

# 13 STRATEGIES <sup>of</sup> Rust Belt Cities





*A Publication by:*  
Diamonds in the Rust

*Diamonds in the Rust*  
*June, 2012*

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Front Page Photo  
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# Letter from Professor Kyle Ezell



From a moniker of shame to a term of endearment, “The Rust Belt” is being embraced by a new crop of young people who are passionate about the potential of their storied home region. This

book is the result of a year’s-worth of researching, brainstorming, and exploring ways that the post-industrial Midwestern United States can become the premier region in North America. Admittedly, the ideas in this work are only a start, but they are powerful, and they are proof that something good is happening here. Young people in the Rust Belt know they must become ingenious. There’s no other choice.

These students who dedicated a year of their lives to this project (and I) believe that a new interest in “real” places—places that have seen hard times but are now yearning to tell new stories of triumph—will transform this once downtrodden region into a magnet for people who want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. It’s an exciting time around here, and I have been privileged to be the advisor to this amazing project by this amazing group of scholars.

Kyle Ezell  
Associate Professor of Practice  
The Ohio State University’s City and Regional Planning Program

# Introduction

Volunteers were already hacking at the roots taking over the black top along the outer fence of the Youngstown Playhouse lot. Others were whitewashing an adjacent brick wall that would later become a mural. When we took up our shovels and roller brushes to join them, we were becoming something more than we had been previously.

Becoming part of the solution—whatever that solution may be—is a process. We have spent the 2011-2012 academic year researching, generating, and writing about potential solutions to Rust Belt challenges. As part of our research, we visited Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Detroit, and Flint during our Spring Break, talking to local leaders and learning from grassroots efforts like the one in Youngstown to clean up the Playhouse lot. This publication is the result of those labors and experiences. The thirteen City and Regional Planning graduate students who have taken part in the Rust Belt Independent

The Diamonds in the Rust team visiting Pittsburgh, PA.  
Photo Credit: Marianne Eppig



Study—which we collectively named Diamonds in the Rust—are each inspired and challenged by the Rust Belt.

While there is no single accepted definition of the Rust Belt region, one way of explaining it is to identify a number of the post-industrial cities that lie within its borders, such as Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Warren, Youngstown, and Buffalo. Many of these cities have a common history of great industrial wealth followed by a dramatic decline in residents, jobs, and investment. In the wake of this collapse remain architectural masterpieces infiltrated with blight and surrounded by resilient poverty. Many of us are from this region, which gives us great pride in our cities' tenacity and grit as well as great hope for their recovery. By coupling our hope with action, we believe that we can help make a difference for this region.

Each article within this publication was written by one of the graduate students who participated in the City and Regional Planning Rust Belt Independent Study. Each presents an innovative strategy to address a Rust Belt challenge: tax code to reduce the number of inner city vacant lots, chaos planning to bring life into urban cores, multi-lingual signage to accommodate diverse populations, policy to protect the Great Lakes, reuse of abandoned rail lines, free rent to incentivize migration back into the city, and much more. Together, these articles paint a vision for what the Rust Belt could be within our lifetimes. By promulgating these ideas, we hope to contribute to the conversation about how to implement strategies for addressing the region's obstacles.

All of us have a personal stake in the future of the Rust Belt. Whether we grew up here, are affected by it economically, or want to see it rise again, each of the Independent Study participants has a reason for being involved in this yearlong endeavor. To explain our reasons, we have included a short autobiography of each author before the articles. By giving details about what has

inspired us, perhaps we will inspire you to become part of the solutions for this remarkable region as well.

We will not end here. We are already making plans for the continuation of the Rust Belt Independent Study next year. The shape of the project may change with time, but future graduate students will carry forward the purpose of involving students in gaining a wider understanding of the challenges, initiatives, and possibilities of the Rust Belt. Out of this greater understanding may come promising solutions and future leadership for this region.

Become involved in the discussion by visiting our website (<http://go.osu.edu/diamondsintherust>) or our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/DiamondsInTheRust>). We want to hear from you!





# Spring Break in the Rust Belt

Spring break and Rust Belt don't often appear in the same sentence. However, our group of seven Ohio State students spent spring break 2012 meeting with the Mayor of Flint, touring Youngstown's Iron Roots Urban Farm, and learning about community revitalization efforts in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh. This trip was part of a year-long independent study project initiated by Liz Colombo and Marianne Eppig, both Master's

students in OSU's City and Regional Planning (CRP) program. As part of the project, thirteen CRP students have been collaborating to recommend innovative solutions aimed at tackling some of the region's most pressing issues. The final result of our research is this publication entitled *Diamonds in the Rust*, containing each of our individual essays.

Our trip began in Pittsburgh, a city we were particularly interested in visiting since it has made strides in shedding its Rust Belt image.

We visited unique rowhouse

neighborhoods, such as Bloomfield, Lawrenceville and the South Side, each with its own vibrant shopping district. We also met with the East Liberty Development Inc (ELDI), a community development corporation working to revitalize the East Liberty neighborhood which had been devastated by urban renewal projects. ELDI shared with us a secret to their success; focusing on the neighborhood residents themselves, instead of the vacant lots, has brought about positive results. And the results in East Liberty are indeed impressive. Crime has plummeted, the housing project towers, once symbolic



Exploring examples of historic preservation in the Mexican War Streets neighborhood of Pittsburgh.

Photo Credit: Liz Colombo

of the community's decay, have been demolished, and Google has recently moved some of its offices into a 100-year old factory in the neighborhood.

After leaving Pittsburgh, our next stop was Youngstown's Idora neighborhood. We arrived early in the morning to participate in a community workday facilitated by the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation. Part of our group helped to prepare a wall for a new mural along the commercial corridor and the others cleared brush from an adjacent parking lot. An impressive number of volunteers had turned out to help that morning and several other projects were being completed, such as artistic board-ups on residential streets and the tilling of soil at Iron Roots Urban Farm. A definite highlight for us was touring the six-story Erie Terminal building, currently being renovated into apartments and retail space in downtown Youngstown.



Assisting in the preparation of a wall for a new artistic mural in Youngstown's Idora neighborhood.  
Photo Credit: Marianne Eppig

It wasn't until we arrived in Detroit, however, that we fully realized the scope of disinvestment and abandonment affecting the Rust Belt. Planning students from Wayne State University gave us a four-hour guided tour of the city. We walked around the shuddered Packard Plant and drove through neighborhood after neighborhood of collapsed roofs, broken windows, and burnt-out buildings. Revitalization efforts seemed to be scattered throughout the city, often with restored houses sitting next to vacant ones. We wondered if it would be better to concentrate resources on just a few target areas, and if so, what that would mean for residents not living those target areas. Lengthy discussions ensued over whether the city should clean up the worst neighborhoods, or attempt to halt the wave of blight by aiding neighborhoods that are still somewhat stable.

The last stop on our trip, Flint, further impressed upon us the urgency of the Rust Belt's plight. At the Genesee County Land Bank, we heard a heart-wrenching story of the realities faced by families who choose to stay in Flint



Curtis Moore of Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation describes plans for the Iron Roots urban farm.

Photo Credit: Liz Colombo

The highs and lows—the stark realizations and the moments of hope—on our spring break Rust Belt tour have galvanized our determination to join the ranks of those fighting for our region. We hope that our research will further discussion of the Rust Belt, raising awareness to both the urgent plight of these cities and the tremendous efforts underway to revitalize them.

because they believe in the city: few educational opportunities, social isolation, decimated property values, high insurance rates, and inaccessible financing for home repairs. Flint Mayor Dayne Walling described to us the tough decisions he is faced with: deficits so large that both tax increases and service cuts are needed to balance the budget. In fact, the governor of Michigan has declared the city to be in financial emergency and has taken steps to directly control the city's finances.

During Spring Break in the Rust Belt, we saw signs of destruction but also of hope and revitalization.  
Photo Credit: Marianne Eppig



# Chaos Planning in Detroit

By Liz Colombo

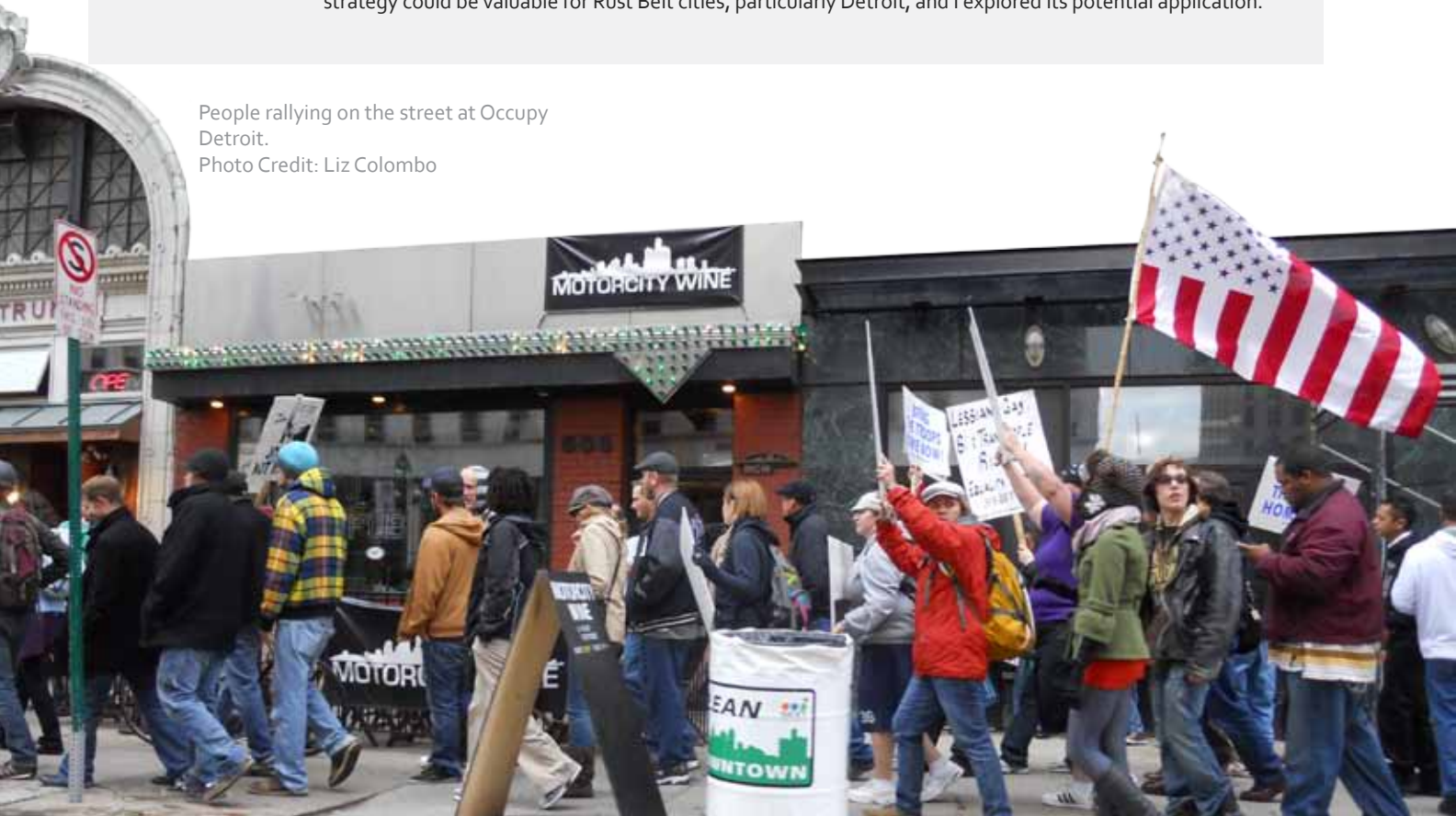


My name is Liz Colombo and I grew up in St. Louis. After working as a community organizer in Cincinnati for a couple years, I began to recognize that many of the issues facing both cities had their roots in their industrial past. However, their histories are also responsible for their beautiful architecture, neighborhoods, and cultures (including toasted ravioli and Skyline Chili, of course). So while I was deeply concerned about the consequences of the Rust Belt's population and economic decline, I had fallen in love with the region. I am getting a Masters in City and Regional Planning so that I can be part of the Rust Belt's revitalization.

My Diamonds in the Rust article argues that Detroit should utilize a planning strategy based on chaos theory. I was inspired by the Fashion District in Los Angeles, which seemed almost unplanned in that it had people and goods spilling onto the streets, wild colors and signage, and vendors densely packed. But the Fashion District is not unplanned; there is a clear planning strategy that limits regulation to achieve vibrancy and diversity. Through chaos, a real sense of identity and community has been formed. I decided that this strategy could be valuable for Rust Belt cities, particularly Detroit, and I explored its potential application.

People rallying on the street at Occupy Detroit.

Photo Credit: Liz Colombo



It is not news that Detroit is in trouble. More than a million people have abandoned the city over the last half-century. It is noteworthy, however, that even as the city drastically changed, city planners did not significantly change the way they planned; instead, Detroit continued to use many of the same traditional planning strategies that are based in growth, linearity, and even utopianism – certainly not the reality Detroit has been facing. This form of city planning is guided by rational planning theory, which—despite being widely criticized for being unrealistic, lengthy, and expensive—continues to dominate city planning.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, this method has failed to revitalize Detroit. Given the complexity of Detroit’s issues, Detroit city planners must reinvent their strategies and shift toward a more adaptable, bottom-up planning approach. Chaos planning, based on chaos theory, should replace rational planning as the guide for Detroit’s revitalization efforts. Although the word chaos can invoke fear due to its association with confusion, randomness, and even mayhem, chaos theory is much more about the importance of interactions at the local level than anything catastrophic.

Even as the city drastically changed, city planners did not significantly change the way they planned.

Chaos, in its truest form, simply defines the non-linear and unpredictable nature of interactions. Chaos theory originated as a mathematical study of the behavior of dynamic systems, which are complex, unpredictable, and interactive; a definition well-aligned with the nature of cities.<sup>2</sup> In dynamic systems, small changes can cause extensive consequences. In the context of Detroit, the city is bound by its physical location and its resources, but actions by residents and others as well as activities at the neighborhood and block levels have consequences that reverberate throughout the city.

The idea of chaos planning is a fringe idea in the planning world, but Detroit is on the fringe of city development and therefore is in the perfect position to experiment with new strategies. There are few guidelines for Detroit to use in employing chaos planning, but in his paper “Complexity Theory and Urban Planning,” Michael McAdams suggests that many of the tools of chaos planning are already used by competent city planners. The combination of these strategies creates something much larger – a comprehensive planning theory that is a marked shift from rational planning. Chaos planning includes three overarching strategies: transitioning away from long-term, land use-oriented

planning toward a greater emphasis on policymaking that encourages creativity and experimentation; transitioning from a top-down to a bottom-up planning approach; and focusing development resources in the creation of vibrant third places, which include public and private spaces that foster interaction and build a sense of community.

### Creativity and Experimentation

Even though the dynamic nature of cities makes them impossible to predict, traditional planning remains rooted in medium- and long-term visions for the city's future. Often, these visions play out in very specific land use plans that often make land use inflexible, especially in the short term, making the land use plan a barrier to adapting to an area's changing reality. This is not the way Detroit should be planned. Given the immediacy of many of the problems facing the city, planners should focus on revitalization in the short-term. While long-term strategies have an important place in planning, especially for environmental and transportation planning, economic and community development strategies must be responsive and flexible. To effectively encourage investment in the short-term, Detroit planners must engage stakeholders to identify possible projects and create momentum. Stakeholders not only include politicians and civic leaders, but residents and small business owners as well. This is especially important for Detroit, which can use as much additional support in revitalization efforts as its planners can foster.

Turning Technologies is a successful business incubator focused on software in Youngstown, Ohio.  
Photo Credit: Liz Colombo

In order to activate the energies and ideas of stakeholders, city planning efforts must shift from long-range land use plans towards a greater focus on developing policies that make it easy and inexpensive for community groups and entrepreneurs to act on creative ideas. There are many practical ways in which this can be done. One way





to make city planning more responsive is to establish a flexible zoning overlay to make it easier for development. Pantalone and Hollander, in "The Relaxed Zoning Overlay: A Tool for Addressing the Property Vacancy Cycle," explain that flexible zoning overlays address the challenges facing neighborhoods, particularly ones with high vacancy rates, in a timely fashion. The Relaxed Zoning Overlay (RZO) expands the list of by-right uses in a given community when the vacancy rate hits a certain level.<sup>3</sup> This makes the process to create a community garden, a pop-up business, and many other uses much easier and quicker as the interested party bypasses the re-zoning and variance processes. The resulting flexibility encourages investments that may not have occurred otherwise, since the re-zoning process can be lengthy and challenging.

Another way to encourage investment would be to establish an "Idea Incubator." This is a broad approach that is inspired not only by business incubators but also neighborhood activities funds, business district improvement funds, and current idea incubators found in many cities. Detroit has an abundance of dedicated stakeholders with great ideas, but many lack the necessary support for these ideas to come to fruition. While creative people are often able to successfully develop their own ideas, the success or failure of their creative ventures is often "defined by how a city behaves in response to their initiative."<sup>4</sup> Establishing a central location for stakeholders to come to for support and guidance from the city could strengthen existing initiatives and encourage the creation of new ventures. Fortunately, a framework already exists that can be expanded. "I Am Young Detroit" is an inspiring movement that provides support for young entrepreneurs. Not only should Detroit support this venture, but the city should include I Am Young Detroit's efforts in the overall idea incubation strategy.<sup>5</sup>

Detroit's flexible policymaking could even include updating the laws on squatting. With tens of thousands of vacant buildings, squatting has become commonplace. While it can create obvious issues, when the squatter behaves like an appropriate neighbor, surrounding residents often welcome them into

City planning efforts must shift from long-range land use plans toward a greater focus on developing policies that make it easy and inexpensive for community groups and entrepreneurs to act on creative ideas.

the community.<sup>6</sup> This could be a method of property maintenance, a means to return nuisance properties into homes for people committed to taking care of them, and a positive benefit to communities that struggle with the array of issues associated with vacant housing, including declining property values, an increase in crime and arson, and the psychological impact of a constant reminder of a community's decline. Although it may be difficult legally, there are precedents for allowing squatting as well as economic analyses that suggest that squatting can be economically beneficial for a community.<sup>7</sup>

A good example of a refocus of efforts from physical development to the establishment of adaptable policies can be found in the money-strapped post-industrial city of Newcastle, Australia. Here, Marcus Westbury, who founded Renew Newcastle, explains that the organization, without any initial funding, focused its efforts on engaging "the immediacy of enthusiasm and activity and stepped back from the contentious and divisive debates about what should and shouldn't happen in the long term."<sup>8</sup> Westbury defines Renew Newcastle as a broker between property owners of vacant properties and entrepreneurs. By agreeing to clean the properties up, entrepreneurs can use the space until the owners can successfully lease them out. Renew Newcastle has been able to greatly increase the simplicity and reduce the risk of starting a business, while at the same time invigorating once vacant streets and improving the prospects of renting out spaces for the property owners. This process has resulted in sixty projects in thirty previously empty spaces. Westbury explains:

"[W]e effectively made a whole system to make space behave as quickly and responsively to allow people with enthusiasm and passion to direct it into the city. We made it quick for people to try and cheap for them to fail. We removed capital and complexity from the equation and in doing so we... unleash[ed] the energy of hundreds of people."

The impact on quality of life that many big projects have is probably not worth the energy cities put behind them.

### **Bottom-Up Planning**

Nimbleness is not the only short-coming of traditional planning strategies. Too often, city planners focus their energies on large physical development projects in hopes that they will

revitalize a city. Downtown malls, convention centers, and stadiums are perennial economic development favorites, and for many well-intentioned reasons. They provide very visible signs of progress and their singularity makes them understandable and more easily financed. However, they often fail to live up to expectations. There are many cases in which stadiums leave the city heavily indebted and many downtown malls struggle with vacancy.

The impact on quality of life that many big projects have is probably not worth the energy cities put behind them. The opportunity cost of these efforts is the multitude of smaller neighborhood-based economic development initiatives that could have been developed that may have the potential to make a much greater impact on quality of life. This focus on neighborhood-level planning activities is a key component of chaos planning. Michael Batty, one of the first to apply chaos theory to the development of cities, argues that the city at its smallest scale is the most alive and dynamic scale of the city. Many urbanists, from Jane Jacobs to Jan Gehl, have asserted that cities should be planned at the people-scale, challenging the status quo focus on the site and city scales.<sup>9</sup> It is at the people-scale that the economic development potential of Detroit can be activated.

Working to enhance the quality of life at the neighborhood level is already an integral part of Detroit's revitalization. The Detroit Works Project, run by the City of Detroit, launched in 2010 to improve the city's "physical, social and economic landscape."<sup>10</sup> The Short-Term Actions component is heavily focused on neighborhood-based initiatives, utilizing neighborhood-level data to inform planning strategies. A next step for neighborhood-scale planning



Neighborhood residents building a paved pathway at a community cleanup day.  
Photo Credit: Liz Colombo

would be to assign planners to specific neighborhoods so that they gain an intimate understanding of the assets and challenges of particular neighborhoods. Neighborhood planners act as brokers, technical assistants, and advocates. Detroit's planners can activate residents to take ownership over the development of the neighborhoods with the proper support systems. Communities that were previously inactive have been empowered in other Rust Belt cities, especially in Youngstown, by the city's efforts to revitalize the city.

In chaos planning, neighborhood-based planning has citywide implications. Activities at the most localized level cause chain reactions throughout the city. If Detroit is revitalized neighborhood-by-neighborhood, this ultimately – albeit slowly – can change the Detroit landscape as a whole. It is a time-consuming and long-term strategy, but neighborhood-based planning engages many of the city's stakeholders in the process, cementing a sense of responsibility and pride in Detroiters.

An example of successful neighborhood-based planning is the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group. While North St. Louis was experiencing extreme disinvestment, some neighbors decided to fight back against the decline in the late 1970s and formed the community organization. Their voluntary, unfunded efforts began with initiatives such as potlucks, beautification efforts, and food delivery to elderly neighbors. After a few years, planners and policymakers recognized the capacity of residents in Old North St. Louis and provided funding and staffing to assist residents in achieving their vision through grant writing, design, and other planning expertise.<sup>11</sup> The Old North St. Louis Restoration Group has since renovated an extensive number of housing units as well as the neighborhood business district, and started a grocery store co-operative. The organization was recognized as the 2011 "Overall Excellence in Smart Growth" award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

### **Vibrant Third Places**

The final weakness of traditional planning is that it often marginalizes the importance of community spaces. Of course, in an ideal world, city planners greatly value community space, but in the real world of limited resources,

cities often postpone or eliminate financial support for festivals, public spaces, and farmers markets. Since these are the places where community is built and neighborhood character is developed, chaos planning prioritizes community space. Chaos planning relies heavily on interactions between community members and their communities, and community spaces increase the probability of these activities. One way to describe these spaces is “third places,” which was coined by Ray Oldenburg in *The Great Good Place* in 1989. Third places include coffee shops, bars, or “other hangouts at the heart of a community.”<sup>12</sup> Oldenburg asserts that third places encourage discussion, renew community spirit, and enhance the civic nature of citizens.



A festival in Detroit that brought hundreds of people out onto the streets  
Photo Credit: Dave Hogg

This concept of third places can go much further than neighborhood “hangouts” to include spaces that foster interaction between people from different communities and backgrounds. Public and semi-public spaces such as markets, festivals, parks, public squares, and even sidewalks provide the relatively rare opportunity for diverse groups of people to engage with one another. Jane Jacobs stated, “Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contracts are the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow.”<sup>13</sup> According to chaos theory, the consequences of these chance interactions can be much farther reaching than creating lively discussions. In “Marketplaces: Prospects for Social, Economic, and Political Development,” Alfonso Morales proposes that “[t]hird places can release the creative...and economic energies between the community and the individuals who compose it.”<sup>14</sup> These places not only can expand individual worldviews and create distinct senses of place, but also can create laboratories for community revitalization and entrepreneurship.

Financial support aside, city planners often miss the importance of interaction in third places. Planners attempt to “clean up” chaotic third places; the laundry list includes Venice, California’s removal of street vendors from their

famous strip, New York City's removal of park performers from city parks, and even San Francisco's removal of benches throughout the city to ensure homeless people cannot sleep on them. Whether attempting to solve budget issues or reduce the chaos of a place, these efforts can reduce quality of life for residents and eliminate a neighborhood's character that is vital to its sense of place.

