To: Dr. Moran

From: Sara Abdulrazzak

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Subject: Rebuilding, Repurposing and Reusing structures in Detroit

**Interview Memo**

Detroit is a unique case in the sense that it was able to survive an unprecedented bankruptcy. The year 2013 set Detroit as the city with the highest debt in U.S. history. With a $18-$20 billion debt, Detroit was easily able to outperform Alabama’s Jefferson County record-setting Chapter 9 filing for $4 billion (Saunders, Pete. "Detroit After Bankruptcy." *Forbes*). With bankruptcy comes abandonment, foreclosures, poverty and crime. These normalized issues have tainted Detroit’s image and dubbed it as a crime capital and thus the last place foreigners would want to visit (Fisher, Daniel. "America's Most Dangerous Cities: Detroit Can't Shake No. 1 Spot. *“Forbes*). A large part of the problem comes from its physical appearance. First impressions matter and when visitors, usually middle to upper class suburban individuals, come to Detroit they expect to see a city littered with trash, abandoned houses and factories, homeless people, and much more. Unfortunately, this is largely true especially when they leave the downtown area. Nonetheless, the city is participating in numerous efforts to revive itself in various ways such as building the Renaissance center near the river walk, reopening parks, blight removal, improving public transportation and much more (Helms, Matt, Joe Guillen, John Gallagher, and JC Reindl. "9 Ways Detroit Is Changing after Bankruptcy." *Detroit Free Press*). Though projects like the Renaissance are not traditional Detroit projects, they have successfully pooled a variety of accommodations such as a hotel, convention center, restaurants and shops that any robust city would feature (<http://gmrencen.com/)>. The issue at hand however is that if we focus on constructing these new commodities for visitors but leave the residential areas to decay, causing the citizens will likely work against rather than work with the cities.

I was able to interview Bill Salliotte, an employee at the Taubman developing company, regarding the issue of adding malls or just general shops in Detroit. According to Salliotte, “the most important step in developing any mall or similar project is garnering support from the locals and the local government” (Salliotte). Tubman, owner of 22 malls nationwide, has been a loyal ally to suburban malls, however, “most people don’t want suburban malls in urban settings” (Salliotte). He also mentioned that most of the contention that comes with building anything is how the locals will be effected. A common issue Taubman faces is that “most people are worried about traffic [the shopping centers] will bring or how [they] will burden the schools and present infrastructure” (Salliotte). The Joe Louis Arena for example will be turned into a hotel and office area with shopping centers that will reside near Cobo Hall (Helms, Matt. "Detroit Deal with Creditor Includes Joe Louis Site." *Detroit Free Press*). This will emulate the Hyatt hotel and McCormick convention center combination in Chicago and other convention center/hotel hybrids in major metropolitan cities. The issue however is that “in order for a project to work, there needs to be a market that will support it” (Salliotte). Though he made it clear that he did not believe the project would fail, Salliotte did say, “there isn’t much money to be spent in Detroit, especially not in traditional “mall” stores. Starting with big box stores like TJ Maxx or Target may be a safer plan” (Salliotte). We believe that introducing such stores and additional utilities like a YMCA might encourage locales to increase their participation in Detroit’s market. The locals will wreak the benefits and in return aid the city by filling in jobs and supporting other projects that may benefit both sides of the equation

A solution that have the potential to satisfy both developers and locals is setting conditions for one another. Salliotte explained that “it is not uncommon for a developer to promise a school or park or something along those lines for the community in exchange for their support” (Salliotte). In addition, many people were not content with the fact that the replacement for the Joe Louis Arena would benefit billionaires like Mike Ilitch rather than the city and its inhabitants (Salliotte). We believe that by repurposing the broken down and abandoned areas, the city will not only make use of vacant land and collect property tax from such projects, but also more people would be willing to move back to Detroit. If the luxuries in suburban towns are initiated in urban settings more people will entertain the idea of moving into the city and potentially aid in its overall growth.

**Answered: What social, demographic or other groups are most affected by the problem you are working on.  Why are these groups most affected?**

Works Cited

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