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The Influence of Equity and Land-Use Sustainability in the Planning of the District Detroit

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Abstract

The city of Detroit, Michigan, is undergoing a development boom unlike anything it has seen in recent years. The District Detroit is one such project, pioneered by one of the city's most recognized families. What is difficult to discern, though, is to what extent the District actually provides a benefit to the city's residents. By way of a case study, this research seeks to determine the influence that factors of social equity and land-use sustainability had in the formation of the designs for the District, as well as their ultimate outcomes. Results indicate that while these dimensions initially played a role, neither was implemented to their full extent, and in fact few of the original commitments were realized. These findings implicate the need for more extensive government involvement than that which was seen in Detroit, and can be applied to some degree in the District's own future, as well as any developments which aim to utilize Smart Growth practices.

I. Introduction

Economic development is driven by the desire not necessarily for a better world overall, but to achieve a better world for the person overseeing the development. This often comes at the cost of more environmentally-friendly, socially-just infrastructure. In response to this persisting and widespread mindset, a field has emerged out of the urban planning sector regarding sustainable development. This was designed in an effort "to combine economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity interests" (Trudeau, 2018). The field recognized that without the balance of the other two, economic incentives would continue to push more and more people out of their homes, and out of an acceptable standard of living. In doing so, the environment can also be compromised, facing significant degradation in the process.

Detroit, Michigan is no exception when it comes to issues of sustainable development. Recent years have seen a stark increase in the number of developers coming to Detroit, but this has been confined almost exclusively to the downtown area. This new wave of investment has been largely purported by the media to be epitomizing the second coming of the city, however others contend that this is not really the case. Residents are facing lower standards of living than any other point in recent history, while also having less of an opportunity to overcome these economic barriers, seen in decreasing levels of employment availability and income (Reese and Sands, 2017). So if this is the case, it must then be asked why the narrative of a Detroit on the rise is nevertheless continuing?

Part of the answer may lie in the fact that it is those most wealthy, a measure tightly correlated with race, who are experiencing these economic benefits (Quizar, 2020). Black people constitute a majority of the city's population, yet it is white businesses and developers who are seeing the largest gains from this move toward increasing construction projects in the most

trafficked districts. These districts also happen to comprise the highest concentrations of the city's white population (Derringer, 2017). As a result, Detroit is undergoing perpetually increasing income inequality disparities, largely along racial lines. This is an indicator, then, that development in Detroit is on the whole not sustainable but is instead only exasperating the historically ingrained social justice issues and gentrifying the city.

When it was announced in 2014, the District Detroit (then unnamed) was promoted as a means of helping to remedy these problems. A large-scale development project consisting of mixed-use buildings, hotels, retail, and new residential neighborhoods, the District was designed by Olympia Development of Michigan (ODM) and subsequently approved by the city. The creation of a new arena, later dubbed Little Caesars Arena, and thousands of jobs for Detroit residents were also among the cornerstones of the plan (Gallagher, 2014). Today however, almost none of these projects have come to fruition, and the ones that have are primarily office spaces and parking lots (Reindl, 2020). With so little progress relative to the District's initial plans, this raises the question of how equity and environment were factored into the development, or if they were even considered.

The goal of this paper is to decipher the motivations that were behind the proposal to build the District Detroit, specifically relating to concerns over how equitable and environmentally conscious the plans were. It will also assess how the weight of these factors may have changed over time, from when the District was initially conceived to the signing of the final contract. This will be accomplished through analysis of reports by a community advocacy group, agreements between ODM and the City of Detroit, and newspaper articles detailing progress on the District's construction. First, though, there will be a discussion of previous research that has been done in regard to sustainable development and its impact both inside and outside of Detroit.

