of "asset-based community development", success (Colding & Barthel, 2013; Abbott, 1996). Assets wherein community assets (individuals, associations, instishould be connected both physically and socially. Community assets in the G7 Planning Area include community tutions, natural resources, etc.) are identified, connected, centers, a public library, schools, abundant land availabiland built upon to "multiply their power and effectiveness, ity, engaged community organizations and leaders, plus and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes (Kretzman & an active population of residents who are already improving and maintaining their neighborhoods. These and other McKnight, 1993, p5). assets should be identified and mapped, then connected throughout the planning, design, implementation, and This work is already underway, as the Planning and Development Department is seeking wisdom and input from management phases.

- Build lasting relationships with a diversity of stakeholders Residents
  - Community organizations
  - Public
  - Private
  - Nonprofit
- 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

As has been expressed through community engagement, the abundance of vacant land in G7 provides opportunity to employ vacant land as a platform for education residents to operate for-profit farms. and skill building. Educational attainment and skill building have been shown to improve labor market outcomes and enhance community resilience in deindustrialized cities, particularly during an economic downturn (Perna, 2014). Characterized by high rates of poverty and low income, the G7 Planning Area is likely to benefit from programming that provides residents with opportunities to develop marketable skills. Residents can be trained and employed in the deconstruction and rehabilitation of abandoned structures, thereby enabling them to get construction-related jobs in the future. Community gardens provide opportunities to learn agricultural skills, which can empower residents to grow their own food, either for personal consumption or for profit. Existing community organizations already committed to these efforts should be engaged and supported to provide such opportunities. LifeBUILDERS, located in the Regent Park neighborhood, is already working to remove tions. blight and employ local youth (LifeBUILDERS, 2020). Keep

Growing Detroit is a local organization that provides agricultural education to local growers, which could empower

In addition to market-based skill building, vacant land adaptation can be catered to promote environmental literacy and advocacy (Colding & Barthel, 2014), which is especially important during these times of climate change, environmental injustice, and biodiversity loss. Community gardens, stormwater management, and natural open space provide platforms for environmental education, either through interpretive signage or educational programming. Again, existing community assets should be engaged and supported to increase the capacity and efficacy of such programs. The Regent Park Community Association is already seeking to acquire land to implement stormwater and native plant gardens. Land-based educational programs could be connected to and led by schools, the local library, community centers, or other community organiza-

# **Strategies**

- Partner with community organizations to develop long-term education 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
  - Signage Educational programming

# 4c. Develop strategies for community-based landscape management

pends to maintain vacant lots (Sadler & Pruett, 2017). This Beyond implementation, neighborhood improvement projects must be operated and maintained, requiring labor, program has resulted in improved landscape quality and livability by helping to: alleviate poverty; provide income skills, materials, and equipment. Given the City of Detroit's lack of fiscal capacity to maintain the abundance of vaand job skills; increase social interaction and time spent cant land, strategies should be developed to engage the outside; improve perceptions of safety and reduce crime; community in the management and care of open space. prevent dumping of waste; and engage youth (Sadler & Community management strategies include the creation of Pruett, 2017). Residents also report a "spill-over effect", community gardens and engaging the community in tree wherein neighbors of newly maintained vacant lots begin planting and maintenance, mowing, and beautifying lots. taking better care of their own properties (Sadler & Pruett, The City of Berlin has successfully reduced city expenditure 2017, p601). by engaging groups of local residents in the management of public open spaces that also serve as platforms for so-Additionally, a top priority of G7 residents is the expancial and environmental education (Colding and Barthel, sion of opportunities for residents to acquire vacant lots, 2013). Community management also has the potential to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions—by localizing DLBA already operates a side-lot program for this purpose, labor, there is less need for transporting people and equipresidents can only purchase homes that directly border their own parcel (Detroit Land Bank Authority, 2020a). Research ment.

thereby increasing community land ownership. While the has shown that the transfer of vacant land to communi-As has been revealed through community engagement, G7 ty residents can result in significant improvements to the residents are already helping to maintain and beautify pubcondition and care of vacant land through an increased licly owned vacant lots. During both Community Meeting number of gardens and trees, and an increased presence #1 and the Vacant Land Adaptation Focus Group, residents of cues to care (Gobster et al., 2020). Given the wealth of expressed interest in receiving stipends to support the labor benefits that community management provides to both resiand equipment required for this work. In Flint, the Genesee dents and city governments, it is recommended that the G7 County Land Bank Authority (GLCBA) has launched a sti-Neighborhood Framework Plan develop community-based management platforms to improve landscape quality, build pend-based community management program, Clean and Green (C&G), through which community groups receive stisocial capital, produce income, and provide education.