People enjoying the Festival du Son in Toulouse, an example of a great Third Place gathering  
Photo Credit: Nirgal KsiNo

Detroit cannot underestimate the importance of third places in its revitalization efforts. While Detroit – as most cities do – already values these investments, to fully commit to chaos planning, resources might be redirected from the support of “first” and “second” places, homes and offices, to adequately support the development of third places. This may seem counterintuitive for a city that can barely afford to address its vacant homes and office buildings, but if Detroit wants to compete with its suburbs, it has to prioritize quality of life. Spending public dollars on supporting vibrant third places where people spend time and resources can encourage private development in the surrounding community, but the inverse is



not necessarily true. For example, public investments in neighborhood business districts, parks, streetscape/sidewalk improvements have been found to significantly correlate with improvements in housing values in surrounding areas.<sup>15</sup> Morales argues that third places are “full of extra-economic possibilities” and are important components “for practicing planners interested in creating multiuse districts that support multiple purposes.”<sup>16</sup>

Although still in the planning process, it is likely that Detroit’s right-sizing efforts will include targeted efforts to improve third places in stable neighborhoods through investments in neighborhood business districts. There are plenty of examples of cities prioritizing third places in their development plans from which Detroit can learn. In 1999, the City of Ann Arbor decided to get involved in the revitalization of the city’s farmers’ market through financial investments, reframing the marketing strategy, and playing an active role in its management through a sponsorship of an advisory board and a market master. According to Morales, the market, with the support of the City, has “enjoyed great popularity, become the fulcrum for mixed-use development, and influences other land use planning.”<sup>17</sup>

## The Potential of Chaos Planning

While city planning is sometimes perceived as a non-essential city service, few can argue that planning for a city’s future – particularly in Detroit – is superfluous. Planners have a clear role in implementing the three components of chaos planning, utilizing their expertise to write grant applications, developing neighborhood plans, designing third places, and, perhaps most importantly, acting as advocates for ideas, innovators, and communities to make things happen. These strategies are already happening in Detroit to different degrees, but the structures behind city planning in Detroit have yet to shift to a more flexible approach provided in chaos planning. Long-range plans, investments in private spaces, and attracting out-of-town businesses to relocate to the city still define many city planning departments. The individual activities of planners do have the same level of impact as how the planning department as a whole views development.<sup>18</sup>

Chaos theory asserts that the dynamic nature of cities means that the future is unknowable and development is non-linear. However, planners play an

important role in monitoring the non-linear, unpredictable development patterns in the city and encouraging the types that benefit the city. Just as feedback loops are vital to chaos theory, they are the mechanisms that drive change in city development.<sup>19</sup> Feedback loops will help planners understand what activities and efforts are impacting the city, what strategies are failing, and which need to be improved.

Chaos planning provides a change in behavior. Detroit's problems can be approached in a different way, allowing for new results to be achieved, however long the road may be.

Detroit's future is unknown, and though chaos theory's non-linear processes are unpredictable, they often are driven by purpose.<sup>20</sup> Batty explains, "The baseline for change is often random, but when utility and human intention are added to such processes with geometry constraining the way they operate in space, highly ordered structures

can emerge."<sup>21</sup> There are already myriad stakeholders that care deeply about the future of Detroit that can be tapped to further mobilize the creative energies of the city. Therefore, planners must manage and direct this purpose, and once this is done over and over again with the same goal in mind, an overarching reality is created.

Obviously, the revitalization of Detroit is a daunting task. For cities to be transformed, "radical changes in technology and/or behavior" are required.<sup>22</sup> Chaos planning provides a change in behavior. Detroit's problems can be approached in a different way, allowing for new results to be achieved, however long the road may be. Perhaps Renew Newcastle's experience describes the possibilities of chaos planning best for Detroit:

"As cities age, the challenge is not always to rebuild them physically but to re-imagine how they might function and adapt. In Newcastle in many respects nothing has changed since 2008. The buildings are mostly the same...No revolution has taken place. Yet, on another level much has changed – dead parts of the city are active and vibrant, 60 projects have started, hundreds of new



events have been created, and whole new communities are directly engaged in creating whatever it is that the city will become.”

This example of short-term revitalization efforts fostered by the creativity and energies of stakeholders is the essence of chaos planning and speaks to the potential of these strategies grounded in real-world efforts. I believe that through the adoption of chaos planning strategies, Detroit can more effectively achieve revitalization efforts and change the narrative of the city from one of decline to one of hope and opportunity. ◇

# Filling the Void

## Dealing with Vacancies in the Rust Belt

By Tyler Grzegorzcyk



I was born and raised in Midland, Michigan, near the northern edge of the Rust Belt. While I didn't grow up in a typical Rust Belt city, I was still able to feel its effects on the nearby cities of Saginaw and Flint. The decline of the Rust Belt has had an impact on the entire state of Michigan, and my goal has been to better understand the issues that the region is facing.

Even throughout the course of my short life, the cities of the Rust Belt have undergone tremendous change. Jobs, people, and investment have fled these cities, leaving behind a forgotten, but important legacy. They have been left forgotten and abandoned by much of the nation, left to deal with the perils of deindustrialization. Still, these cities have tremendous character and potential that has been overshadowed by their decline.

In a city like Detroit, where less than half of the peak population remains, a large portion of the city lies empty and derelict. When neighborhoods are seeing streets with only a handful of occupied homes on an entire block, the social fabric of a community undoubtedly takes a toll. The mere sight of such a landscape is eerie beyond words. By analyzing potential solutions to the issues of population loss and vacant properties, Rust Belt cities, such as Detroit, can begin to once again become livable cities and start to restore the sense of pride and community that has been lost. This analysis reveals potential methods and strategies that can be utilized by cities across the region that are facing the same tough issues of vacancy and shrinking populations.

Detroit's historic train station is one of the largest symbols of disinvestment and vacancy in the city.

Photo Credit: Tyler Grzegorzcyk

**A**s the populations of many Rust Belt cities continue to decline, older urban areas are left with an abundance of vacant infrastructure, resulting in fragmented and broken neighborhoods. The dwindling population also results in a weakened tax base that is still expected to provide for services for the same city area. Of course, this results in a significant financial burden for the city and often reduced levels of services for residents, further incentivizing people to abandon the city. Conventional planning practice teaches planning for the growth and expansion of cities which must be re-engineered to be realistic for trends encountered in most Rust Belt cities. An attitude must be created that accepts the fact that a city can still be great even with a lower population. To be successful in bringing back the Rust Belt cities, we must plan for maintaining the quality of life in the face of population loss before we can plan for eventual population growth.

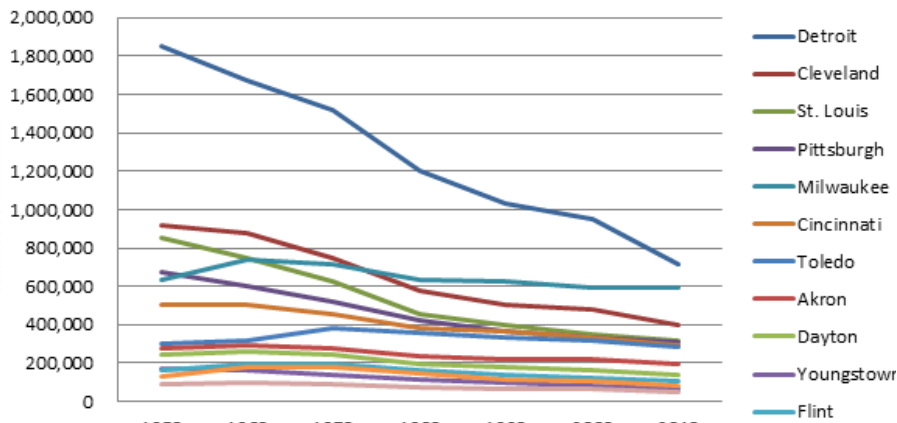
Integral to recovery is disrupting the cycle disinvestment and restoring a sense of place and purpose in these neighborhoods. The first step in the long process of recovery is to combat the vacant structures and parcels that plague the streets of these cities. Rust Belt cities should develop a system of reclaiming land in areas that have high rates of vacancy, focusing on areas where density is lowest, and reinvestment would be most difficult. In these locations, it is no longer economically viable for a city to provide infrastructure and basic city services. Once land is reclaimed and the stress on city services is reduced, the city can begin to focus its resources on making viable communities strong and vibrant.

There are many factors that a city must consider to determine what land should be reclaimed and how to determine the appropriate outcome of the selected land. To begin the process of reclamation, a city must analyze various factors to make the appropriate decision. There are many examples that different Rust Belt cities have used that can be analyzed to understand their outcomes, successes, shortcomings, and application to other cities, ultimately providing a guide for those wishing to do the same in their city.

## **History of Disinvestment**

Detroit, Flint, and Youngstown: once illustrious cities that were built upon a foundation in manufacturing - an industry that has in many ways vanished

## Historical Population Change



from these cities. But when the doors shut for the final time, this industry still maintained a long-standing presence in the region. Along with this went the high quality of life, the jobs, and the image of what made these cities great. Today, crime, unemployment, and diminished reputations plague these cities. While the remaining residents have not given up, the nation has all but given up on them. As shown in the graph to the left, population losses of nearly 50 percent since peaks in the mid twentieth century put Detroit, Flint, and

Youngstown on pace with similar cities across the Midwest.<sup>1</sup> Even Chicago, the encouragement of the region, has lost nearly 1 million in population since the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> This population loss is the single most important catalyst of the need for land reclamation across Rust Belt cities.

Historical U.S. Census figures illustrating population decline in various Rust Belt cities since the 1950s. The entire region has suffered from population loss as people continue to move to the southern and western regions of the country.

Photo Credit: US Census and Tyler Grzegorzczuk

A fundamental step in determining a course of action is for cities to accept the situation they are in and to commit to building the city for stability before growth. According to Ian Beniston of the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation, the most important thing to do at the beginning is to embrace the challenge. "You have to face reality and be realistic. Accept that you are a smaller city."<sup>3</sup> This acceptance allows you to focus all your efforts on becoming a livable city that provides for all of its current residents, rather than still trying to provide for those that left fifty years ago. The same attitude needs to be echoed in all areas of the community. If people are raised in an environment in which they are consistently told that their community is failing, then they are less likely to seek change to make conditions any different. If they are able to accept the fact that their city can be a great place even

at a lower stable population, it at least serves as a starting point for later development.<sup>4</sup>

### The Process

On a city by city basis, a method must be determined that will define what parts of the city warrant significant reinvestment and which parts are beyond immediate repair. This was accomplished in Youngstown by conducting an inventory of the present conditions of various properties citywide. The conditions were simplified into categories of stable, transitional, redevelopment, semi-rural, and industrial states. Public input also played a critical role in determining what many Youngstown residents considered as most important.<sup>5</sup> Together, city leaders, with an effort made through the Youngstown 2010 initiative, were able to determine where success was most likely to occur: areas that were both near foundational anchors such as hospitals or universities and “areas that were transitional...not 70%-80% vacant,” said Beniston. “...This was where success was most likely.” Areas that were determined to be lacking the minimum

The hope was to restore value to neighborhoods which were otherwise deteriorating, and make them a place that was once again a viable space for the community.

Detroit's former Packard Plant sits vacant, attracting vandalism.  
Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick



needs for reinvestment were then able to utilize various methods of land reclamation.

Once areas are determined to be beyond repair, the city can begin the reclamation process. An important tool to obtain underutilized properties is through a municipal “land bank.” Land banks have the ability to acquire vacant (and often declining) properties, redevelop them, and re-sell them as livable homes in the community. In Flint, the Genesee County Land Bank was created for that exact purpose. The hope was to restore value to neighborhoods which were otherwise deteriorating, and make them a place that was once again a viable space for the community. Michigan was also able to change its foreclosure laws to easily transfer the title and ownership of foreclosed homes to the county, leaving less time for structures to sit in “limbo,” further deteriorating and becoming a hotbed for crime. Since 2002, the land bank has been able to re-use more than 4,000 structures within the county.<sup>6</sup> Not only does this help to improve the neighborhood visually, but the absence of vacant structures can improve the health and safety of an entire community. Vacant structures are several times more likely to be linked to crime or arson, which draws on an already dwindling tax base to deter this activity.<sup>7</sup>

While there is rarely any opposition to recovering vacant housing, the specific areas that are targeted for reinvestment and those that are left as “too far gone” can stir up some strong emotions. Perhaps one of the biggest questions for cities considering downsizing is how the public will react. Public knowledge is not always founded on accurate or complete information, and

While there is rarely any opposition to recovering vacant housing, the specific areas that are targeted for reinvestment and those that are left as “too far gone” can stir up some strong emotions.

this is a key aspect in the planning process. In some instances, citizens feel as though local governments are working in methods of opposition, attempting to force them from their neighborhoods, when in reality, most cities are simply offering certain incentives to draw people into more economically and socially stable neighborhoods. This creates a safer situation for both

the city and for its residents. In the Youngstown case, community involvement was able to spark the momentum needed to get the project up and

running. Giving the public a voice in the planning process enables citizens to feel as if they are a part of the change and reduces the risk of backlash and citizen disapproval. Informing citizens will significantly decrease the likelihood of miscommunication and potential conflict. This can take some time; the Youngstown 2010 initiative conducted a campaign that lasted nearly two years but was able to garner support and interest from residents. This allowed for ample time in which the residents were able to voice opinions on what they wanted for their city.<sup>8</sup>

Once the Youngstown 2010 plan was adopted, Youngstown had the necessary guidance to strategize investments and target reclamation efforts. As seen in countless other Rust Belt cities, Youngstown faced the issue of having a large amount of vacant infrastructure left over from its glory days. Between 2006 and 2010, then mayor Jay Williams increased the city's demolition budget from a modest \$300,000 a year to a more robust \$1 million annually. The increase in funding allowed for more than 350 structures to be torn down per year.<sup>9</sup> While progress continues to be made, there is still a long way to go. Nearly 900 structures still require demolition at an estimated cost of \$4.5 million.<sup>10</sup>

Once the land is reclaimed, the next question is what to do with it. While open lots may be seen by some as a more attractive alternative than vacant buildings, it is still not ideal. Detroit, along with many other cities, has turned towards urban gardening as a solution to vacant land in neighborhoods that are still sufficiently populated. Gardens not only are a productive use of land, but also beautify and can provide an additional food source for the neighborhood. The size of the garden varies from organization to

Vacant homes in Detroit often cannot be repaired and are left as eyesores.  
Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick



organization, but the purpose remains the same. In lesser populated reclamation areas, low cost and low maintenance solutions such as a simple flower bed or a field can be a solution. Rather, when sufficient population remains to take care of the property, a higher maintenance but also higher yield food garden may be more appropriate. Carolyn Leadly, director of Rising Pheasant Farms, shares:

“I hope what I’m doing makes the neighborhood more attractive — that people would want to move into the neighborhood — because, at this point, there is no reason why anyone would want to move into this neighborhood,” she says. “There are no stores besides liquor stores in this entire neighborhood.”<sup>11</sup>

The city seems to realize the importance of these neighborhood gardens, as they have chosen not to fine residents for usages that technically make this type of gardening against zoning regulations.<sup>12</sup> This effort also aids in combating “food deserts” that face many urban neighborhoods in which adequate access to healthy food options are not available.

Methods of utilizing vacant spaces can vary, however, depending on where the property is located within the city. If the property is not located in a target investment area, methods such as gardens and land banking may not be as effective. Many Rust Belt cities do not have the financial resources necessary to destroy all of the vacant structures, much less determine what to do with the land afterward. This is especially true if it is not seen as a viable neighborhood for investment. As seen in cases such as Detroit, some land is simply returned to open spaces on a lot by lot basis as properties come down. This gradually reduces the burden on services in the city without mandating a neighborhood to move. With enough reinvestment through the land bank

Beautiful housing stock sits largely abandoned in Detroit’s Brush Park Historic District, just blocks from the city’s downtown core.

Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick





and other organizations, there is hope that residents will eventually locate to these targeted areas. This allows certain portions of the city to be returned to a more natural state, allowing for an increase in density, and in turn, efficiency in the areas of investment.

Through targeted investments in vacant properties in conjunction with revitalization efforts, Youngstown has been able to make tremendous progress toward stabilization, but it is an ongoing initiative. When asked if he believed the current process in Youngstown has been a success, Beniston stated, "We are not far along. There would need to be thirty years of continued progress to get where we want to be."<sup>13</sup> The city has been taking the right steps, but it ultimately comes down to the ability to fund the changes. This is a similar problem in cities across the region.

By analyzing various methods of land reclamation across Rust Belt cities, we are able to draw

conclusions that may allow others to follow by example. Countless other cities across the region are dealing with similar problems, but may have been unable to fully develop their plans. As found in this analysis, one of the integral parts of the process is to look at the city from an honest perspective. To face the economic and social realities, there must be plans for stabilization. This planning must not be blind to its surroundings, but must address the city's vacant land and potentially right-size. While vacant properties can be detrimental to a city and its image, creative strategies for reuse of this vacant land across the region presents a unique opportunity for neighborhoods to build upon, enabling future generations to recreate a more sustainable Rust Belt and the once great and prosperous cities within.

To face the economic and social realities,  
there must be plans for stabilization.

### **Phase 1: Analyzing the Past**

Determine your city's story. What does it need to do and why?

- Face reality and accept that planning should be focused on maintaining current population levels instead of unanticipated growth.

### **Phase 2: Working for A Better Present**

Determine what the overall desired outcome is:

- It is impossible to measure success without goals.

Develop a community plan to offer an official yet realistic expectation for the study area:

- Without formal documentation, getting something started can prove to be difficult.
- Take your ideas to the public, and keep them informed. Allow for feedback, effectively enabling residents to have a strong voice in the entire planning process.
- Be watchful for potential funding sources, as money tends to be the number one limitation to such projects.

### **Phase 3: Looking Toward the Future**

If no thought is given to the future, it will only fall back into disrepair and goals will fail to be met:

- Periodically revisit goals to see if you are on track.
- Revise goals as needed and when new issues arise.
- Be innovative. Don't be afraid to be unique or different. Find a niche for your community. ◇

People throughout the Rust Belt are using vacant land for community gardens, like this one in Ohio City.  
Photo Credit: Marianne Eppig



Julie (m)

# How Can a Property Tax Structure Save the Rust Belt?

By David Foust



I am originally from Westerville, a suburb of Columbus, Ohio. As a child, I was fascinated with the tall buildings and the experience of being in the center of downtown Columbus. This fascination has stayed with me through college and continues to this day. I studied City and Regional Planning for my undergraduate and graduate studies at The Ohio State University and there I satiated my curiosity to learn the intricacies of city form and function.

My project is an extension of this curiosity. The sprawling American city poses a myriad of problems to both cities and individuals. It strains city budgets, and costs individuals time, money, and convenience. I believe the solution to many of the problems of sprawl is found in building denser, mixed use, urban in-fill communities around city cores. My article explores how a change in property tax structure can not only encourage this type of in-fill development, but also sustain it well into the future so that our Rust Belt cities once again become dynamic centers of American life.

Surface parking lots destroy the urban fabric of a city, making it a dull and lifeless place outside of normal working hours

Photo Credit: David Foust



All Rust Belt cities have something in common: they have experienced urban decline. Significant portions of the inner-city areas of Rust Belt cities lie vacant and neglected and, aside from pockets of redevelopment, they are set to stay that way for the duration of the current economic downturn. With much of the population of each Rust Belt city being in surrounding metropolitan areas, these cities are forced to cater to a population that mostly commutes into and out of the city by car. Empty surface parking lots alongside vacant, rusty, and boarded-up buildings have come to characterize Rust Belt cities. Not only are these properties eyesores, but they also damage the urban feel of the city. A city should be defined by things like its local charm, its memorable skyline, and its amenities; not by expanses of broken pavement or lack of urban fabric. Cities can encourage new development by changing the traditional property tax structure into one that taxes land and buildings separately, which can help revitalize the urban landscape of Rust Belt cities.

### The Current Tax Structure

Benjamin Franklin famously wrote, "In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." It is axiomatic that taxes must exist for government to function and provide public services. In many states, property tax revenues are primarily distributed to school districts, with a small portion going to the municipality. Most municipalities rely on a traditional property tax system in which the total value of the land and any buildings on the land are assessed at a single tax rate. This combination of land and buildings, often known as "improvements," is often referred to as "real property," "real estate," or "realty." The state appraises the value of "real property" and assesses a tax on it based on an approved millage, which can be set by levy and government action. A millage rate is the tax applied to the property. One mil represents \$1 of tax assessed per \$1,000 of assessed real property value per year. For instance, an individual who owns a \$100,000 piece of real property assessed at a rate of 30 mills would pay a property tax of \$3,000 per year.

The downside to this system is that it effectively encourages land speculation and land-grab because the financial burden of holding land is small. Speculators purchase land, hold it, and eventually sell it years later for a large profit. This strategy is based off of the economic concept of land scarcity,

Dense, walkable urban environments attract consumers and urban dwellers alike. For some, simply knowing there is much to do and see within a city make it an attractive place to be.  
Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick



which suggests that land speculation can push the price of land upward due to the reduced supply.

### The History of Taxes

Land has historically been the great equalizer in the United States. Easy access to land provided a way out of poverty for many people. “Abundant free or cheap land encouraged geographic mobility and mobility of status. Those in poverty, and they were numerous, were buoyed up by constant evidence of people pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, even our country’s Founding Fathers were land speculators who amassed huge estates.

Nevertheless, shortly after the United States was founded, local taxes were primarily based on land values. “These taxes imposed a financial drain on people ‘stuck’ with large unused land holdings. To avoid tax bills, many owners sold off excess holdings. This... took away what makes land grabbing and speculation so profitable and seductive – the reality or the impression of land scarcity.”<sup>2</sup> Many who had amassed huge estates sold unused portions of their property holdings to reduce the tax burden.

Under the traditional property tax system, it is financially viable to purchase four parcels of land in the heart of the city for \$50,000, pave them for \$5,000, call it a parking lot, and charge individuals \$70 per space per month. This way, the land generates enough revenue to pay for liabilities like parking attendants, policing, and property taxes, which will be low due to the lack of structures on the land. Fast forward 10 years later: four parcels to

the east and four parcels to the west are both purchased for \$100,000 for the construction of office buildings. The increased prices for parcels in that area will likely cause the city to reassess the property values for the four parcels of parking lot at much higher than the original \$50,000 purchase price, and the owner of the property can sell the parcels to be developed and make a significant profit.

### Consequences

What harm is done? Sure, there is always demand for parking. However, parking lots are not only an economically inefficient use of land compared to an office building but also too many can destroy the urban fabric of a city. Eventually, with no contiguous urban experience, the city could lose its appeal to visitors and residents alike. Eventually, commercial activity slows, residents move away from the central city, and the city's downtown no longer thrives. The municipality is then forced to spend more of its limited resources to attract and retain residents, visitors, and businesses, all while dealing with other urban problems like blight and deteriorating infrastructure. Granted, there are many factors at play in a city's economy and parking is absolutely necessary to a certain degree, but parking becomes less necessary if fewer people commute. Similarly, the traditional property tax structure is not perfect, nor is it the only property tax structure that exists. Traditional property taxes offer little flexibility and tax revenues are often forfeited as a bargaining chip for new development. What if a tax structure could be used to attract and retain businesses, residents, and visitors all while sustaining necessary tax revenue?

What if a tax structure could be used to attract and retain businesses, residents, and visitors all while sustaining necessary tax revenue?

### The Two-Rate Tax

There exists such a structure: a two-rate land value tax. The real property is assessed in the same way as the traditional property tax structure, but in applying the tax rate, the values of the land and buildings are separated and taxed individually. Under this tax structure, different rates can be assessed

on the value of the land and the value of the building. There are four primary benefits to this type of tax:

- Taxes on individual residential parcels are generally reduced,
- The need for fiscally destructive incentives often used by cities competing for development projects is reduced because the two rates can be adjusted,
- Construction and rehabilitation of residential and commercial buildings are stimulated and central business districts are revitalized by the attraction of private investment, and
- More efficient land use results because idle lots and under-utilized parcels are put to productive use, reducing pressure for urban sprawl.<sup>3</sup>

Consideration of this tax structure has a significant implication for municipalities. It strengthens the ability of cities to attract and retain residents and businesses because the rates can be adjusted without decreasing the revenue base of the city. By reducing the rate of tax on buildings and proportionally

increasing the rate of tax on land, the tax revenue collected from improved parcels will remain the same or decrease, but the tax burden on unimproved parcels will increase. This reduces the individual tax share from those who own improved property and increases the tax share of the owners of unimproved land within the tax district. The new tax share on unimproved parcels will encourage the property owners to

By reducing the rate of tax on buildings and proportionally increasing the rate of tax on land, the tax revenue collected from improved parcels will remain the same or decrease, but the tax burden on unimproved parcels will increase.

put the properties to a more economically profitable use, or otherwise sell them to willing buyers who have the resources and intentions to improve the parcel. Eventually, if there is new growth within the area, parcels in close proximity inherently increase in value due to the surrounding improvements and increased demand. Upon annual reassessment then, the price of the surrounding parcels of land will have likely increased, the individual tax share of the area is decreased because it is shared among more improved-parcel owners, and the total amount of tax collected for the municipality can remain the same or even increase if necessary. The city can gradually adjust the two tax



rates to balance growth and development within the municipality to ensure that the market is not over-inflated.

The growth potential that could accompany a two-rate land value tax reduces the need for costly incentives like abatements, which many municipalities currently use, because adjusting the tax rates can provide effectively the same development benefit as abating the tax, without actually forfeiting tax revenues. This will allow cities to stay economically competitive without falling into the fiscally destructive homogeneity of using the same incentives employed by competing, often neighboring, municipalities. While incentives and other measures can be beneficial, the two-rate land value tax suggests that a city can effectively shed the extra financial burden of “keeping up with the Joneses.” The municipality can encourage physical development by taxing the value of the land at a high rate and the value of the buildings at a low rate. This allows landowners and developers to build without an unreasonable tax increase. Conversely, by the same logic, the city can slow growth by

Pedestrian plazas provide great areas for people to meet, relax, and soak in the urban experience.

