

Motown and Rose City: a situated political
economic comparative study of urban
agriculture in Detroit, MI and Portland, OR

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Abstract

As urban agriculture (UA) gains visibility in media, the public perception of food, and city policy, it becomes increasingly important to understand the driving motivations and causal forces of the movement in different locations. I argue that the space UA fills is place-specific; each city has developed ideas about farming in the city that are responses to unique social, spatial, and political economic experiences. There is an overall shortage of investigation into UA from a situated political economic perspective. This paper, therefore, seeks to accomplish two broad goals. First, I will exhibit the importance of a political economic framework in understanding UA by conducting a comparative study of Portland and Detroit. I argue that due to unique and broadly oppositional historical contexts, these two cities have vastly different foundations beneath their urban agriculture movements. Whereas Portland's movement has arisen out of a post-scarcity demand for localism, fulfillment, and a general environmental appeal of urban food production, Detroit's movement is a response to a new-scarcity, one which is a result of the prominent vacancy, food insecurity, and public health concerns. And second, based on my observations and findings, I hope to provide suggestions for how the City of Detroit should support and promote UA in different ways than Portland, based on the location-based demands and visions of actors in each movement.

1 Introduction

The 21st century has seen further industrialization and internationalization of food production, more food shortages, and farther-reaching food-borne epidemics than our modern food system has ever experienced. At the same time, the start of the millennium has also seen growth in alternative responses to these environmental, social, and health crises that are largely attributable to the lack of intimacy and transparency of the average Western meal. These responses have taken a number of forms, ranging from organic farming to Freeganism and farmers markets to Community Supported Agriculture. Many of these movements are pursued through the development of "alternative food networks," which work to support mostly local goods by reducing the distance between "where food is grown and where it is purchased and eaten."¹ In general, alternative food networks are focused on developing connections between the producer and the buyer, a relationship that is progressively being more intimately cultivated.

¹Lucy Jarosz, "The City in the Country: Growing Alternative Food Networks in metropolitan Areas." *Journal of Rural Studies* (2007), doi:101016/j.jrurstud.2007.10.002, p 232.

These responses have been paralleled by an outburst of literature in the last decade that has not only catalyzed a wave of academic interest in food systems but also reached the public psyche in a way that has exposed the potency of food-related discourse in securing the attention of consumers. The popularity of books like Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, as well as the extent to which they seem to have influenced the public debate on food systems, show that people are no longer satisfied with what advertisements project - they want to be told "what to eat" (also the title of a Marion Nestle book, a 2006 top-10 on Amazon). But the popularity of conscious food consumption is not what is important about the abundance of recent "foodie" literature - what we should note are the threads running throughout this literature, the commonalities of inquiry, and how they have created a contemporary discourse that is both diverse and comprehensive.

Urban agriculture, as a particular form of response, is a movement that has shown incredible growth across the country in the last few years. Because of its prominence in the aesthetic composition of cities, the increased presence of farms within urban boundaries has made it a topic of both alternative food visions and public debate. And the spatial demands of food production have forced city governments to recognize the importance of their role as mediators who must balance the variety of opinions held by the public towards UA.

However, in the general body of literature on urban agriculture, there is very little published that approaches the movement, and the barriers facing the movement, from a political economic perspective. This is surprising on a number of levels - political economy, as an interdisciplinary approach to understanding institutions and systems, seems highly apt as a framework for interpreting the apparatus of both the broad UA movement and place-based UA. This project is an attempt to exhibit the value of the political economic approach to understanding urban agriculture.

As Thomas J Sugrue said, "It is only through the complex and interwoven histories of race, residence, and work in the postwar era that the state of today's cities and their impoverished residents can be fully understood and confronted."² Further, it is important to recognize that things like alternative food networks and urban agriculture are constituted out of a number of complex, sometimes contradictory processes and relationships, which are internalized in time and

²Thomas J Sugrue. "The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit." Princeton University Press, New Jersey. 1996.

place.³ These processes include the historical, political, economic and social dimensions of change, and have to be understood together in order to assemble a comprehensive picture of any given system or structure. This is the strength of the political economic framework, especially when applied to a comparative study of two cities with diverse backgrounds and populations.

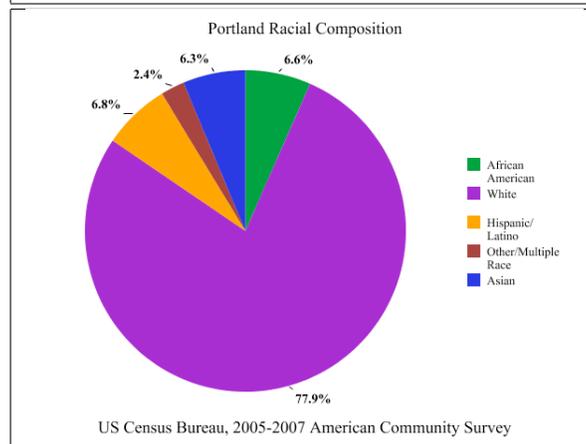
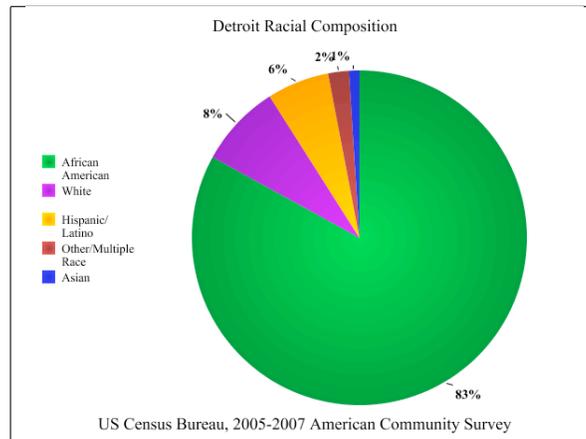
By understanding the unique historical contexts of Portland and Detroit, this study provides a more complete insight into the motivations and driving visions of actors in the urban agriculture movements in each city. I argue that Detroit's UA growth is a response of "new-scarcity;" that is, pervasive food insecurity, joblessness, and urban malaise in the city have led the population to pursue urban food production as a way to combat these forces. Further, Detroit's vivid racial background is reflected in the importance of black self-sufficiency in the majority of the city's UA organizations, as is the focus on community involvement and control of the means of production. Conversely, Portland's historical experiences have created a very different political, economic, social, and spatial atmosphere in which UA has been advanced on a "post-scarcity" platform founded primarily on: a desire for higher quality food; an overwhelming demand for "local;" environmentalist attitudes; a quest for fulfillment; and a dissatisfaction with the industrial food system at large. Importantly, many of the farmers involved in the movement are young and white, and have chosen to farm the city because of a desire to distance themselves from third party reliance and technodependent lifestyles.

As such, it seems absurd to suggest that these cities should follow the same, or even similar, approaches to promoting and supporting UA. Especially with regards to the future of municipal involvement, this study will show that the strategies that Portland and Multnomah County have pursued in support of UA (though praiseworthy and largely successful) are not transferrable to Detroit's conditions. The final section of the paper argues for Detroit to initiate a stronger land acquisition and re-distribution program, more explicit and long-term subsidies for UA projects in the forms of cheap land costs, reduced utility expenses, and less taxes, and developing a model that goes beyond the community gardens-approach of Portland and fosters opportunity for for-profit, commercial farms that increase employment potential and economic growth. In the end, these approaches are reflective of the different motivations and goals of UA in each city, which are themselves a result of deeply rooted political economic

³Jarosz 2007, 2.

experiences.

Below is a quick snapshot of some important statistics that are relevant to this project.



Detroit	Portland
Land Area: 138 square miles	Land Area: 134 square miles
Population: 837,711	Population: 551,236
Unemployment Rate: 28% (or higher)	Unemployment Rate: 10%
Poverty Rate: 33%	Poverty Rate: 13.1%
High-Poverty Neighborhoods: 141 of 315	High-Poverty Neighborhoods: ~20 of 90
Vacant Properties: 91,000+	Vacant Properties: unknown

Defining urban agriculture: what is it, and what are its goals?

There are many visions of what urban agriculture is and can be. These

range from vertical farming to extensive agricultural production on public land, and involve different sets of actors and relationships. Some envision it as a return to an agrarian system within city boundaries. Others inspire highly technological multi-story farms, aquaculture, and full-scale processing.⁴ From the framework of place-based political economy, it should be clear that no one solution is appropriate accross the board - a vibrant urban agriculture system will likely involve a medley of small and large-scale farms, some community-run and some for-profit, and a host of strategies in between. The approaches that are appropriate in each location depend on spatial constraints (or abundance), social values, political and legal support, and the financial capacity of organizers. To understand these considerations in Portland and Detroit, then, requires that we first understand the political economic background on which UA is operating. This will be the purpose of the next section of the paper.

But what does urban agriculture generally aim to solve? Why should we focus on developing this movement, and not on increasing food aid or decreasing the cost of food? One theme that has been constant in most discussions of visions of future urban food systems, and especially urban agriculture, is the issue of food access. It is becoming increasingly obvious that a neighborhood's proximity to full-service grocery stores⁵ has significant impacts on the community's health and vitality.⁶ Further, "low-income and minority communities tend to have less access to supermarkets than wealthier and predominantly white communities, while having a greater number of corner stores, convenience stores, and liquor outlets."⁷ The Food Access Network has identified four main reasons that food poverty arises: accessibility, availability, affordability, and awareness.⁸ Some

⁴Dickson Despommier from The Vertical Fam Project, www.verticalfarm.com

⁵Defined by the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability as: "full-service" food markets or grocery stores are considered to be those that provide a full array of food options, including fresh produce, meats and dairy products as well as packaged foods."Portland Plan Background Report Fall 2009."

⁶See: Black, J.L. and J. Macinko. 2008. "Neighborhoods and obesity." *Nutrition Reviews*. 66(1): 2-20.; Hatherly, Joanne, "Distance from grocery store determines weight: Study," *Vancouver Sun*, April 6, 2009. Accessed on 3/8/11 at <http://www.vancouversun.com/Health/Distance+from+grocery+store+determines+weight+Study/1473004/story.html>; Wrigley N., D. Warm, and B. Margetts. 2003. "Deprivation, diet, and food-retail access: findings from the Leeds 'food deserts' study" *Environment and Planning A*, 35(1): 151 - 188.; Laraia, B., A.M. Siega-Riz, J. Kaufman, and S. J.Jones. 2004. "Proximity of supermarkets is positively associated with diet quality index for pregnancy." *Preventive Medicine*, 39: 869-875.; Medical News Today, "Access To 'Healthy' Food Stores Associated With Lower Prevalence Of Obesity In New York City," March 21, 2009. Accessed on 3/8/11 at <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/143099.php>

⁷Portland Plan 2009.

⁸SustainWeb, Food Access Network, "What leads to food poverty?" Accessed 3/8/11 at http://www.sustainweb.org/foodaccess/what_leads_to_food_poverty/.

have argued that increasing the number of supermarkets is the best solution for food deserts, because it can increase the economic vitality and business appeal of communities, as well as address health issues.⁹ While this suggestion might be applicable in some cities with high urban density, strong public transportation, and high median incomes (like Portland), the same studies have found that cities like Detroit face serious barriers that forced grocers outward towards the suburbs in the first place.¹⁰ The food access issue is important for this project for two reasons. First, the differences in overall food access and also race-related access between Portland and Detroit are certainly results of longer-term and larger-scale forces that have determined the constitution of food insecurity in each city. And second, these differences hold important implications for what strategies have potential to be effective in addressing food security. These ideas will be explored in the first and third sections of the paper, respectively.

Another common goal of urban agriculture is improving the environmental health of the city. Farming the city turns brownfields into greenfields, reduces impermeable surface cover thereby improving runoff, and improves ecological services. UA also contributes to the sustainability of both the city in which it is operating. For this project, sustainability in food production refers to a number of specific things: it improves the capacity for carbon capture, reduces transportation miles of the total food demand of the city, reduces transportation miles of distribution if production and markets are widespread enough, reduces dependence on and demand for industrial agriculture, reduces petroleum-based production and packaging, localizes the food economy, and so on. It is important to consider the affects urban food production will have (or has) systemically, especially if UA is to be pushed onto the national political agenda.

Urban agriculture also aims to improve community cohesion and food education. One popular type of urban agriculture is the Community Supported Agriculture model, in which members pay an annual fee (generally between 400 and 500 dollars) in order to receive weekly parcels of produce from a farm. This increases communication and improves relationships between the buyer and the farmer, as well as promotes transparency in farming practices and production costs. Other projects are not founded on the CSA model, but still rely on community financing and labor to maintain the farm. These efforts are also a great strategy for educating citizens on all aspects of food production, processing,

⁹Detroit Fresh Food Access Initiative, "Report of Taskforce Findings August 2008," Detroit Economic Growth Corporation.