II. Review of Literature

There has been a fair amount of research examining green and sustainable infrastructure, and how to bring it about, such as that conducted by Grodach (2011) analyzing perceived impediments to long-lasting, environmentally conscious development. Similar case studies were also carried out by Trudeau (2018). Such scholarship has yet to extensively turn a focus to the city of Detroit, but work assessing the impact this development has on pre-existing residents of the city, primarily in the form of gentrification, has been published. Literature by Safransky (2014) and Reese et al. (2017) are two examples, as well as studies looking at ways to combat this phenomenon such as one by Coombe et al. (2017). Furthermore, a small subset of research specifically investigating the community impacts of Little Caesars Arena has emerged, both when its existence was only an idea (Trendafilova, 2012) and after the arena was constructed (Brennan et al., 2018).

A qualitative analysis run by Grodach (2011) looked at the concept of sustainable development. He sought to uncover what motivated the economic development practices of the leaders of such organizations across 15 cities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area of Texas, and why they may not opt for a sustainable route. This area was targeted because, according to the author, it reflects many other United States megalopolises, due to its "foundation of low-density suburban expansion on cheap and abundant land, low housing prices, and the growth of new economy sectors" (Grodach, 2011). This description is remarkably similar to Detroit, an approximately 140 square mile city marked by few high rises and a substantial number of housing prices barely reaching above $10,000. In order to evaluate which barriers could exist to sustainable development, Grodach conducted an analysis of documents - including city plans and websites and policy reports - which were taken in conjunction with interviews administered with

the aforementioned economic development heads. One key finding was that economic developers are not particularly concerned with environmental or social justice issues when devising plans for development, and instead seem to prioritize attracting growth in an area.

Another study, by Trudeau (2018), considered the notion of sustainable development by conducting three case studies examining different outcomes in efforts made to address environmental and equity concerns in new development projects. The first two cases looked at suburbs outside of Denver, Colorado, neither of which imposed a truly sustainable approach. The first city, Westminster, saw local government officials failing to implement stringent requirements to add affordable housing during the development of a new subdivision, sacrificing equity in the process (Trudeau, 2018). With the second Colorado city, Lakewood, the same private development company moved towards more sustainable plans, including LEED certified buildings and green space, however parallel to before there was no concern for affordable housing. The last case that Trudeau analyzed, though, proved to be a marked change from the first two. In this Austin, Texas project, social equity was prioritized from the start, and consequently the sustainability of both the community and the environment followed (Trudeau, 2018). After evaluating the results of these three cases, Trudeau concluded that it is possible to successfully bring together concerns of sustainability and equity when undergoing new construction, so long as there are institutions that advocate for these values and provide resources to ensure that their goals are met.

The case in Austin proves that sustainable development can be achieved, however it also emphasized the importance of advocacy to do so, particularly citizen advocacy. It is rare for a private firm to compromise monetary profit for community benefit, and even less common for this to happen without pressure from the people in that community. Moving now to Detroit,

Coombe et al. (2017) studied an organization called the Neighborhood Working Partnership (NWP) with just those aims. These primarily included building up the engagement skills of Detroit residents in an effort to encourage collaboration between the city and its constituents in the policy-making process, facilitated through training and workshops developed by the NWP. Coombe et al.'s research also took the form of a case study, with the goal to assess the impact of this group (2017). Utilizing a qualitative analysis of the group's previous reports, surveys, and focus groups, Coombe et al. were able to determine that several benefits emerged as a result of having participated in the NWP program. A vast majority of residents reported feeling that they had gained more skills when it comes to advocating for policies, said they would be more active and engaged in policy issues in the future, and believed themselves to be more empowered than they were at the outset of the program (Coombe et al., 2017).