Photo Credit: Flickr User rockafello6



<b>GROWTH AND DECLINE IN RUST BELT CITIES</b>			
<i>Pittsburgh and 14 other Midwest Cities<sup>a</sup></i>			
<i>1960-1979 compared with 1980-1989</i>			
AVERAGE ANNUAL VALUE OF BUILDING PERMITS <sup>b</sup>			
(Values in Millions of Constant 1982 Dollars)			
City	1960-1979	1980-1989	Percent Change
Akron	\$134,026	\$87,907	-34.41
Allentown	\$48,124	\$28,801	-40.15
Buffalo	\$93,749	\$82,930	-11.54
Canton	\$40,235	\$24,251	-39.73
Cincinnati	\$318,248	\$231,561	-27.24
Cleveland	\$329,511	\$224,587	-31.84
Columbus <sup>c</sup>	\$456,580	\$527,026	15.43
Dayton	\$107,798	\$92,249	-14.42
Detroit	\$368,894	\$277,783	-24.70
Erie	\$48,353	\$22,761	-52.93
<b><i>Pittsburgh</i></b>	<b>\$181,734</b>	<b>\$309,727</b>	<b>70.43</b>
Rochester	\$118,726	\$82,411	-30.59
Syracuse	\$94,503	\$53,673	-43.20
Toledo	\$138,384	\$93,495	-32.44
Youngstown	\$33,688	\$11,120	-66.99
<b>Fifteen-City Average:</b>	<b>\$167,504</b>	<b>\$143,352</b>	<b>-14.42</b>

Notes:

a) "Rust Belt" was a term for northeastern cities whose heavy industries declined sharply after World War II. Of these comparable cities, only Pittsburgh used the two-rate tax. The data are for the cities proper and do not pertain to the much larger metropolitan areas surrounding them.

b) The year 1979, used as the dividing point for the before-and-after annual averages, was when Pittsburgh significantly increased its land taxes and lowered its building taxes.

c) Columbus, the only other city showing positive growth, annexed surrounding communities in the 1980's (March 1996 discussion, Rybeck and city planner); noteworthy because Oates-Shwab found that, unlike Pittsburgh, most cities in the same witnessed greater suburban than in-city growth in that decade.

Source: Wallace E. Oates, Robert M. Shwab, *Impact on Urban Land Taxation: The Pittsburgh Experience*, University of Maryland, 1995; based on Table 3.

increasing the tax on buildings and reducing the tax on land so the market does not over-inflate.

According to the table on the opposite page, most Rust Belt cities saw a decline in the average annual value of building permits.<sup>4</sup> Pittsburgh, the only city on this list that used a two-rate land value tax, was also the only city that saw a significant increase. “After World War II, despite the decline of the steel industry, Pittsburgh enjoyed a renaissance. Sixty new buildings and skyscrapers costing over \$700 million shot up on former rail yards and warehouse areas. An area that had employed 4,000 gave jobs to 20,000 after the privately financed renewal.”<sup>5</sup> While the correlation of the increased value of building permits does not imply that the two-rate tax was the sole cause for the increase, a significant statistical outlier, such as Pittsburgh, cannot be ignored.

Pittsburgh, the only city on this list that used a two-rate land value tax, was also the only city that saw a significant increase.

The reason for the increased investment championed by Pittsburgh was the ability of the city to increase the tax on land while decreasing the tax on buildings, discouraging land speculation, and thus encouraging growth. In a conversation with Brian Ellis, President and COO of Nationwide Realty Investors, he affirmed, “Differentiated tax on vacant land and idle uses [like surface parking] can be a good thing. It discourages inefficient uses because there is an economic disincentive to long-term land speculation and land-grabbing.”<sup>6</sup> He stressed that taxes alone are not necessarily a differentiating factor in development decisions, but did acknowledge that for any developer it is certainly a consideration because, in many cases, the developer is also the land owner.

### Application for Rust Belt Cities

While a change in the tax structure alone is likely not sufficient for major investment to occur, it would be a significant first step and an effective tool for cities to accomplish other city improvement goals as well. The two-rate tax could be implemented with the designation of a special taxation district. For instance, a Rust Belt city that wants to encourage urban infill

development could designate the central business district as a special taxation district and implement a two-rate land value tax. It would ultimately discourage economically inefficient uses like surface parking and vacant properties in the central city. Ideally, it would also encourage the owners of these properties to develop their parcels or turn them over to an individual or business who will develop them. In the long run, this type of tax system could be used to adapt to fluctuations in tax revenues for the municipality and its school system, finance infrastructure improvements to revitalize the city, and ultimately benefit the local economy .

This recommendation is contingent upon the existence of a market for development within central city areas. There must be a shared perspective by the city and its citizens to improve its downtown or uptown. Given the number of community groups and neighborhood development corporations that exist in Rust Belt cities, it is evident that there are still plenty of opportunities for investment. Cities recognize that demand is often a triggering factor in physical development, but sometimes it can take some encouragement. Therefore, there should also be business or entrepreneurship programs set forth by the city accompanying this tax system to be able to fill vacancies in the new development. Brian Ellis notes that even in the widely successful Arena District project in Columbus, Ohio, “We still have some vacant storefronts 10 years later. Ultimately, the market will dictate how much development can occur.” This can be a lesson for cities. To foster physical development and growth, cities must foster the growth of businesses to fill these vacancies as well. While it would be imprudent to say that a municipality can control an economy, it would be naïve to claim that a city is powerless to improve its own condition. With the proper framework, a city can continue to grow, thrive, and be the ideal home for many in the future. ◊

Local shops and restaurants make a city's downtown attractive. They provide places to see and experience, engaging urban explorers.

Photo Credit: Flickr User rockafellero6

How Can a Property Tax Structure Save the Rust Belt?



# Capturing the Rust Belt's Potential

By Alan O'Connell



Born and raised in Cleveland, I grew up in the 90's believing that my city was a thriving metropolis on the rise. New skyscrapers, stadiums, and arenas, the Rock Hall, the best museums and hospitals around; I thought, "Cleveland is the place to be!" But alas, it was not. I began to realize that my beloved hometown was actually poor, shunned, and dying. I was crushed, and from a young age I committed myself to doing whatever I could to transform what I once believed into reality. It seemed natural that I should become a city planner someday, and in 2010, I enrolled in The Ohio State University's Master of City and Regional Planning Program.

Even today, some soulful and vigorous intangible makes me feel more alive in this dying city than any other place on earth. Perhaps it's a lingering energy from prosperous decades past. That same energy can be felt in cities from Milwaukee to St. Louis, and from Dayton to Detroit. I believe a key factor in making these intangibles tangible (again), is physical movement. I have focused my article on exploring innovative transit funding solutions for Cleveland, and other Ohio cities. My objective is to suggest feasible alternatives in a state whose constitution makes public transportation funding particularly difficult.

The Guardian of Transportation statues stand at four corners of an iconic Cleveland Bridge.

Photo Credit: Stu Spivak

In these times of diminishing state and federal funds, how can Rust Belt cities pay for the projects they so desperately need to become more sustainable? Rust Belt cities seem to be especially plagued by transportation-related detriments. Aging highways soak up much of the state and federal funds that could otherwise be used for public transit, and their overly wide avenues make urban spaces feel lifeless. Additionally, underutilized rail lines spider-web through residential areas and make urban neighborhoods less livable. These problems represent wasted money and potential for cities that can scarcely afford to squander anything.

Transportation improvement projects have been proven to provide countless economic, environmental, and social benefits.<sup>1</sup> These benefits, in turn, could provide critical leverage for large-scale redevelopment and reinvestment in blighted areas, decreased pollution from emissions, and increased economic activity and accessibility in urban neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> This article explores innovative methods of getting around transportation financing disadvantages by turning Rust Belt city problems into Rust Belt city solutions.

Cities with robust public transportation systems are more livable and attractive to young professionals.<sup>3</sup> The Rust Belt must work to retain and attract a college-educated workforce in order to remain competitive with other regional economies. However, most of America's Midwestern cities (with the exception of Chicago) exhibit characteristically meager public transit systems.<sup>4</sup> The state departments of transportation in the Midwest heavily favor funding for highways and roads. Some state constitutions, such as Ohio's, even forbid allocating state gas-tax dollars towards mass transit.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, citizens of the Rust Belt region should work to amend their outdated constitutions to allow state gas tax to fund public transit. Unfortunately, this process may take decades, and transportation funding at all levels of government continues to dwindle at a time when struggling cities need it the most.<sup>6</sup> The consequence of diminishing funds is that cities and transit agencies can no longer rely on the state and federal government to help pay for projects, and now must find a way to fund them on their own. Rust Belt cities need solutions immediately because doing nothing is not an option.

One possible way to finance much-needed transportation projects is through various value capture taxing methods. Traditionally, value capture is used to assure that municipal governments are reimbursed for infrastructure

investments. City projects are funded over time through increased property values within the project's established impact area. Some of the value added to properties within the impact area, which is the direct and indirect result of the city's investment, is "captured" through special taxes. Depending on the type of project, the amount that property owners pay in value capture tax is abundantly offset by the increases in property values. If no value is added, no additional tax is collected. The system is structured so that only those who directly benefit from the public improvement will be taxed for it.<sup>7</sup>

For this reason, value capture has the greatest success in areas that are underutilized and exhibit high potential for increased property values.<sup>8</sup> There is no higher potential for increased property value than on land already at rock bottom. Detroit and Cleveland contain thousands of acres where land values seem to have nowhere to go but up. Land in Rust Belt cities is inexpensive to acquire, unlike in Portland and Washington, DC, where value capture techniques have already been utilized with great success. Rust Belt cities could even purchase the land themselves, build the improvement project, and then sell the same land at a higher price. This ability to acquire inexpensive land represents a major advantage over other cities with more expensive property. Furthermore, many of these "prime" Rust Belt locations happen to contain

Downtown Cleveland is the heart of the city's transit system.  
Photo Credit: Alan O'Connell





huge expanses of completely abandoned land, often already owned by municipal land banks.<sup>9</sup>

Rust Belt cities have multi-lane freeways that were planned to accommodate the much larger populations of days past. Today, some of those interstates are no longer entirely necessary and may even be detrimental to the city's health. There are several examples of these highways, which only serve to encourage sprawl, cut off neighborhoods and districts, and eliminate the possibility of access to and development of shorelines.<sup>10</sup> Billions of dollars are spent on the upkeep of badly planned highways across the Midwest. Some of these highways are underutilized, falling apart, and still soaking up precious state and federal funds. Cities like Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle have converted sections of their urban highways to more pedestrian-friendly complete streets.<sup>11</sup> Complete streets consider other forms of transportation besides the automobile and accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians alike. Highway-to-complete-street transformations enable healthy street-level retail activity to flourish where it was once impossible.<sup>12</sup> However, Rust Belt cities do not have the same monetary support available to carry out expansive freeway repurposing. So how can Rust Belt cities, some struggling to provide basic services, possibly fund such major construction projects?

Rust Belt cities must work to convert city highways that have become expensive handicaps into more livable complete streets.

Rust Belt cities must work to convert city highways that have become expensive handicaps into more livable complete streets. By working together with their state transportation departments, cities may be able to negotiate a deal for funding such a project. Here's how:

### *State*

The initial investment is a portion of the cost to tear down the highway, and convert it to complete street. The value capture is the deferred costs of maintenance over the rest of the roadway's planned service life. This could be countless millions, especially when the particular highway is due for a

major overhaul, or is aged and expensive to upkeep. Now that the city is taking over responsibility for the roadway, it is “saving” the state money which would have gone towards maintenance and improvement of that highway over decades.<sup>13</sup> With more money in the future state transportation budget, there may be more available for mass transit. Within this, there may even be potential to negotiate a funding guarantee for future transit projects. The city should sell it like a business plan, and the state should see it as a major opportunity to save money over time by unloading expensive assets.

### *City*

The initial investment is also a portion of the cost to tear down the highway, and convert it to a complete street. The city's value capture is this: the freeway deconstruction opens up hundreds of acres on the lakefront, prime for development. Reconnecting to the lake will also enhance property values for the entire Central Business District (CBD) previously cut off from its major natural asset.<sup>14</sup> The entire CBD could be included within a value capture area for the project.

As with many of the Rust Belt's highways, the streets were designed in another time for a different, much larger, city.

The biggest hurdle to overcome is selling this “transferred responsibility plan” to state and federal agencies as a way to save money in the long run. The major selling point has to be: pay some now and save a lot

over many decades, hopefully freeing up more funds in the future by avoiding the budget shortfalls that plague agencies today. If executed correctly, this kind of deal could be mutually beneficial to all parties involved that are looking for ways to do more with less.

As with many of the Rust Belt's highways, the streets were designed in another time for a different, much larger, city. Many avenues in Detroit, Cleveland, and St. Louis were made to accommodate traffic for a city with twice the current population.<sup>15</sup> Today, these underutilized four- and six-lane barriers disrupt the urban fabric and can make downtowns feel lifeless, which discourages investment.<sup>16</sup> To encourage pedestrian-oriented and business-friendly environments, these roads need to be put on a diet and converted to

complete streets. Value capture taxing could be used in this situation as well, to fund city street improvement projects. However, with city streets, there is no need to negotiate with state and federal agencies. Value capture from the subsequent increase in property values, combined with some reduced maintenance cost over time, should render this method feasible for several roads in need of improvement.

Nearly all Rust Belt cities have an abundance of rail lines.<sup>17</sup> Rust Belt rail lines spider-web and crisscross through residential neighborhoods and into downtown areas. Like some of the highways and roads, a number of these rail lines are underutilized. Some railways are abandoned all together. They are an ugly reminder of a booming industrial past, and in their current state they cannot be assets, only eyesores. Many run through residential communities, and negatively affect their property values. A study conducted in Cleveland found that property values within 750 feet of railroad track decreased by an average of 6%.<sup>18</sup> Because of the cheap land surrounding them, the railways may offer huge potential for value capture taxing.

These rail lines could be utilized to create a more sustainable comprehensive transportation system for city residents of all income levels. Automobiles are expensive, and they are only becoming more unaffordable for low-income people. Public transit is a far more affordable option for most of those currently residing in less affluent communities. The American Public



The wide roads of Cleveland, Ohio provide opportunities to reconfigure streets.

Photo Credit: Alan O'Connell

## 13 Strategies for Rust Belt Cities

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Transportation Association found that the average Clevelander could save nearly \$10,000 per year by using public transportation instead of driving.<sup>19</sup>

Adding rail transit stations within these neighborhoods may provide an immediate boost in much-needed private investment.<sup>20</sup> New investments could set the foundation for future growth and prosperity in low-income neighborhoods. Transit-oriented developments clustered around the new transit stops would provide more jobs, and more tax dollars for the city.<sup>21</sup> However, extra taxes placed on the residents of low-income neighborhoods may do more harm than good. So, the third example of value capture avoids placing new taxes on the residents by profiting solely off of developers who are looking to build near new transit stations.

Employing the same method cities use to improve highways and roads, transit authorities can fund current projects based on the capture of future increased value. After first obtaining acreage around future station locations, a transit authority could boost the value of its own land by constructing a new transit station. This method has been used by private developers in Japan

Cleveland's famed Euclid Avenue was recently redone to include bus rapid transit and a beautified streetscape.  
Photo Credit: Alan O'Connell



and by city governments in Denmark where it was successful, and there is no reason why it couldn't be replicated by transit authorities in Cleveland or Detroit.<sup>22</sup> Once the value of the land around the station is boosted, it can then be sold to developers at a higher price than what it was purchased for. Although this is not a value capture taxing method, it is a way to capture the value added resulting from public improvement projects.

The significance of various transportation projects like the ones mentioned goes far beyond increases in property tax for value capture. There are countless economic, environmental, and social benefits that improve the quality of life for the city's residents.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps these methods could be applied to other types of projects, and used by other agencies as well. Examples include clean-up of contaminated lands, new parks, and increased security measures. Transit authorities should be allowed to harness this financing mechanism to build new transit stations, expand service hours, and provide better service. School districts could also potentially utilize value capture to upgrade schools, hire more teachers, and provide better programs.

Rust Belt cities continue to struggle with transportation legacies left over from the past. In order to make this infrastructure advantageous again, it needs to be transformed. However, the funding mechanisms employed for today's civic transportation projects are inadequate. Financing these much-needed and expensive transformations requires a fundamental paradigm shift. Value capture techniques may be part of the answer. It is an alteration, which shifts the financing burden away from state and federal agencies, and toward developers who pay the costs over time. In the future, we may see state and federal agencies serving more as safety nets to reduce the risk involved in attempting these value capture financed projects.

The abundance of cheap land in Rust Belt cities makes value capture financing an alluring option. Hard-pressed municipalities may use value capture methods in new ways to fill the budget gaps left by diminishing state and federal funds. There are many challenges involved with coordinating negotiations between various government agencies and with avoiding the over-taxation of potential developers. However, if Rust Belt cities can effectively utilize this technique, it could play an integral role in their revitalization. ♦

# Repurposing Railways in the Rust Belt

By Thomas Stikeleather



My name is Thomas Stikeleather, and I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. Spending my formative years in Cincinnati made me care about the vitality of the city. Old industrial cities with declining populations like Cincinnati are places that deserve our attention and our respect. To neglect these places would be to carelessly lose an essential part of American history and identity.

This article explores the railroad infrastructure aspect of the Rust Belt. I was inspired to write about this topic by a couple of railroad bridges suspended over Interstate 71 near Downtown Cincinnati. I have traveled under these overpasses on I-71 hundreds of times in my life, but in all these trips I have never seen trains on the bridges. The bridges are still there, but the tracks are abandoned. I was also inspired by the adaptive reuse of the Cincinnati Union Terminal as the Cincinnati Museum Center, now home to three museums, a history library, an Amtrak station, and an OMNIMAX theater. I am a utility analyst for the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and a second-year student in the Master of City and Regional Planning program at Ohio State.

Unused rail lines throughout the Rust Belt have the opportunity to become community assets.

Photo Credit: Tom Stikeleather



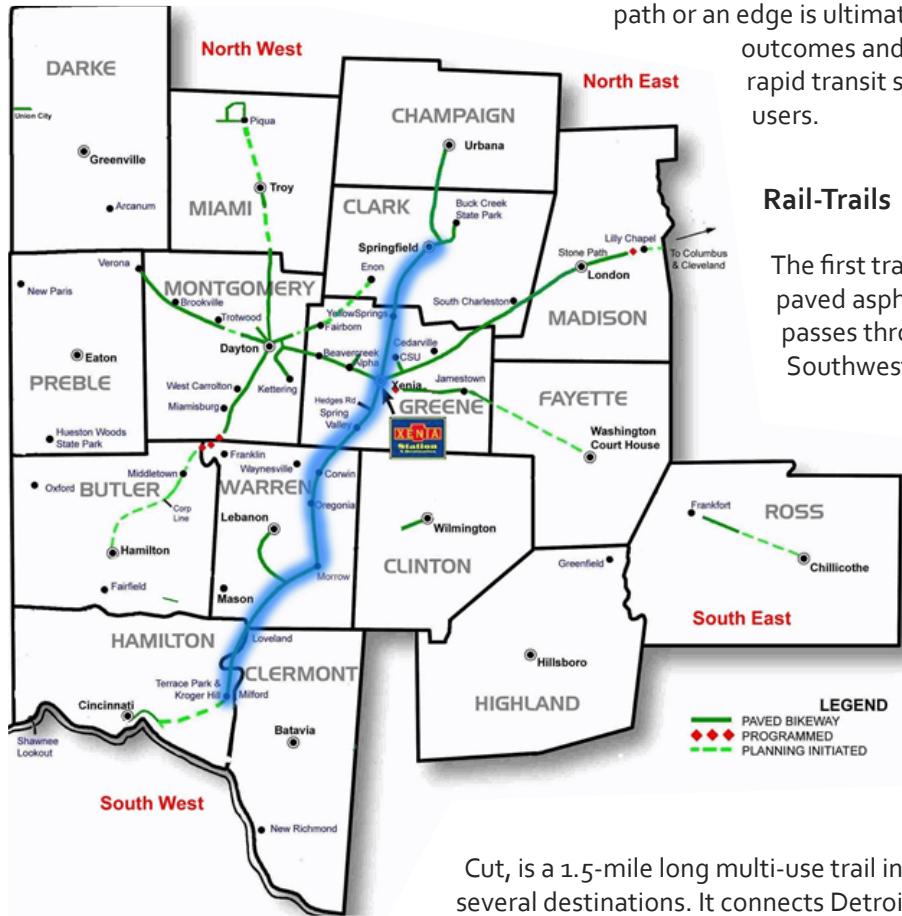
Rust Belt cities are known as places with excessive amounts of vacant and abandoned infrastructure. Prominent examples of infrastructure abandonment are various deserted railroad corridors in these manufacturing towns. Routes that were once the lifeblood of a community have deteriorated and become overgrown, unattended, and unwelcome spaces in the community. The state of Ohio alone has over 7,000 miles of abandoned railroad, interurban, and streetcar lines.<sup>1</sup> But there is still hope for these spaces. Cities, counties, states, and non-profit organizations in the region can leverage their railroad infrastructure to create positive outcomes by transforming the railways into new, appropriate land uses. In fact, several cities and towns in the region have already successfully repurposed some of these linear land resources.

Concepts defined in Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* incorporate these linear land resources into the legibility of an urban space. Paths, "channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves," are one of five major elements of mental maps of cities.<sup>2</sup> Edges are physical and perceived boundaries of neighborhoods and seams of urban space as determined by a user. A user would not experience an urban environment by following an edge. People also use nodes, districts, and landmarks to comprehend cities. A railroad can act as a path or an edge, depending on its function. Someone riding a train would view a railroad as a path to a destination, while someone waiting for a train to cross would view the railroad track as an edge. An abandoned railroad therefore can only act as an edge because it no longer functions as a path.

Reusing rail lines is a promising method to positively utilize this abandoned infrastructure to create distinct, legible paths for comprehending a city. Reuse of railways improves a city's transportation and quality of life without taking private property. Reviving unused rail lines is not intrusive because the land and the path already exist. Revitalizing railroads does not encroach on private property in the way highway or roadway expansion does. It simply repurposes abandoned resources to give people more transportation options.

One solution to railroad abandonment is creation of a rail-trail. Rail-trails (or rails-to-trails) are recreational paths formed by the redevelopment of unused railroad lines. As a rail-trail, the unused railroad becomes a path, or rather, a road or street on which people ordinarily travel. A rail-trail can improve the

legibility of an urban space. Alternatively, cities can reuse abandoned railways for mass transit uses such as bus rapid transit. Use of the rail line for any form of transit returns it to its original purpose as a path. Whether it is used as a path or an edge is ultimately up to the user. This article uses outcomes and lessons from two rail-trails, and a bus rapid transit system to provide guidance for future users.



Bicycle trails in Southwest Ohio. Highlighted blue route is the Little Miami Scenic Trail. Map Credit: Ed Dressler, modified by Tom Stikeleather

### Rail-Trails

The first trail, The Little Miami Scenic Trail, is a paved asphalt, multi-use, multi-county trail that passes through several small cities and villages in Southwest Ohio. The 78-mile trail is the longest paved recreational trail in Ohio and the second longest rail-trail in the United States. For much of its extent, the trail follows the Little Miami River. Trail proponents envision the Little Miami Trail as one leg of the Ohio-to-Erie Trail, a proposed trail that would connect Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, Akron, and Cleveland using an uninterrupted series of dedicated recreational paths.<sup>3</sup>

The second trail, the Dequindre Cut, is a 1.5-mile long multi-use trail in Detroit, Michigan that connects several destinations. It connects Detroit RiverWalk, a multi-use riverfront trail; Lafayette Park, an urban residential community; and Eastern Market, a retail area, to downtown Detroit. The trail, formerly a part of the Grand Trunk Railroad, is a “cut”, or bicycle highway, because it sits 25 feet below street level and has exit ramps every half mile.<sup>4</sup> The Dequindre Cut project cost \$3.4 million, which provided path pavement, cleared brush, and added “extras” such as emergency phones and street benches. Future plans call for extending the trail.<sup>5</sup> The Cut concept complements proposals made in Detroit’s



non-motorized transportation plan, approved in 2008-2009, which calls for 400 miles of bike lanes.<sup>6</sup>

Rail-trails have many positive effects on cities and towns. First, they benefit the economy.<sup>7</sup> According to Chrisbell Bednar, the Director of the Greene County Parks Department, people build vacations around the Little Miami Trail.<sup>8</sup> The Little Miami and associated rail-trails in the Miami Valley (Dayton metropolitan area) attract 1.5 million visitors to the area annually.<sup>9</sup> In terms of economic impact, multi-use trails in the Miami Valley have a \$6.4-7.1 million benefit in terms of hard goods, a \$5.5-7.1 million benefit in terms of soft goods, and a \$1.6-1.8 million benefit to the region in terms of overnight accommodations.<sup>10</sup>

Rail-trails support local small businesses. Simeon Copple, a small business owner along the Little Miami trail, says that 80 to 90 percent of his patrons are trail cyclists.<sup>11</sup> According to Brian Forschner, Director of Planning and Zoning for the City of Xenia, one of the towns along the trail, most recreational trail users are from outside the area.<sup>12</sup> To the extent that the trail has brought outside investment into the city, the Little Miami and associated trails have had a multiplier effect on the communities' tax bases.