¹⁰Detroit Fresh Food Access.

and distribution. And the presence of farms in the city improves the aesthetics and visual appeal of the urban landscape, improving community attitudes and stimulating community relationships. Many urban agriculture organizations, such as the Garden Resource Program Collaborative in Detroit, develop separate branches dedicated to education programs for community members and youth, in an effort to inform average citizens on the challenges and benefits to growing food in the city.

Especially in Detroit, there is also a concerted effort to develop UA models that maximize employment, in the hopes of alleviating joblessness. Alongside education efforts, UA has amazing potential to reengage urban youth with pastoral roots, and to make farming lucrative as a means of income as well as a rewarding occupation. Further, by focusing on employing certain sectors of the population, such as juvenile delinquents, single parents, or the homeless, UA stands to impact crime rates, poverty, and the overall neglected aesthetic of the city. And as the labor force of UA grows, so does the spending power of its employees, as well as the tax base of the city, leading to overall economic growth, and in the case of Detroit potentially attracting business reinvestment in the inner city.

The last important goal of the overarching UA movement that is pertinent to this project is its potential to convert unused land into productive land. This is certainly more applicable in Detroit than in Portland, but is nonetheless relevant in both cities. Finding economically or socially beneficial uses for vacant land is essential to maintaining or rebuilding the health of a city. Proliferation of vacancy leads to a number of resultant problems. First, increasing vacancy causes depreciation in property values in the surrounding neighborhood, which leads to a decrease in the local tax base.¹¹ Because of this, the municipality's tax revenue runs dry, "while at the same time the correlative municipal costs pertaining to such properties burgeons, hampering the municipal government's capacity to monitor such properties and safeguard against the multitude of public health and environmental safety risks presented by their continuing state of abandonment."¹² Moreover, homeowners living in blighted neighborhoods are burdened with a higher proportion of taxes, while at the same time suffering higher homeowners insurance.¹³ Vacant properties have also been proven to

¹¹Thomas Gunton. "Coping with the Spectre of Urban Malaise in a Postmodern Landscape: The Need for a Detroit Land Bank Authority." *Detroit Mercy Law Review* 2007, Vol 84, 521-570, 522.

¹²Gunton, 522.

¹³Gunton, 523.

be host to crime, targets for arson, and are often used as unmonitored dumping grounds.¹⁴ And finally, ubiquitous vacancy produces “an aesthetic of urban malaise” which contributes to a perception of the community as inherently dysfunctional or blighted. As Thomas Gunton points out, it has been shown that vacancy produces a “detrimental psychological effect that detracts from the community’s quality of life by producing social fragmentation and creates a disincentive to future investment necessary for economic rehabilitation.”¹⁵ Obviously, not all vacant properties in the city are easily convertible to UA - many have decrepid structures that must be razed, and industrial-area parcels may have serious soil contamination. This suggests something incredibly important for the future of UA: the movement will require support from the city in the form of some type of land bank, which would be responsible for acquiring property as well as preparing it for UA production. Again, this is an insight mostly applicable to Detroit - Portland’s vacancy rates are incredibly low. The city of Detroit has already taken steps to flatten vacant sections of the city - but is doing so as part of an overarching scheme of revitalization that is primarily aimed at reducing the drain of municipal funds as well as attracting investment. If UA in Detroit is to be successfully prioritized as a land use for vacant property, then the city will need to more concretely associate demolition efforts with the creation of farms.

These main goals of urban agriculture will be explored in the contexts of both cities later in this paper. As will be shown, different goals take higher priority in different locations, mostly due to the motivations and driving visions of actors involved in the movement in each location. The following section will show that these motivations differ as a result of the vast dissimilarities in the political economic historical backgrounds of each city, and that understanding these disparities is essential to fully comprehending the character of UA and the ways city governments ought to, or have already, involved themselves in the support of the movement.

2 History Matters: The importance of political economic context in understanding UA

It may seem obvious that there are stark differences in the social, spatial, and political economic histories of Portland and Detroit. Their backgrounds

¹⁴Gunton, 523.

¹⁵Gunton, 523.

in everything from industry to politics have taken different paths and have arrived at dissimilar current climates. What I intend to do in this section is highlight the most important contrasting aspects of the cities' pasts and show how these have significantly influenced the urban agriculture movements in each location. This is important because it should be foundational for understanding the motivations of actors in the movement in both places, and how UA more broadly has arisen in unique spaces. Further, the idiosyncratic experiences of each city are the foundations of their class and racial composition, both of which are central to understanding the urban agriculture movements. For this section I will give a general synthesis of the important historical background of each city, separately, then discuss the implications of the ways these different city biographies have influenced the class and race make-up of their UA movements.

I will primarily focus on three themes: social, spatial, and political economic. The important social background includes racial and class tensions, as well as the racial, class, income, and general population demographics of the cities. Spatially, the most significant factors for this project include neighborhood discrimination, density statistics, vacancy statistics, and historical land use trends, policies, and results. Politically and economically, it is important to understand the labor politics in each city, their economic bases both past and present, and the orientation of local politics. The introduction to this paper provided some basic population demographics, geography, and poverty rates. This section seeks to explore the roots of these current statistics.

Detroit: the rise and fall of Motown

Detroit as it stands today is an empty shell of its former self, a haunted reflection of a once thriving industrial center and the fourth largest city in the US. It has been hollowed out by number of larger, systemic causes, and left to decay from within. In 1950 the city had a population of 1.8 million residents, and Detroit was a thriving center of industrial activity, mostly riding on the boom in automobile production by the Big Three - General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. As of 2000, the population had shrunk to around 900,000 - a 10% reduction every ten years.¹⁶ Understanding the scale of this evacuation of the city center is difficult - many factors influenced the changes in population density, racial demographics, and income dynamics that have occurred since

¹⁶Tom Philpott. "From Motown to Grown town: the Greening of Detroit." Grist Magazine, August 24th, 2010. Accessed 3/10/11 at <http://www.grist.org/article/food-from-motown-to-grown-town-the-greening-of-detroit/P1>

the city’s heyday as a manufacturing powerhouse. It is difficult to visualize what such an immense exodus could do to the structure of a city, or how it could effect the confidence of its citizens. The figure below helps paint a picture of the population decline and qidespread vacancy. The story of Detroit’s fall from grace is a racially charged, politically and economically intense epic that in itself is the driving force behind the city’s current surge in revitalization efforts, especially the growth in urban agriculture as a response to the sweeping land vacancy and aesthetic blight. This section is an attempt to weave together the most important historical forces that together have created a space in which UA has and can continue to flourish.

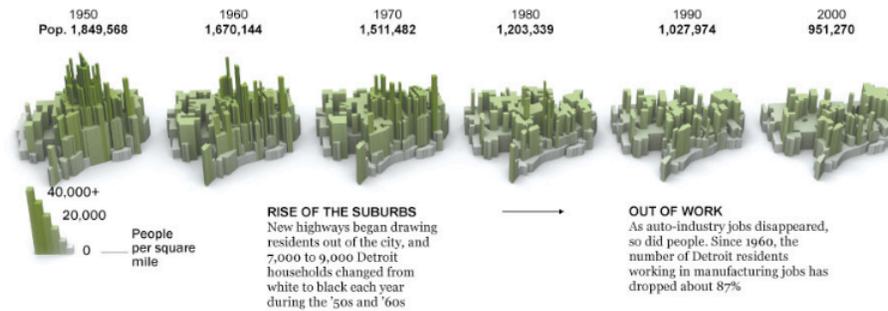


Figure 2: Population change in Detroit¹⁷

As Gunton said in his article relating to the need for a Detroit Land Bank, “The principal causes of [Detroit’s] atrophy are predicated upon cataclysmic demographic shifts reflecting the socioeconomic fault lines hewn by racial antagonism, the strategic closing of industrial facilities and pervasive job losses and the internal impetus of suburban sprawl induced by the haphazard developmental planning of land hungry private developers.”¹⁸ In many ways, this statement summarizes well many of the historical experiences of the city that have been foundational in the formation of a new-scarcity demand for food production within city limits. These causes are also vaguely representative of the three main lines of inquiry this paper will follow in establishing an understanding of the important historical factors resulting in the character of modern Detroit.

¹⁷TIME Magazine Online. “Detroit: Now a Ghost Town.” Accessed 3/10/11 at http://www.time.com/time/interactive/0,31813,1925735,00.html?iid=digg_share

¹⁸Gunton, 521.

“Getting a grip on the scale of Detroit’s economic catastrophe is difficult, like trying to estimate the size of an mastodon.”¹⁹ The beginnings of the city’s crisis are deeply embedded in its early history, “its roots deeper, more tangled, and perhaps more intractable” than social scientists have previously understood.²⁰ The historian Thomas Sugrue published a book in 1998, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, that is a phenomenal source on much of the information I seek to bring to light in this section, and this book will be an important reference.

African American migration, white flight, and citywide discrimination

In the first decades of the 20th century, a majority of African Americans moved to urban centers, mostly above the Mason-Dixon line. Millions moved to Detroit, driven from the rural south by disturbances in the agricultural economy there, and lured by promises of freedom and opportunity that had been denied to them even through the depression.²¹ Between 1910 and 1970, Detroit’s population went from 1.2 percent black to 44.5 percent.²² According to the 2000 Census the city is around 80% African American, but due to continued population loss it is projected to be closer to 90% in the results of the 2010 Census.²³ The swelling population had effects on all aspects of the city, from neighborhood segregation and tensions to job discrimination and riots. The forms of racial discrimination that developed in Detroit were both complex and pervasive, and ensured that black laborers would disproportionately feel the effects of deindustrialization and the decline of the city center.²⁴ Many of the significant fault lines drawn into the geography of the city during the postwar era are still visible in more recent studies of race and class demographics of Detroit’s neighborhoods.²⁵

In pre-war Detroit, “Racial ideology, a shifting and fluid popular vernacular of race, served as the backdrop to the relationship between blacks and whites.”²⁶ These ideologies, long standing in opposition but only newly exposed to one

¹⁹Philpott, 1.

²⁰Sugrue, 5.

²¹Sugrue.

²²Sugrue, 23.

²³US Census, www.census.gov.

²⁴Sugrue, 8.

²⁵see maps of black population demographics in Sugrue, pages 35, 184-187; and Factfinder on www.census.gov.

²⁶Sugrue, 8.

another in the contexts of housing, labor, and political competition, were largely informed by broader national projections of African American culture. The ways in which white communities viewed the growing black population were derived from contradictory images marketed for mass consumption in music, radio, movies, and popular sports.²⁷ These images influenced the day-to-day interactions of whites and blacks in the city, and had serious impact on the extent to which discrimination penetrated labor, housing, and public services policy.

Throughout the transition period of the postwar era, from a predominately white to a predominately black inner-city population, racial tensions continued to change alongside of political, economic, and national-level shifts. Even as African Americans became, for the first time, an important part of the Democratic constituency, their pursuits of racial equality were combatted with persistently unjust government policies that continued to reinforce and reconstruct racial stereotypes.²⁸ Black communities were restricted to ghettoized neighborhoods, and public housing projects were aimed at already impoverished, increasingly black sections of the city. By concentrating public housing projects in neighborhoods that were already poor, the city was effectively “bankrolling white suburbanization through discriminatory housing subsidies.”²⁹ Between 1950 and 1960, Detroit’s suburbs grew by 25 percent, while the inner city lost 100, 000 residents.³⁰

As will be explored in the next subsection, the spatial aspect of citywide discrimination became a pivotal axis of the struggle for black empowerment. Struggles between whites and blacks over territory were some of the most violent and pervasive racial clashes the city witnessed. Broadly, most whites saw the expansion of the black population and black neighborhoods as an assault against their land and communities. Some white areas of the city strongly defended their ownership, while others went largely undefended. The displaced whites from these undefended neighborhoods, like Fenkell-Linwood, the Twelfth Street area, and some wealthy areas of the Northwest side, encountered the appeal of suburban communities. I will explore in more depth the spatial struggles involved with neighborhood demographics in the next section - here I would like to investigate the social magnetism of the suburbs.

²⁷Sugrue.

²⁸Sugrue, 9.

²⁹Sugrue, 10.

³⁰Philpott.

Detroit has been pegged as one of the most clear cut examples of white flight.³¹ Between 1950 and 1960, the city's suburbs grew by 25%, swelling the demand for expansionary land policy and large-scale development strategies of the farmland surrounding the outskirts of the city.³² There were countless appeals of a move to suburbia for whites with the financial ability and social motivations to do so. Most importantly, the suburban communities popping up all around the city represented an opportunity to recreate the barriers between the black and white populations. This took the form of less tangible social stigmatization, as well as a few distinct housing policies that reinforced ideas of segregation and inaccessibility. For the former, the actual physical distance from the parts of the city that were being quickly populated by the expanding black demographic, as well as a complete absence of the black community's presence, created a sense of homogeneity and isolation. These "suburban communities were themselves defended communities, whose invisible walls against 'invasions' were far more difficult to breach than the constantly shifting, insecure lines that divided the city."³³ Development companies themselves catered and appealed selectively to the white population, "tout[ing] the exclusive nature of their communities and contrast[ing] them to the undesirable city."³⁴ "Residents of suburbs lived in communities whose boundaries were firmly established and governmentally protected, unlike their urban counterparts who had to define and defend their own fragile borders."³⁵ Of course, the barriers to suburbs were not entirely racial - there was also a strong class exclusivity that was embodied by the larger house sizes, larger lot sizes, and increased costs of transportation.

