

Design of Urban Farming Community: Strategies for Vacant Lands in Detroit Urban Neighborhoods

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SUMMARY

Detroit's vast vacant plots threaten the economic and social vitality of the region. Despite pockets of infill developments initiated by various agencies to deal with such a crisis, the positive impact is minimal because they are piecemeal and not well coordinated. In response, I developed a proposal for designing urban agriculture communities in test sites through master plans that feature farming education centers, micro farms, community gardens, greenhouses, community markets, and supportive mixed-use development. This provides a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to the vacant land crisis

The first component of the research was to consult with our key collaborators to fully comprehend their objectives and to identify two potential project sites in Detroit: one near a main commercial thoroughfare and one in a residential section in the East Warren community. We added two more sites after consulting with more project participants. This was done to consider carefully the characteristics of several significant areas in East Warren. The second component was to create two student design teams from my home university's community outreach studio to generate a design. Since two more sites were added, we created four teams. The third component was to conduct periodic reviews of the design research with the partnering agencies in order to verify compliance with their development goals and to gather feedback from all interested parties. The fourth component was to generate exhibition boards and scale models of the design research for public presentation. All project participants, Detroit City Council members, and residents participated in the December 13th final presentation and will participate in the December 20th public exhibition at Detroit Museum of Contemporary Art.

The final research results include the following: (1) Feedback from various project participants and interested parties suggest that urban farming is a viable strategy for vacant land to promote revitalization, sustainability, and public health. (2) An urban agriculture, health, fitness, and lifestyle center is proposed as the main facility of an urban farming community to promote agriculture, sustainability, and healthy lifestyles through various services. (3) East Warren has four significant areas, each of which has unique characteristics in terms of land use and physical features. Thus each area (test site) requires a different type of agriculture development. In response four models in urban farming community design are proposed to deal effectively with the four unique sites: an industrial district model, an open space model, a corridor model, and a residential district model. In conclusion, urban agriculture can catalyze unifying the efforts of diverse groups in promoting revitalization, sustainability, jobs, availability of healthy food, and positive lifestyle. We learned that successful urban farming will require (A) incorporating our present research efforts into the ongoing community garden developments, and (B) developing a comprehensive design guide book for urban farming community based on our master plans so that different entities can apply them to various situations. In our next grant application, we focus on (B).