Rail-trails also provide amenities, or positive spillover effects, in terms of property values. A Master's thesis by Duygu Karadeniz at the University of Cincinnati examined the impact of the Little Miami Scenic Trail on residential property values in Loveland, Ohio. For every foot closer a house was to a trail entrance, the study found that the property value rose by \$7.05.<sup>13</sup>

The Little Miami Scenic Trail revitalized the city of Xenia, Ohio.<sup>14</sup> Xenia (pop. 25,719) is the county seat of Greene County, Ohio and was historically an important railroad junction in the region. At one time, four different railroads all intersected in the central business district of Xenia. All four rail corridors have since been vacated by their respective railroad companies.<sup>15</sup> Today, each of the former railroads in the city has been transformed into a recreational trail. The rail-trail efforts in Xenia earned the city the title of "Bicycle Capital

of the Midwest” in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> From 1970 to 2000 the population of Xenia declined. However, from 2000 to 2010 the city grew again.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the Dequindre Cut improved Detroit. According to Thomas Woiwode, the Director of the GreenWays Initiative for the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM), the trail is “about the development of a community asset that Detroiters can be proud of and can communally use and celebrate.”<sup>18</sup> The multi-use trail is recognized today by international developer Tony Goldman as a “world class community asset.”<sup>19</sup>

Rail-trails also promote environmental stewardship. The land along the Little Miami River is owned outright or protected by conservation easements. Designating much of the riparian corridor as a state park has made the river of an exceptionally high quality in the state.<sup>20</sup> Multi-use nature trails or greenways such as the Dequindre Cut are “about inspiring ‘green ways’ [i.e. environmentally conscious ways] of living.”<sup>21</sup>

A rail-trail can be noteworthy for its artistic value as well. The city of Detroit bought the land for the Dequindre Cut in the 1990s to create a driveway for a casino that was never developed on the site.<sup>22</sup> Around that time, graffiti artists discovered the unused area and transformed the space into a premier tagging location in Detroit.<sup>23</sup> The site remains a major outdoor artistic space. Early in the planning stages “everyone familiar with [the Cut] agreed that the graffiti (at least the artistic stuff) was world-class art worthy of preservation.” Since the development of the trail, however, sunlight has cracked and peeled some of the artistic graffiti along the Cut.<sup>24</sup>

Construction of one rail-trail can facilitate the construction of additional rail-trails to create an interconnected transportation network for non-motorized traffic. Since the opening of the original Little Miami Scenic Trail, four spur rail-trails have been added to bring the amenities of the Little Miami Trail to additional cities and towns nearby.<sup>25</sup> This example of spur trails can guide other cities interested in rail-trails. Communities seeking to build rail-trails should connect the trails to existing multi-use trails, if possible. Therefore, the

new recreational path can connect seamlessly to the existing paths and the new interested groups can easily coordinate with existing like-minded groups.

In order to be built at all, rail-trails often need grassroots support from groups and individuals.<sup>26</sup> On December 24, 1981, anonymous donors gave \$50,000 to the Village of Yellow Springs, Ohio, a college town along the former right-of-way of the Little Miami Railroad, on behalf of “vigor, social awareness, concern, lifestyle, initiative... independence and democratic convictions.” The donors provided the money with the conditions that the funds could only be used to acquire track right-of-way for the creation of a recreational trail and that the identity of the donors could not be revealed for 20 years. This initial anonymous investment funded the first stretch of the Little Miami Scenic Trail.<sup>27</sup>

Public-private partnerships with strong private funding and volunteering are also important for rail-trail success. These trails are subject to budget uncertainty at the government level, but if private groups are invested in the effort, a rail-trail project is more likely to thrive than with government support alone. The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM), a local nonprofit foundation, was actively involved in the creation of the Dequindre Cut.<sup>28</sup> CFSEM provided funding for the planning process, community engagement, and community outreach, and matched public funding to leverage investment. Government funding for the Cut came



Rail lines can often be repurposed as separated bikeways.  
Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick

from the City of Detroit and the Michigan Department of Transportation's ISTEPA fund.<sup>29</sup>

Having allies in government can also aid the development of a rail-trail. Ed Dressler, former Director of the Greene County Parks Department, leveraged \$3 million in federal funding to complete the Greene County portions of the Little Miami Trail. As a result, the first section of what would become the northern part of Little Miami Scenic Trail opened to the public in 1991.<sup>30</sup> The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) acquired the rail corridor south of Xenia over subsequent years and Little Miami State Park opened to the public in 1997.<sup>31</sup>

Railroad corridors are typically owned by a variety of parties. Some parts of a rail corridor are owned outright by the railroad company, ("fee simple") while other parts belong to adjacent property owners through an easement arrangement. Once a rail company abandons a railroad, the railroad property reverts to belonging to various private interests. Once the property reverts to private interests, gathering up all the pieces of land for a rail-trail is tricky. Therefore, the best time for rail-trail advocates to claim a railway for a trail is before the rail corridor is abandoned.

Once a trail is built, the initial opponents of a trail can become some of the strongest proponents of the trail.

"Railbanking" is a way in which rail-trail supporters can claim otherwise-abandoned corridors for trails before the corridors become abandoned.<sup>32</sup>

Volunteer labor groups may be necessary to maintain a rail-trail. Over time some of the bridges along the Little Miami Trail became unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians. In response, a group called Friends of the Little Miami State Park formed and began maintaining the bridges.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of long-distance rail-trails, cooperation between various jurisdictions is essential. The Little Miami State Park (LMSP) is a linear park that makes up a 50-mile portion of the Little Miami Scenic Trail. LMSP is operated by ODNR. The City of Loveland, Ohio manages the Loveland Bike Trail, the name for the part of the bike trail within Loveland. The Greene County Parks Department manages 15 miles of the Little Miami Scenic Trail to the north

of LMSP, while Clark County manages the section of the trail within Clark County.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, fear and community opposition can hamper the creation of a rail-trail, but these obstacles can be overcome. The track of the Dequindre Cut had been abandoned for 25 years, which turned the area into “a wilderness in the middle of the city” according to one local resident.<sup>35</sup> Tom Woiwode claimed that the Cut site was a big challenge. It was “significantly overgrown and ominous – shrubbery, trees, long grass, a dumping place for car carcasses, household items, [and] an occasional dead body.” Initially, converting the space to pedestrian and bicycle use was a foolish idea; it was “too scary, too expensive, [and] nobody would be interested in it.”<sup>36</sup> By 2008-2009, community attitudes in Detroit began to change.

Community concern also affected the Little Miami Trail. Community opposition in the village of Terrace Park prevented the extension of Little Miami Scenic Park for many years, but in 2006 the portion of the trail through Terrace Park opened.<sup>37</sup> This 2.65-mile extension of the Little Miami State Park in Hamilton County cost \$1.1 million and was a crowning achievement of former Ohio Governor and cycling enthusiast Bob Taft.<sup>38</sup> Communities often oppose rail-trails because they fear that a heavily used trail through their backyards will increase crime.<sup>39</sup> However, once a trail is built, the initial opponents of a trail can become some of the strongest proponents of the trail.<sup>40</sup>

## Bus Rapid Transit

Rail-trails are not the only potentially positive reuse of an unused railroad right-of-way. Bus rapid transit is another solution that has been implemented successfully in the Rust Belt. The Pittsburgh Busway consists of three routes that utilize bus rapid transit (BRT), a transit system that uses buses to create a rail-like passenger transit experience. It is operated by the Port Authority of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Funding sources for the three Busway routes include the U.S. Department of Transportation, the State of Pennsylvania, and the Port Authority of Allegheny County.<sup>41</sup>

In 1977, the South Busway in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania opened as the first bus rapid transit system in the United States. The South Busway is “4.3 miles of

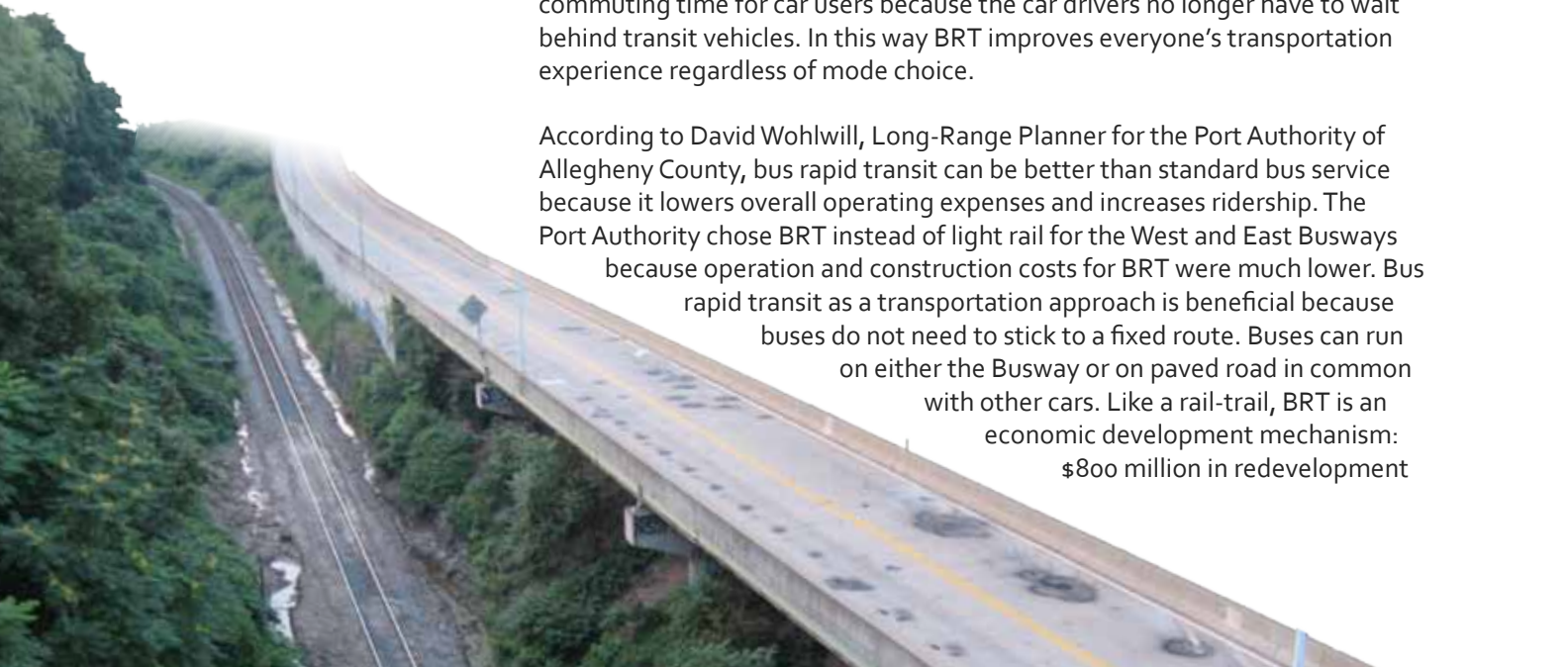
exclusive bus lanes” that connect southern neighborhoods and suburbs to Downtown Pittsburgh.<sup>42</sup> The South Busway used existing trolley right-of-way and the Norfolk & Western Railroad right-of-way. Construction costs for the South Busway, excluding vehicles, were \$27 million.<sup>43</sup>

The Martin Luther King, Jr. East Busway, the second of the three lines, opened in 1983. The East Busway was built in an active rail corridor. In order to build this line, freight rails were consolidated from three to two tracks and the third track was given to the East Busway. The \$113-million East Busway project originally was a length of 6.8 miles, but in 2003, a 2.3 mile extension to the Busway opened at a construction cost of \$68 million, or about \$3 million per mile.<sup>44</sup> The East Busway has a weekday ridership of 25,600.<sup>45</sup> The West Busway, a 5-mile route, was built in an abandoned rail corridor at a construction cost of \$258 million.

Once a route was built, buses that had initially used city streets were rerouted to the new road. The Busway enables transit users to bypass congestion that they would have faced if they traveled by car on the Pittsburgh highways and streets.<sup>46</sup> One might expect a city with a population that has declined over time to have less traffic congestion problems because fewer people use the infrastructure that is already in place, but that is clearly not the case in Pittsburgh. Moving buses from the shared road to the Busway also improves commuting time for car users because the car drivers no longer have to wait behind transit vehicles. In this way BRT improves everyone’s transportation experience regardless of mode choice.

According to David Wohlwill, Long-Range Planner for the Port Authority of Allegheny County, bus rapid transit can be better than standard bus service because it lowers overall operating expenses and increases ridership. The Port Authority chose BRT instead of light rail for the West and East Busways because operation and construction costs for BRT were much lower. Bus rapid transit as a transportation approach is beneficial because buses do not need to stick to a fixed route. Buses can run on either the Busway or on paved road in common with other cars. Like a rail-trail, BRT is an economic development mechanism: \$800 million in redevelopment

The busways in Pittsburgh are an adaptive way to reuse rail tracks.  
Photo Credit: Wikimedia User  
TheZachMorrisExperience



occurred along the East Busway from 1983 to 2008.<sup>47</sup>

### Rail Fail

Sadly, not every abandoned railroad has been put to a better use. Rust Belt communities that need to improve quality of life should try to avoid repeating what happened to the Chesapeake & Ohio of Indiana Railroad. The C&O of Indiana once connected communities west and northwest of Cincinnati, Ohio to the downtown. In 1979, rail operations ended on a major section of the route.<sup>48</sup> That same year, the Southwestern Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) proposed a sales tax as a ballot issue to allow the transit agency to buy the abandoned rail right-of-way. The plan, proposed by SORTA and metropolitan planning organization OKI, would have transformed the Cheviot Rail Yard along the C&O track into a transit center, construct a light rail system on the west side of town, and implement transit-oriented development. However, SORTA's tax proposal was rejected by voters, which meant the transit agency could not afford to purchase the rail tracks.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the failure of the ballot initiative, the C&O still might have been turned into BRT or a recreational trail through citizen initiatives. Instead, the defining path and edge of the former C&O railroad was broken up and sold to private developers. In the late 1980s, the Cheviot Yard, the rail yard in Cincinnati associated with the line, was redeveloped as a big box retail plaza known as the Glenway Crossing Shopping Center.<sup>50</sup> The rail paths along part of the route became surface parking lots and generic car routes to chain retail development. Even though Glenway Crossing in its current form has aided the city's tax base, the neighborhood and city missed an opportunity to develop the land for an even denser, more coherent land use that might have generated even more income for the city than the strip mall. It wasted a chance to use a pre-existing path to strengthen neighborhood ties and link a fragmented community back together with a sustainable transportation option.

In December 2011, the Glenway Crossing Transit Center, a bus terminal, opened within the Glenway Crossing Shopping Center, which affirms that the

Like a rail-trail, BRT is an economic development mechanism: \$800 million in redevelopment occurred along the East Busway from 1983 to 2008.

space is still an important component in the urban transportation system.<sup>51</sup> However, a bus terminal surrounded by acres of surface parking is inherently less user-friendly than a rapid transit station surrounded by pedestrian-scale mixed use facilities.

### **Trail or Transit?**

The best use for an abandoned rail line depends on the location and circumstances of the line. A rail-trail is the best use for an abandoned rail line that runs through multiple small towns, if the communities can afford to maintain it. Small towns likely do not have the traffic problems that require a transit-only right-of-way that light rail or BRT can provide. A rail-trail is better for an urban area that has no need for traffic congestion relief. Operational costs of a rail-trail are much lower than the operational costs of a bus or rail transit corridor. Transformation of unused railways into recreational trails ultimately improves community legibility, benefits residents and small businesses, encourages stewardship for nature and wildlife, and can even provide a canvas for local public art.

Bus rapid transit is appropriate for urban areas with excessive rail lines and motorized traffic congestion issues. Pittsburgh had the foresight to relieve suburban traffic jams using repurposed rail corridor capacity while it still could. If the west side of Cincinnati continues to sprawl, there will be no easy way to build a feasible solution that does not involve road widening. Today, Pittsburgh's former rail corridors are legible paths that clarify the urban environment, maximize economic development, and improve transportation access for all people. The Glenway Crossing rail corridor, however, is a disjointed edge that does little for the legibility, walkability, and accessibility of the urban and suburban areas that developed around it.

Whenever a rail line becomes unused, communities should try to repurpose it as a trail or another form of transit. Either outcome is an acceptable reuse of a railway depending on the context. Trail or transit use of this existing land resource creates benefits in terms of usability, spatial legibility, transportation, economic development, environmental improvements, and neighborhood revitalization in ways that other fragmented redevelopment of the railway cannot match. It even does so at a much lower cost of land and



resource acquisition than the construction of an entirely new transportation corridor. Rust Belt transit agencies, governments, nonprofits, recreational advocates, and community organizations must take control and ownership of former rail corridors in order to maximize the extent to which revitalization can occur in these post-industrial communities. ◊

# Developing Shale for Good

## Small City Economic Development Strategies

By Patrick Hewitt



I come from a small steel city—Warren, Ohio—located along the industrial banks of the Mahoning River. I have always been passionate about Warren—its long history, local institutions, and especially its future. As a history undergraduate of Denison University and a planning graduate student at Ohio State, I have studied the unique situation of Ohio's cities. From our largest metropolises to our smallest villages, Ohio's communities portray the Rust

Belt's greatest cultural institutions as well as its toughest economic challenges. These challenges and the long road toward overcoming them are what inspire me.

My project looks at the economic potential of Warren related to Shale Gas exploration. Hydraulic fracturing brings many problems—the most potent of which is environmental. For planners, hydraulic fracturing also brings scores of other issues: overcrowded housing, damaged roads, and social ills. Yet, it also brings economic potential if a plan is in place. My article asks how a small city can leverage its institutions and resources to offset negative effects while attracting permanent, shale-related jobs to the city's core.

The Trumbull Courthouse is located at the center of the city's downtown square.

Photo Credit: Patrick Hewitt

There is rarely much to cheer about in Warren, Ohio. For decades, this city in northeast Ohio has seen its population decline...26% of its population has left since 1970.<sup>1,2</sup> Companies closed steel and automobile factories and residents left, seeking brighter opportunities. However, the city is not without character—from the 19th century courthouse that towers over the city square to the ever-famous old world pizza at downtown’s Sunrise Inn. Within these Warren icons, residents are talking about a new discovery that has the potential to transform the city’s long-struggling economy: Shale.

According to numerous studies, the development of this natural resource will bring jobs to Warren and increase its population.<sup>3</sup> An industry-funded economic impact study in September 2011 predicted that shale development would create or support as many as 204,000 jobs in Ohio by 2015.<sup>4</sup> Other studies have shown that shale development will also bring congestion, construction, and social ills. Warren can position itself to capture shale’s economic potential while mitigating the problems associated with it. By constructing a shale center that addresses these issues, Warren can attract permanent jobs, boost its population, and set the stage for future growth.

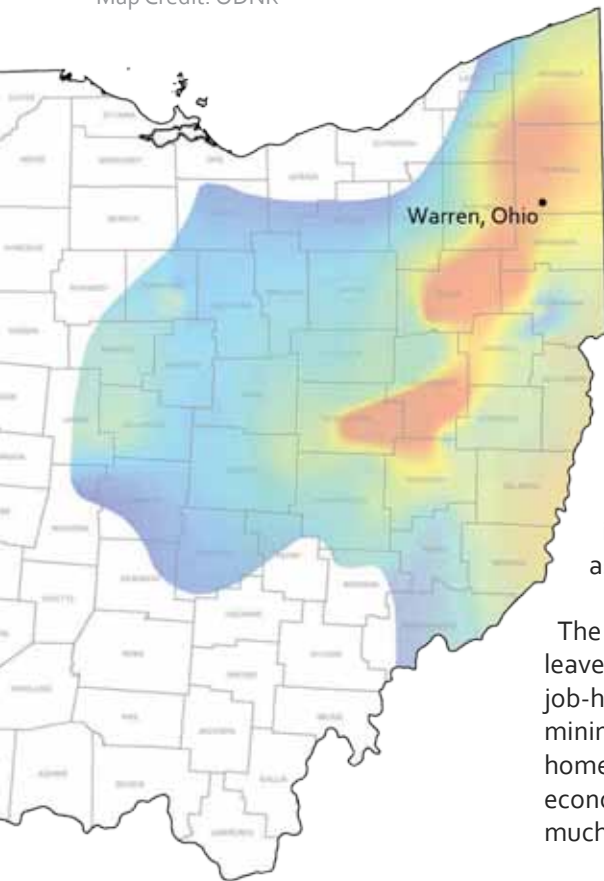
## Developing Shale

Warren, Ohio sits atop a few layers of rock that have the 21st century’s version of black gold trapped within them: natural gas. Only recently, gas companies have discovered ways of profitably extracting the gas trapped inside this shale rock through a process called hydraulic fracturing or ‘fracking.’ The process involves vertically drilling into the rock, slowly turning the pipe horizontally and then drilling for long distances parallel to the surface.<sup>5</sup> By blasting highly pressurized water into the bore hole, gas companies break up the rock and capture the freed natural gas.

New opportunities for economic growth will come with drilling. There will be new jobs in drilling, well construction, and manufacturing the needed materials. It will also bring new challenges in controlling the development that is associated with the burgeoning industry. The influx of new workers will need housing and the drilling could be loud or even environmentally harmful. Prepared cities will be able to profit from shale and those caught unprepared could find themselves with overcrowded housing, road congestion, and

polluted streams and rivers. Luckily for Warren, other cities have already had to face shale development. Pennsylvania has been a drilling hotbed for years.<sup>6</sup> The state's experience shows the problems and possibilities of drilling. While environmental concerns dominate the conversation, other major problems also arise from the drilling process.

Warren is located in the heart of the Utica Shale formation (greatest shale development potential shown in red)  
Map Credit: ODNR



### Shale's Boom and Bust

The development of shale begins with a boom. New wells require hundreds of temporary workers that are often specialty workers relocating from across the country.<sup>7</sup> The influx of new workers often leads to a shortage of housing, skyrocketing rent, and overcrowded hotels.<sup>8</sup> Especially in small towns, heavy trucks overwhelm streets, workers crowd restaurants, and new residential subdivisions or mobile home parks are hastily built.<sup>9,10,11</sup> The boom phase could physically overwhelm a small city like Warren.

The initial boom in shale development has profound social impacts on a city. A boom can lead to a shortage in housing supply that artificially increases home prices, often affecting those on fixed incomes.<sup>12</sup> Workers moving to a city may not integrate well into the community, becoming outsiders that draw the ire of neighbors.<sup>13</sup> Without truly integrating into the community, permanent workers can create discord in neighborhoods and may seek to abandon their new homes as quickly as possible.<sup>14</sup>

The construction boom may overwhelm a city, but the ensuing bust can leave the city with damaged infrastructure. Following the construction and job-heavy drilling phase, a rig is often left to pump out natural gas with minimal staffing.<sup>15</sup> The temporary workers leave the city, abandoning mobile home parks and leaving crumbling roads.<sup>16</sup> The bust can leave few lasting economic benefits, and the short development spurt can cost a city just as much to repair.

## Why Be Excited about Shale?

The winners in shale development will not be the cities that see the most drilling because drilling jobs are temporary and transient and are often performed by out-of-state specialists. The cities that succeed will be those that identify and attract permanent, shale-related jobs and successfully integrate workers into the community.

Permanent shale jobs are found in manufacturing and office work. A single rig can be drilled in a matter of months, but drilling the entire Utica Shale—by some accounts the largest shale gas deposit in the world—will take decades.<sup>17</sup> The Marcellus Shale, a smaller and shallower shale deposit in Pennsylvania, could take as long as 100 years to completely drill.<sup>18</sup> The development of the larger Utica shale deposit will require steel, pipes and motors. Warren has the opportunity to produce this shale-related machinery. With its manufacturing history, Warren has the space, infrastructure, and the skilled workers necessary to produce these components.

## Attracting Permanent Jobs

Attracting permanent jobs to Warren will mean differentiating the city from its competitors. Eastern Ohio has seen job loss for decades, and cities up and down the state line are clamoring at the opportunity to develop the shale.

For well placement, the location of natural resources will determine the rig's location; but for manufacturers and office workers, there will be other considerations: access to rail lines or highways, appropriate zoning, access to raw materials, and the ability to transport finished goods to development sites.

The companies exploring the Utica Shale are not based out of Ohio and do not know its detailed history. The largest developer is Chesapeake Energy Corp, which holds leases on roughly 1.5 million acres in Eastern Ohio.<sup>19</sup> From their offices outside of Ohio, these developers are building supply lines for shale

The cities that succeed will be those which identify and attract permanent, shale-related jobs and successfully integrate workers into the community.

development. Warren has the opportunity to connect these shale interests to Ohio's manufacturers.

### **The Shale Center: Online**

To attract permanent shale jobs, Warren needs to create an online Shale Center. Its purpose would be to connect component manufacturers with out-of-state investors. By assembling an inventory of local manufacturers, creating an easy, online-database connection, and advertising those services to developers, Warren can be at the forefront of the Shale job growth.

To start, Warren should catalogue its industrial businesses to assemble a full understanding of the city's shale potential. Warren already has steel mills capable of produc-

ing needed goods. If the city completes an audit, it can determine which businesses have the potential to cater to the needs of the shale industry. By upgrading existing businesses and expanding them, Warren will be able to quickly respond to shale developers' needs.

With a complete understanding of the city's potential, Warren could host an online portal to connect out-of-state companies to local producers. The drilling of shale is happening at a rapid rate. By creating easy connections for companies, Warren could become the hub for the Shale gas industry in the region.

### **The Shale Center: In Person**

Translating the Shale Center from the internet to the real world will create a physical center for the shale industry. A physical shale center could be a mixture of educational resources from major universities, general answers for residents concerned with shale development, legal advice for those who require it, and meeting spaces. By locating a physical center in the heart of downtown Warren, the city can foster new development interests in the city's struggling core.

By creating easy connections for companies,  
Warren could become the hub for the Shale  
gas industry in the region.

The development of shale may require additional educational institutions. New workers will need to be trained in manufacturing techniques. Economists, psychologists, and environmentalists may want to study the impacts, spinoffs, and long-term effects of shale drilling, while companies may want to devise new methods of drilling and extracting gas. Warren's existing downtown Eastern Gateway Community College could be geared toward shale research and training. This node of research can attract corporations to locate permanent offices within the area.