Suburban communities were also supported in their pursuit of exclusivity and homogeneity by governments, especially the Federal Housing Administration and the Home Owner's Loan Corporation.³⁶ Many suburbs refused to join broader municipal policy changes, and enlisted a host of legal instruments to discourage minorities from moving in. Among them were prohibiting division of single-family houses into apartments, limiting multiple-family housing, and enforcing minimum lot sizes.³⁷ Further, each suburb had its own parks and

³¹Charles T. Clotfelter, "The Detroit Decision and 'White Flight,'" *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 5:1 (Jan., 1976), pp. 99-112; Council of Conservative Citizens, "Detroit is shocking example of 'white flight,'" cofcc.org.

³²Philpott.

³³Sugrue, 245.

³⁴Sugrue, 245.

³⁵Sugrue, 246.

³⁶Sugrue, 245.

³⁷For more examples of barriers used to enforce heterogeneity, see Paul R. Dimond, "Beyond Busing: Inside the Challenge to Urban Segregation," University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor

recreation programs, school district, libraries, and public services, all of which was paid for by local taxes.³⁸ This, therefore, gave the suburban citizens a tangible sense of control and ownership of the infrastructure and public programs in each outlying town. This was an increasingly important draw for whites leaving the city center - an opportunity for re-empowerment after being “forced” from their homes.

All of this had significant ramifications in the long term racial demographics of the city. Of course, discriminatory land use policy and segregative housing commissions were eradicated over the course of the 1970s and 80s as minorities gained status in national and local politics, so the urban-suburban divide has become increasingly class based - it is simply that racial inequality is closely tied to income distribution in Detroit. But regardless of the eradication of “legal” racial discrimination, it is clear that racial divides still haunt Detroit. At the time of the 2000 US Census, over 70% of blacks in metropolitan Detroit lived in the city of Detroit itself.³⁹ There is no doubt that the oppression the African American community in Detroit has battled has impacted their social psyche - especially compounded with the all-too-real experience of proliferating vacancy, shattered public school systems, a decrepid aesthetic, and long-forgotten public services in many areas. Malik Yakini, a long time supporter of urban farming and chairman of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, said, “African-Americans in Detroit tend to have a sense of despair and helplessness that is a direct result of oppression.”⁴⁰ The following two sections explore the ways in which spatial discrimination, land use policy, labor politics, and the deindustrialization of Detroit have compounded with the turbulent racial and social histories and produced a modern city that is open to and ready for a renaissance in urban food production.

Neighborhood discrimination, land use trends and the proliferation of vacancy

As Thomas Sugrue argues, “Perceptions of race differences were not...wholly, or even primarily, the consequences of popular culture...In the postwar city, blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition. The physical state of African American neighborhoods and white neighborhoods in Detroit reinforced

(1985), 51-56.

³⁸Sugrue, 245.

³⁹US Census, 2000.

⁴⁰Philpott, 2.

perceptions of race.”⁴¹ Myriad spatial implications arose out of the clashing of race and class in Detroit. Most importantly, as the black population grew and demanded more housing, white attempts to ghettoize and enclose black neighborhoods created a war over historical boundaries. In the 1950-70s, these were founded on the persistence of the limited vision of both citizens and politicians, largely based on the labor relations “manpower” theory that placed the blame for inequality in employment and income on the workers themselves and avoided criticising structural shortcomings.⁴² The pervasive joblessness and decaying infrastructure of many inner-city neighborhoods served only to reinforce white stereotypes of black people, families, and communities.⁴³

White neighborhoods felt threatened by the influx of blacks and began to defend themselves through a number of avenues. They refused to sell to blacks, used force and threats of violence, and established restrictive covenants amongst other white residents to assure homogeneity.⁴⁴ Some landlords charged higher rents to blacks to try to both discourage their move-in and take advantage of the overall housing shortage among the black population - even as late as 1960, the median monthly rent for blacks was \$76 a month, while rent for whites was only \$64 a month.⁴⁵ White developers took steps to further segregate all-white neighborhoods from black ones, including violent assault of black pioneers and threats. One extreme case involved the Eight Mile community, which in the 1940s was around 70 percent vacant but the land was predominately owned by blacks who were waiting to build homes. The half-square mile community was surrounded by some of Detroit’s newest and most exclusive neighborhoods, as well as a lot of open land that was prime for development. One developer was unable to secure loans and permits from the Federal Housing Association because of his development’s proximity to Eight Mile. The solution? Build “a foot-thick, six-foot-high wall, running for a half-mile on the property line separating the black and white neighborhoods.”⁴⁶

This was not the end of the Eight Mile story. The residents lobbied for years with the FHA to secure loans for improvement and construction, but were denied repeatedly for no apparent reason. The government devised a plan to force Eight Mile residents from their neighborhood in order to open it up to

⁴¹Sugrue, 9.

⁴²Sugrue.

⁴³Sugrue, 8.

⁴⁴Sugrue, 24.

⁴⁵Sugrue, 54.

⁴⁶Sugrue, 64.

further all-white development. As one resident noted, “Now in Detroit, even though we own the land we are being told to ‘Get off’ because we are not able to develop it in the way some people think it should be developed.”⁴⁷ This closely reflected the general FHA policy that mandated racial homogeneity in housing developments. Even the “social reformers” of the New Deal era believed staunchly in a “separate-but-equal philosophy of housing finance.”⁴⁸

It was this segregationist framework for understanding city planning that led to the development of the suburbs as an alternative for white families fleeing the city center. These homogeneity-oriented policies also led to even more extreme levels of discrimination and segregation in the suburbs than there was across neighborhoods in the city. The 1960s and 1970s saw the most significant migration of the white population - in this decade 344,000 whites left the central city of Detroit, reducing the white population from 1,182,000 to 838,000.⁴⁹ In 1960, the level of segregation in the city was around 64.9 percent, while in the suburbs it was closer to 92 percent.⁵⁰ By 1970, segregation in the city had dropped to 51.2 percent, while segregation in the suburbs had climbed to 93.3 percent.⁵¹ What is most interesting about this, in the context of racial discrimination, is that housing prices in the two study areas were not found to be of significant influence in this segregation. Thus, the extensive residential segregation in Detroit is most predominately explained by racial discrimination - and therefore should not be answered by offering lower cost housing (although that is certainly necessary in much of Detroit), but by reducing discrimination in housing.⁵²

The suburbanization of Detroit, along with the city’s prominent deindustrialization (which will be explored in the next section), has led to two changes in the geography of the city that are of utmost importance to understanding the urban agriculture movement. First, the racial composition of the inner city is now almost entirely African American. Given the discussion of the social experiences of blacks in Detroit explored earlier, this population is faced with a long history of oppression and is poised on the brink of not only an economic revitalization, but also a social and class revitalization. As the UA movement grows and changes, it is essential to recognize the spatial qualities of contemporary

⁴⁷Sugrue, 66.

⁴⁸Sugrue, 67.

⁴⁹Joe T. Darden, “The Residential Segregation of Blacks in Detroit: 1960-1970.” *International Journal of Comparative Studies*, 17:1/2 (1976), p84-91, 85.

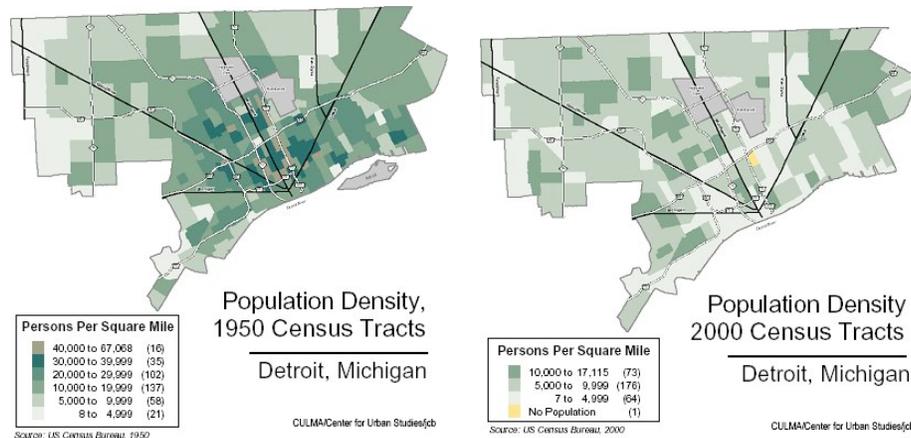
⁵⁰Darden.

⁵¹Darden.

⁵²Darden.

Detroit. Although the statistics tend to paint the growth in African American population as a sort of “take-over” of the city, in reality the roughly 90%-black city population was left to survive the deteriorating hollow core of a city.

And second, the city has experienced increasing vacancy rates for decades, resulting in an immensely underpopulated inner city. A 2009 Detroit Residential Parcel Survey found “that 26% of the city’s residential parcels - or 91,000 lots - are now vacant.”⁵³ Many other surveys have been conducted that arrive at similar statistics - although Detroit is still relatively dense compared to some similar-sized cities, there are sections of the city that are currently over 40% vacant. The myriad effects of land vacancy and urban malaise were explored in the introduction - refer to the maps below for visual representations of land vacancy in Detroit.

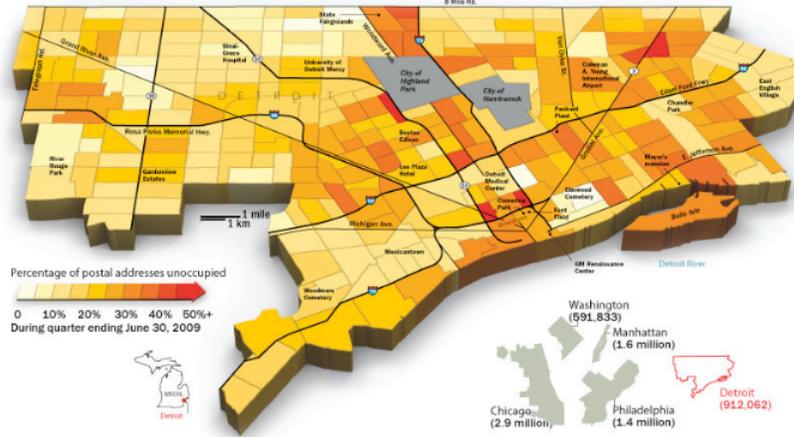


Change in Population Density 1950-2000⁵⁴

⁵³Detroit Residential Parcel Survey, <http://www.detroitparcelsurvey.org/>.

⁵⁴Wayne State University, Center for Urban Studies. Accessed 3/14/11 at http://www.cus.wayne.edu/search_list.aspx?TopicAreaID=&DocTypeID=6&submitlist=Submit.

Sky-high vacancy rates
 Of the almost 400,000 postal addresses in Detroit in 2009, about 20% are unoccupied



Vacancy Distribution in Detroit.⁵⁵

GROWING FOOD IN THE CITY: THE PRODUCTION POTENTIAL OF DETROIT'S VACANT LAND

Figure 1: Distribution of Vacant Parcels Across Detroit. The two subsets show examples of high and low vacancy neighborhoods and the different degrees to which vacant parcels are contiguous.



Detail of Vacancy Distribution in Detroit.⁵⁶

⁵⁵TIME.

⁵⁶Kathryn Colasanti, Charlotte Litjens, and Michael Hamm, "Growing Food in the City:

The politics of labor, flight of industry, and relocation of capital

Detroit's primary labor pool in the postwar era was in the manufacturing sector - in 1947 there were around 330,000 manufacturing employees, and 280,000 production employees.⁵⁷ This massive labor force was split up into two general groups - "primary sector" and "secondary sector" jobs, primary sector being skilled and semiskilled and secondary sector being unskilled, janitorial, or assembly work.⁵⁸ Black workers were disproportionately concentrated in the poor-paying second sector jobs; employers found the growing black population as a consistent source for cheap, replaceable labor. Racial discrimination in Detroit labor went beyond just segregation by job type, however. "Racial ideology and culture, politics, labor market structures, and internal firm dynamics all interacted in shaping patterns of black employment."⁵⁹

Hiring policies were inconsistent across industry, based on the political climate of the time, and received varied influence from unions. The inconsistency in the hiring of blacks - even skilled auto workers - was a source of great frustration, because the extent to which black workers were hired was seemingly arbitrary.⁶⁰ Even within individual firms like GM, there were plants with percentages of black workers that weren't easily explained by skill-set or location.⁶¹ It is clear from examples like this that discrimination in Detroit needs to be understood as historically unique, and cannot be reduced to a single theory.

