

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

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Abstract

The city of Detroit faces a crisis that threatens the economic and social vitality of the region: The existence for decades of too much vacant land in urban neighborhoods. Various public and private agencies have proposed infill housing for vacant tracts but with minimal impact because the scattered pockets of developments are piecemeal and not well coordinated.

In response, the American Coalition of Black Farmers and the Christ Community Development Corporation have recently proposed to the City of Detroit Planning Department a prototypical farming education center with a community market to serve as a catalyst for community revitalization by creating locally-based jobs, teaching young people about healthy lifestyles and sustainability, and helping minority-owned farms in Detroit's outskirts partner with Detroit residents in urban farming-related businesses.

My research proposal entails designing urban farming communities in test-case locations that pair farming education centers with community markets and feature high-yield micro farms, community gardens, greenhouses, and supportive mixed-use development to illustrate the urban and architectural impact on Detroit's dilapidated urban neighborhoods.

The first component of the research is to consult with the two agencies in question to fully comprehend their proposed guidelines and to identify two potential project districts in Detroit: one near a main commercial thoroughfare and one in a large residential neighborhood. Second, I will create two student design teams from my home university's community outreach studio to generate a design for each site through which the proposed guidelines can be realized. Third, our teams will conduct periodic reviews of the design research with the partnering agencies to verify compliance with their guidelines and to gather feedback from all interested parties. Fourth, we will generate exhibition boards and scale models of the design research for presentation to all interested parties.

Funding for this design research would allow the architectural community to help solve one of the most critical issues facing Detroit. The American Coalition of Black Farmers and the Christ Community Development Corporation have made progressive recommendations for revitalization that address the vacant land crisis, and my research will provide a clear demonstration of its urban and architectural implications to the City of Detroit and other interested entities.