As with any major new development, area residents will have questions. The shale center can be a service to area residents, providing answers about the fracking process, how it affects the environment and water quality, where to get legal advice, how land leases work, and what new developments are occurring. By creating this central location for information, legal professionals will be inclined to locate their offices nearby, and pedestrian traffic will be increased in the city's downtown.

A physical shale center can also act as a welcome center for workers moving to the area for shale-related jobs. A major problem of past shale booms has been the lack of housing and the failure of new residents to transition into the community. A shale center could provide detailed information about housing availability, neighborhood descriptions, and information about local churches,

Downtown Warren could be revitalized with the addition of a Shale Center and related businesses.  
Photo Credit: Patrick Hewitt



schools, and civic associations. By encouraging meaningful connections to the Warren community, the Shale Center will increase the number of permanent residents in the city.

Finally, the shale center can provide a dedicated meeting space for community groups, developers, and local businesses to coordinate strategies around shale. Few places have been able to actively understand and coordinate actions to plan for shale development. By taking the initial step to establish the infrastructure to prepare for these changes, Warren will be able benefit from this booming industry.

### **A New Future for Warren**

Warren, Ohio is on the cusp of great change. The presence of shale gas has the potential to transform a community long devoid of investment. How Warren handles the coming changes through its investments, strategies, and plans for growth will determine whether shale enhances or damages this Northeast Ohio city.

Shale does not provide answers to all of Warren's problems, but it could be a catalyst for change. By concentrating Warren's resources on attracting permanent shale-related jobs, the city may see an extended period of growth and development.

A shale center will create connections and provide the information and facilities to target the expanding shale market. By linking shale companies with local suppliers, Warren can expand its manufacturing base. The shale center can provide the necessary resources to answer the public's questions about the development of shale, its effect on the environment, and related job and housing opportunities. It can be a catalyst of education, innovation, and job growth in Warren, Ohio. For the first time in decades, Warren's residents are talking about new jobs and future development. Warren needs only to understand the possibilities and harness the opportunity to become the nexus for shale development in Ohio. ♦

Bringing jobs back to its downtown could help revitalize downtown Warren, Ohio.  
Photo Credit: Patrick Hewitt





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THE OLD BANK

# Leveraging Municipal Healthcare Contracts to Spur Business Innovation and Relocation

By Ed Stockhausen



Born and raised in a city that has been misunderstood as the "Mistake on the Lake," I am a proud believer in Cleveland and, by extension, other Rust Belt cities. I earned two degrees at Xavier University, in Cincinnati, Ohio: a BA in Spanish, and another in Philosophy, Politics, & the Public. While the former focused on language and culture in Latin American countries during periods of social and political upheaval in the 20th Century, the latter honed my

interests in the dynamics of democracy, political and social structures, and economies. In order to better understand these relationships, I moved to Columbus in 2007 as a Legislative Service Commission Fellow, and I began work for the Ohio Senate Minority Caucus. I am blessed to serve as the Legislative Aide for State Senator Shirley Smith, who represents Cleveland in Ohio's 21st District. Working for an elected official has significantly informed my ideas and opinions of the city and other Rust Belt communities. The legal, social, and economic dimensions of our world fascinate me, especially as they mix and combine to create problems we need to overcome. That is why for this project, I am investigating how Rust Belt cities can make themselves more attractive as a place to do business by leveraging national healthcare reform and opening municipal healthcare contracts to small- and medium-sized businesses and start-ups. Harnessing the powers of the market can be advantageous for cities, especially as they look for ways to attract businesses and new residents.

Healthcare is breaking the bank for many small businesses, but municipal contracts could be used to spur innovation.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User 401K 2012



**R**ust Belt cities can promote economic development and investment by taking advantage of large municipal workforces and their healthcare contracts. Development can be indirectly promoted by creating mutually beneficial programs that extend municipal health insurance options to small- and medium-sized businesses. National healthcare now requires every individual to be covered by a health insurance policy. These new requirements could be satisfied by allowing local businesses to purchase into the municipal workers' health insurance contracts. Increasing the pool of insureds would decrease overall costs, creating savings that could then be passed back to the city, participating businesses, and employees. Other incentives that drive down the cost of healthcare could be used to support entrepreneurs and encourage employees to move into the city.

### **The Diagnosis: Urban Disorder**

A slew of urban problems has devastated the Rust Belt's central cities over the course of the latter half of the 20th Century. The decline of manufacturing, exacerbated by population loss, has led to smaller tax bases and abandoned neighborhoods. Incentives to attract investment often rely on waiving property or income taxes for an extended period, which often promotes business development at the expense of school districts' and municipal pocketbooks. The cities' demographics often require them to provide more and more services at higher costs by relying on local levies and state support.

States should have an active role in strategically guiding development and helping businesses succeed. Ohio, for example, uses the Third Frontier Program and its Hubs of Innovation & Opportunity to direct state dollars, raised from bonds and taxes, to specific high-tech investments. Unfortunately, states must find a balance between investing in the future and retaining existing companies, which might be lured to another state by tax incentives and other offers. The states' weakness becomes the cities' Achilles Heel because it escalates regional infighting among municipalities desperate to attract employers and employees' income taxes. Such is the motivation

behind anti-poaching agreements like the one in place in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.<sup>1</sup>

### Costs of Care

Meanwhile, independent of these challenges, small- and medium-sized businesses have struggled to provide affordable health insurance to their workers and families.<sup>2</sup> Health insurance costs have risen faster than inflation over the last several years, and these rising costs have led to higher premiums and less coverage for workers. For example, between 1997 and 2006, the average employer-based family premium in Ohio rose from \$5,198 to \$10,967, a rate that was still less than the national average of \$11,381.<sup>3</sup> Worse yet, that

Health insurance costs have risen faster than inflation over the last several years, and these rising costs have led to higher premiums and less coverage for workers.

national average was predicted to reach \$24,000 by 2016 under the system that was in place before the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. This estimate represents an 83% increase over 2008 premium levels for employer-sponsored family healthcare.<sup>4</sup> The same study found that in Ohio, family insurance

purchased through an employer would have cost \$23,139 in 2016, an increase of 111% above 2006 premium costs.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, such increases in healthcare insurance would limit families' abilities to purchase coverage, even through their employers.

The fact that healthcare insurance costs increase so dramatically also helps illustrate why small employers are less likely to offer insurance than large employers: according to one survey, 62% of firms with 3 to 199 workers offered coverage in 2008 whereas 99% of firms with 200 or more workers provided coverage.<sup>6</sup> The example holds true in Ohio where, according to 2008 statistics kept by the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, of the 239,158 business establishments in Ohio, 61.6% offered health insurance coverage to employees. This data includes 97.4% of large businesses with 50 or more full-time

employees, and 45.5% of small businesses with fewer than 50 full-time employees.

The need for healthcare insurance – especially for families – is clear, and the mandate for it is in place. The missing component, however, is its affordability. As discussed above, a majority of employers offer healthcare insurance to their employees at some cost, so cities need to be given the authority to make it easier for their businesses to offer that insurance. National healthcare reform has already provided the framework through which cities can accomplish exactly that goal.

### Mechanics of National Healthcare

In 2010, Congress and President Barack Obama sought to address these problems through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (“Affordable Care Act”). Its primary mechanism, the individual mandate, requires nearly all citizens and legal residents to obtain health insurance, and it accomplishes this in large part by requiring businesses to provide insurance for their employees.<sup>7</sup>

Photo Credit: Flickr User Victoria Reay

According to the Congressional Research Service, more than three-fifths of the population is insured either as a worker or as the spouse or dependent of a worker.<sup>8</sup> The advantages of obtaining health insurance through an employer include risk pools that are not formed on the basis of health status, ease of acquisition by workers, and tax subsidies that exceed those for individual market insurance. However, these benefits must be weighed against the fact that the plans are chosen by employers, they may not meet individual workers’



needs, and changing jobs may require obtaining both new insurance and new doctors.<sup>9</sup>

By 2014, states are required to create healthcare exchanges systems through which individuals and businesses can each purchase healthcare. The exchanges available to individuals are called American Health Benefit Exchanges, and businesses with no more than 100 employees can purchase from separate systems known as Small Business Health Options Program Exchange. Beginning in 2017, states will be allowed to request permits from the federal government to allow businesses with more than 100 employees to purchase health insurance in the Small Business Health Options Program Exchanges.

Cities should extend participation to businesses with no more than 200 employees, and special financial incentives should be offered to those with up to 25 or 10 employees. These size classifications will help center cities attract the innovative talent that starts small but could grow into a medium or large company.

Small employers with 25 or fewer employees and less than \$50,000 in annual payroll will initially be given help in the form of tax credits. Between 2014 and 2016, the credit will be worth up to 35% of the employer's premium contribution if the employer contributes at least half of the total premium. Tax-exempt small businesses and charity organizations meeting these requirements are also eligible for tax credits, but only up to 25% of the employer's contribution toward the employee's health

insurance premium. After 2016, the credit will be available to employers with 10 or fewer employees and average annual payroll of less than \$25,000. The credit phases-out as firm size and average wage increases. Tax-exempt small businesses meeting these requirements are eligible for tax credits of up to 35% of the employer's contribution toward the employee's health insurance premium.

Employers with 50 or more full-time employees will be penalized by a calculated fee if they do not offer health insurance coverage. These businesses will

also be penalized if they offer coverage, but at least one full-time employee receives a premium tax credit because of the coverage's expense.

Beginning in 2014, employers with more than 200 employees are required to automatically enroll employees into health insurance plans, even though employees are permitted to opt out. Employers can incentivize participation in wellness program by offering their employees incentives of up to 50% of their premium share.

Because the Affordable Care Act already has different requirements of differently sized businesses, the demarcation on small- and medium-sized employers is already drawn. Cities and states need only tailor their programs to match the Affordable Care Act's design. Cities should extend participation to businesses with no more than 200 employees, and special financial incentives should be offered to those with up to 25 or 10 employees. These size classifications will help center cities attract the innovative talent that starts small but could grow into a medium or large company.

### Creative Care

In each Rust Belt metropolitan area, central cities have the largest municipal workforces and almost all full-time employees are given the option of purchasing healthcare in pre-arranged packages.<sup>10</sup>The program should reduce

Insurance matters for hospital emergency rooms because individuals with health insurance use the ER more frequently than the uninsured. In fact, according to the US Department of Health & Human Services, the uninsured made up about one fifth of all ER visits in 2006, the most recent year for which data was available  
Photo Credit: Flickr User KOMUnews.



**EMERGENCY**

the administrative burden businesses face when trying to navigate and understand healthcare policies. By leaving a majority of that administrative work to municipal employees responsible for administering the municipal healthcare contracts, businesses will have fewer worries and concerns.

In order to be successful, states must first give some of their cities authorization to operate this program. States should carefully create limits on which cities will be given this permission, and they should prioritize central cities above other surrounding communities. Although it is unlikely that those other communities have the municipal workforce necessary to generate the kinds of healthcare savings envisioned herein, the state should set clear parameters preventing counties and small cities from participating. Such restrictions would focus development in the urban core. States should also consider restricting suburbs that purchase healthcare in aggregate from participating in this program.

### Healthy Growth

Because larger pools of participants will create savings for all participants, those savings could be used in creative ways. For example, they could be returned to businesses and their employees on a monthly or quarterly basis, thus reducing healthcare expenditures at a micro level.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, those savings could be used by the city to offer tax credits to employees of participating businesses to incentivize purchasing a home

in the municipality. The city would doubly benefit from taxes paid on income, and school districts would benefit from increased property taxes. If shown to be popular, such a tax credit might spur neighborhood revitalization in otherwise stalled areas. Regardless of how the savings are used, the city and

Pairing health insurance with business development would create engines of innovation and hives of entrepreneurial activity within the urban core.



participating businesses should outline and agree to them long before those opportunities become available.

Another idea to complement this program would be to allow cities to couple these insurance programs with business incubators. Business incubators already help start-up businesses by providing shared facilities and technological support. Cities could offer health insurance to the incubators' "residents" at steep discounts, or for free if financing allows. Such an offer would show the city's commitment to attracting, nurturing, and supporting innovative ideas and people. Pairing health insurance with business development would create engines of innovation and hives of entrepreneurial activity within the urban core.

### **The Prognosis**

Healthcare reform offers Rust Belt cities and states unique opportunities to leverage municipal capital, in the form of the municipal workforce, in order to entice businesses to locate and innovate within their borders. Though each city should engage in its own analysis of available possibilities, opening healthcare contracts to a larger public is a positive way to fight a number of ills and problems that have set upon America's industrial centers. ◇

# Sparked by Translation

By Kent Miller



Growing up in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio I was never fond of the city's nickname "cow town."

But in some ways, the city deserved the name. Columbus, along with much of the Midwest, was markedly less diverse than bigger cities. At first, I wanted to get out; I wanted to go somewhere where I could explore big city life. But

the closer I got to graduation, the more I wanted to be near home. I realized that what I wanted was to bring the level of diversity I saw in other cities home with me. "Sparked by Translation" is the proposal of a small change designed to bring diversity to the Rust Belt.

Bilingual sign in front of Parliament in Ottawa, Ontario.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User MPDo1605

Culture has long dictated an individual's sense of place. Working almost subconsciously, our perception of culture is how we instantly know if we are looking at a picture from India or El Salvador. There are a few obvious yet vital cues for location identification. Elements such as architecture, food, language, people, and city form are the most tangible pieces to the puzzling concept of "culture." They are the easiest ways to know when we are experiencing something new. Accommodating immigrant culture could be the key to bringing new populations into the Rust Belt cities.

## A Culture of Cultures

The United States has historically been a phenomenon of place. Immigration to the United States from all parts of the world has created Chinatowns that communicate primarily in Mandarin, Latino communities with lavish music and dance festivals, and Japanese schools that teach on Saturdays so that students have a sixth day of schooling for the week. Importing culture has long been an American custom. In Columbus, Ohio, German immigrants in the 19th century created one of the country's most unique historic districts. It is now known as German Village and to this day, it is lush with renowned German-inspired restaurants and attractions.

Unfortunately for the country as a whole, political pressure has resulted in the vilification of immigration. Several states, particularly in the fast-growing South and West, have created anti-immigration legislation, formalizing hostility. But one legislature's mistakes can be another's opportunity. By effectively forfeiting a portion of their share of immigration, states like Georgia and Arizona have given states like Ohio and Michigan the opportunity to spark growth. New immigration can be used to stabilize neighborhoods, provide a

By effectively forfeiting a portion of their share of immigration, states like Georgia and Arizona have given states like Ohio and Michigan the opportunity to spark growth.

workforce for stabilizing local economies, and create outside interest in cities of states that are often criticized as the “fly-over” states.

### **An Opportunity for the Rust Belt**

Of the many issues plaguing Rust Belt cities, arguably the most publicized is population shrinkage and the resulting sky-high vacancy rates. By means of the simple economic principle of supply and demand, there are three approaches to solving this problem; reduce supply (demolition), increase demand (population growth), or a combination of both. Cities will be smart to utilize the latter, but as cities have become more and more desperate for solutions during the recent recession and housing crisis, they have begun to rely more heavily on supply reduction. This article details how cities can begin to increase demand in neighborhoods with high vacancy rates through the simple act of finding ways to make immigrants feel welcome.

First, many will question how bringing more immigrant people, traditionally seen as poor and unskilled, to an underemployed region will help it. There are several counters to this argument. A recent Brookings Institute report indicates that immigrants are now more likely to be high-skilled than low-skilled. Additionally, 44 of the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas were high-skilled immigrant destinations, those defined as settling 25% more immigrants with a college diploma than those without a high school diploma. Seven of those cities are in Ohio. There are no middle- or low-skill destinations in Ohio. Detroit, Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg are also high-skill destinations. Los Angeles, each of Texas’ six major metros, Las Vegas and Phoenix are low-skill destinations.<sup>1</sup> Sandra Svoboda<sup>2</sup>, on the topic of immigration in Detroit, writes that we need to change our question from “Why aren’t we building a wall and keeping illegal aliens out?” to “How can immigration policy better support American industry’s needs and be an engine for more economic successes?” To support her point she writes:

“Mexicantown, located adjacent to the Ambassador Bridge crossing to Canada [in Detroit], lures urban and suburban patrons, who find restaurants, groceries and food trucks for jalapeño-laced feasts. Carryout Middle Eastern food is common fare for the downtown office set, and Asian

markets—Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian, specifically—are setting up in the neighborhood around Wayne State University, the main downtown campus.

Parking spaces outside any of these are overwhelmingly filled with American-made (or, at least, assembled) cars and trucks. Detroit supports its own. Will America do the same for its auto industry, and the city that shares its name?”

In a separate report cited by the White House’s, “Building a 21st Century Immigration System,” it was found that 25% of the fastest growing companies between 1990 and 2005 were founded by immigrants. The White House aptly titled this section “Immigrants are Job Creators.”<sup>3</sup>

### Encouraging Immigrants to Locate in the Rust Belt

Once cities have accepted that new residents, regardless of culture, are a good thing, they can begin to consider how to attract this demand. Traditionally, it has been the private sector that has brought people to cities in the United States. Government programs have assisted through housing programs, but ultimately job availability has been the driving force for location choice. But for cities in the Rust Belt, economic development alone is not doing the trick.



When the private sector fails to meet a local need, local governments attempt to fill this gap. On the topic of immigration, several local governments have done just that, from New York City to Dayton, Ohio. Policy advocates have suggested this strategy for several other cities, including Michigan governor Rick Snyder pushing it for Detroit.

In October of 2011, Dayton, Ohio passed the “Welcome Dayton” initiative aimed at creating a better environment for the current immigrant population as well as providing resources for new immigrants. The program seeks to

Near its border with Quebec New York state has implemented signs in both English and French.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User MPDo1605

address six areas: “1) City Policies and Justice System, 2) Business and Trade Economic Development, 3) Social Services and Health Services, 4) Financial Institutions and Banks, and 5) Community Culture, Arts and Education.” as

well as a flexible sixth category.

Services provided include architectural design for businesses within the newly created immigrant business district, interpretation services, and a municipal identification card.<sup>4</sup>

The State of New York has recently debated its own version of the federally rejected DREAM Act, legislation, which would “allow undocumented students who meet in-state tuition requirements in New York to access state financial aid for higher education.”<sup>5</sup> Such access is crucial to the mobility of young adults who were brought

here as children, many of whom are currently unable to attend college or work because of their undocumented status. If passed, the bill would signify to immigrants that New York, despite the national climate, values immigrant students’ careers as much as any other New Yorker’s career.

Regardless of the potential long-term benefits to their respective constituencies, both the State of New York and the City of Dayton must provide financial assistance in the short term. These expenditures, like the \$17 million in additional aid from New York, are what the opposition will likely use to oppose bills containing these initiatives. At a time when spending on almost anything can be controversial, it is often the case that local governments



Signs in multiple languages can be more welcoming to visitors and immigrants.

Photo Credit: Flickr User MPD01605

will experience difficulty in passing such measures. Though it seems obvious, cities should find the cheapest, most effective way to accomplish their objectives.

## A Canadian Example

In order to be effective, programs should require minimal maintenance costs and be cheap to implement, while also providing the largest possible benefit for the largest constituency. The province of Ontario, Canada has already found that solution.

Outside of the province of Quebec, Ontario has the most Francophone citizens in Canada: 582,690 people, according to the 2006 Canadian Census.<sup>6</sup> Out of over half of a million French-speakers, 85% of them live in areas requiring that street signage be written in both English and French. There are 25 designated areas throughout the province.<sup>7</sup> Aside from providing safer roads, bilingual signage also demonstrates respect for citizens speaking another language. Passed in 1986, the preamble of the French Language Services Act demonstrates this respect, reading, “the Legislative Assembly recognizes the contribution of the cultural heritage of the French speaking population and wishes to preserve it for future generations.”<sup>8</sup>

In April 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau released a report on primary language use; over 34 million spoke Spanish, some 10 million spoke another European language, over 8 million spoke an Asian language, and another 2.2 million spoke primarily in yet another language.

Though the Francophone population in Canada is longstanding, Americans are in a similar situation. There are many permanent residents who speak a language other than English at home, particularly Spanish. In April 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau released a report on primary language use; over 34 million spoke Spanish, some 10 million spoke another European language, over 8 million spoke an Asian language, and another 2.2 million spoke primarily in yet another language.<sup>9</sup> While other languages may be more common in certain

areas, Spanish certainly is the most commonly used language other than English in the United States.

### **Bilingual Signs**

Replacing unilingual signs with bilingual signs is simple and cheap. In Ohio, for example, signs are given an expiration date when installed. When signs reach their expiration date, they should simply be replaced with signs in both English and Spanish, or the local secondary language. No signs should be

removed in favor of bilingual signs unless they were already planned for replacement. This strategy minimizes cost by allowing gradual implementation in addition to allowing the current signage to live out its useful life. All communicative signs should be included in this program. Communicative signs are those that convey a message primarily through words, not numbers.

For example, a speed limit sign is numerically-based, while way-finding signage is communicative. Numeric signs do not need much explanation but “pedestrians only” or “bridge closed ahead” could be more clearly communicated through bilingual signs.

Initially, it may only make sense to implement bilingual signage in urban areas where languages other than English are most prevalent. While the state of Ohio is comprised of only 6.3% people who speak a language other than English at home, urban areas such as Columbus and Cleveland have higher concentrations of foreign language speakers at 12.6% and 11.6% respectively. However, not all cities are significantly, or even at all, higher than their state averages. In Detroit, only 9.2% of residents speak a language other than English at home in comparison with Michigan’s 8.9%. Further, the U.S. as a whole is comprised of 20.1% of people who do not speak English at home.<sup>10</sup>

The U.S. as a whole is comprised of 20.1% of people who do not speak English at home. (U.S. Census Bureau) By advancing ahead of the curve, Rust Belt cities can show that they, too, are a deserving location for immigrants.



By advancing ahead of the curve, Rust Belt cities can show that they, too, are a deserving location for immigrants.

Successful implementation of this strategy will create demand in cities that have not experienced growth in decades. Vacant houses and lots will begin to fill. Residents will be able to enjoy new and prevalent cultures that contribute to the quality of life and economies of their communities. Many enterprising immigrants, for example, start businesses such as ethnic restaurants and grocers. Office crowds and suburban tourists will have a reason to visit neighborhoods that previously received nothing more than a passing glance from car windows. But bilingual signage is only a start. Rust Belt cities and states must use each and every innovative tool in order to draw new residents and foster growth. ◇

# A Rusty Brand

By Melissa Lindsjo



I grew up in Worthington, Ohio, which is as old as the state and helped me understand that cities and communities are different and that is important. I completed my undergraduate degree and worked two years as an AmeriCorps VISTA at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio. It was during my time at Wittenberg that I gained interest in the Rust Belt. I was involved in several community projects that showed me the rich history of the city. It also gave me the opportunity to collaborate with very passionate community members who built upon the assets and traditions of Springfield while taking on issues of the city creatively with the future in mind.

I am writing my article about the branding plan for the Rust Belt influenced by the grit, history, and success of the area that showcases the young professionals who are making these cities their home and future. I became interested in the branding of cities when Liz Colombo and I were visiting Buffalo, NY. I found out that it was named the Queen City and thought that was odd since I thought Springfield, OH was the Queen City. Liz, who has lived in Cincinnati, said it was also the Queen City. I had to get to the bottom of this. Also, why do some of these names stick to the cities while others do not? I feel it is so important to have a strong brand that will help lay the foundation of their comeback.



Buffalo shows its pride and branding of the city by having local businesses showcase iconic statues of buffaloes in the downtown; this storefront also has "Believe in Buffalo" on its window.

Photo Credit: Melissa Lindsjo

A famous proverb states “a good name is more desirable than riches,” and through the decades Rust Belt cities have had their share of names. The Queen City, City of Arches, Motor City, Glass City, Steel City, Nickel City, Corn City, Gateway to the West, Rose City, Motown, Forest City, Champion City, Mural City. I could go on with nicknames for Rust Belt cities. These nicknames speak to the past, tradition, and legacy of the cities – and in quite a few cases, the industry from which the cities got their wealth. In fact, these names have branded their respective cities. History is important, of course, but as these cities move forward they need to think of themselves in a different light. These nicknames do not fit these cities as much anymore. It is time to get their message out with a strong branding initiative. There should be a connection between city and people. The branding should emphasize parts of the city that are unique, represent the people, and show forward thinking or progress.

What are the key aspects to a successful 21st century Rust Belt branding campaign? They can be summarized with the following characteristics:

- Participation → Engaging the “right” people
- Collaboration → Ownership
- Rust & Diamonds
- Honest → Embrace

In this article I will give examples of these characteristics as guidelines to follow when a city is thinking about branding itself. The city should not take exactly what another city has done and use that as their branding, but should build upon its unique qualities.

## Building Brands

The subjects of branding and public relations (“PR”) campaigns are familiar to most Rust Belt cities. Over the last 60 years, many of these cities have tried numerous branding endeavors. Initially, some seemed successful, but in the end they all failed. Buffalo provides a good case study. My favorite, or maybe my least favorite, Buffalo slogan was the 1960’s “Boost Buffalo, it’s good for you!” Cleveland may have the worst track record of all. Cleveland has tried many times to brand itself with little success. A disastrous branding strategy

from 1981 was “Cleveland’s a plum.” The campaign was obviously inspired by the effective and still used New York City brand, “The Big Apple.” Cleveland’s campaign was unsuccessful. It compared Cleveland to another city, and to most people, the plum was inferior to the apple. More importantly, why would we associate plums with Cleveland? A city should never compare itself to another city because it loses its unique appeal.