In the 1950s, although racial inequality in the job market persisted, the overall threat of massive job losses began to take precedent in the public agenda. In the postwar era, industry experienced a jump in capital mobility, leading to a decentralization of production. Advances in communications, transportation, industrial technology, and the acceleration of economic competition led to a massive deindustrialization of many of the large northern cities, especially across the region that came to be known as the Rust Belt.⁶² Starting in the '50s, firms began reducing employment at inner-city plants, replacing employees with increasingly automated technologies, and building new facilities in outlying towns and suburbs, other states, and even other countries.⁶³

The Production Potential of Detroit's Vacant Land," C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University, June 2010.

⁵⁷Sugrue, 144.

⁵⁸Sugrue, 92.

⁵⁹Sugrue, 93.

⁶⁰Sugrue, 96.

⁶¹Sugrue, 97.

⁶²Sugrue, 127.

⁶³Sugrue, 128.

In addition to the leading causes of firms' decisions to relocate and cut jobs, there were other incentives to decentralization. First, it allowed employers to outgrow the social relations of production, and provided them with an opportunity to control increasing labor costs and weaken the trade unions.⁶⁴ In fact, firms began locating farther and farther south, because of the largely anti-union sentiments of communities there. And second, companies complained of a lack of available real estate in the inner city, particularly in Detroit. With more horizontal and automated assembly lines, floor plans were less inclined to multi-story, separated divisions of labor and more demanding of large, single-story buildings where automation engineers could design efficient systems of automated production. Also, more and more workers were commuting to work by private automobile (as of 1955, 71 percent of manufacturing employees commuted by private car) - this required additional space for parking lots, space that simply wasn't available in the city.⁶⁵

The results of deindustrialization were immediate, intense, and pervasive. Between 1947 and 1977, total manufacturing and production jobs went from around 600,000 to 250,000.⁶⁶ The statistics from some areas of the city are staggering - almost hard to conceive. Detroit's East Side, once the epicenter of the auto industry, lost 71,137 jobs in seven years, from 1953 to 1960.⁶⁷ Ten plants closed - some for good, some had relocated to suburbs, and some to other states. The amount of vacant land left behind by the flight of industry is equally shocking: in 1956 over a million square feet of space in factories were vacant; by 1957 the number had jumped to 9.9 million.⁶⁸ The auto industry led the charge out of the inner city: between 1947 and 1958 the Big Three built 25 new plants in the metropolitan Detroit area, all of them in suburban communities, most more than fifteen miles from the center city.⁶⁹ And as these jobs left the city, white workers who could afford to move to suburbs followed, increasing the suburban migration and city vacancy rates.

This of course was not entirely the result of large industry and automobile manufacturers relocating or closing. For as these behemoths of industry left the city, thousands of small metal working, auto parts, and machine shops that relied on the auto industry as clients also followed. These small plants, some

⁶⁴Sugrue, 128.

⁶⁵Sugrue.

⁶⁶Sugrue, 144.

⁶⁷Sugrue, 149.

⁶⁸Sugrue, 148.

⁶⁹Sugrue, 128.

with under fifty workers, employed about 20 percent of the Detroit-area workforce in 1950, which made them the second largest employment category behind automobile production.⁷⁰ Between 1950 and 1956, 55 manufacturing firms had moved from the city to the suburbs.⁷¹ And as Sugrue notes, “it is impossible to calculate the number of metal and auto parts firms that moved outside the Detroit metropolitan area altogether, but undoubtedly many followed auto plants to their new locations in other parts of the country.”⁷²

Such complete relocation of business and capital, which continues today, has had a number of impacts that are extremely relevant to a political economic study of more recent urban agriculture growth. First, the combined loss of business revenue and increased land vacancy has resulted in a constantly dwindling city tax base.⁷³ Income, transaction, corporate, property, and production taxes that the city once received dried up as the city deteriorated. Second, this decrease in available public funds has meant tighter fiscal policy and an austerity in public services and programs. Funding for urban education, antipoverty, and development programs has been cut. Further, public-sector job opportunities have been diminished, and the city no longer has the resources to maintain infrastructure.⁷⁴ Some parts of the city that are very sparsely populated have been removed from waste-removal schedules, mail routes, and infrastructure maintenance altogether. Third, widespread unemployment, especially amongst the black population, has been a dominant problem, even as other cities have begun to recover from the recent economic recession. Although official unemployment statistics for the city hover around 28%, it might be more accurate that close to 40% of the population is not working.

And fourth, as unemployment has grown, spending by urban residents has simultaneously dwindled, leading to an overall exodus of retailers from the city to the suburbs. This flight of business has included grocery chains - today, no major full-service grocery stores operate within the city. The lack of shoppers discourages food store investment in the inner city, and is compounded by a number of other business concerns. Namely, skewed perceptions of market strength, the impact of food stamp cycles, increased business costs (higher rates of theft, higher employee turnover, higher operating costs and taxes), development difficulties (the modern big-box grocers face zoning barriers and other site

⁷⁰Sugrue, 129.

⁷¹Sugrue.

⁷²Sugrue, 129.

⁷³Sugrue, 139, 269-271.

⁷⁴Sugrue.

preparation issues), and inadequate financing all create an investment climate that is unattractive to grocery chains.⁷⁵ As explored in the introduction, such limited access to full-service stores offering healthy food choices has serious public health impacts. A major focal point of urban agriculture projects in Detroit is filling the access gap left behind by retailer flight - which has been shown to be a result of myriad long-term causes.

Portland: Planning and citizen-government cooperation

As will be explored in this section, Portland has a significantly different political economic history than Detroit. Although it has certainly faced its share of racial tension, economic struggles, and population shifts, the city has not had the massive polarizations in vitality that Detroit has experienced. Further, environmental agendas have been stronger in Portland for decades, some of which has to do with political representation, but also with the attitudes of the city's population and the citizens of the Pacific Northwest in general. A cogent planning vision - including the establishment of an urban growth boundary - has led to a relatively dense inner city, with a thriving economy and strong tax base.

As a disclaimer, information for the City of Portland was much harder to assemble than for the City of Detroit. Information on Portland tends to be lumped into the Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area, without much data that explicitly denotes statistics within the city limits. This could be attributed to the historical precedent that the City has traditionally thought in terms of Multnomah County, and the metropolitan area, as opposed to focusing solely on the inner city. The City of Portland is really just one section of the larger Tri-Counties designation, and because of the interconnectedness of these counties both politically and economically, much of the Census data and other mapping initiatives have not focused specifically on Portland.

Along with its economic growth, Portland has seen a general trend of gentrification of minorities, especially in the inner Southeast and Northeast. The city has long been considered overwhelmingly white, and has even been called a haven for skinheads.⁷⁶ That is not to say that Portlanders are intentionally

⁷⁵Detroit Fresh Food Access.

⁷⁶David Jackson, "Skinhead Against Skinhead." 1993, TIME Magazine, accessed 3/15/11 at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,979034,00.html>.

racist - if you've ever been to Portland you know that acceptance of differences is one of the prominent features of the unofficial citizen code. But such a white, and generally affluent, population demographic has important implications for understanding the development of urban agriculture in the city.

World War II industry, marginalization of minorities, and higher land value

Even before the U.S. declared war on Japan following Pearl Harbor, Portland was already a wartime industrial forerunner. In 1940 the Commercial Iron Company was granted the city's first federal shipbuilding contract, and other firms were granted large contracts in 1941.⁷⁷ The city's location at the intersection of the Willamette and Columbia rivers was ideal for shipbuilding and other steel-based industry, and employment skyrocketed in the 1940s. Similar to Detroit's automobile boom, the sudden growth in demand led to a surge of employment opportunities - and workers flooded in from all over the country for jobs in Portland's shipbuilding industry. The leader of the industry, Henry Kaiser, took private initiative on employment and recruited twenty thousand workers out of New York.⁷⁸ Portland was an attractive location for potential employees - the city had been at the helm of the longshoreman strikes of 1934, which resulted in strong worker unions on the waterfront and an even stronger union influence in city politics.

From 1940 to 1944, the greater Portland area's population jumped from 501,000 to 660,000.⁷⁹ As Carl Abbot claims in his book about planning and politics in Portland, "World War II made the quiet town of Portland into a homefront problem with official recognition."⁸⁰ In 1944, at the peak of war employment, the War Manpower Commission counted 140,000 defense workers in Portland, and about 115,000 of them were employed by shipyards. As DeMarco points out, "Portland's past record of opposition to planning came home to haunt it in a big way."⁸¹ The housing crisis brought on by the sudden influx of workers came to a head in 1943, when the Housing Authority of Portland came forward with a statement that the city was unable to cope with the demand

⁷⁷Gordon DeMarco, "A Short History of Portland," Lexicos Publishing, 1990, 132.

⁷⁸DeMarco, 133.

⁷⁹DeMarco, 133.

⁸⁰Carl Abbott, "Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City," University of Nebraska Press, 1983, 125.

⁸¹DeMarco, 133.

for new units, and that although it had begun work on a 5,000 unit project, the real need was closer to 20,000 units. Henry Kaiser's son, Edgar, suggested a privately-financed housing project of 10,000 units in North Portland - this agreement resulted in the creation of Vanport city. The city was erected in just over a year, and housed between 18,000 and 35,000 people at a time. But there were serious problems with this overnight city - shoddy construction, deteriorating infrastructure, and inadequate public services were all characteristic of the quality of life in Vanport.

In 1944, civic leaders in Portland were hit hard with the results of a survey taken amongst the shipyard workers - over 51 percent said they wanted to stay in Portland after the war, and another 33 percent said they would stay if jobs were available.⁸² The strategy of relying on overcrowded temporary housing projects would no longer be adequate to cope with the city's population - Portland would have to move beyond its 40-year opposition to city planning. Later that year, the city brought in Robert Moses, New York City's Park Commissioner and one of the most esteemed planners in the country. He proposed a massive and expensive overhaul of the city's road system, with the goal of increasing the drivability and livability of the inner city.

Portland is historically an overwhelmingly white city - as early as the 1850's the entire state of Oregon banned African American immigration. According to Darrell Millner, a professor of black studies at PSU, this was the result of a ubiquitous attitude in the Pacific Northwest that "If you don't have more than one race, then you don't have any racial problems."⁸³ But with the wartime employment boom, the black population began to swell - it grew from 2,100 in 1940 to 15,000 in 1945.⁸⁴ The majority of these workers were forced into temporary housing projects, and experienced intense hostility. Like in Detroit, they were excluded from unions and were the subject of labor and housing discrimination. In fact, the Housing Authority pursued a conscious policy of segregation from the get-go, resulting in pockets of the city where minorities were intentionally channeled.⁸⁵ For the most part, these neighborhoods were located in the northeast part of the city - according to the Coalition for a Livable Future's (CLF) Equity Atlas, "the region's African American population remains con-

⁸²DeMarco, 136.

⁸³Betsy Hammond, "In a Changing World, Portland Remains Overwhelmingly White," *Oregonian* 2009. Accessed 3/14/11 at http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2009/01/in_a_changing_world_portland_r.html.

⁸⁴DeMarco, 135.

⁸⁵DeMarco.

centrated in North and Northeast Portland (map 2-5). This is consistent with long-standing settlement patterns and historic housing discrimination practices, like redlining, which limited African Americans to this area of Portland.”⁸⁶

“In recent years, the very hot housing market in central Portland, at the heart of the region, has become less and less affordable for lower income residents, including many people of color.”⁸⁷ Higher demand for housing due to low interest rates and in-migration, combined with Portland’s relative affordability compared to other major West Coast property markets at the beginning of the 1990s, drove a substantial increase in housing values in the ‘90s.⁸⁸ The median value for single-family homes increased 75% during the decade, reaching \$189,000 by 2000 (in 2005\$) - and prices have continued to rise rapidly since then: As of 2005, the region’s median home price was \$232,000.⁸⁹ As the authors of the Equity Atlas said, “as property values soar, real estate investors stand to reap large rewards. But low-income residents may be unable to afford the higher price of remaining in their neighborhood. They are, instead, displaced involuntarily. This is an all- too-common result of “successful” neighborhood improvement efforts, despite the fact that improved conditions in low-income communities are essential for equitable and sustainable regions.”⁹⁰

In short, people of color are being displaced by higher housing prices, and are forced to move to areas with cheaper costs - almost exclusively away from the city center. The figures and maps below provide a visual aid for the extent to which housing prices have changed in Portland.

⁸⁶Coalition for a Livable Future, “Equity Atlas,” (2002) Chapter 2, 15.

⁸⁷Equity Atlas, 15.

⁸⁸Equity Atlas, Chapter 3, 33.

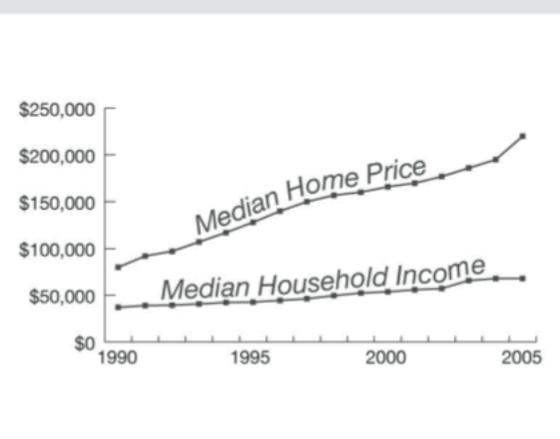
⁸⁹Equity Atlas, Chapter 3, 33.