Community engagement is again shown, though not explicitly, to be necessary in Safransky's (2014) work analyzing the implications of deeming Detroit to be an "urban frontier". Her objective was to assess how perceptions of Detroit as an urban wasteland create a common notion that the city is a place to be explored and settled, much as was the case in the preindustrial United States (Safransky 2014). Among other things, Safransky argues that the representation of Detroit as a "frontier" only encourages land-grabbing by wealthy people outside of the city, people who ignore the needs of Detroit's residents. This research underscores the findings of Coombe et al. (2017) and Trudeau (2018); without effective input from residents of a developing area, both the government and private investors will be more likely to build what they want without regard for the pre-existing environment. Safransky (2014) made her case by way of in-depth research into how green redevelopment would be incorporated into potential plans for a future Detroit, recording numerous interviews and oral histories, and analyzing media portrayal

of Detroit as it would be perceived by outsiders (Safransky, 2014). She ultimately found that images of nature overtaking industrial areas in Detroit promote it as needing help by non-native actors, which ultimately tends only to be a detriment to the city as a whole (Safransky, 2014).

With Detroit's history of being painted so poorly in the news and media, especially following the 2008 recession, people began to consider ways in which the city's image, and economy, could be restored. One such example is the research of Trendafilova et al. (2012). Before the construction of Little Caesars Arena was even announced, this research team attempted to evaluate how sports could be used as a means of ushering money back into downtown Detroit (Trendafilova et al., 2012). A panel of four experts, each having some stake in the economic growth of Detroit, was assembled, and an interview subsequently conducted. Based upon the answers given in this interview, Trendafilova et al. (2012) identified three general beliefs that the panelists had: development related to professional sports was important in encouraging other forms of development; improving the facilities that the professional sport teams in Detroit use improves the image of the city overall; and there are still drawbacks to having an economy based solely on professional sports, such as the correlation of team performance with profit. Essentially, sports may be a necessary, but not sufficient, method of reviving the downtown area. It should also be said that this hypothetical growth is generally contained within downtown and does not necessarily guarantee any increased standard of living in the neighborhoods that surround it.

While Trendafilova et al. (2012) and Safransky's (2014) research took place before development of the District Detroit was made public, Reese et al. (2017) examined some of its impacts post-construction. With two primary questions at the core of their research, the authors sought to determine if the media narrative that Detroit is on the rise was accurate, and if the

changes that are taking place in the city will be sustainable and accessible for everyone in it (Reese et al., 2017). Using data pertaining to economic health and recovery for the downtown and Midtown areas of Detroit - where most development was taking place - and comparing those to long-term trends of the city at large, Reese et al. concluded that despite common media storylines, Detroit is still undergoing an overall decline. It seems that even immediately following the upheaval of the core of downtown, this is not proving sustainable to Detroit as a whole. Reese et al. (2017) hypothesize that one reason for the persisting declines in economic well-being could be due to the small scale in which development is taking place. Being that only a minute proportion of the city's landscape has been altered (approximately five percent of Detroit's total area), this is likely not enough to balance out the increasing poverty and homelessness that is plaguing the vast majority of the untouched neighborhoods.

The evidence of decline that Reese et al. (2017) found is reflected in research conducted by Brennan et al. (2018) by way of a case study of the development of Little Caesars Arena. This study examined the role that community engagement played throughout the construction process of the arena, similar in objective to the advocacy research by Coombe et al. (2017). This was assessed through news reports, a focus group with community representatives, and interviews with stakeholders involved in the arena's development and outreach (Brennan et al., 2018). One pattern prevalent among focus group participants was the lack of knowledge of both what the plans of the developer were, as well as the existence of the primary advocacy group, the Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) (Brennan et al. 2018). This absence of clarity translated to the stakeholders, which included members of the NAC, who also cited poor structuring of the organization and limited flexibility within it as impediments to a wholly effective advocacy group (Brennan et al., 2018). In their research, Brennan et al. (2018)

demonstrate how the developers of the arena tried to keep their intentions largely out of the public eye, which served as a barrier to community advocacy groups in lobbying for what they believed would be best for the city's residents. Not only that, the advocacy group itself was mostly unpublicized, resulting in many residents being unable to voice their opinions and concerns about the arena's construction.