What does this name or brand stand for?  
It stands for many things: the hope that is still in these cities, the grit of the region, the transformations that they have gone through and will go through once again, and the hope we have for the region’s future.

Branding is difficult work. We learned this firsthand when this book’s research team and contributors went through a long process to come up with our brand “Diamonds in the Rust.” We met three times for group brainstorming and voting. First, we came up with a long list of possible titles. Then, we shortened it to about 15 options, which we again cut down to three. We voted on those final three options, which

resulted in a tie between the brands “Diamonds in the Rust” and “The New Monday Project.” After another vote, “Diamonds in the Rust” won by merely one vote. What does this name or brand stand for? It stands for many things: the hope that is still in these cities, the grit of the region, the transformations that they have gone through and will go through once again, and the hope we have for the region’s future.

### **Cities Defined**

What defines cities? I believe it is the people in them and how they make their city their own. The process of branding a city relies heavily on human relationships, soul searching, and honesty. The post-industrial cities of the Rust Belt have been struggling against disinvestment and population decline for more than half a century. It is difficult for cities to acknowledge that they are shrinking. How do we address declining population when cities have traditionally been associated with growth? This association is a turning point. Instead of giving in to a death spiral, cities can change in a healthy way by doing some

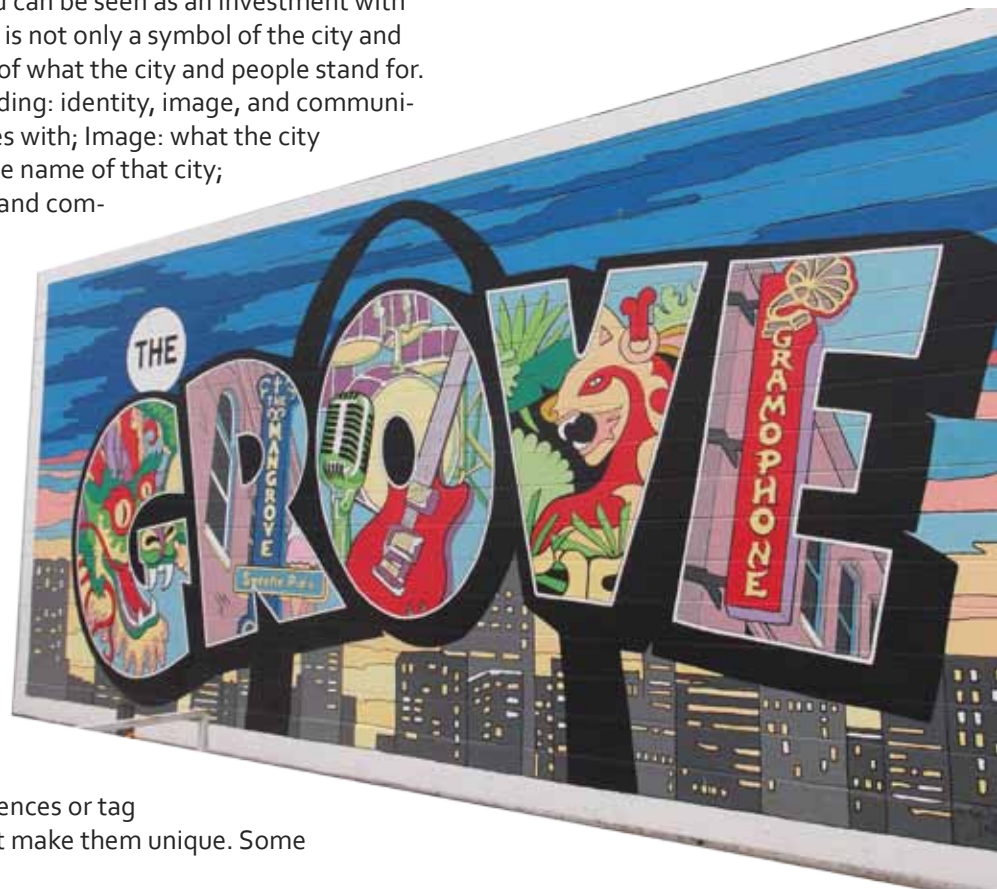
re-adjustment. Luckily, Youngstown, Cleveland, and Detroit have started to acknowledge this and are beginning to readjust their plans.

Successful branding is concise and can be easily memorized.<sup>2</sup> If a catchphrase is commonly used by community members within two to five years after its introduction, then the brand is a winning effort; if not, it has failed.<sup>3</sup> To be used by the people, it should resonate with community members and embody the truth of what the city is and who the residents are. According to research, building a successful brand can be seen as an investment with very strong positive returns.<sup>4</sup> Branding is not only a symbol of the city and its people, but a promise to the future of what the city and people stand for. There are three main concepts of branding: identity, image, and communication.<sup>5</sup> Identity: what the city identifies with; Image: what the city wants people to see when they hear the name of that city; and Communication: what does the brand communicate about the city?

Recently, there has been a push for cities to once again try to rebrand themselves. One way cities are rebranding is playing on words within the city name. Springfield, OH finished their brand in 2008. Columbus, OH began planning a new brand in 2007, and it is rolling it out this year as part of its bicentennial celebration. What these two cities' brands have in common is that they have come up with not necessarily a tag line, but a single word to use in the name of their cities (US for Columbus and IN for Springfield) and take that word to make short sentences or tag lines for various aspects of the city that make them unique. Some

St. Louis' neighborhood, The Grove, has recently revitalized itself. To help with their identity, murals have been placed on buildings in the Central Business District, showing the culture and identity of the area through creative artwork.

Photo Credit: Melissa Lindsjo



examples: "Take a road trip back IN time." "Performances are always IN season!" "Architectural wonders abound IN Springfield."<sup>6</sup>

### Participation

Now that we have seen examples of more successful and current branding campaigns, let us look at some steps to achieve a 21st Century brand. First of all, who should make the decisions? In my opinion, the short answer is that anyone who is invested in the future of the area should be invited into a transparent and inclusive branding process. An open process will create the new identity with stronger buy-in and support, which hopefully will make it stick for the long haul. For the Rust Belt, I believe the "right" people include everyone from an artist just coming into the city to a blue collar working family to

Detroit has several groups working on making a new brand for the city. This is an example of one of the murals that has been painted throughout the city to create a sense of community and pride.

Photo Credit: Eric Olson



an elderly citizen who has seen and experienced both the city's successes and downfalls.

I believe if cities are open to letting ideas blossom more organically, the branding will stick and outlive the two year mark. Most of the branding initiatives that have been unsuccessful have been those stemming from the city or visitor's bureau. Guerilla marketing might be a way for Rust Belt cities to define strong identities. Guerilla marketing is a low-cost advertising strategy that uses graffiti, stickers, blogs, etc., to give attention to specific idea. Guerilla marketing not only showcases the true passion of the people calling their city home, but also shows ownership and honesty. This brings about the argument for either a top-down or a bottom-up approach to branding. Detroit has been doing a few organically grown initiatives such as Detroit Lives and I am Young Detroit (IAYD). Time has not been able to tell if this method of branding has worked since they are still within the one to five year timeframe. I believe the guerilla marketing strategy is working to help people of Detroit start thinking about who they are and what the city means to them. I am hopeful that this will increasingly catch on and we will see more t-shirts and murals around the city showcasing this idea. Perhaps city officials will see this as well and build upon these strong assets for branding Detroit.

Another helpful tip to sustain a brand or vision is to think about what the city will do on an ongoing basis. Will they continue to have public meetings or host events throughout the year? Buffalo has been hosting events that showcase the "Real Buffalo" and is planning to revisit its branding efforts every year to see how it should change as the city is changing.

## **Collaboration**

Collaboration is a key concept when thinking about the future of a city and its branding. Jamie Greene, Principal of ACP, was able to give me some insight on the power of collaboration as it related to his work with Muncie, IN. Muncie brought together a diverse 40 member steering committee that was charged with creating a strategic plan, including a marketing campaign. He felt that everyone in the community was represented by at least someone on the committee and that all values and interests were represented. This committee was highly successful with creating outreach and awareness for this process of

A Rust Belt city should also celebrate its innovative past and how it is continuing that tradition with the technology or entrepreneurship it is harvesting now.

developing a strategic plan. Three hundred community members attended three public meetings. Mr. Greene believes the leadership of the steering committee is reflective of the overall community. Starting in March, Muncie will be working on a branding plan and has started a 501(c3) organization that will continue

this open, engaged, and supportive movement to help bring Muncie, IN back into the playing field and have a strong identity for itself. Collaboration can boost confidence in community members and be an inspiring endeavor.<sup>7</sup> Collaborating also helps a city recognize the importance of civic engagement and the realization that we are all in this process together. Once everyone is working together, there also needs to be a sense of ownership in order to make the branding effort last.

### **Rust & Diamonds**

In the process of rebranding, I believe it is important for Rust Belt cities to accept and celebrate their rust history. A branding strategy can be created with this theme. The rust can come through by showcasing the cities' histories and traditions, either by using old brands or being inspired by an event that happened in the city. Rust Belt cities are resilient and that should resonate in their branding.

Of course, it is important to connect the rust with the diamonds that exist in all of our cities. A Rust Belt city should also celebrate its innovative past and how it is continuing that tradition with the technology or entrepreneurship it is harvesting now. Around the world, cities are striving to become knowledge cities by nurturing top notch education and competitive technology sectors. Several cities have already started this process, or have put a plan in place for the future: Melbourne, Delft, Barcelona, Palmerston, and Monterrey.<sup>8</sup> Many Rust Belt cities could strive to become knowledge cities.

Cities should look at what creative engines already exist. How can they build a network from them? One of the biggest assets of Rust Belt cities is their



higher education institutions. These institutions give the city resources, networks and, most of all, hope for the future. By developing these assets, cities can attract the younger generation to stay or move into the city, which is a vital part of making a city sustainable. Detroit has started to do this with Tech Town, also known as the Wayne State University Research and Technology Park. Tech Town stimulates job growth and small business creation by supporting entrepreneurs and developing companies in emerging industries including advanced engineering, life sciences, and alternative energy.<sup>9</sup> Since its opening in 2000, Tech Town has developed numerous initiatives such as THRIVE and the Great Lakes Stem Cell Commercialization Center which is the first of its kind. THRIVE “provides one-on-one coaching to help startups set and reach milestones, plus networking opportunities, educational workshops, and access to talent and capital.”<sup>10</sup> These initiatives will help showcase the diamonds in the city.

## Honesty

A brand has to relate to the city. Detroit has been named the motor city because it built cars. When the industry that was the city’s namesake is gone, the city needs to reinvest and to use its realities to fuel its brand. One way to create an authentic, honest brand in each Rust Belt city would be for each city to take on the movement IAY\_ (I Am Young \_). This movement was started in 2010 to showcase the young population living in Detroit, and the network of young people is growing.<sup>11</sup> It promotes artists, entrepreneurs, writers, and other creative occupations. It could be expanded to celebrate the wide array of experiences Rust Belt cities provide. I believe cities could expand this idea to the two-prong strategy of IAY\_\_\_ and IAE\_\_\_ (I Am Experienced \_\_\_). The two-prong strategy would celebrate the long-time residents as well as showcasing that the city has the amenities for “Nerds.” The movement allows for the community to be honest with itself by truly



expressing who they are, what they do in their city, and what the city means to them. This strategy also provides a unified regional approach to showcase what the Rust Belt is about to places outside of the region. Doing this will also help each city showcase their uniqueness since each city will be showing the people of their city. This can easily be done with the help of universities and colleges, which fortunately exist in abundance in the Rust Belt. These institutions provide a great network for promoting a program and sharing ideas.

Based upon my research, interviews, and exploration of Rust Belt cities, I believe that it is important for branding initiatives in our region to engage the public and build upon history while transforming the legacy into what the future will bring. Branding must represent the city and, to do that, branding needs to be unique. Cities should capitalize on their history and legacies. If branding is based in these characteristics, it will be authentic, resonate with stakeholders, and deliver a lasting and powerful message. ♦

*"It is possible for a city to have a brand and an image that evolves into a 'quality of place'. This in turn establishes brand loyalty, which is essential to a city's survival. It is also possible for a poorly branded city, with the right strategy, to turn itself into a success. This cannot be done by branding alone."*

*-Julia Winfield-Pfefferkorn*

This mural is another example of how a Rust Belt city can help brand itself through creative artwork identifying with a neighborhood or city.

Photo Credit: Melissa Lindsjo



 **Lenten Menu  
Has arrived**

 **KITCHEN  
OPEN LATE**  
Wed-Sat  
Sun-Tues

231 East Canal Street  
*Double Wide Grill*  
Birmingham, AL

**HOT  
STAND**



# “Trial Living” in Görlitz [*your city*]

By JM Rayburn



My interest in the Rust Belt is perhaps unexpected as I am originally from Ft. Lauderdale. I relocated to Columbus in high school when my mother landed a job in the local healthcare industry. I graduated from The Ohio State University in 2009 with two bachelor's degrees--one in Portuguese and the other in International Studies with a focus on World Business & Economy. I returned to Ohio State in 2010 to pursue a Master's degree in City & Regional Planning with a focus on housing and neighborhood development. After 10 years in Columbus, I proudly call the city, and Ohio for that matter, home. My interest in the Rust Belt is the culmination of greater forces at work. At bare minimum, I am no longer content to wait for better times. I will work for better times. I want to be in the 'trenches' committed to meaningful work in Rust Belt cities rather than finding a mediocre planning job. My inspiration comes from the people and colleagues I meet from Rust Belt cities who are involved with having a positive impact.

The 20th century marked the triumph of the Suburbs. I believe we now live in the century of the City. Younger generations are moving back to the inner cities to seek more affordable, smaller homes that are closer to jobs. The Rust Belt inner cities have a future, one that is much stronger than originally thought. I propose the introduction of Probewohnen or “trial living”. It is a housing initiative from the German city of Görlitz that gives temporary, rent-free housing in newly renovated apartments to those interested in the opportunity to explore life in the city and to cultivate a unique living experience. Young professionals and students, who relocate for opportunity or who are determined to change their living situation, can provide new life to industrial cities in decline. The aim is to increase the acceptance and appreciation for the currently less popular inner city neighborhoods. It's time the Rust Belt cities convinced Americans of the same. Trial living will provide these cities a hand up, not a hand out.

Cleveland's free stamp is related to the theme of Probewohnen in Rust Belt cities.  
Photo Credit: JM Rayburn

**R**ent-free housing in newly renovated apartments? The German city of Görlitz makes a convincing argument to outsiders about the benefits of urban living. This is achieved through renovations of vacant buildings in order to attract tenants to inner city neighborhoods. Implementation starts with an application process and concludes with a one-week stay. It's time Rust Belt cities convinced Americans of the same, but with a six-month time horizon.

### **A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out**

How will the Rust Belt stabilize and foster an economic recovery that contributes to an elevated quality of life for residents? Look no further than the inner city housing market. Recent studies and real estate trends have both shown more people moving into inner cities.<sup>1</sup> Younger generations are relocating to the inner cities to seek more affordable, smaller homes that are closer to jobs.<sup>2</sup> Rust Belt cities could leverage their abundant supply of beautiful historic, yet currently vacant, buildings in order to attract new tenants to their downtowns. By increasing the downtown resident population, Rust Belt cities will galvanize their local economies due to the introduction of more wealth and economic activity. The market will continue to accommodate the housing shifts to inner city neighborhoods, but the process can be given a much needed boost by municipal governments. "Trial living" is a public-private partnership that delivers benefits to everyone. Private sector firms offset the capital costs leading to a public sector gain, while also advertising sponsors for a private sector gain. Selected participants are given the opportunity, without obligation, to live rent-free in inner cities and contribute to employment, culture, and economic activity. Thus, young professionals and students, who relocate for opportunity or who are determined to change their living situation, can provide new life to industrial cities in decline. For that reason, trial living will provide Rust Belt cities with a hand up, not a hand out.

### **"The East German Rust Belt"**

The history of trial living, or Probewohnen in German, dates back to the reunification of West and East Germany in 1990. The two German states signed a treaty agreeing on a monetary, economic, and social union. East Germany had long been considered as having the most robust economy in the former

Soviet Bloc. The removal of the Communist government revealed the cracks in the foundation of that system.

- East German industries could not compete in the open market system. Unemployment skyrocketed.
- Wages and educational standards were higher in Berlin and West Germany.
- Many left East Germany.
- Suburbanization occurred, though not on the scope and scale as seen in the United States.
- Vacancies soared in inner cities.
- The population plummeted in central cities.

The trends of East German cities mirror those in American Rust Belt cities. It was clear the market alone was not going to correct the downward spiral of economic restructuring, which also had an impact on the quality of life for residents. Researchers from the Technical University of Dresden (TUD) began to approach the issues of high vacancy rates and dramatic population loss. They focused their efforts on the city of Görlitz.



*The Plattenbauten (suburbs) and the Gründerzeit (inner city)*

The data indicated that the focal point of high vacancy rates and population loss relate to the “Gründerzeit” style of residential buildings in the inner city neighborhoods. During the Communist era, more people tended to live in these residences than before World War II because there was a housing shortage in East Germany.<sup>3</sup> Noticeable changes arrived in the 1980s when people began to leave

inner city neighborhoods because new prefabricated housing estates, or Plattenbauten, were built at the city's edge. The Plattenbauten were simple residences but at those times offered better amenities than old buildings in the inner city, such as central heating.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Introduction of Probewohnen**

To bolster economic and urban recovery, Görlitz city officials introduced the concept of a one-week probewohnen, or trial living. The trial living program allows residents from outlying areas and regions to learn the urban environment from the perspective of a "citizen Gorlitzer" as well as generate economic activity. The Görlitz Probewohnen was a pilot project with funding from the federal government. It served not only as a test, but also a research project.

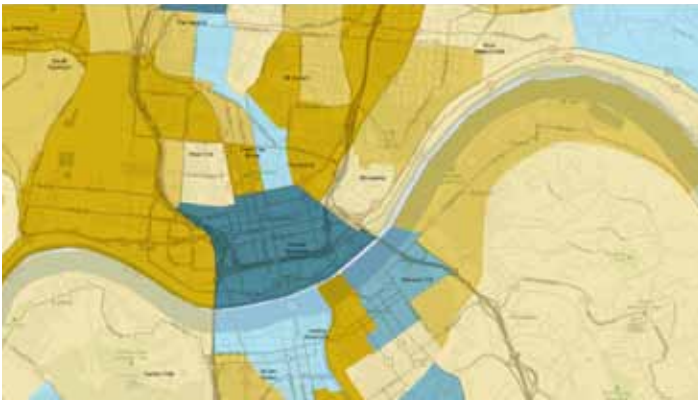
The city planning and building code officials partnered with local residents and Professor Jürg Sulzer of TUD to produce research on the topic of inner city revitalization. Each adult participant is interviewed on his/her experience. Beyond the specific questions, the interview gives citizens the opportunity to offer their opinion about living in the city. According to Professor Sulzer, the research findings will provide feedback on urban development and improving the quality of housing that can be passed on to policymakers and the housing industry.

### **Who Should Be Targeted for Trial Living in the Rust Belt?**

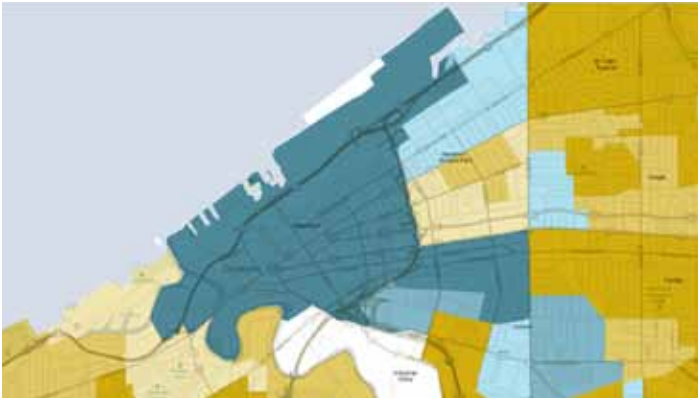
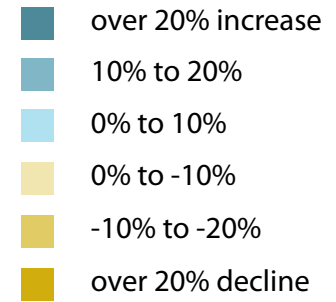
In the German model, participants were identified through personal interviews. A total of 126 people (63 households) from all over Germany applied. These applicants were a mix of two parent families, single parents with children, educated singles\*, couples without children and empty nesters.

#### **The Probewohnen research sought to answer:**

- How can the appreciation of inner city neighborhoods increase in post-industrial cities?
- What must be done to reduce the negative perceptions of the inner city neighborhoods?
- How can the quality of living in inner city neighborhoods increase in post-industrial cities?
- What design changes will result from the experience of trial living participants, specifically those participants from suburban environments?



**2010 Census.**  
Downtown Cincinnati  
witnessed popula-  
tion increases of up to  
32.6% (2000-2010)



**2010 Census.**  
Downtown Cleveland  
witnessed popula-  
tion increases of up to  
87.2% (2000-2010)



**2010 Census.**  
Downtown Detroit  
witnessed popula-  
tion increases of up to  
24.2% (2000-2010)



All were invited for a week-long trial run of rent-free housing in the historic Gründerzeit homes. Thirteen households were selected for the first trial living program—four families with children, six singles, and three couples of different age groups. Due to high levels of interest, the program partners decided to continue the research study. “Version 2 trial living” enabled 465 people from 259 households to apply for the trial living program. Twelve of these households were selected, including two families with children, five singles, and five couples of different age groups.

Overall, there were over 750 applications from all over Germany and neighboring countries. The high number of applicants from both versions of the trial living program show that this unconventional idea has momentum. American Rust Belt cities can replicate the same model for two reasons. First, many of these cities have valuable and historic housing stock located in inner city neighborhoods. Second, there has been a profound shift in American housing preferences. In a reversal of previous trends, retiring baby boomers and Generation Y favor a walkable urban neighborhood closer to their jobs. These are the first groups of people that should be targeted for trial living in the Rust Belt.

\* In this case, educated refers to individuals with at least a bachelors degree.

## Implementation

### 1. Select Housing

Housing for the trial living program was chosen from a pool of vacant apartments in the Gründerzeit districts. The apartments ranged from one- to three-bedroom apartments. IKEA Germany furnished the apartments in the Görlitz model. The Rust Belt model must seek partnerships with private sector firms to offset the capital costs while also advertising sponsors. The amount of vacant housing stock, available public resources, and the degree of private sector commitment will ultimately decide the scope and scale of the trial



Relates to the background story of Probewohnen.  
Photo Credit: JM Rayburn



Relates to the marketing/PR campaign mentioned in the text.

Photo Credit:  
REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT.

living program. The city-owned housing would be managed as if it were rent-subsidized housing.

### *2. Attract Applicants*

Rust Belt cities that adopt the trial living program must target potential applicants in the region as well as throughout the nation. The project must therefore be accompanied by an intensive public relations campaign by the city tourism or economic development department. Görlitz officials kicked off their public relations campaign with the “Wandering living room” installation. A living room set up was assembled at various places in the city where passersby could sit and express their views on life and living in Görlitz. A local marketing group created an artistic documentary of the installation and a website was set up where a short video clip could be downloaded as part of the marketing campaign. All of this was meant to supplement social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Google + as well as Flickr.

### *1. Select and Interview Participants*

To improve the living experience, selected applicants were allowed to bring two pieces of their favorite furniture. The delivery and removal of the favorite piece of furniture in Görlitz was organized by the project leaders. The American model should extend the required stay from one week to six months in order to secure economic, social, and emotional connections to the neighborhood and city. The goal is to bring fresh ideas and skills to Rust Belt cities with a long-term impact. A longer stay permits the opportunity for employment and networking. After the pilots, interviews were used to assess participants’ perceptions of living in the Gründerzeit neighborhoods. Questions probed about the qualities and deficiencies of the housing experience.

### *1. Moving Forward*

American Rust Belt cities should use a marketing campaign that leverages social media to attract the target audience of young, educated professionals and entrepreneurs. Social media is a must since most of the popular websites

come at no cost to use. Private sector buy-in and funding can dramatically expand the scope and scale of probewohnen in American Rust Belt cities.

## Funding

Funding for the trial living program in Görlitz came from the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (BMVBS), the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR), the Technical University of Dresden, and additional sponsors.

Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) grants are a sound fit for trial living and ought to be applicable for future use in Rust Belt cities. A public-private partnership must play a more critical funding role as well.

## Conclusion

Although participants of trial living will not pay rent, they will still contribute to economic benefits. Participants will provide immediate economic activity to local businesses by purchasing consumer staples such as food, transportation, and other miscellaneous goods and services. The extension of required stay to six months promotes a longer duration of increased economic activity and combats chronic vacancy rates.

The ripple effects of trial living may produce longer-term profit for the surrounding neighborhood and thus generate economic activity for the city as a whole. An example would be permanent relocation to the city and employment in the existing job market or job creation through small business start ups. The latter might require collaboration with other government agencies and small business incubators. When the trial living concludes after six months, the participants should be guided to more extended residency options, whether it be finding an apartment to rent or purchasing a home. Estimates of economic activity can vary. Sales tax and income tax revenue from the consumption of consumer staples and employment are direct

impacts. Property tax revenue will be realized from participants who relocate and purchase housing.

