

# The Greening of Detroit: Changing Lives and Landscapes in a Major American City



Presenter: Rebecca Salminen Witt  
**President, The Greening of Detroit**





## THE ORGANIZATION

We grow things.

The Greening of Detroit's mission is sustainable growth of a healthy urban community through trees, green spaces, food, education, training, and job opportunities.

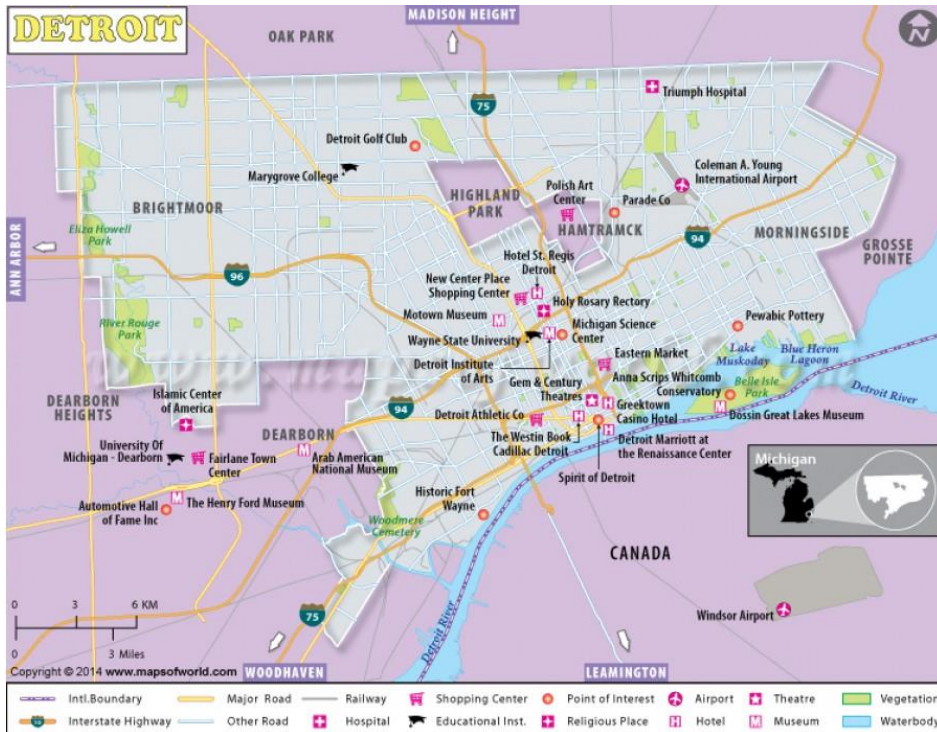


## THE CITY: DETROIT, MI USA

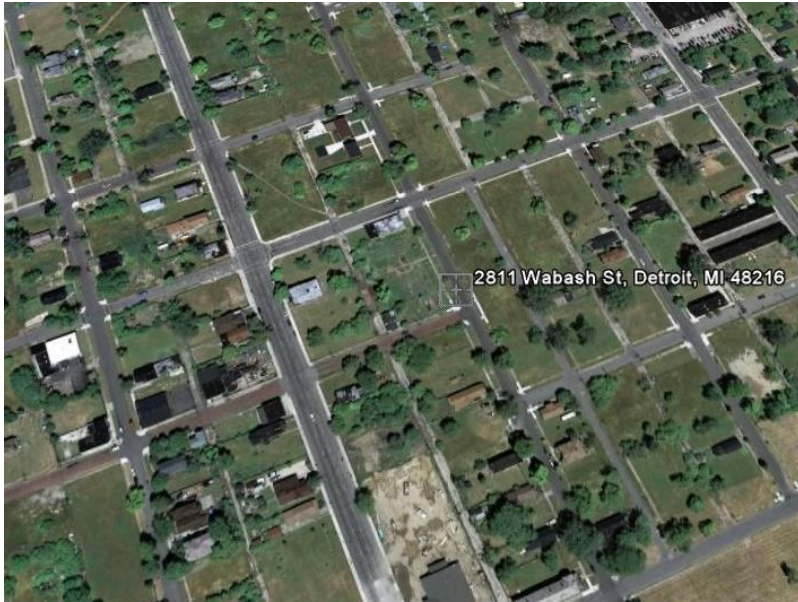
❖ French Origins:  
Founded in 1701 by  
Antoine de la Mothe  
Cadillac

❖ International border  
with Canada via Detroit  
River

❖ At 224 km<sup>2</sup> Detroit is  
3x the size of Paris







# THE CONDITION

Abandonment

+

Lack of City services

+

Proliferation of Vacant Space

+

Broken Food System

=

Optimal conditions for the  
proliferation of Urban  
Agriculture and Green  
Infrastructure



## THE RESPONSE:

Taking matters into our own hands...

- ❖ Abandoned land is an opportunity
- ❖ Economic Self Sufficiency through jobs
- ❖ Food Security through gardens
- ❖ Wealth through property ownership





# Green Infrastructure

Engineered systems reduce storm water runoff into Detroit's Combined Sewer System.

- Generates new jobs
- Native root systems reduce soil compaction and increase infiltration rates.
- Reduces maintenance costs
- Increases property values by beautifying neighborhood.





# Workforce Training Program

- ❖ Teaches the businesses of landscaping and agriculture
- ❖ 8 week - 2 year apprenticeships
- ❖ Hands on practice
- ❖ Design + Build + Grow + Business Planning
- ❖ 12 new farms launched in past 3 years
- ❖ 93% Employment Rate in past 3 years





# Urban Agriculture

- ❖ Resources + Education + Connection
- ❖ Individual, Community, School, and Production Gardens
- ❖ Farmers Markets
- ❖ Supply for Restaurants & Institutions





## Youth Participation

- ❖ Green Corps Summer Youth Employment Program
- ❖ Detroit Public Schools – School Garden Collaborative.
- ❖ Environmental and Nutrition Education





## The Lessons

- ❖ Sustainable change requires participation by citizens from every sphere
- ❖ Establish a clear and equitable path to property ownership early.
- ❖ Consider issues of food safety for food grown in urban soils
- ❖ Inadequate or outdated policies and regulations slow progress





# What's Next in Detroit?

- ❖ Community based planning
- ❖ Integration of municipal planning, landscape, architecture, and agriculture
- ❖ Comprehensive landscape renewal in ¼ mile blocks throughout the city.
- ❖ Contract growing for brewing and distilling – hops, grapes, apples
- ❖ Conversion of closed school properties into farming complexes for small scale growers





## Challenges along the Path Ahead

- ❖ Balancing rapidly growing need and interest in the movement with sustainable growth
- ❖ Integrating agriculture and green infrastructure into stabilizing neighborhoods
- ❖ Creating equity in ownership: property rights for farmers who have been growing without ownership of their land, and community interest in land use as redevelopment occurs.





Rebecca Salminen Witt  
[rebecca@greeningofdetroit.com](mailto:rebecca@greeningofdetroit.com)

[www.greeningofdetroit.com](http://www.greeningofdetroit.com)