A common theme has become evident throughout this literature, and that is that sustainable development is not necessarily an easy accomplishment. Private interests and lack of accountability often overpower the needs of the community where new development is to be sited, and it is not uncommon for the public to be purposefully misled or misinformed to their ultimate detriment. This can make community advocacy quite difficult, although it is often a requirement in order to ensure any sort of equity and/or environmental consciousness in the finished product. These patterns are not lost in Detroit, either. The Little Caesars Arena and the District Detroit as a whole were painted as being saviors of the city, however it is becoming increasingly clear that these projects were not exactly fueled by altruism. At the same time, the specific factors that motivated the construction of this large-scale project have not been completely transparent. Consequently, this paper ventures to resolve the question: To what extent were equity and sustainability factors in the design plan for the District Detroit, and in what ways were they ultimately realized?

III. Methods

In order to answer this question, this paper conducts a case study analysis of the District Detroit. A case study is useful because it allows for a close examination of the development and the projects associated with it from multiple angles and perspectives, permitting a holistic account of the factors and motivations behind it. More specifically, the District Detroit represents

that of a typical case study, a place that "exemplifies a stable, cross-case relationship" (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). A key objective in typical cases is to identify the "causal mechanisms at work" in such a generalizable relationship, and then assess how these causes compare to the theoretical framework through which the case is being analyzed (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

The District Detroit is emblematic of a typical case because what has thus far been seen in the District is not unlike development that has taken place in other cities, such as those in the work of Trudeau (2018). Additionally, the layout of the city is comparable to other low-density areas such as Dallas, Texas. Both are expansive cities that have been plagued by a retreat of residents to the suburbs, causing a decline in housing prices and collapse in the downtown areas (Grodach, 2011). When it was proposed, the District was marketed as a means of revitalizing downtown and bringing wealth back into the city, however there has been debate over how honest these pledges really were. The project leaves many residential areas untouched and unaccounted for, which begs the question how much, if any, of the venture is actually beneficial to pre-existing residents, and if it ever will be.

To determine how the District was designed to fit within the city, an analytical framework was assumed when reviewing the evidence obtained as part of this research. The framework specifically looked at two criteria, land-use sustainability and equity, and tracked how and by whom these were altered throughout the design and implementation processes. Both of these terms can be subjective, so it is imperative that their intended meanings be defined here. There is a commonly cited definition of sustainable development, one which applies to this case as well, coined by the United Nations in 1987: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987). A particular emphasis is put on preserving the natural environment while simultaneously

preventing the inhibition of economic growth. Admittedly, some definitions of sustainability coincide with those of equity, so for the purposes of this research there will be a focus on land-use sustainability only, where the physical environment is targeted. The District Detroit was meant to encompass a significant portion of the downtown area, so it should follow that such an expansive project be mindful of how it will be changing the landscape for those who occupy the city for years to come. Equitable development, on the other hand, strives to uplift traditionally marginalized communities and reduce pre-existing wealth inequality, encouraging public involvement along the way ("US EPA", n.d.). Any discussions along these lines evident in the planning process for the District were considered in the results.

Much of the evidence for this research was obtained by means of the NAC, the aforementioned group of Detroit residents established by the Detroit City Council. This includes two key documents that were used throughout the analysis, the first being the Amended and Restated Concession and Management Agreement (CMA), the relevant parties being the Detroit Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Olympia Development of Michigan Events Center (a branch of ODM), and the Red Wings. The second was a District Vision produced by the NAC (District Vision), an outline of what this group perceived to be the most critical considerations to make when undergoing large-scale development in Detroit. A variety of resolutions passed by the Detroit government and contracts between the city and ODM are utilized as well. In addition to these documents, newspaper articles supplement gaps in understanding over time, particularly in how the District has evolved since the District Vision and CMA were finalized in 2014.