⁹⁰Equity Atlas, Chapter 3, 37.

FIGURE 3-1. 1990-2005: HOUSING PRICES VS. HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN THE PORTLAND METROPOLITAN REGION*

*Median income based on a family of four.

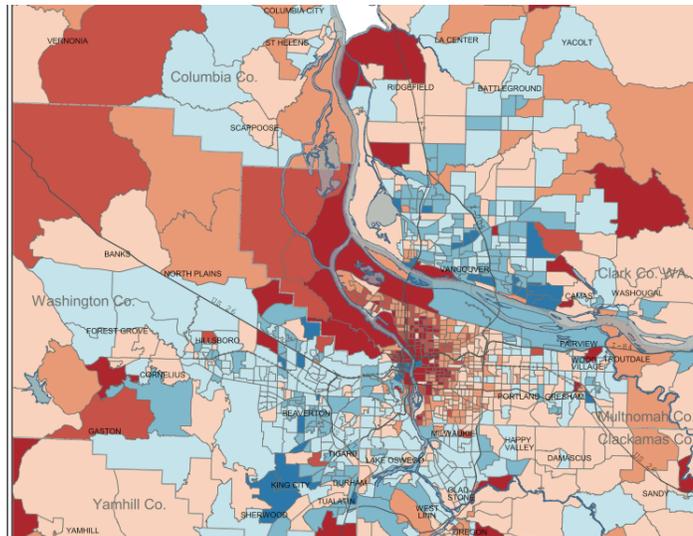
Source: US Dept. of HUD, Regional Multiple Listing Service as of April of each year listed. Figure courtesy of the Community Development Network.



Housing Price vs Household Income⁹¹

Percent Change 1990-2000: Median Value Owner-occupied Single-family Housing*
by Census blockgroup Portland-Vancouver PMSA

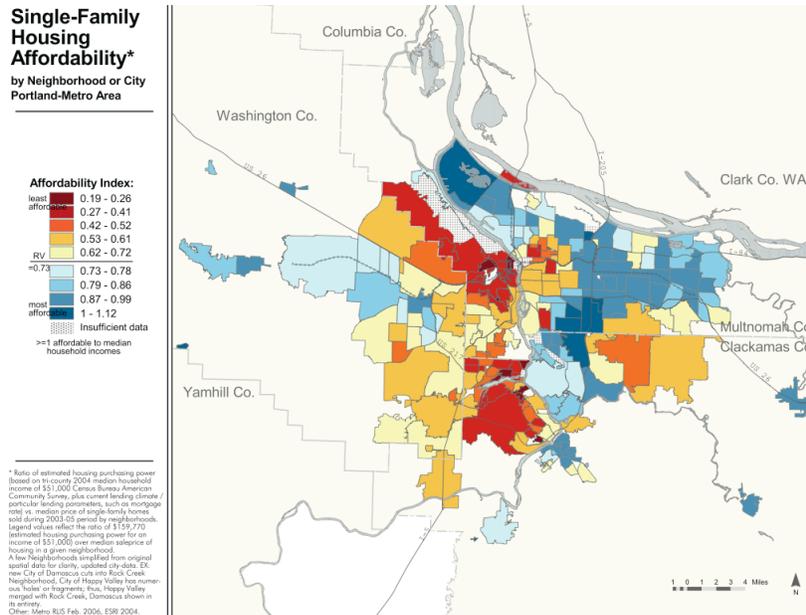
Percent Change:
 <25
 25 - 50
 51 - 75
 +75%
 =RV 76 - 100
 101 - 125
 126 - 150
 >150
 No Data
 RV 1990-\$36,900
 2000-\$170,000
 (in 2005)



Percent Change in Housing Price⁹²

⁹¹Equity Atlas.

⁹²Equity Atlas.



Single-Family Housing Affordability⁹³

These trends in housing prices and an overall increase in demand for property in Portland stand in stark contrast to the Detroit experience. Portland’s inner city is increasingly dense, vibrant, and white - and these demographics are reflected in the driving motivations of those involved with UA, as will be shown in the next section.

Planning policy, the urban growth boundary, public transportation, and the allure of a dense city center

Portland is considered by some in the urban planning industry to be the leader in “smart growth.” The city has a long-standing tradition of land-use foresight, and has had a citywide focus on inner city density, anti-sprawl, and the preservation of the rural periphery of the city. This is, for the most part, embodied by the city’s Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), enacted in 1973 as part of a state-wide governor’s initiative aimed at managing urban growth and conserving land. But the city was not always supportive of a planning agenda.

In the pre-war and WWII era, private industry leaders were influential in stifling planning programs in the City, with the goal of maintaining control of

⁹³Equity Atlas.

land use designations.⁹⁴ In fact, the success of pre-war industry in Portland is partially attributable to the flexibility the City allowed firms in securing land for expansion and defining their own housing parameters for employees.⁹⁵ Business owners were also intent on maintaining control of worker's rights and privileges, stifling union growth with the help of the city. But, as mentioned earlier, the housing crisis of the post-war era sparked a transition to strong city planning that was catalyzed with the election of Mayor Terry Schrunk in 1957. Schrunk created the Portland Development Commission a year later, which began a long-term oriented revitalization effort across the city. However, early on it became clear that the PDC was dominated by businessmen, and many blamed the PDC for "urban removal, not urban renewal."⁹⁶

It wasn't until the 1970s that planning in Portland began to resemble its current composition - this happened with the election of Neil Goldschmidt as Mayor in 1972. Goldschmidt took advantage of the outspoken youth citizenry during the era, and began to implement citizen involvement in city planning. His administration created the Office of Planning and Development (OPD), which oversaw the PDC and Planning Commission. This new agency's objectives were:

- ž "preserving the neighborhoods
- ž creating and maintaining affordable and adequate housing
- ž commitment to public transportation
- ž and sustaining and expanding commercial and industrial districts that would revitalize downtown."⁹⁷

This agency, along with the Portland Improvement Corporation, the governor, and the Citizen Advisory Committee, developed the Downtown Plan in 1972. This truly marked the start of an era of citizen-government collaboration and urban revitalization - the plan involved a host of actions to make the downtown area more livable for workers, shoppers, pedestrians and permanent residents.⁹⁸ The involvement of citizens has been paramount for the Portland government for decades, and has been one of the reasons that UA policy has so quickly been driven into a number of concrete positions in the last few years. Also, the city's focus on developing a diverse public transportation program has been one of

⁹⁴DeMarco.

⁹⁵Abbott.

⁹⁶DeMarco, 145.

⁹⁷DeMarco, 145.

⁹⁸DeMarco, 146.

the reasons it is consistently voted one of the best cities to live in. The TriMet system, including the MAX light rail, has been a high priority in both spending decisions and land use decisions for the City for years. As a result, the city boasts very reliable and widespread public transportation networks - one reason that the city's food insecurity is so low. Because people can easily access public transportation, financial and transportation limitations are not as influential in peoples' food access and daily food decisions.

As mentioned earlier, in 1973 Portland created the UGB - with the primary goals of increasing city density and preserving the periphery. Oregon Metro, the organization responsible for managing the UGB presents this list of benefits:

- ž motivation to develop and redevelop land and buildings in the urban core, helping keep core "downtowns" in business
- ž assurance for businesses and local governments about where to place infrastructure (such as roads and sewers), needed for future development
- ž efficiency for businesses and local governments in terms of how that infrastructure is built. Instead of building roads further and further out as happens in urban "sprawl," money can be spent to make existing roads, transit service and other services more efficient. ⁹⁹

According to the CLF, "Strong population growth in the region, along with land use laws which require that development occurs within designated areas, has resulted in increased housing density within the UGB in the Portland metropolitan area."¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, as will be explored later, the focus on densification has left little land available for UA development, and has also put land stresses on other city departments that in turn forces UA lower in the pecking order.

Connecting the Dots

Where Detroit has experienced racial riots and tensions for decades, Portland has seen a marginalization of minorities and a whiter, more dense city center. The grand ideology of Motown has penetrated to the very roots of Detroit - indeed it is the scaffolding of the city's modern character, the reason for both the resiliency of its citizens and the proliferation of urban malaise and aesthetic

⁹⁹Oregon Metro, "Urban Growth Boundary," <http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=277>

¹⁰⁰Equity Atlas, 13.

blight. Portland, conversely, seems to draw little of its contemporary social energy and composition from its past - its history is shrouded by the dominance of more recent environmental and progressive interpretations of what it means to “build a city.” Portland’s past is much more clear-cut than Detroit’s, and

These differences have resulted in a public character in each city that has strongly influenced the way UA has evolved. Everything from the racial demographics of those involved in the movement, to the sites selected for production and distribution, is affected by the social histories of these two places.

3 Post-scarcity vs new-scarcity: motivations of Portland and Detroit’s UA movements

It should be noted, first and foremost, that this section is in no way attempting to devalue or condemn UA in Portland. In many ways, the success of the movement and its rapid incorporation into city government structure has led the way for other cities around the country. However, in the context of a political economic study of Portland’s UA growth, it is necessary to observe the driving motivations and visions of actors involved from all sides. This project is not a critique of the characters of those involved, or the city in general, but is rather an attempt to expose the differences between the attitudes of farmers, organizers, and politicians in Portland and Detroit. In so doing it has become apparent that the movement in Portland at large is driven by forces that vary greatly from those forces at work in Detroit.

Broadly, the motivations in Portland’s UA reflect a “post-scarcity” response, whereas Detroit’s movement is founded largely on a “new-scarcity.” The term post-scarcity has been used in other contexts to describe a hypothetical society in which goods, services, and information are free, and is generally associated with utopian literature.¹⁰¹ This is not the definition I am applying to this project. Instead, post-scarcity in this case refers primarily to two things: first, that the desire to produce food within the city is not a response to an actual unmet demand for calories; and second, that instead it is a response to a demand for “local” food, environmental agendas, and a desire for a return to a fulfilling agrarian lifestyle. These motivations have resulted in a strong citizen interest in local food and urban food production within the city.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹Wikipedia, “Post-Scarcity,” accessed 3/15/11.

¹⁰²Nina Mukherji, “The Promise and the Pitfalls of Municipal Policy for Urban Agriculture,” Thesis paper for Master of Science at University of Wisconsin, 2009, 36.

Because the UA movement has only come to fruition in the last ten years or so, there is little first-hand data that investigates the individual motivations of farmers in Portland. The best information I have found is from a peer of mine, Sonja Hakanson, who conducted an undergraduate thesis for which she interviewed a number of farmers in Portland.¹⁰³ After organizing their responses, she found four common motivations that resonate clearly with my argument that Portland's UA growth is indeed a post-scarcity response. First and foremost, these new farmers find satisfaction in the challenge of farming. Operating a small farm with few employees is intensely challenging both physically and ideologically, as farmers are forced to make decisions about how exactly they adhere to certain standards or ideals in their practices. Another challenge is maintaining a high standard of quality in their products - in fact this has become a facet of the UA movement both in Portland and in other cities. For, as Tim Donovan said in his essay "Symbolic vs Tangible Action," "That we are producing food in the city can no longer be a selling point. Why we are producing food is a wonderful means for introducing the concept of urban agriculture. But finally, how we are producing food must be the key point of an excellent and lasting urban agriculture."¹⁰⁴ Second, these farmers enjoyed the diversity, or multiplicity, of tasks they performed on a daily basis. Both of these motivating desires can be seen as direct responses to the increasing depersonalization, mechanization, and division of labor in more conventional career paths.¹⁰⁵ It is clear that new farmers in Portland, those individuals pushing the movement along, are in part driven by a desire for reversion to more tangible and manual labor, resulting in a kind of new-renaissance in agriculture.

Third, Portland's urban farmers are driven by environmental action. For some, farming is simply their idea of the most direct way to have an impact. As one farmer mentioned, although at first it didn't seem "activist enough," farming soon became the most meaningful way of affecting others' lives.¹⁰⁶ UA in Portland is an appendage of the broader environmental urban renewal force at work, and serves as a means of reconnecting the urban setting with pastoral narratives. In this sense, the movement also aligns with broader "sustainability" ideologies, forwarding Portland's aversion towards the industrial food complex

¹⁰³Sonja Hakanson, "It's more just like living: small sustainable farming in Portland, Oregon and the path to unalienated labor," Lewis & Clark College Undergraduate Thesis, 2011.

¹⁰⁴Running With Pitchforks, Quarterly Zine, Issue 1, 2011, 11.

¹⁰⁵see Richard Sennett, "The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism," Norton 1998. , and Jeremy Rifkin, "The End of Work," Tarcher/Putnam 1996. , amongst others.

¹⁰⁶Hakanson.

and increasing the extent to which the city is pursuing its own means of growing food. Unfortunately, as will be shown in the following section, the city simply does not have room to expand production in a way that could seriously increase the city's self-sufficiency.