It is important to remember that the main cause of Rust Belt population loss is economic restructuring. Rust Belt cities have to concentrate on economic recovery while downsizing the urban infrastructure in order to reach a new equilibrium with fewer residents. Housing policy in these cities can play a major role in this process. Housing policy over the past several decades has created exclusion and complicates the pathway to equilibrium in post-industrial cities. As stated previously, Rust Belt cities are witnessing a resurgence in downtown residency. The market alone, however, cannot solve all problems. Clever public intervention in the form of trial living could help Rust Belt cities leverage their abundant supply of historic buildings to attract new tenants to their downtowns. By increasing the downtown resident population, Rust Belt cities will galvanize their local economies due to the introduction of more wealth and economic activity. ♦

Rust Belt cities should demonstrate the benefits of downtown living, as Gorlitz, Germany has.  
Photo Credit: Marianne Eppig



# Attracting and Retaining Middle-Income Families through Public-Private Partnerships

By Joseph P Wingenfeld



I was born and raised in an inner-ring suburb of Cleveland called Lakewood, OH. Growing up in a Rust Belt city plays a significant factor in why I am interested in the Rust Belt. After witnessing first-hand the decline and struggles Cleveland faces along with its great untapped potential, I became very interested in being actively involved in redeveloping the city. My interest in Rust Belt cities also includes my strong concern for social justice which is particularly acute in declining Rust Belt cities where many in poverty have been left behind. My paper topic looks specifically at leveraging local institutions in Rust Belt cities to develop neighborhoods which are enticing to middle-income families. This is a particular problem for Rust Belt cities that have lost the majority of their once thriving middle-income family neighborhoods.



These homes along Lincoln Blvd on Buffalo's Northside are wonderful examples of the Gilded Age architecture surrounding Buffalo's Institutions.

Photo Credit: Jay Smith

**D**uring the decline of Rust Belt cities, those with the means to leave these cities did so in droves in search of places with better opportunities, resulting in an overall abandonment of the city by middle-income families.<sup>1</sup> Middle-income families provided stability to countless neighborhoods in these cities and are important to building strong public schools and delivering consistent sources of income to both the city and school districts.

Middle-income families have been leaving urban neighborhoods in major waves since the 60s and 70s. The first wave, often referred to as “white flight,” occurred as mainly white middle-income families left behind urban neighborhoods for the suburbs. More recently, minority middle-income families have been leaving inner city neighborhoods for the suburbs as well. This is acutely true in Cleveland where, between 2000 and 2010, the city saw a 33% drop in households comprised of married couples with children, a 23% drop of children under the age of 18, and a 35% drop in enrollment in city schools.<sup>2</sup> This trend has left behind many neighborhoods in Rust Belt cities in a state of abandonment and disrepair.

Over the past couple of decades, Rust Belt cities have experienced varying degrees of success in attracting residents back to their urban neighborhoods, most successfully repopulating downtown areas and trendier city neighborhoods with young professionals and empty nesters. This trend has helped breathe new life into these cities. Yet, Rust Belt cities have struggled to attract middle-income families back to urban neighborhoods and few large-scale projects to initiate this process exist. While attracting empty nesters and young professionals bestows many benefits on Rust Belt cities, much effort should also be exerted in attracting middle-income families. The result would help create cities that are diverse and accommodating for all walks of life. Alice Rivlin from the Brookings Institute asserts that attracting middle-income families holds the promise of creating neighborhoods with a strong sense of community with residents who are committed to their city and wish to remain there as they age.<sup>3</sup>

Public-private partnerships can be employed to attract and retain middle-income families within city neighborhoods. These partnerships would consist of large institutions, usually universities, hospitals, or other large employers, working together with their surrounding neighborhoods and other partners to create neighborhoods attractive to middle-income neighborhoods. Other

partners would likely include government entities, foundations, and non-profit organizations. Rust Belt cities in particular have been blessed with a plethora of strong institutions that originated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These institutions are not relics of a past era but are still extremely relevant in the present. Often times they are bright spots in Rust Belt cities representing major areas of growth and redevelopment. The vast resources of these institutions can be tapped and leveraged with other resources to create policies and redevelopment efforts that attract and incentivize middle-income families to live in neighborhoods surrounding their institutions. This is not just an effort that would benefit the city with an increased tax base and population but also would benefit participating institutions by investing in the surrounding community.

### **The Origins of Public-Private Partnerships & Attracting Families**

The idea of using public-private partnerships to leverage funding to redevelop neighborhoods in close proximity to major institutions has been popular since at least the 1990s. Their redevelopment efforts to date usually are focused on improving surrounding lower-income neighborhoods. Institutions view these

efforts both as a social obligation and a way to create attractive surrounding neighborhoods. The idea of using public-private partnerships to attract middle-income residents became more prominent when Alice Rivlin, a writer for the Brookings Institute, suggested it for the City of Washington D.C. in the early 2000s.

Her recommendation was to reverse the exile of middle-income families from the District of Columbia and to leverage funding when local government cash reserves were low.<sup>4</sup> This idea has not yet gained traction in the Rust Belt for myriad reasons: a focus on public-private partnerships that improve lower-income neighborhoods and an urban attraction strategy mainly focused on attracting young professionals and empty nesters, just to name two. Yet, the

Rust Belt cities in particular have been blessed with a plethora of strong institutions that originated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



idea is particularly relevant in Rust Belt cities where dwindling city budgets are commonplace and attracting middle-income families is challenging.

### Process to Implement Public-Private Partnership to Attract Middle-Income Families

#### *Creating Focus Areas*

Leveraging resources to attract middle-income families into city neighborhoods should be targeted to maximize their impact in specific focus areas. The focus areas should be located adjacent or within close proximity to institution(s). It is preferable not to select highly distressed and impoverished neighborhoods but rather areas with signs of vitality and physical intactness. Neighborhoods with existing “family-friendly” amenities should be preferred. These are areas with significant park space, larger homes, cultural institutions nearby, and close proximity to schools. It is important to note that this strategy does not intend to displace or devalue the existing low- and moderate-income communities, but rather this is merely part of a larger, overall strategy that continues to reinvest in all kinds of communities.



Located on Buffalo’s North side, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery is one of many institutions clustered in the area.  
Photo credit: Jay Smith

#### *Gaining Institutional Support for a Middle-Income Strategy*

Whether a city government, an institution, a foundation, or community development organization decides to initiate this process is not of the utmost importance. What is important is that the redevelopment effort is concentrated, has broad political support, and receives significant funding. Funding



Severance Hall in Cleveland's University Circle District is one of many anchor institutions attracting middle-income residents.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User TaberAndrew

can be raised from a number of sources. This is likely to include large institutions, foundations, the city, or even from philanthropic and corporate donors.

Convincing a large institution that it should reinvest in surrounding neighborhoods to attract middle-income families is not easy. As mentioned, this type of public-partnership largely has not been attempted. However, there are a number of arguments that can be

used to convince institutions to participate in this type of partnership. With the right incentives in place, attracting middle-income families into surrounding neighborhoods is beneficial to institutions. Institutions that employ middle-income households could bring employees closer to the office, reducing commute times, parking needs, as well as improving employee health since employees could walk more.

Public-private partnerships require wide collaboration among neighborhood stakeholders, diverse sources of funding, and targeted investment. There are many examples of successful partnerships that can be utilized as models. Once the institution is on-board with a strategy to attract middle-income families and the partnership is in place, there are a number of smart, practical strategies that can make the partnership a success.

One housing trend that many Rust Belt cities can tap is that many neighborhoods surrounding institutions contain housing typologies and amenities attractive to middle-income families.

### **Following a Multi-Pronged Approach**

Creating neighborhoods that are attractive to middle-income families requires addressing multiple aspects of the neighborhood in a visible and coordinated way. This section discusses the four identified

areas that public-private partnerships need to focus on in order to attract middle-income families:

- Housing Strategies
- Improved Schools
- Safety
- Provision of Vibrant Retail and Appropriate Service Amenities

### *Housing Strategies*

Before detailing the housing strategy, special attention should be given to ensure that low-income residents in these targeted neighborhoods are not pushed out. The purpose of this type of redevelopment is not to displace lower-income residents, but to create neighborhoods which are attractive to middle-income families. Housing policies that promote a mix of incomes are particularly relevant in assuring this does not occur. The Brookings Institute suggests taking advantage of existing programs located in each city, such as rental and home-ownership subsidies, to ensure that new and renovated housing is available to families of diverse income levels. Other means to avoid pricing-out lower-income residents include creating inclusionary zoning, community land trusts, as well as other broad policy commitments.<sup>5</sup>

One housing trend that many Rust Belt cities can tap is that many neighborhoods surrounding institutions contain housing typologies and amenities attractive to middle-income families. These neighborhoods are often filled with large three-story homes with spacious yards. Frequently these neighborhoods are in close proximity to smaller institutions and other amenities such



These homes along Lincoln Blvd on Buffalo's Northside are examples of the Gilded Age architecture surrounding Buffalo's Institutions.  
Photo Credit: Jay Smith

as zoos, museums, orchestra halls, theaters and large swaths of parkland and cemeteries. This type of development was created during the Gilded Age for middle to upper middle-income families desiring to take advantage of amenities typically found nearby large institutions. Buffalo's north side in the Parkside neighborhood and Delaware District illustrates this trend nicely where larger homes are plentiful and amenities such as the Buffalo Zoo, universities, hospitals, large parks, and expansive boulevards are either within the neighborhoods or in adjacent neighborhoods.

It is, however, a bit challenging to get middle-income families to locate in these homes considering the large rehabilitation costs often required to prepare them for modern living. To assuage these concerns, rehabilitation programs can be provided to assist in covering the rehab costs. The Greater Circle Living Initiative provides a good example of this type of program with its matching program. This provides institutional employees living in neighborhoods surrounding or within the University Circle district up to \$8,000 of matching funds for approved exterior renovations.<sup>6</sup> In more challenged neighborhoods or homes that require significant repair, homes could be given away for a dollar with the assurance that the buyers will remain in the homes for an extended period of time.

Buffalo's Northside neighborhood also contains many homes very appropriate for middle-income families with at least three bedrooms and close proximity to numerous institutions. Photo credit: Jay Smith

As stated earlier, for reasons of proximity to work and health and lowered parking costs, it is ideal to attract employees from participating institutions to relocate into targeted neighborhoods. Considering institutions can contain thousands of employees, these employees can comprise a significant



percentage of the middle-income families attracted to these targeted neighborhoods. One tool to attract institutional employees is through financial incentives to purchase homes in the targeted neighborhoods.

The Greater Circle Living Initiative offers between \$5,000 to \$15,000 of forgivable loans towards the down payment and/or closing costs to employees who decide to live within selected neighborhoods surrounding the University Circle District.

Loans are completely forgiven with zero interest after employees have

lived in the homes for five years.<sup>7</sup> Another large employment pool to be considered is city employees. According to the Brookings Institute, this is the city's "most obvious single group of commuters likely to contribute to a restitution of its tax base." In an ideal world, city governments would simply require their employees to live within city limits. However, this strategy is fraught with legal implications. A more practical strategy is to incentivize these employees to reside in the city limits by providing assistance in relocating into these targeted neighborhoods or through significant tax abatements.<sup>8</sup>

A number of preferable models have been created by the University of Pennsylvania using institutional resources to improve schools in its surrounding neighborhoods.

### *Improving Schools*

It would be unrealistic to assume that school districts could provide additional funding in targeted schools for improvements, considering the limited resources of most Rust Belt city school districts. A number of preferable models have been created by the University of Pennsylvania using institutional resources to improve schools in its surrounding neighborhoods. In its West Philadelphia Initiative, the University created the Penn Alexander School in 1998. The public school was built under the Philadelphia School District but, in actuality, functioned as a partnership between the school district and the University of Philadelphia. The University provided significant funds to construct the new school and then placed \$1,000 per student of its own money into the school, totaling \$750,000 worth of funding every year. The creation of this school was developed in conjunction with other intensive neighborhood

redevelopment efforts which have drastically increased investment in the neighborhood.<sup>9</sup>

Another model called University Assisted Community Schools (UACS) created a partnership between the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia School District in 1994. This initiative is directed out of the Netter Center. In the UACS, the University of Pennsylvania works with three high schools and four K-8 schools in west Philadelphia within a two-mile radius of the University. Each school has at least one liaison working between the schools and the University trying to determine what is in the best interest for both parties. The crux of the program lies in assistance provided by hundreds of volunteers, work-study students, interns, and professors.<sup>10</sup>

### *Safety*

Concerns over safety are another challenge that needs to be addressed when attracting middle-income families back to Rust Belt cities. Some helpful ideas to increase neighborhood safety are used by the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance of Hartford, CT (SINA).<sup>11</sup> The alliance holds monthly conversations between safety forces and local residents that allow residents to express their concerns about safety and recommend activities to improve safety. SINA also provides bicycles to police officers in an effort to increase neighborhood respect for police through more personal contact with residents and to improve crime prevention through a more intimate policing strategy.

Another idea includes creating a special police force for the institution and the targeted neighborhoods. A number of institutions already have their own police forces, such as the University Circle Police Department in Cleveland. Where a special police force already exists, institutions can provide extra funding to extend the department's coverage into the targeted neighborhoods. Cincinnati's Uptown Consortium created a Safety Subcommittee that focuses on increasing actual and perceived public safety presence. To achieve this, the committee created a graffiti removal program, street cleaning

initiative, and an enhanced code enforcement strategy targeting negligent property owners with the City's Assistance.<sup>12</sup>

### *Provision of Vibrant Retail and Appropriate Service Amenities*

As with any redevelopment effort, it is also important to have a stable and thriving commercial sector. Commercial establishments specifically needed include full-size grocery stores, pharmacies, and daycare centers. The participating institution(s) in collaboration with a number of partners can create incentive packages to develop these necessary neighborhood amenities.

Looking to existing examples, a number of public-private partnerships have focused on creating programs that stimulate commercial and economic development in commercial districts surrounding their institutions.

The University of Pennsylvania worked in collaboration with a foundation, community development corporations, and the city to stimulate commercial development in two nearby commercial corridors. Revitalization focused on façade improvement, business recruitment, and pedestrian lighting. These efforts resulted in an increase in retail occupancy from 75 percent to 98 percent in the neighborhood surrounding and including the University of Pennsylvania in one year.<sup>13</sup>



Another case study is the Small Business Retention Program created by Cincinnati's Uptown Consortium. This was implemented in collaboration with the Hamilton County Development Company. The focus of the program is on improving businesses already located in the Uptown neighborhood. The program conducts business retention meetings, offers one-on-one coaching

With both great ethnic and intergenerational diversity, Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood is a model of a Rust Belt neighborhood that accommodates a range of income levels.

Photo Credit: Robert Pontzer

services for business plan development, business and strategic planning, marketing and sales, and access to capital.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

The redevelopment strategy of Rust Belt cities should not be based solely on attracting young professionals and empty nesters. While attracting these demographic groups is an important ingredient in creating vibrant and successful cities, over-reliance on attracting these two demographic groups creates a one-dimensional approach to revitalization. Middle-income families are an important part of the recovery equation. Admittedly, attracting middle-income families is a more challenging proposition than focusing efforts on empty nesters and young professionals since the public school systems must be addressed. Yet, attracting this demographic group gives cities greater generational diversity and provides the opportunity for people to live in cities through all the life cycles, rather than limiting it to young adulthood and retirement. The strategy espoused conveniently builds off of established assets and amenities already in Rust Belt cities. It focuses on redeveloping neighborhoods with many existing family-friendly amenities and harnesses the immense potential large institutions possess to positively affect their surrounding neighborhoods. ♦

Public-private partnerships can help Rust Belt cities attract families to downtown neighborhoods.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User Breahn Foster





# The Exploratory Learning Co-op

By Tom Hetrick



The Rust Belt is in my blood. I was born a block away from a Western Pennsylvania steel mill and I approach life with the same grit and determination that defines my region. The aging rowhouses, quiet downtowns, shuddered factories, and social conflict all gnaw at my soul, rousing a spiritual ardor to share in the reawakening of this gilded empire. I see in myself a parallel to the Rust Belt's self-doubt and burden of memory, but also to its strength of character and enormous potential.

This resonant discordance drives my commitment to public service, social justice, and school reform. Last year I devoted 1,700 hours as an AmeriCorps volunteer, assisting students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to achieve their post-secondary education goals and plan for their future careers. This experience gave credence to my belief that our public education system is at best antiquated, and in the case of our inner-city schools, utterly broken. I am convinced that no city can effectively plan without an honest evaluation of the state of its schools. My proposal of the exploratory learning co-op is not an end-all solution, but my hope is that it may serve as a tool for community redevelopment and that it will generate open discussion among stakeholders to capitalize on this region's most undervalued resource--the youth of the Rust Belt.

Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick



**A**s a teenager, I was fascinated by languages and geography. In my free time, I made hundreds of flashcards to learn Spanish verb conjugations and I spent hours reading about foreign cities and countries in my parents' encyclopedia set. I suppose my nerdy hobbies paid off after receiving a grant from the Ministry of Education in Spain to work for a year at a bilingual school in Madrid, and then a fellowship to fund my Master's in City and Regional Planning at The Ohio State University. The credit for my primary education goes not to a school—for I did not spend much time in one—but to my parents who decided that exploratory learning was best for me and my sister.

My parents joined the growing number of Americans who were convinced that “school was killing [children’s] creativity and homogenizing [their] soul.”<sup>1</sup> Nearly fifty years ago, John Holt, a leading writer on education, wrote that “compulsory schooling destroys children’s native curiosity and replaces it with a self-conscious and fearful desire to please the teacher. Kids learn not rich subject matter but skills necessary to pass tests and charm authorities.”<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Milton Gaither, in his history of home-schooling, argues that the uprooting caused by suburbanization and the subsequent monotony of the built environment “led so many young people to challenge the system by leaving it, founding communes and pioneering homeschooling.”<sup>3</sup>

The home-school movement grew out of both the counterculture right and left—the left because of anti-establishmentism and anti-commercialism, and the right because of anti-secularism. Recent studies highlight the ongoing dichotomy of those who home-school for academic and pedagogical reasons and those who do so for religious reasons. While religiously-motivated home-schooling dominated in the 1980s and 1990s, recent studies highlight the growing importance of academic and pedagogical reasons for home-schooling.<sup>4</sup> One of the leading scholars to study home-schoolers, Brian Ray, finds that achievement among this group is exceptionally high when compared to public school students. Despite what some may believe, the median income for home-schooling families is higher than the national average and home-schooling parents typically have more formal education than parents in

the general population.<sup>5</sup> Today, more than 1.5 million American students are home-schooled, up from 1.1 million in 2003 and 850,000 in 1999.<sup>6</sup>

### **Exploratory Learning: Education That is Place-Based, Interest-Driven, and Life-Altering**

While home-schooling may seem like a daunting task, my parents found a community of like-minded families that functioned as an informal educational co-operative. Through these connections, my sister and I were able to take music lessons and participate in recitals. Later, as teenagers, we would regularly perform at nursing homes and assisted living facilities. In a kind of modern one-room school-house arrangement, I was able to help tutor some of the younger members in history and geography. One mother in the group was from Puerto Rico and she enthusiastically helped me with my Spanish. Together, we volunteered extensively to teach English to recent immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala. All these experiences instilled within me a fascination for learning and a commitment to public service. As an undergraduate, I majored in Spanish and education, and later joined AmeriCorps to work at a public high school in Cleveland.

Faced with the decision to either send their children to my dismal high school, pay for expensive private tuition, or move to the suburbs in search of good public schools, the vast majority moved to the outer-ring suburbs.

My year with AmeriCorps proved to be incredibly eye-opening and life-changing. The school I was assigned to was mired in a poisonous atmosphere of complacent apathy, from the administration all the way down to the students. The natural curiosity and joy for learning that marked my childhood was virtually nonexistent here. I then began to notice the enormous chasm between the school and the surrounding neighborhood. The school was located in Ohio City, a gentrifying neighborhood on Cleveland's West Side, popular with recently graduated 20-somethings who enjoyed the cultural amenities, indie music scene, and local bars. There was, however, a complete lack of educated 30-somethings living there with their kids and it was not hard

to figure out why. When these families were faced with the decision to either send their children to my dismal high school, pay for expensive private tuition, or move to the suburbs in search of good public schools, the vast majority moved to the outer-ring suburbs.

Throughout my year with AmeriCorps, I became very interested in the connection between cities and schools and decided to attend graduate school to study this relationship further. At Ohio State, I joined a group of students interested in Rust Belt cities who had created a year-long independent study focusing on solutions to issues affecting our region. After centuries of exploiting our natural resources, our waterways and transportation networks, and throngs of both skilled and unskilled labor, the Rust Belt is in an economic rut, seemingly without resources to leverage. However, it is my firm belief that we are indeed in possession of a resource with tremendous potential—the youth of the Rust Belt.

### **The Need for New Education Models**

Capitalizing on this strength will prove difficult since our current public schools, urban and suburban alike, are outdated at best. Our school systems have changed little since our days as a nation of farmers and factory workers.<sup>7</sup> In a New York Times article on the changing US economy, Michael Ellsberg argues that the skills most needed in today's job market are not actually being taught in schools. He quotes President Obama as saying that "small businesses are where most new jobs begin," and claims that the creativity needed for starting new businesses is stifled by schooling.<sup>8</sup> He states: "If a young person happens to retain enough creative spirit... she does so in spite of her schooling, not because of it."<sup>9</sup> John Holt recognized the importance of adaptability decades ago when he wrote: "Since we can't know what knowledge will be most needed in the future, it is senseless to try to teach it in advance. Instead, we should try to turn out people who love learning so much and learn so well that they will be able to learn whatever needs to be learned."<sup>10</sup> If the cities of the Rust Belt are to compete globally, we will need just this type of adaptable workforce. The director of the London School of Economics Cities Programme, Fran Tonkiss, states that urban areas must be resilient. "Sustainable urban form," she says, "must be robust enough to withstand change and also adapt to change...whether we're talking about...environmental change... [or] demographic change and economic cycles."<sup>11</sup> Not only must

individuals be adaptable, according to Tonkiss, but the organizations and institutions in a city should be resilient as well.

If our schools are not adapting to changing economic needs and they are not awakening the natural curiosity and love for learning required for our youth to become critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and innovators, then it would behoove us to find new models. I believe that a model to develop passionate, creative, lifetime learners lies in the essence of home-schooling. However, as I stated previously, home-schooling can seem like a daunting endeavor, so in the spirit of the African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child,” I propose that to strengthen our region and revitalize our cities, we make use of the exploratory learning co-op.

Neighborhoods on Cleveland’s West Side have been successful at attracting young, educated singles back to the inner-city, however a critical mass of families choosing to remain in the city is still elusive.

Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick

This model has been gaining popularity around the country. The first home-schooling co-op in San Francisco, called the San Francisco Schoolhouse, was formed in 2011 with just four students. One of the founding parents, Rebecca Dake, reports that a co-op “offers a middle choice for the middle class.”<sup>12</sup> The co-op is made up of three families and two former teachers were hired to instruct the students. Each family pays between \$7,000 and \$9,000 to be part of the co-op, considerably less than private school tuition in San Francisco.

Much more affordable models exist, however, here in the state of Ohio. For the purpose of this article, I interviewed two co-op administrators and one participant. The results revealed different approaches to co-operative learning with varying degrees of formal structure and ideological homogeneity. Parents used varying methods at home to develop their children’s natural curiosity and love for learning, but I focused my inquiry on how the structure of the co-ops allowed for sufficient socialization, ensured



readiness for secondary education and careers, and served as a support network for home-schooling families.

### **Model 1: Christian Home Educators Co-op**

The first co-op is located in Akron and is known as the Christian Home Educators Co-op (CHEC). I interviewed Kay Ference who was a founding member of the co-op nearly 16 years ago. The co-op has evolved over time, gradually becoming more structured. Today, there are more than 130 students that meet once a week for core classes such as biology, physics, English, history, and SAT prep. The students are divided into four branches: ark, for the youngest members; elementary; junior high; and senior high. When parents register their children in the co-op, they know there will be a commitment that may include grading, child care, administration, event planning, or teaching. Teachers are chosen based on familiarity with subject matter. One of the fathers who is an engineer teaches physics. A mother who is a doctor taught biology and chemistry for years, but after her children graduated, she served as a mentor for two years to the new science teacher and revamped the curriculum.

The largest classes have 16 students. Each year there is a graduation ceremony for seniors, usually with about 7-10 graduates per year. Teachers of these classes require teaching assistants to help with grading. Teachers are not paid; all are volunteers. The cost to families is generally very low. There is a registration fee of approximately \$50 to cover insurance costs, then costs for materials, copies, and other supplies associated with each class, which altogether usually range from \$15-150, depending on the class. Fundraisers occur throughout the year to raise money for scholarships for low-income students to attend the co-op, and indeed a broad range of students from different backgrounds attend, from lower income to upper middle income.