To help conceptualize the events that transpired both leading up to, and following, the announcement of the District, a timeline was created (see Figure 1). The boxes in red correspond to the two primary documents used in the analysis, while those in blue represent any project

progress on buildings in the District. White boxes depict important contextual information that both enabled and influenced the creation of the District. Before anything could be built, however, the first major step to making ODM's vision a reality was to expand the oversight of Detroit's DDA, which was finalized by both the Michigan House and Senate in December of 2012. This expanded the traditional boundaries that the DDA commands to include the area where ODM wanted to build the arena, which again was meant to be the catalyst for the District. The next major event was the signing of a Land Transfer Agreement (LTA), from the city to ODM, in early 2014. As a condition of this agreement, the NAC was devised as a way to provide community input in the planning process. Consequently, in July of that year, the NAC presented their District Vision. Two months later the CMA was signed, indicating that a final agreement between the developer and Detroit had been reached.

The subsequent six events highlighted in Figure 1 display the start and end dates (when applicable) on the projects that have commenced construction thus far in the District. While none of these in particular are a focus of this research, it should be noted that all of the projects that have been completed, or that are near completion, have direct ties to the Ilitch family, the owners of ODM. The final date to note is in September of 2019, which marked the final meeting of the NAC. The group subsequently retired due to the stipulations of the LTA and a lack of reception from ODM.

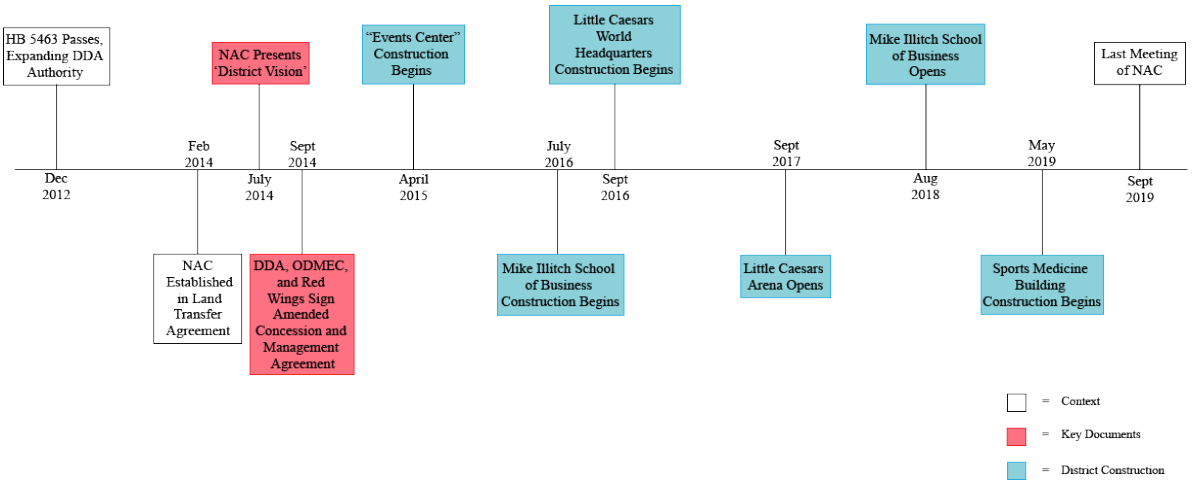

Figure 1. Timeline of Events in Formulating the District Detroit

One limitation of this research that is necessary to acknowledge now is the difficulty in obtaining relevant evidence. Because little could be found by way of public hearing testimony or transcripts, the view of the community is represented almost exclusively through the NAC. While this still provides a good way to measure residents' desires, it does not necessarily encapsulate the full extent of them. Additionally, ODM was not particularly transparent about their designing or planning processes, and as a result getting their pure perspective on the matter was not possible, at least given the time constraints on this research. As a result, the majority of ODM's viewpoint came from the CMA alone, supported by portions of information found in other NAC documents and in media outlets.

IV. Results and Analysis

As previously discussed, the two primary influences this paper seeks to measure relate to equity and land-use sustainability. Looking first at equity, of all the documents examined there was no explicit use of the word; there were only descriptions of either requirements that had to be met or goals that would ideally be achieved. Additionally, some of the evidence that was categorized as being of 'equitable' nature related not expressly to the development itself, but instead to those involved in the construction process in terms of workers that were to be hired

and businesses that would supply resources. The following two sections describe the original designs and ideas for the District that aimed to ensure a project that was just as beneficial to the residents of Detroit as it would be for ODM and the people it attracted from outside the city. They also detail the actual results of these initial objectives, primarily whether or not they were fulfilled. The results for land-use sustainability will subsequently follow the same format. It should be noted that at the point in which the early documents were drafted, neither the arena nor the District as a whole had yet been named, so they are often referred to as the "Events Center" and "Ancillary Area," respectively.