# **Strategies**

- Expand opportunities for residents to acquire vacant lots
  - Mowing
  - Tree planting
  - Gardening
- Support new and existing community gardening efforts
- Engage residents in the management of public open space

Provide stipends for the maintenance of municipally-owned vacant lots

# CONCLUSION

This project identified a series of goals and strategies for vacant land adaptation to inform the planning and design of neighborhood revitalization efforts in the Gratiot/7 Mile Planning Area. We employed an iterative process of site analysis, case studies, community engagement, and literature review.

While the G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan has a defined set of boundaries, future planning efforts should incorporate a broader vision for the surrounding area and city as a whole. Therefore, improvements in G7 should seek out innovative solutions to serve as pilot projects for potential implementation citywide. As Schilling and Logan express, successful urban greening efforts must move beyond the neighborhood scale, fostering larger scale green plans that build on initial successes (Schilling & Logan, 2008). In so doing, the G7 Planning Team can develop opportunities for expanding beyond the site, with the potential to enhance connectivity of people, open space, and natural ecosystems throughout the City of Detroit.

Given the vast quantities of vacant land in the area, combined with funding constraints resulting from the city's reduced tax base, it is recognized that not all vacant land will be adapted in the immediate future. Therefore, the G7 Neighborhood Framework Plan should incorporate policies for both "interim and permanent green reuse", determined by "location, ecological value, and economic conditions" (Schilling & Logan, 2008, p457). Sites can then be identified for immediate activation through community parks, greenways, stormwater management, and productive land uses. Collaborative management plans should be developed for other areas that cannot be activated and improved at this time, with improvements to come at a later date as resources allow. Some of this land can be slated for either future development or eventual improvement as larger parks and natural areas, in support of a vision for a connected open space network throughout the City of Detroit.

# **APPENDICES**

# APPENDIX A: CITY OF DETROIT'S NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING SURVEY

# Neighborhood Planning Survey

The purpose of this survey is to understand how residents perceive their neighborhood and the changes they want to see. This survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The results will be used in the City's neighborhood planning efforts. Thank you for your participation.

#### \* Required

^ Kequirea	How many years have you lived in this neighborhood? *	Youth & Family-friendly Activities
×	How many years have you lived in this heighborhood:	More entertainment venues (e.g. theaters, skating, bowling)
Your answer	O 0-1 year	Affordable Housing Opportunities (Single-Family)
What is your age? *	O 2-5 years	Affordable Housing Opportunities (Multi-Family)
O linder 12	O 6-10 years	More food delivery options
	O 11-20 years	Eliminate street and basement flooding
0 13-19	More than 20 years	Less littering and illegal dumping
0 20-29	What are some of the things you would like to see improve in your	More wi-fi/free internet options
0 30-49	neighborhood? (Select all that apply) *	
50-74		
O 75+	Ways to get around better (e.g. biking, walking, bus)	
What is your race? *	More retail, dining, and entertainment options	What do you like most about your peighborhood? *
O Black	Demolishing or repairing vacant buildings	what do you like most about your heighborhood.
O White	Places to play and exercise	Your answer
Asian or Pacific Islander	More places to enjoy nature (e.g. birds, trees, flowers, butterflies, etc.)	
O Hispanic	Other:	
Other	If you could only make one of the improvements above which would you	Would you like to receive undates on planning happen
Prefer not to say	choose? *	
		O Yes
What is your gender *	Ways to get around better (e.g. biking, waiking, bus)	O No
O Female	More retail, dining, and entertainment options	
O Male	O Demolishing or repairing vacant buildings	If you would like to receive updates on planning happe
Prefer not to say	O Places to play and exercise	neighborhood, please provide your name and email ad
	More places to enjoy nature (e.g. birds, trees, flowers, butterflies, etc.)	Your answer
Other:		

What is the most critical issue you want resolved in your community? (Select all

ing, nightclubs)

that apply) \*

Renovate abandoned storefronts

Fix sidewalks and streets

ing in your neighborhood?

ening in your ddress.

# APPENDIX B: VACANT LAND USE SURVEY

#### Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan **NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING SURVEY #2** Vacant Land Use

![](_page_56_Picture_2.jpeg)

City leaders and residents are coming together to create a plan for the neighborhoods near Gratiot and 7 Mile in Northeast Detroit. The Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan is a city-led plan of action, co-crafted by residents to guide future growth and investment in the neighborhood. A team of graduate students from the University of Michigan is conducting a survey to assist in this process.

This survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The results will be used in the City's neighborhood planning efforts. Thank you for your participation.