The co-op is housed in a church in downtown Akron and the church provides the space at cost. Families come from nearby cities, including Cleveland, Youngstown, and Warren, to take part in the co-op. Kay estimates the time commitment for administrating the co-op to be approximately 8 hours per week, though during the spring registration season, she might spend up to 20 hours a week. At the co-op they emphasize repeatable practices to make

work lighter in subsequent years. Kay originally started the co-op because her son had Asperger's Syndrome and she felt he would fare better if she tailored his education to his needs. Today he is in his second year at Kent State University. The co-op boasts other successes. In addition to regular activities, which include support groups, dances, holiday parties and field trips, the group has placed at the National Science Olympiad and Lego robotics competitions. To encourage healthiness, they engage in a fall hiking spree in which the group takes a series of eight walks through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.<sup>13</sup>

### **Model 2: Wright Independent Learning Cooperative**

As its name might suggest, CHEC is made up of families with a Christian worldview. However, another co-op in Dayton, called the Wright Independent Learning Cooperative (WILC), is not based on religious membership. The group's website clearly states that it "strives to be tolerant, open-minded, and tactful to all in our homeschool community... and [it does] not discriminate based on homeschooling style, race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation."<sup>14</sup> I interviewed Lori Damron, who is an administrator of WILC, and she expressed appreciation for the non-religious nature of this particular co-op. She stated: "I wanted a group to have a support system for myself and friends for my children. This is the third homeschool group that I have joined. The other two made you sign a statement of faith. I find statements of faith to be very pointless. I couldn't hack being the only Mom that wasn't an enthusiastic Christian. I wanted a group that was secular and religion would never be an issue."<sup>15</sup> She enjoys the diversity of the group and the "laid-backness."

Unlike CHEC, WILC holds no formal classes. However, the 43 students involved can take part in a variety of activities, such as field trips, holiday parties, crafting days, bowling, campouts, nature studies, swimming, Science, History and Art Fairs, and a theatre production in which the students are in charge of costuming, props, and scenery making. Families take turns coordinating events. Two administrators handle an online forum, coordination within the group, and communication with interested parents. The time commitment is usually an hour or two a week, though sometimes they will spend up to three hours alone meeting with interested parents. There is no fee to join the WILC co-op.<sup>16</sup> One member of WILC, Anna Creese, also described how



she liked the co-op for its inclusiveness. “We are urban, suburban, and rural,” she says. “The kids’ ages range from infants to 15... We have members of various socioeconomic status, educational backgrounds, races, gender preferences, religious backgrounds...”<sup>17</sup>

One of the principal objections to home-schooling is that the children will grow up in isolation, lacking in social skills as adults. However, the co-op provides a way to ensure sufficient socialization with peers. CHEC conducts weekly classes, and while WILC does not, Anna states that the “principal function is a weekly activity for the whole group... It can be educational or simply entertaining, typically free or very low-cost.”<sup>18</sup> During the rest of week, children learn at home. Another common objection to home-schooling is that the children will not have a solid education. This objection, however, does not stand up in the face of research that shows home-schoolers performing at higher academic levels than the general population.

CHEC holds SAT prep classes and they make sure students have solid transcripts for college applications, as well as plans for after graduation. As a result of their diligence, many students go on to post-secondary education.<sup>19</sup> In fact, for more than two decades, home-schoolers have been welcomed at the nation’s top colleges and universities. Joyce Reed, a former Dean of The College at Brown University, stated that “homeschoolers are the epitome of Brown students. They are self-directed, they take risks, and they don’t back off.”<sup>20</sup> In a letter to home-school leaders, a dean of admissions wrote: “Boston University welcomes applications from homeschooled students. We believe students educated at home possess the passion for knowledge, the



Cities are blessed with amenities that are readily accessible to home-schooling families.

Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick

independence, and the self-reliance that enable them to excel in our intellectually challenging programs of study.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Why an Exploratory Learning Co-Op Makes Sense in the Rust Belt**

To bring this back to the Rust Belt, there would be several distinct advantages for the City of Cleveland (or another city) if home-schooling co-ops were to take hold and grow. First, by providing additional options for education, more families might be willing to remain in the city limits, enjoying the multitude

Home-schooling co-ops would produce a generation that truly got to take advantage of all that our Rust Belt cities have to offer.

of cultural amenities that Rust Belt cities have to offer. Stemming the out-migration of families would bolster the city’s beleaguered budget in the form of increased property tax revenue. Additionally, more residents would mean more spend-

ing in neighborhood business districts, supporting the local economy. Home-schooling co-ops would produce a generation that truly got to take advantage of all that our Rust Belt cities have to offer, hopefully increasing the chances that they would stay in the region after they grow up. Also, it would serve as a model for parents across the city who are dismayed by the quality of education their children are receiving in the public schools, but feel unable to do anything about it.

Exploratory learning co-ops may also provide job opportunities; for example, graduate students or recent college graduates could provide expert instruction to co-op students. In his blog, Walter Russell Mead posits that “there may be an opportunity for entrepreneurs in these co-ops as well. A connected person might find success in coordinating teachers, parents, field trips, classroom lessons, and, eventually, exam and college application preparation.”<sup>22</sup> He also suggests the use of a voucher system to assist parents in creating these “schools of the future,” though it is unclear where funding would come from to support such a voucher program. Finally, just as charter schools have shaken up the education world, a co-op movement with enough support could put pressure on public school districts to make needed reforms to improve the quality of their education.

I believe that neighborhood associations and community development corporations are in the best position to promote home-schooling co-ops, especially in neighborhoods that have begun to revitalize, but seem unable to retain educated families with children. And like the Ohio co-ops described, membership would not have to be confined to the middle class. CHEC provided scholarships to committed low-income families to cover the registration costs. I do not propose, however, that home-schooling co-ops are a replacement for the entire public school system, especially in inner-cities. This would merely be another educational alternative and tool to encourage the development of key areas of the city through the retention of educated families.

As part of our Diamonds in the Rust project, we travelled to several Rust Belt cities, meeting with community leaders at organizations working to revitalize neighborhoods across the region. At the Genesee County Land Bank in Flint, Michigan, we heard the personal story of a staff member's travails in finding a quality education for her daughter in the City of Flint. The local public schools were of notoriously poor quality and the tuition of private schools was outside the family's reach financially. A lottery system allowed the daughter to attend school outside the district in one of Flint's suburbs, but since the school was some distance away, she never had opportunities to meet similarly-aged youths in her neighborhood, greatly increasing the family's sense of isolation. The parents were committed to staying in the City of Flint, despite the added hardships involved, because they believed in the city and wanted to be part of its revitalization. An exploratory learning co-op may have been exactly what this family needed. Through a co-op, they may have been able to find like-minded families that were experiencing similar dissatisfaction with the choices for their children's education and, in turn, pool time, knowledge, resources, and creativity in order to provide a quality exploratory and community-based education.

The parents were committed to staying in the City of Flint, despite the added hardships involved, because they believed in the city and wanted to be part of its revitalization.

It is my hope that this article furthers discussion regarding education in our urban areas, changing education from a leading reason families leave our cities to a reason to remain. ♦

# Protecting Great Lakes

## Closing Loopholes in the Great Lakes Compact

By Marianne Eppig



After graduating from college, I moved back to my hometown – Cleveland, Ohio – and couldn't bring myself to leave for New York or Boston like many of my friends. Instead, I started working for organizations focused on making my city more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. I created my blog, *Renovating the Rust Belt*, to write about all the work being done in post-industrial Great Lakes cities to make them more sustainable places to live.

The more I learned, the more I saw that some big changes need to take place through planning, policy, business, collaboration, and community outreach—projects sprouting from the ground-up and reaching from the top-down. I needed to know more so that I could find the levers in these Great Lakes cities and begin pulling. So I decided to enroll in The Ohio State University's Masters of City and Regional Planning and Masters of Administration programs. Once I got here, I noticed that there weren't any courses about revitalizing post-industrial cities, so I decided to co-lead the Independent Study that has become "Diamonds in the Rust."

I chose my topic because I felt that I needed to know more about water use legislation around the Great Lakes. The more I researched the topic, the more I became both fascinated and frustrated with how we take care of the largest deposit of fresh water on the planet. I hope you find the topic just as interesting and look into the matter further for yourself!

Cleveland, Marianne's hometown, is located on the southern edge of Lake Erie—one of the most threatened of the Great Lakes.

Photo Credit: Marianne Eppig

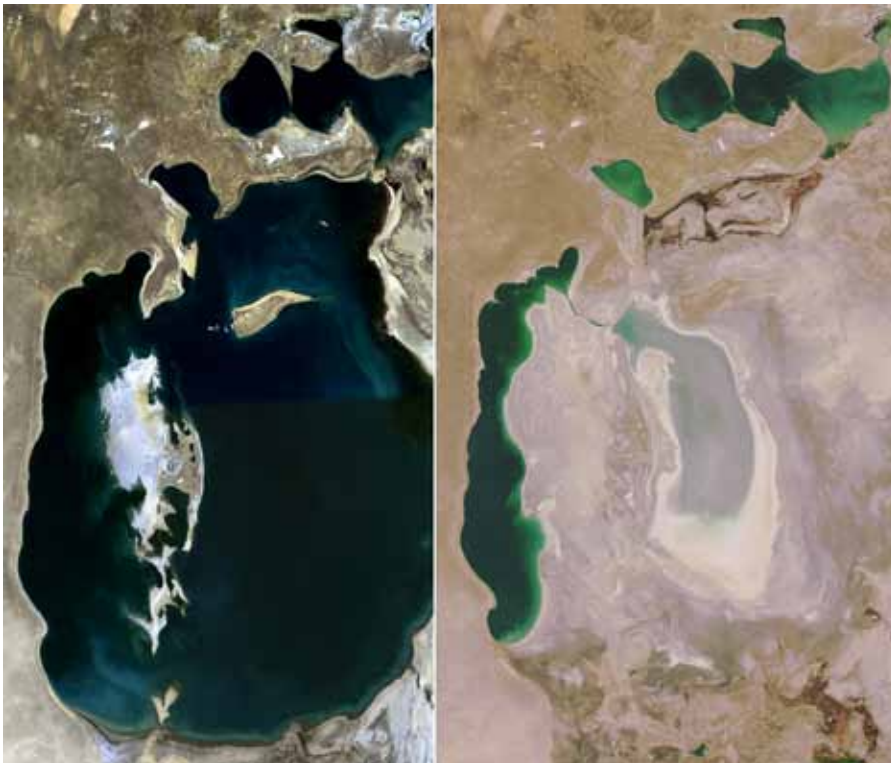


The Great Lakes are more than lakes. They are fresh water seas that extend past the horizon line and whose depths hide the rusted steel of long lost vessels and unique ecosystems of life. They hold one-fifth of the world's fresh surface water in a century that will see water surpass oil in both geopolitical significance and conflict.<sup>1,2</sup> Like oil, water is tied to economic growth, but unlike oil, water is essential for life, health, safety, and national security.<sup>3</sup> According to a United Nations report, two-thirds of the world's population will face stress on their water resources by 2025 and 1.8 billion people will be living in regions of "absolute water scarcity."<sup>4</sup> The impacts of population growth, development, agricultural practices, pollution, and profligate water use and management have led us to a global water crisis.<sup>5</sup>

The Great Lakes are no exception to this pervasive mismanagement. They, too, are threatened by direct and non-point source pollution, some of which has contributed to the proliferation of algal blooms, turning the lakes an unsightly green and detracting from tourism and recreation—main economic drivers for the Great Lakes region.<sup>6</sup> Unregulated withdrawals of water for industrial and consumptive use threaten further environmental degradation of the lakes and their watersheds. Despite their massive size, less than 1% of the Great Lakes is renewed annually by precipitation, surface water runoff, and inflow from groundwater sources.<sup>7</sup> Many consider the Great Lakes to be a non-renewable resource for that reason.<sup>8</sup> Even if water withdrawals from the Great Lakes Basin remain within that 1%, local shortages of surface water or groundwater could significantly affect users and ecosystems.<sup>9</sup> If over 1% of Great Lakes water is removed from the Basin, water levels will decrease over time.<sup>10</sup> The cumulative impact of total withdrawals from the Great Lakes, in addition to the effects of climate change, require a new era of improved water management in order to preserve the ecosystems, economies, and quality of life within the Great Lakes region.<sup>11</sup>

## A Call to Action

In 1997, John Febbraro was watching television in his home in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, when a request for donations for the world's poor came on the screen. Mr. Febbraro, who was a partner at a small consulting firm called the Nova Group, realized that the people shown in the ad not only needed food, but also fresh drinking water. It was then that he came up with the idea



The Aral Sea in central Asia, formerly one of the four largest lakes in the world, is currently less than ten percent of its original volume due to several decades of large-scale diversions of water. Figure 1, above, compares aerial images of the Aral Sea from 1989 and 2008.

Photo Credit: NASA

Figure 2, next page, is of an abandoned boat where the Aral Sea has since dried up.

Photo Credit: Flickr User Arian Zwegers

of shipping Great Lakes water to people around the world. With his partner at the Nova Group, they came up with a plan to ship the water in freighters from Lake Superior to Asia. In 1998, Mr. Febraro filled out a permit application to enact his business plan, and after a thirty-day comment period that elicited no response from the public, he obtained a permit to export 158 million gallons of water to Asia per year.<sup>12</sup>

When the news of the Nova Group's plan hit the papers, it sparked a region-wide anti-diversion debate. There had been plans for diversions of Great Lakes water before, but never quite like this one. The Nova Group's plan identified gaps in legislation for the export of water. Since the proposal came from Canada, the Water Resource Development

Act of 1986 (WRDA)—that banned diversions for U.S. states—did not apply, and because the diversion was less than 5 million gallons of water per day, the proposal did not fall under the non-binding agreements of the Great Lakes Charter of 1985, which included a notice and consultation process for proposals to divert large amounts of water out of the Basin. Existing laws did not prevent the export of Great Lakes water from Canada.

The Nova proposal delivered the external shock necessary to motivate officials on both sides of the border to come together and negotiate new, binding, international legislation for the management and regulation of Great Lakes water use. Canadian officials were able to pressure John Febraro into withdrawing his permit by late 1998. Quickly afterward, Canada passed a federal law banning diversions from the Great Lakes Basin. At the request of Great Lakes governors, U.S. Congress amended the WRDA so that both

diversions and exports of water from the Basin required the unanimous approval of all eight Great Lakes state governors. But questions still lingered. Would these legislative adjustments be enough to prevent the diversion or export of water from the Great Lakes as water tensions escalate throughout the world?

### **The Great Lakes Compact**

The public's reaction to the Nova proposal produced strong regional support for creating legislation that would better protect the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin from diversions and exports. The next ten years were spent researching, negotiating, drafting, and eventually signing new legislation for the Great Lakes Basin. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement, a non-binding agreement among the Great Lakes states, Ontario, and Québec was to be implemented in Ontario and Québec through Provincial laws and in the states through The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact (the Great Lakes Compact). In order to become law, the interstate compact needed to pass through the legislatures of each of the eight Great Lakes states—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—as well



The Great Lakes Basin boundary is defined by the flow of water in the region. If a drop of water falls within the Basin, it will find its way to the Great Lakes.

Map Credit: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

as U.S. Congress. President George W. Bush signed the Compact on October 3, 2008, making it state and federal law by December 8, 2008.

The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact is a binding agreement among the eight Great Lakes states to protect the water resources of the Great Lakes Basin. The Compact sets minimum requirements for water use inside the Basin and bans new or increased diversions of Great Lakes water outside of the Basin with limited exceptions. Despite the success of bringing this new legislation and its protections into place, the Compact has a sizeable loophole—a remnant from negotiations. Bottled water companies are exempt from the ban on diversions as long as states do not regulate their activities.<sup>13</sup>

### The Bottled Water Loophole

Since the Compact allows for unlimited water withdrawals in containers up to 5.7 gallons, companies including Nestlé, Pepsi, and Coca-Cola, among others, are able to remove and export large quantities of fresh water from the Great Lakes for profit.<sup>14</sup> Nestlé, for instance, was able to acquire a permit to withdraw 150 gallons per minute from Great Lakes Basin groundwater in Ewart, Michigan.<sup>15</sup> Nestlé pays only the service charge for the municipal tap water it uses—9.4 cents per 1 million gallons to the City of Ewart—and nothing for the 100 million gallons of Great Lakes water it removes and sells annually from Sanctuary Springs in Mecosta County.<sup>16</sup> Local





governments have actually encouraged the bottled water industry to pump and sell over 300 million gallons of water from the Great Lakes Basin every year, often in the name of economic development.<sup>17</sup>

### **Water: A Product?**

The Compact also allows for the withdrawal and sale of Great Lakes water in any sized container as long as it is labeled as a “product” and used in agricultural, manufacturing or industrial processes.<sup>18</sup> This diversion exception undercuts the original intent of the Compact and sets an historical precedent for our relationship to water. If the Nova Group decided to reinstate its plan to ship Great Lakes water to Asia, all it would have to do is label its freighters with the word “product.” Once water is viewed as a product, it is subject to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other trade rules that significantly limit countries’ abilities to protect and manage the resource.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the history of mankind, water has never before been labeled as merely a product, and for good reason. All life depends on access to fresh water. A product sells for the highest price it can fetch, and not everyone or everything that depends on water can pay that price if water is sold as a product.

### **Increasing Water Rates & Inequitable Access**

In Detroit, Michigan, over 45,000 residences have had their water shut off by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department because they could not pay their water bills.<sup>20</sup> As the city has lost industry, the population has lost jobs, and increasing water rates due to decreased population and municipal revenues have met with an increasing inability to pay those rates. To survive, people carry buckets of water from public venues or run a hose from their neighbor’s house. Families without an adequate supply of water have had their children taken away by social services.<sup>21</sup> These people live next to one of the world’s largest supplies of fresh water.

To combat the loss of revenue, the City of Detroit—like many Rust Belt cities facing similar financial losses—considered privatizing its water services. Selling water services to private companies may give cities some financial

respite, but the public often loses in these situations since privatization often leads to increases in water rates.<sup>22</sup> And this happens in places where people are already having trouble paying for water.

### **Problems with the Privatization of Water**

While cash-strapped Great Lakes cities may view privatization as a way to cash-out their water supplies, corporations around the world see the control and ownership of water as the key to future profit. An investment analyst for NGP Global Adaptation Partners recently boasted in front of an agriculture investing conference that investors could make “buckets and buckets of money” in the water sector.<sup>23</sup> Corporations can make a profit with water systems because they often charge higher rates.<sup>24</sup>

Food & Water Watch recently conducted a review of the 10 largest sales and concessions of public water supplies to private companies in the U.S., finding that water rates increased by an average of 15 percent per year after privatization.<sup>25</sup> On a review of 18 local governments that made water systems public again, water and sewer services averaged 21 percent cheaper than private operation.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to increasing water rates, the privatization of water supplies results in a decline in public oversight over the management of the resource.<sup>27</sup> While governments are legally accountable to the public and their needs, companies are primarily accountable to their investors. Governments can write into privatization contracts a requirement for government oversight of private operations, but public oversight—and thus control—over water quality and price decline with privatization.<sup>28</sup>

### **Access to Water as a Human Right**

The commoditization and privatization of our fresh water resources is not socially or environmentally equitable and will not result in the long-term protection of the Great Lakes. In order to foster a more sustainable solution

to water management, water must be categorized as a human right, not a product.

The General Assembly of the United Nations, of which both the U.S. and Canada are a part, approved Resolution 64/292 in July of 2010, which “recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”<sup>29</sup> Several months later, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a similar resolution, strengthening the interpretation of the General Assembly resolution and making it binding.<sup>30</sup> Since access to safe drinking water and sanitation is identified as a human right, governments must act as better stewards of fresh water resources.

In order to foster a more sustainable solution to water management, water must be categorized as a human right, not a product.

### **Great Lakes Basin: A Commons, Public Trust, and Protected Bioregion**

Given the importance of the Great Lakes and the significant threats they face, a more robust strategy for protecting them is required. Maude Barlow, a renowned author and water activist, and Jim Olson, an environmental lawyer famous for his representation of Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation against Nestlé Waters North America, Inc., have teamed up to propose an alternative way to manage the Great Lakes Basin. Their proposal includes that the Great Lakes Basin be recognized as:

- A Commons to be shared, protected, and carefully managed by those living around it.
- A Public Trust, underpinning in law that the Great Lakes must be protected by our respective governments for the common good for each generation.
- A Protected Bioregion that is governed as a single integrated watershed despite the multiple political jurisdictions surrounding it.<sup>31</sup>

While the language may have fallen out of use, the ideas of the Commons and the Public Trust are quite old. A Commons is a common resource that no

one can own—examples include national and state parks, public libraries, and oceans. Because fresh water is a Commons that is necessary for life and for which there is no substitute, Barlow claims “water must be regarded as a public Commons and a public good and preserved as such for all time in law and practice.”<sup>32</sup> By recognizing the Great Lakes Basin as a Commons, individuals and municipalities may become more careful stewards of the shared resource so that there is enough clean water to meet human and ecological needs for generations to come.<sup>33</sup> Barlow extends the idea to regulation of the private sector:

“Under a Commons regime, all private sector activity would come under strict public oversight and government accountability, and all would have to operate within a mandate whose goals are the restoration and preservation of the waters of the Basin and water justice for all those who live around it.”<sup>34</sup>

This sort of regulation of the use of the Commons is legitimate under Public Trust Doctrine, which was first codified in 529 A.D. as Codex Justinianus and has since appeared in many jurisdictions and precepts, including the Magna Carta.<sup>35</sup> In the U.S., where the doctrine is referred to as a “high, solemn and perpetual duty,”<sup>36</sup> it is used to protect the right of public access to water and of water itself.<sup>37</sup> Public Trust Doctrine protects the Commons as property of the public. As such, the common resource cannot be taken and used for private gain and governments must protect the Public Trust as trustees.<sup>38</sup> The Great Lakes Basin has been subject to Public Trust law in the United States since the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Illinois Central Railroad v Illinois* (1802), in which the Court ruled that lands under navigable waters is held in trust for the people.<sup>39</sup> Although Public Trust Doctrine already applies to the Basin, residents of the region need to become aware of what it means and put it into practice in order to better protect and manage our common fresh water resources.

Barlow and Olson recommend that the Great Lakes Basin also be legally designated a Protected Bioregion because the Public Trust Doctrine, as a legal framework interpreted in courts, does not guarantee protection for the Commons. Legislation specific to the Great Lakes Protected Bioregion would safeguard the water and ecosystems of the Basin by law, prioritizing the restoration of its ground and surface waters.<sup>40</sup>

In order to accomplish the formal and practical recognition of the Great Lakes Basin as a Commons, a Public Trust, and a Protected Bioregion, Barlow and Olson identified key principles to guide the process of creating a strong governance structure.<sup>41</sup> On December 13 of 2011, the duo met with the International Joint Commission (IJC) requesting that they apply the principles of the Commons and the Public Trust in order to improve oversight of the Great Lakes Basin.<sup>42</sup> The IJC was formed to uphold the directives of the U.S. and Canadian Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, which addresses water flows, water quantity, pollution, and water quality in the Great Lakes Basin. By adopting the principles of the Commons and the Public Trust Doctrine, the IJC could set the tone for the region in this nascent stage of Compact implementation, especially since the Treaty of 1909 is up for review and revision every ten years.<sup>43</sup>



Lake Superior.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User natalielucier

## Funding the Restoration of the Great Lakes Commons

Restoring the water quality and damaged ecosystems of the Great Lakes Basin, in addition to treating and servicing water and sewage for the people

of the region, is immensely expensive. Many of the municipalities surrounding the Great Lakes have aging infrastructure and are struggling to maintain services while keeping water rates affordable. In order to uphold access to clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right, and in order to restore and protect the great common resource of the Great Lakes, our State, Provincial, and Federal governments must prioritize funding for these undertakings within the Great Lakes Basin.

Without this critical funding, twenty percent of the world's fresh water will become increasingly contaminated and more municipalities will almost surely turn to the privatization of their water supplies.

### Conclusion

We must protect our fresh water resources so that they can continue to nourish the people, environments, and economies of this region for generations. As the global pressure for fresh water increases over time, we can use the revitalization and protection of the Great Lakes to attract both people and businesses to the Rust Belt.

We can choose our legacy. ♦

### What You Can Do

Legal, political, and financial challenges surrounding the future of the Great Lakes and all fresh water are mounting, and we need your help. Here are some ways in which you can make a difference:

- Educate others about this issue and the potential solutions presented in this article.
- Support your local watershed group with a donation or with your time.
- Contact your local representatives and let them know about some of the issues and solutions presented in this article.
- Visit <http://go.osu.edu/diamondsintherust> for more information.

(Opposite Page) We need your help to protect the Great Lakes, one of the Rust Belt's most valuable assets.  
Photo Credit: Flickr User Stew Dean



# This is the Beginning

Throughout the experience of creating Diamonds in the Rust, we have found more questions than answers. What defines the Rust Belt? What cities does it include, and why? What are the consequences of demolishing our buildings and what are the other options? How do we address these challenges without becoming despondent? How do we celebrate our region's assets without behaving like blind cheerleaders? How do we ensure our region thrives?

What we offer are strategies for the larger conversation about revitalizing our cities. The diversity of topics addressed in our articles represents the complex dynamics that already exist in Rust Belt cities. Long-time neighborhood residents, creative youth, institutional agents, and many other concerned

stakeholders are working together on a cornucopia of projects to breathe life into these cities once again. This publication is our contribution to that multi-faceted effort.

Though we hope our articles provide some insight into these complex issues, we do not pretend to have all of the answers.

Ours is only a small piece of the puzzle, a **declaration of commitment** from young people to the recovery efforts of our region.

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In the end, we hope that Diamonds in the Rust serves as a starting point for additional conversation about revitalization efforts in this region of concern. Having discovered new springs of hope for our communities, we are now committed for the long haul. We hope that you have also found much to be hopeful for here in the Rust Belt.

Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood is home to many cultural institutes and universities.  
Photo Credit: Tom Hetrick





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*A Publication by:*  
Diamonds in the Rust