And fourth, Portland's farmers find their jobs to be a fulfilling occupation that affords them the freedom of working by their own rules. One farmer said, "There is no wrong in growing food - at a basic level, it is a worthwhile thing to do."¹⁰⁷ In a recently published zine called "Running with Pitchforks," Conner Voss from Diggin' Roots Farm said, "[I farm] because I couldn't really think of anything else that would be as fulfilling and creative. I think it's the perfect blending of lifestyle and livelihood. I want to strive to build a life that isn't so dependent on third party services. I like the idea of an integrated lifestyle where I am responsible for some of my own sustenance and survival. I think that food production is a really amazing and incredibly exciting and fulfilling way to do that."¹⁰⁸ Sarah Brown, his partner at Diggin' Roots, stated that she farms because, "Relying on our system as it stands seems a bit....irresponsible... I feel like we need to do something productive and positive to move the system in a direction that I can feel good about, because it's essential to all our lives."¹⁰⁹

As should be clear based on the responses from Portland's farmers, "The city's increasing involvement in urban agriculture seems to be motivated by a desire to expand the consumption of local food and to afford recreation rather than to improve troubled neighborhoods or create jobs."¹¹⁰ These motivations are clearly reflected in the steps the City has taken to support and promote UA in recent history, as will be explored in depth in the next section. The scale at which farms in Portland are operating, as well as the networks of distribution they explore,¹¹¹ fail to acknowledge much of the potential UA has to create jobs, alleviate food insecurity, or repurpose land. To return to Tim Donovan's point that *how* we are producing food is important - in the post-scarcity context this refers to soil quality, ecological impact, quality of produce, etc. But there are other important questions to ask about how we produce food in the city: how does it employ people?; how does it involve the community?; how does it directly benefit the most food insecure people first, and locavores later? As with much

¹⁰⁷Hakanson.

¹⁰⁸Running With Pitchforks, 49.

¹⁰⁹Running With Pitchforks, 49.

¹¹⁰Mukherji, 95.

¹¹¹see Hakanson. The nine farmers interviewed all sell their produce directly to restaurants, at farmers markets (often considered prohibitively expensive), or through CSA models.

of the UA in Portland, these questions are rarely addressed first, and certainly are not prioritized in the City's strategies for encouraging UA.

As an interesting note, all nine of the farmers Sonja Hakanson interviewed were white, middle-class white males in their mid-twenties and early-thirties. This sample might not seem representative - but in Portland, this demographic is quickly becoming the driving force behind UA. Almost all these farmers held degrees from universities, many of them prestigious liberal arts colleges. This suggests that the current upswing in interest in UA in Portland is being fueled not by an increased need for food access, but rather by a dissatisfaction with more conventional career paths for college graduates, and a desire to revert back to manual labor as a pursuit of self-fulfillment.

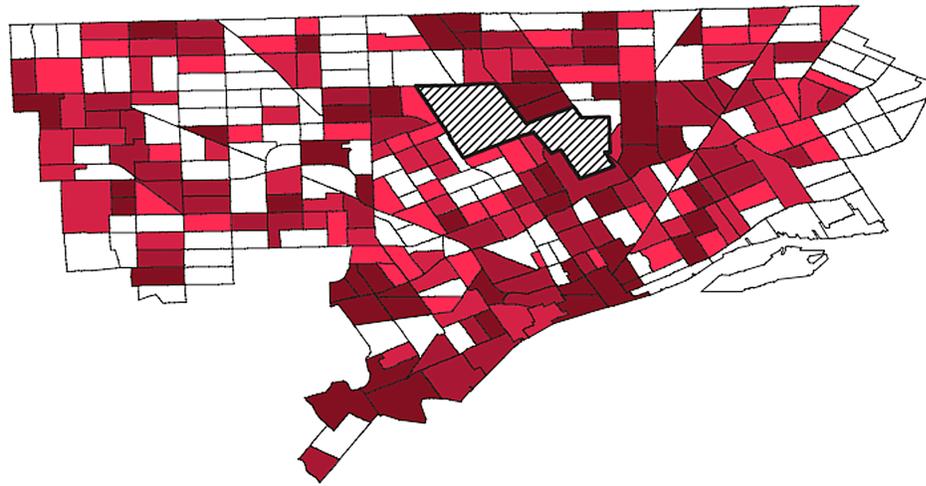
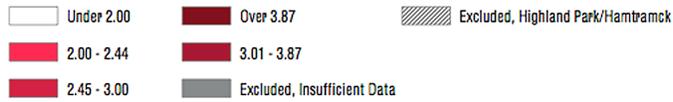
New-scarcity, for this paper, reflects a crisis of access to healthy foods and a dependence on fringe retailers¹¹² that affects the majority of the population in the city. Over 550,000 of Detroit's residents are considered food insecure, or live in statistical food deserts.¹¹³ As explored in the introduction, such intense imbalance in food access has serious negative diet-related health effects, and also creates social stigmas of helplessness because citizens feel as though they have no agency in attracting more healthy food retail to the inner city. New-scarcity also refers to a UA response aimed at widespread unemployment and land vacancy - these factors have left the city coffers dry, and resulted in a downward spiral of deterioration in public services, infrastructure maintenance, and city development. The urban agriculture movement here is not principally aimed at addressing environmental values of localism, distrust of the industrial agricultural complex, or fulfilling a social duty to be a conscious consumer. Although these may be facets of some organizations, UA in Detroit is driven by two motivations: meeting the overlooked food needs of a half million residents; and reversing the urban blight that has plagued the city's economy, aesthetic, and communities for decades by revitalizing community and empowering black citizens. As Malik Yakini said, "Even if the gardening movement had no economic viability, just the fact that it's bringing people together for the common good is very significant...Producing even some of our own food restores a sense of power, a sense that we can shape our own destiny."¹¹⁴

¹¹²Defined in as: Gas stations, liquor stores, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies, convenience stores, and other venues that specialize not in the sale of healthy foods but in the sale of 1) alcohol, 2) tobacco, 3) lottery tickets, and/or 4) a comparatively small selection of prepackaged and canned food products high in salt, fat, and sugar. See Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group, "Detroit Food Desert Report," 2007.

¹¹³Detroit Food Desert Report, 4.

¹¹⁴Philpott.

Map 1: Detroit Out-of-Balance Census Tracts *Food Balance Scores of 2 or More by Range*



Detroit Food Balance Census Tracts¹¹⁵

The map above shows the food balance of census tracts in Detroit. The City has been engaged with challenges of food security for years, including adopting a Policy on Food Security in 2008, which addressed:

- ž current access to quality food
- ž hunger and malnutrition
- ž the impacts and effects of inadequate diets
- ž citizen education and food literacy
- ž economic injustice within food systems
- ž urban agriculture
- ž the role of schools and other public institutions

¹¹⁵Detroit Food Access Report. For this study, food balance scores were calculated by dividing distance to a mainstream food venue (read, grocer) by the distance to a fringe food location. Scores over two are out-of-balance, meaning residents travel at least twice as far to reach mainstream venues as they do to reach a fringe location.

ž and emergency response.¹¹⁶

Clearly, UA is just one approach the City is pursuing as a means of addressing food insecurity - but there are currently policy audit proposals underway to drive UA to the forefront of Detroit's approach to food insecurity. The Detroit Works Project (DWP) prepared a policy audit earlier this year (it actually came out while this paper was being written), in which it identified a number of key issues associated with urban agriculture and food security. These were:

- ž Access to healthy food options, education, and public health implications
- ž Supporting existing gardening efforts and related initiatives that bring healthful options to residents
- ž Land use issues and implications of large-scale farming
- ž Benefits of local foods, including supporting the regional economy, reduced transportation costs, and associated implications of shipping food products.¹¹⁷

Especially important to this report was the issue of access, which is a driving concern underlying food insecurity issues. It is important to understand the different ways in which access can be defined and measured:

- ž physical access to a store or other source of food, either on foot or by a convenient mode of transportation
- ž financial access, or whether the food is affordable
- ž nutritional access, or whether enough food, and enough types of food, are available to compose a healthy, balanced diet
- ž cultural access, or whether the food is familiar and whether the consumer knows how to prepare it.¹¹⁸

This report was developed with the input of the majority of the major UA organizations, projects, and communities, in the effort to create a representative audit for the city's proposed UA policy. It should be seen as relatively representative - or about as representative as such a report can get. In fact, the DWP

¹¹⁶The Detroit Works Project, "Phase One: Research and Priorities, Urban Agriculture + Food Security, Audit," (original December 17th 2010, audit April 2011), <http://detroitworksproject.com/get-involved/policy-audits/>, 1.3.2.

¹¹⁷Detroit Works Project, 1.3.3.

¹¹⁸Detroit Works Project, 1.3.3.

chose to title the audit “Urban agriculture and Food Security” because it was consistently regarded as the most important relationship in building Detroit’s UA policy and networks. The development of UA policy in this direction is a clear indicator that addressing food insecurity is the leading motivation for the majority of UA advocates and organizations in Detroit. It is encouraging that this vision is being promoted on the level of city-wide UA policy proposals - it shows that the City is on the right track.

The Garden Resource Program Collaborative (GRP) is one of Detroit’s most extensive existing UA organizations, responsible for “provides support to more than 875 urban gardens and farms in Detroit, Highland Park, and Hamtramck.” The organization was involved with the development of the DWP audit report.¹¹⁹ Part of their mission statement reads, “[We] provide thousands of pounds of fresh, nutritious produce for Detroit families and improve our communities by connecting neighbors, providing an attractive alternative to trash-strewn vacant lots, improving property values, and reducing crime.”¹²⁰ These final three goals are reflective of the other driving motivation of organizations in Detroit, which is the redevelopment and reuse of vacant properties.

According to Yakini, “Our primary work is urban agriculture, urban growing in the city of Detroit. It’s a small-scale farm. We mainly sell the food, although we give some away to people in the immediate neighborhood. We’re trying to create jobs as a result of urban agriculture.”¹²¹ He goes on to say, “Given the vast number of vacant lots in Detroit, we’re creating a model of how we can utilize that space. We’re trying to create greater access to fresh produce, generate income and create jobs. To change the community’s vision of what a city is and how space is used in a city.”¹²² Yakini is a founder of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), a project that aims to explore the ways in which the black community can mobilize in a direction of putting unused and underutilized land to productive use.

Yakini has also spoken to the importance of black control over the means of production, calling the DBCFSN and some other UA organizations essentially black self-determinationist. Remarking that any plans must benefit the major-

¹¹⁹ Garden Resource Program Collaborative, http://www.detroitagriculture.org/GRP_Website/Home.html.

¹²⁰Garden Resource Program.

¹²¹Larry Gabriel, “Life in the Desert,” Metro Times (9/26/2007), <http://www2.metrotimes.com/editorial/story.asp?id=11830>.

¹²²Gabriel.

ity population, he notes that Detroit is 85-90% black. During an interview with Democracy Now, he says, “We’re not interested in plans that come in, where the corporate sector comes in and only uses the majority population as workers. We’re concerned with control and ownership...by African Americans, where we are able to control the revenue generated.”¹²³ This is reflective of the racial background of Detroit residents, who have experienced oppression in employment and politics for decades. The underpinning idea of control is prevalent beyond black self-determinationist UA proponents - there is substantial city-wide resentment for some proposals for large-scale single-owner projects. These types of farms would fail to achieve visions of community cohesion and would not retain revenue within the smaller networks of farms. And further, according to the DWP, large-scale farming has raised a variety of other concerns:

- ž Will large-scale farming will compete with existing small- scale gardens?
- ž Will a large-scale farming effort be a good neighbor? What will it look like, and what nuisances will it cause?
- ž Will large-scale efforts use fertilizers and other chemicals that might reduce air and water quality?
- ž Should so much land be dedicated to farms as a long-term use? What if the farms are not productive or feasible?¹²⁴

Based on interviews with Malik Yakini, the language of the leading UA organizations in Detroit, and the foci of the DWP’s policy audit, it is clear that the driving motivations of actors in UA in Detroit are addressing food insecurity and repurposing vacant land for productive uses in order to create jobs, stimulate the local food economy, and address urban malaise. These visions are very different from those most prevalent in Portland’s UA movement. As such, the next section will explore the ways in which Portland’s support of UA reflects the motivations of its proponents, and how Detroit’s pursuit of municipal support should differ in a number of ways.

¹²³Democracy Now, “Detroit Urban Agriculture Movement Looks to Reclaim Motor City,” (6/24/2010), http://www.democracynow.org/2010/6/24/detroit_urban_agriculture_movement_looks_to.

¹²⁴Detroit Works Project, 4.4.

4 Gardeners for Office: suggestions for Detroit's pursuit of city support for UA in comparison with Portland's approach

"Generally, urban agriculture suffers from a combination of political restraints, that include (Van den Berg & De Zeeuw 1998): restrictive urban policy, laws and regulations (due to the mainly illegal status of urban agriculture); uncertainty about property rights of land; lack of supportive services; unfeasible implementation of environmental technologies; and lack of organisation and representation of urban farmers." ¹²⁵ Also, the start-up costs of even a small farm can be prohibitive, and include a long list of expenses, from purchasing land to soil remediation. If UA is to grow into a serious capital-generating, job-creating, food-security-alleviating movement in Detroit, it will need City support.