1. How old are you? 2. What is your race? Black 🗆 White Asian or Pacific Islander □ Hispanic Other: Prefer not to say 3. What is your gender? Female
 Male Other Prefer not to say 4. Do you currently reside in the G7 Planning Area? Yes 🗆 No Not sure 5. What neighborhood do you live in? Mapleridge □ Mohican Regent Regent Park Franklin Not sure Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_ 6. How many years have you lived in your neighborhood?  $\Box$  0-1 year  $\Box$  2-5 years  $\Box$  6-10 years.  $\Box$  11-20 years □ More than 20 years 7. Please circle the extent to which you believe the following vacant land uses would be beneficial in your neighborhood: **Community gardens** Strongly Disagree Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Playgrounds for children Neither agree nor disagree Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Places for teens and adults to play and exercise Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree **Public art** Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Social gathering spaces Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Places to enjoy nature Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree **Creation of walking trails** Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

#### **Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING SURVEY #2** Vacant Land Use

Planting trees Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

Production of food by local growers Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

Production of flowers by local growers Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

Production of trees by local growers Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

Production of renewable energy (e.g. solar p Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

Flood prevention (e.g. rain gardens, retention Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

Opportunities for residents to acquire adjac Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor

preferred.

1.		
2.		
3.		
4		
5		
5.	-	-

9. Do you have other ideas for how to use vacant land in your neighborhood? Please be specific.

10. Would you like to receive updates on planning happening in your neighborhood? If yes, please provide your name and email address.

![](_page_56_Picture_19.jpeg)

r disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
r disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
r disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
r disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
anels, wind r disagree	turbines) Disagree	Strongly Disagree
n basins) r disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
c <b>ent lots</b> r disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. For the land uses above, please tell us your top 5 choices, with 1 being the most

# APPENDIX C: VACANT LAND USE SURVEY FLYER

# APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP WORD COUNT

![](_page_57_Picture_2.jpeg)

City leaders and residents are coming together to create a plan for the neighborhoods near Gratiot and 7 Mile in Northeast Detroit. The Gratiot/7 Mile Neighborhood Framework Plan is a city-led plan of action, co-crafted by residents to guide future growth and investment in the neighborhood. A team of graduate students from the University of Michigan is conducting a survey to assist in this process.

Take a quick survey to share your thoughts about vacant land in your neighborhood. Use your camera phone to scan the code below or visit the link here:

# http://bit.ly/g7survey2

![](_page_57_Picture_6.jpeg)

Respond by January 24!

![](_page_57_Picture_8.jpeg)

Count	Word(s)
21	people
11	build/built
10	park/parks
10	area/areas
9	safety/safe
9	gardens/gardening
9	vacancy/vacant
8	community/communities
7	ownership/owners/own
7	grow/growing/grower
7	neighborhood/neighborho
	ods/neighbors
/	school/schools
/	street/streets
/	
/	mowing/mow/mowed
/	meadow/meadows
6	houses/house
ے ۲	work
5	waik/waiking
<u> </u>	space/spaces
5	KIOS
4	
4	marker/ markers
4	passage
4	need/needs
4	
4	place/places
4	butterflies
4	bees/beekeeping
3	vouth/vouna
3	food/feed
3	idea
3	home
3	activity/activities
3	sidewalk/sidewalks
3	city
3	plants
3	lawn
3	talent/talented
3	route/routes
3	teach

i i i i	and in the second s
3 farming/farm	1 love
2 beauty/beautiful	1 care
2 project/projects	1 water
2 reservation	1 entrance
2 cooperative	1 exit
2 location	1 central
2 citizens/citizenship	1 playground
2 abandoned	1 fallout
2 develop	1 paved
2 blight	1 target
2 sport/sports	1 experience
	1 prevent
2 maintenance	1 exercise
2 dog	1 group
2 sledding	1 live
2 soil/topsoil	1 landscaping
2 scale	1 responsibility
2 hoophouse	1 winter
2 learn	1 field
2 seed	1 hill
2 sit	1 skating
2 grass	1 benefits
2 trees	1 honey
2 money/monetary	1 property
2 innovate/innovative	1 species
2 platform	1 native
2 business/businesses	1 resources
2 create	1 birds
2 move	1 purpose
2 land	1 urban
2 plan/planning	1 protit
2 rain garden/rain	1 provide
2 flowers	1 season
2 novers	1 workshops
2 flooding	l woodland
	1 attract
	l animals
	l pathway
	l signage
	l contribute
	l stormwater
	1 intrastructures
I slide	1 event

1	mobile
1	lights
1	artists
1	share
1	equity
1	character
1	construction
1	long-term
1	opportunity
1	climate
1	brilliant
1	public
1	hub

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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-de-troit-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/