This section outlines what the City of Portland has already done to support UA. There is a long-standing tradition of urban food production and municipal involvement in Portland, dating back to the 1970s. But because of a number of ideological, spacial, and political restraints, the City has taken a very specific course in supporting UA. After outlining the steps Portland has taken, this section will close with a discussion of the City of Detroit's potential, and what it should and should not apply from Portland's experience.

The City of Portland's approach to UA and its shortcomings

The City of Portland has taken a number of steps to address many of these issues, and has been largely successful in promoting UA in the areas it sees appropriate and feasible. The first part of this section will lay out Portland's approach to city-supported UA, as well as the shortcomings of this approach and what might be changed. This will then be followed by a brief look at UA in Detroit's city government, and

The City of Portland has taken a clear and well coordinated approach to encouraging and supporting UA, at first through the Community Gardens program of the Department of Parks and Recreation, and more recently through a number of institutions and programs. There have been three important aspects of city involvement that have contributed to the impressive growth of UA in

¹²⁵Tjeerd Deelstra and Herbert Girardet, "Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Cities." Thematic Paper, Leusden: Resource Center on Urban Agriculture and Forestry.

recent years. These are favorable zoning, the development of institutions and programs designed specifically for food policy and urban food production, and the establishment of a number of planning reports and test projects.¹²⁶ These initiatives generally reflect the political economic and social climate of present-day Portland, as well as the “weak mayor” government structure, in which city council members have a substantial amount of power. There are, however, some shortcomings in these three city initiatives (and other government branches) that leave the future of UA questionable.

Zoning

Community gardens and private gardens are considered permitted uses in any zones, and there are no restrictions in place to prevent home gardening in a single-family residential district.¹²⁷ Agriculture, according to the zoning code, is given a broad definition that includes activities that raise, produce, or keep plants or animals. Examples of this range from raising fowl or other animals, dairy farms and farming to foresting and wholesale plant nurseries.¹²⁸ Agriculture, which is considered its own use category, is allowed in the Residential Farm/Forest district, in the lowest-density single dwelling district, and industrial districts. However, it is forbidden in higher-density residential districts and all other commercial districts.¹²⁹

Beyond the Agriculture use category, there is also a Parks and Open Areas use area that is defined as “land focusing on natural areas, large areas consisting mostly of vegetative landscaping or outdoor recreation, community gardens or public squares.”¹³⁰ Basically, this can be understood to mean that parks are viable locations for growing food - and these use areas are mostly located in commercial, industrial, and high-density multi-residence districts.¹³¹ There is also an Open Space district, in which agriculture is a permitted use and Parks and Open Areas use is limited/conditional. Clearly, the city has integrated the demand for urban food production into the legal framework of the city in order to provide opportunities in a variety of districts and use areas. The zoning code also explicitly allows for farmers’ markets and other types of outdoor produce vendors - but only seasonally. This will be explored later.

¹²⁶Mukherji.

¹²⁷id, 41.

¹²⁸Portland Zoning Code, Section 33.920.500.

¹²⁹Portland Zoning Code, Chapters 33.100-140.

¹³⁰Portland Zoning Code, Section 33.920.460.

¹³¹Portland Zoning Code, Section 33.110.235.

Institutions and Programs

The Community Gardens program has been active since 1975, and is now responsible for 32 gardens around the city.¹³² These gardens are started in neighborhoods where there is a demand for them, but often supply does not meet demand. The food produced cannot be sold, but some is given to charities, and community members involved with each location receive benefits from the production. Even though this program is the longest standing UA initiative in the city, it has a number of shortcomings that are very important when considering possible approaches for Detroit.

Almost all the other city programs have sprouted since 2000. In 2002, the Portland Multnomah County Food Policy Council was created. According to the statement of purpose from the website, “The Food Policy Council is a citizen-based advisory council to the City of Portland and Multnomah County. The Council brings citizens and professionals together from the region to address issues regarding food access, land use planning issues, local food purchasing plans and many other policy initiatives in the current regional food system.”¹³³ In 2005, the FPC and City Council organized a group of students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program at PSU to investigate Portland’s potential for UA.¹³⁴ They produced a series of reports, Diggable City, which will be explored in the next section.

In 2005 the Bureau of Sustainability created a full time position for a staff member to run food policy and programs. This man is Steve Cohen, locally considered one of the most knowledgeable and approachable figures in the city government. He investigates new areas where UA projects might be possible, runs training programs for gardeners, and develops relationships with organizations and non-profits that pursue food-related projects.¹³⁵ One of his focuses has been on encouraging home gardening and new techniques in gardening, including the SPIN technique, which enables intensive gardening on small plots.¹³⁶ He directs much of his energy towards education programs aimed at increasing the knowledge base of citizens, in order to indirectly increase the extent to which private property in Portland is farmed.

¹³²Mukherji, 47.

¹³³Portland Multnomah Food Policy Council, accessed 3/17/11 at <http://www.portlandonline.com/bps/index.cfm?c=42290>.

¹³⁴Mukherji, 49.

¹³⁵Mukherji, 48.

¹³⁶Mukherji.

Planning, Reports, and Projects

The most exhaustive, well-read, and influential publication by the City regarding UA was the Diggable City report. The PSU students focused on assembling an inventory of city-owned land that might be appropriate for urban agriculture, conducted profiles of a number of lots, analyzed UA policy in other cities, and made policy recommendations for Portland.¹³⁷ This report was then presented to the city, and several citizen taskforces were put in action to develop the recommendations. Although the report originally found over 400 vacant sites suitable for UA, only 12 were found to be free from pre-existing development plans.¹³⁸ Since then none of these possible plots have been pursued, perhaps due to the lack of funding.

The city also commissioned a “Growing Portland Farmers’ Markets” report in 2008 in order to assess “the impact of existing farmers’ markets and offering recommendations for the Food Policy Council.”¹³⁹ The Climate Action Plan (CAP) also included suggestions centered around UA - two of the five main points relate to it. The first suggests that green-collar jobs are essential to the regional economy, including sustainable food and waste reuse. The second suggests that “food and agriculture are central to the economic and cultural vitality of the community, with productive backyard and community gardens and thriving farmers’ markets.”¹⁴⁰ There is also a section in the CAP on food and agriculture, which proposes joint city-county support of a strong local food system, including policy direction and resources to increase percentages of home-grown and local food. This is followed by suggestions for increased farmers’ markets and CSA, more educational opportunities, more encouragement for the use of public and private land and rooftops for growing food, and the creation of over 1,000 new community garden plots.¹⁴¹

Another publication that recently came out was the FPC’s Food Action Plan (FAP) 2010. This report highlighted the need for increased financial backing to jumpstart UA projects, and also focused on prioritizing higher-density locations for projects. Mostly however, the FAP is a road map for a 15-year process intended on increasing the local and regional food economy, and is focused on

¹³⁷Diggable City Final Report (2005), accessed 3/10/11 at http://www.diggablecity.org/dcp_finalreport_PSU.pdf.

¹³⁸Mukherji, 49.

¹³⁹Mukherji, 50.

¹⁴⁰City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainable Development, Climate Action Plan, 2009, 7.

¹⁴¹Climate Action Plan, 14-15.

the county scale, not the inner city. There are some great ideas in this report, like increasing the acreage of urban food producing land through a number of avenues, establishing an agriculture land trust to permanently dedicate urban plots to farming, and developing funding opportunities for urban food production. There are also some interesting social initiatives, like identifying and mapping the most food-insecure areas and directing attention towards them. But mostly, it is a lot of talk and very little action - and definitely not the kind of action Detroit needs. The next section will explore why this is important.

Portland has also implemented a few test projects to explore the capacity of some of its branches and reports. Most noteworthy is Zenger Farm, which is a six-acre farm right on the UGB that runs youth programs, immigrant training programs, and produces food for a year-round CSA. The project developed as part of a long term Bureau of Environmental Services initiative to preserve the Johnson Creek watershed and use the acreage as a storm water collection point.¹⁴² In 1995 a farmer leased the land from the BES, began farming it, and in 1999 signed a 50-year lease with the BES with a master plan focused on education, preservation, and environmental partnerships.¹⁴³ Steve Cohen also started a garden at the City Hall, called the Better Together Garden, in 2009. And finally, the city supports Growing Gardens, a non-profit that installs gardens for low-income families.¹⁴⁴

Shortcomings

There are a number of shortcomings of the City of Portland's overall approach, and some aspects that, while successfully in Portland, have no applicability in Detroit. First, it is clear that the approach taken to supporting UA in Portland is reflective of the history of the city - long-term vision, with a focus on holistic approaches that are hashed out by report after report until they are all-inclusive. This has worked well here, because Portlanders are receptive to environmental stewardship and community values, and also because the demand for urban food production is not borne out of a tangible shortage of healthy food. This was mentioned in section three, but cannot be stressed enough. Although there are certainly pockets of out-of-balance food access, which must be addressed, the city seems to have focused its energy at promoting education and home gardening, rather than developing strong legal frameworks for land acquisition,

¹⁴²Zenger Farm, About the Farm, <http://www.zengerfarm.org/about-the-farm>.

¹⁴³Zenger Farm..

¹⁴⁴Mukherji, 53.

utility and tax subsidies, and long-term trusts.

This is not inherently a bad thing. Obviously, education programs and self-run private gardens are invaluable to increasing urban food dependence. But the social strata that need the most food production development is not in a position to invest the time, energy, and finances into building their own gardens. Further, home gardens rarely produce enough food to substantially alleviate access stresses. And if a home garden were large enough and managed well enough to produce a bounty of food, it would require the time commitment of a full-time job, a job with no income, benefits, or upward mobility. Also, even the most recent report on food policy, the Food Action Plan (published December 2010) suggested that efforts be directed at the most dense areas of the city, especially downtown - but these are by no means the areas most appropriate for expanding UA. This seems to exhibit the city's obsession with proximity - better to grow a small fraction of our food on our rooftops downtown than a significant portion of our food in the less-dense southeast.

The City's lack of focus on land acquisition is frustrating, but is very obviously a result of the overall planning approach of the last few decades, and not necessarily an imperfection of UA policy. With the UGB, the inner city receives more densification, reducing available land, increasing demands for other branches of the government like Parks and Recreation and Water Services, and increasing the demand for commercial land. All of this serves to take farmable land away from UA, and also sinks urban food production lower on the list of city priorities below a host of necessary infrastructural land needs. In short, there just isn't nearly enough land in the city of Portland to come anywhere close to meeting the demand for urban food production. Nor is there enough land to begin thinking about UA in Portland as more than just a series of community and home gardens, loosely connected by a network of education and minimal support systems. It will never be a strong entrepreneurial economy, nor will it ever expand into more commercial systems with distribution and marketing networks - there just simply is not space.

And finally, the city has shown no assertive attempts to leverage cheaper land, subsidized utility costs (Zenger Farm spends over \$2,000 a year on water, and that is a pilot project for the BES), or reduced taxes on property, production, or sales. Other cities, like Chicago and Cleveland, have explored possible avenues for subsidizing UA, such as specific tax-relieved zoning designations and prioritized land use zones. These have been relatively successful, and will be one of my suggestions for the City of Detroit. In "Running with Pitchforks,"

Jill Kuehler, the Executive Director at Zenger Farm, suggests, “while the city is on the right track, it has invested more time and energy on planning than on acting, particularly when it comes to making land available for gardening.”¹⁴⁵

What can Detroit learn? What should it forget?

The City of Portland’s overall approach to UA has been a long-term and somewhat timid effort to encourage growing food in the city where it can be squeezed in without disrupting other planning initiatives and the prioritization of densification. It has never been an effort to transform the urban landscape, to redesign the production potential of the city or to use urban agriculture as a means of growing the local economy or taking major steps towards food security. Detroit, conversely, is in a unique position - in a city with shrinking population, growing land availability with cheap prices, and a relocation initiative already begun by the City, urban agriculture stands to be an answer to a host of demanding questions that residents and politicians alike are struggling to answer.

To refer to the third section of this paper, there are two main driving motivations behind UA in Detroit: the need to meet a real scarcity of healthy food and feed a half-million food-insecure residents; and the re-purposing of vacant land in an effort to eradicate the aesthetic malaise of the city, build community, and work towards food independence and ownership of production. There are of course a host of other implications in developing a vision of UA in Detroit, but it seems that these two objectives are consistently important across sources. These values must be reflected in the approach the City of Detroit takes - if they are lost then the movement is sure to also lose its vitality and purpose. The City has already taken steps towards developing a concrete urban agriculture policy and progressive zoning code, mostly through the creation of the Urban Agriculture Workgroup (UAW).¹⁴⁶ The UAW has been working on a policy draft for the last year or so, and some of my suggestions are echoed in their proposal, while some are not. The UAW has, however, developed a cohesive vision that the City has for UA, including:

ž “Provide access for community residents to fresh, chemical-free food for all income levels.

¹⁴⁵Mukherji, 50.

¹⁴⁶City of Detroit City Planning Commission, “Urban Agriculture Policy for the City of Detroit (Status update)”, Letter to the City Council, March 18 2010.

- ž Create opportunities for community ownership of land and creation of entrepreneurial cooperatives.
- ž Develop the local economy and promote opportunities for ownership by community residents in all aspects of the local food system (production, processing, and distribution).
- ž Create jobs for community residents in cultivation, processing and distribution of food.
- ž Provide economic opportunities for community residents...
- ž Stabilize neighborhoods and enhance community cohesions...
- ž Provide a productive use of vacant land.”¹⁴⁷

This collective set of visions will be important in considering the strategies that the city can and should take to support UA. Also, there is some debate about the order in which these goals are presented, with some communities stressing the need for jobs, and others stressing the need for healthy food. How can the city respect the priorities of different citizen groups while still making tangible progress towards a UA policy?

Quickly, a comparison is in order. The Diggable City report found about 400 city-owned vacant properties in Portland, of which 12 were appropriate and available for farming. In the 2010 report conducted by the C.S. Mott Group at MSU, researchers found 31,123 city-owned vacant properties - all of which were appropriate for farming.¹⁴⁸ Let that sink in, for a minute or two. Portland has 1.2% of Detroit’s city-owned capacity. And the C.S. Mott report was very conservatively conducted, excluding land around hospitals, jails, right-of-way areas, and other areas that could be used for food production.¹⁴⁹ Less conservative reports, which include parcels with structures on them, post-industrial parcels in need of extensive remediation, and non-city owned parcels, tally over 100,000.¹⁵⁰ The more conservative estimate totals around 7.6 square miles, or 4,848 acres - according to the C.S. Mott report, if the land was put to high-productivity biointensive uses, the city could produce 76% of its own vegetables, and 42% of its own food.¹⁵¹ To put it simply, the city of Detroit has incredible production

¹⁴⁷Urban Agriculture Policy for the City of Detroit, 6.

¹⁴⁸Diggable City; C.S. Mott Group, 3.

¹⁴⁹C.S. Mott Group, 3.

¹⁵⁰“Detroit looks at downsizing to save city,” The Washington Times (March 6, 2010), <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/mar/09/detroit-looks-at-downsizing-to-save-city/?page=all#pagebreak>.

¹⁵¹C.S. Mott Group, 7.

potential, but currently lacks the support and structure of municipal policy to actualize this potential.

What does this mean? Broadly, it means that the City of Detroit should take the opposite approach of Portland. Education programs and home-garden support systems should not be forgotten, of course. But the city should direct most of its energy towards supporting the acquisition, preparation, and subsidization of vacant land for the sole purpose of urban agriculture. Detroit, more than any other city in which UA is burgeoning, has the potential to truly convert a barren cityscape into a viable urban agrarian economy - but it will not be successful in doing so without the full support and promotion of the municipality. Further, these goals should be clearly integrated into existing plans for consolidation of the remaining population into more dense locations - these relocation projects are primarily prompted by one thing: shortage of the city tax base, which results in a lack of funding for infrastructure maintenance and public services. As Mayor Bing said in regards to lack of funding for public services, "People will say, 'Well, why not me?' And I'm saying, we don't have the money to do that."¹⁵² But what will become of the land that is vacated as families are moved into the better maintained, more dense areas of the city? This paper suggests that UA should be the principal suggested use, because it offers the most distinct and immediate social, economic, and environmental benefits.

City support will need to come in a number of forms. The most important thing the City can do immediately is to begin promoting urban agriculture as a strong economic option for the broader Revitalization effort. There has been some hesitation from the Mayor's office to wholeheartedly endorse UA as a viable means of bringing economic vitality back to the city. Although Mayor Bing has pledged his "support" for UA organizations and farmers in their pursuit of growth,¹⁵³ it is essential that he take a stronger position on the matter in order to disseminate support accross city offices. Where the City of Portland has generally touted UA as recreationally beneficial, and in line with the environmental aesthetics and attitudes of the city, Detroit must go way beyond this. UA needs to become the cornerstone of the revitalization effort - and there is good reason why it should. It must be obvious by now that the city has been unable to retain full service grocery chains - they have been

¹⁵²Monica Davey, "The Odd Challenge for Detroit Planners," New York Times, accessed 4/5/11 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/06/us/06detroit.html?pagewanted=1&hp>.

¹⁵³City Farmer, "Detroit Mayor Dave Bing offers support to urban farmers." Accessed 3/15/11 at <http://www.cityfarmer.info/2010/05/25/detroit-mayor-dave-bing-offers-support-to-urban-farmers>.

relocating steadily over the last decade and have now entirely vacated the inner city. As mentioned earlier, 550,000 citizens have insufficient access to healthy food - the debate on urban agriculture in Detroit needn't primarily be focused around its environmental, ethical, or economic impact at this point. Addressing food access concretely is quickly becoming imperative for the City if it wants to retain its population and adequately feed its citizens - UA can and should be seen as one of the strongest options for addressing what has become a public health crisis. And this is only one facet of a multi-sided movement - the UAW visions listed above outline the other important impacts a strong UA policy would have on the city.

Beyond the creation and implementation of an official City Urban Agriculture policy code, there are number of more specific suggestions that might be included in the policy, or might be pursued separately. First, the city should establish an Urban Agriculture branch of the Detroit Land Bank Authority devoted to selecting the vacant parcels most readily convertible to farming. This office would be able to prioritize plots in terms of costs of preparation (soil remediation, impermeable surface removal, etc), each plot's location in terms of proximity to well maintained infrastructure and distribution networks, and the potential for each plot to be incorporated or combined with adjacent plots for larger projects. Although UA advocates and government officials have observed that the Detroit Land Bank Authority is potentially a powerful tool, it has yet to be concretized into an office through which UA can be effectively supported. By developing a UA branch, the City would effectively utilize the Land Bank's potential to obtain, prepare, and lease or sell properties to urban farmers and projects.

Second, this proposed UA branch would be made more effective with the development of the Detroit zoning ordinance in a number of directions. Cleveland, Ohio took a big step last year when they created an Urban Garden District, a specific zoning category that deemed agricultural uses the primary use designation. Detroit will need to come up with some similar ordinance - as the "relocation" of Detroit's residents continues, this will become more pertinent, as land will be opening up for re-zoning and it will be essential to have some sort of agriculture district category to capture it. Currently, much of this land is slated for redevelopment - and many see a large-scale land buy-up to be the only way to raise land prices and keep the city afloat. As pressures mount from all directions, the City will be put in a difficult position when redesignating land uses - it is vital that UA zoning district be a serious consideration. Be-

yond the creation of such a category, the City can support UA via zoning in other ways as well. It can adjust existing land uses to be more inclusive of farming practices. It can also expand the extent to which citizens are allowed to erect gardening structures, and the number of animals (chickens, goats, pigs, bees, etc) one family can keep within city limits. And finally, based on research done by the C.S. Mott group and the Detroit Works Project, the City should identify criteria for prioritizing district sizes based on differences in scale-based production potential.¹⁵⁴

Third, the Detroit Food Policy Council should be expanded to include members of the City Council, and representatives from other offices, in order to give the FPC more power in following through on recommendations. Clearly, it is essential to the formation of UA policy and support in Detroit that the voices of the citizens and advocates be incorporated into any government decisions - but such a Council has little weight in truly affecting decisions made at higher municipal levels. Even with the adoption of the Policy on Food Security in 2008, the Food Policy Council has not evolved into an influential force in city politics. By increasing the importance of this group, UA would be made more visible as a means of addressing food insecurity.

Fourth, the City must develop a policy for providing certain types of subsidies to urban agriculture projects. Where the City of Portland has failed to make operating costs of small urban farms cheaper, Detroit has the chance to make UA a lucrative business and employment opportunity by incentivizing start-ups. Although the City has prioritized finding more rent-generating uses for vacant land, and their tax base is low as it is, if the movement is to expand dramatically, it will have to be supported financially by the municipality. Primarily, these subsidies should take the form of: cheaper land rents, or advantages in purchasing land from the Land Bank under a gardening designation; cheaper water utilities - this was one major criticism of Portland's pilot projects; and reduced production and sales taxes. The City could very easily devise a subsidy plan with a system of guidelines and requirements that, should the operator of a project fail to meet, might result in a removal of said privileges.

And finally, the City must continue to work with and support the myriad UA organizations that are already burgeoning in order to develop strong educational, informational, and distribution networks within the city. These will take a variety of forms. Education and information networks will have to focus on

¹⁵⁴C.S. Mott Group; Detroit Works Project.

dialogue between groups in the city - for even within the UA movement there are different ideas of how to tackle the challenges involved. Public schools will have to begin to incorporate both food security and urban garden curriculums into their structures - something the DBCFSN has been initiating for years. Having the support of the public school system, as well as higher-level city branches like the City Council, can only serve to further education efforts. Information networks should include, in some capacity, the ability for organizations to engage in discussion about everything from start-up costs and loan procedures to fertilizer composition and harvesting routines. The City could even create an organization dedicated to facilitating this flow of information - there is already a strong base with the Detroit Garden Resource Program Collaborative and DBCFSN. It could even go so far as to develop its own seed hub and plant library - something that could facilitate the creation of projects. And finally, in order to fully support any expansion in UA in Detroit, the City will have to help develop networks through which producers can get their products to market. Ideally, these networks will be concise, so that individual sections of the city can serve their own demand within a relatively small radius. This will cut down on transportation costs, as well as increase availability of fresh food to neighborhoods with low access. With a comprehensive plan for distribution networks, the City could more easily dictate which sections of the city it might zone for agriculture, as well as the scale of projects based on demand of individual neighborhoods.

Overall, Detroit's approach to expanding UA rests on the formulation and adoption of a strong City Urban Agriculture Policy. With a policy in place, the other suggestions provided above will be more effectively implemented and produce a cohesive system of urban food production, distribution, and consumption. Only by incorporating the priorities of UA organizations and proponents can the City hope to recognize the motivations of these actors, and promote a UA system that takes to heart the visions of the individuals involved.

5 Conclusion

This project has provided an in-depth political economic case study of Detroit and Portland, in an effort to showcase the strengths of the framework for understanding the urban agriculture movement, as well as to suggest the im-

portance of situated perspective in formulating municipal UA policy. The city of Detroit has experienced a massive hemorrhaging of population in the last forty years, as the result of a host of social, political, and economic crises. The remaining inner city is in dire straits financially, has widespread land vacancy, urban malaise, and prolific food insecurity. Portland, on the other hand, has experienced opposite population, economic, and food access trends, and currently boasts increased inner city density and low percentages of food insecurity.

Because of these vastly different historical experiences, the motivations and visions of UA actors and organizations in each city are idiosyncratic to place. In Portland the foundations of UA rest on a “post-scarcity” response, reflecting a desire to find fulfilling ways of living, take environmental action, pursue localism in food production, and find satisfaction in the challenges of operating a farm. Conversely, in Detroit the primary motivations driving UA are based on a “new-scarcity” response that reflects a desire to combat profuse food insecurity, as well as find productive uses for vacant land in order to address urban malaise, crime, and unemployment. Although UA in the two cities is not mutually exclusive in its goals, the prioritization of specific visions is reflective of the incongruent “spaces” that the movements are beginning to fill.

As such, the strategies that the City of Portland has pursued in supporting UA, while appropriate situationally, are not compatible with the direction UA is taking in Detroit. Portland has focused primarily on education and small-scale community projects - and even some of those involved in the movement there feel the City has talked too much and actualized too little. Because of the city-wide priority of densification, there is little available land for a land acquisition program. Further, Portland has not concretely provided any forms of subsidy to UA projects, either in the form of land, tax, or utilities costs. Detroit, with its increasing land vacancy, and focus on employment and food need, should take different actions in order to best support the visions of UA proponents in the city. Primarily, the City should: establish an Urban Agriculture branch to its Land Bank; change zoning ordinance to better promote various types of UA projects; more concretely include UA in the overarching Revitalization goals of the City; and work to create extensive inner-city networks of education information, production, distribution, and consumption.

Both cities are currently deeply engaged in finding ways to support and expand urban agriculture, albeit with different end goals in mind. The ability of the government of Portland to create branches dedicated to food policy and urban food production is inspiring and should certainly be used as a measuring

rod for other cities. But this paper has clarified the importance of developing situated strategies for incorporating UA policy into city dynamics - a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective given the different historical experiences and driving motivations of each city. These ideas are applicable far beyond just the cities of Portland and Detroit - the strength of a situated political economy approach is the unique way in which separate causal factors coalesce into a comprehensive understanding of a place. By approaching the future of municipal support for UA with the prerequisite of developing a deep understanding of the forces behind the movement, one can better generate ideas of how any particular city can pursue the expansion of the movement.

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