Equity Results

Intentions

The LTA served as the foundation for construction in the District to begin, and the city of Detroit was relying exclusively on the promises of ODM in this resolution. The first substantive discussion of equity can also be found in this agreement, in the form of ODM having "framed its proposals around...community input provisions, investment in the community, local hiring and utilization of local businesses, and community development and outreach activities" (LTA, 2014, p. 2). Many of the specific commitments will be outlined below, but this document set the stage for some of the earliest pledges ODM made when delivering its plan for the District.

"Investment in the community" was an angle that ODM leaned into strongly during its initial announcement of the District, with the president of the holding company that oversees ODM saying that "Detroit deserves no less than the best – a world-class sports and entertainment district that we can all be proud of. And that's exactly what we will build" ("Ilitch", 2014). There is continued discussion of the "tens of millions of dollars in public infrastructure improvements" that will be made in the city, including updating street lighting, walkways, and green areas

("Ilitch", 2014). Concerning the "utilization of local businesses," ODM expressly agreed to provide ample opportunity to buy goods and services from Detroit-based companies, in an effort to inject money into the city as opposed to outsourcing from elsewhere (LTA, 2014). The CMA was cited in the LTA resolution, adding there be a mandate that Detroit-based and -headquartered businesses comprise 30 percent of the "total dollar value of City contracts", however this applied only to the arena (CMA, 2014, Exhibit I-2). Along similar lines, another commitment made in both the LTA and CMA was that 51 percent of those who are employed in the arena's construction, as well as 51 percent of the hours performed working, be made up of Detroit residents. ODM also guaranteed the creation of approximately 1,100 permanent jobs at the arena (CMA, 2014). The city council indicated that this promise in particular was an important consideration they would make "while deliberating future requests relative to this Project" (LTA, 2014, p. 6).

In order for residents to obtain jobs, however, it was necessary that a training program of some kind be implemented, as many were not familiar with this sort of work. This concern was outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) entered into by the DDA, ODM, and Wayne County (where Detroit is seated). ODM agreed to "develop and administer a program or programs for involving Disadvantaged, Minority, Women, City and County Resident Owned Businesses in the work to be performed and materials to be supplied in connection with the construction of the Events Center, including a minority apprenticeship program" (MOU, 2013, p. 7). This was reiterated in the CMA, which again stated the need for training programs that would allow ODM to successfully hire the required amount of city residents (2014). On top of these apprenticeship programs that ODM committed to, they also agreed to use "reasonable efforts to recruit qualified Detroit residents to fill employment vacancies at the Events Center" and

"provide internal or external development and training opportunities to prepare Detroit resident employees to qualify for promotional opportunities at the Events Center" (CMA, 2014, p. 114). These were both implied to be following the opening of the arena, as a means to employ local residents even after construction had commenced.

Further commitments were made toward inciting city-wide impacts in the way of community development and youth programs, which ODM or its affiliates needed to "engage" with in order to "foster positive social change" (CMA, 2014, p. 115). The CMA went on to ensure that either ODM or its affiliates continue to donate to Detroit-based charities. Again, while neither of these requirements had explicit connections to the creation of either the arena or the District, they were conditional in order for the developers to be able to construct these projects, and seemingly intended as a means to improve the overall well-being of the city.

Shifting focus from the arena to the District at large, there was a fair amount of discussion, and controversy, surrounding affordable housing. The NAC has placed a particular emphasis on the matter, and in their District Vision one of the recommendations they made was that 30 percent of all new housing have some level of affordability to it (District Vision, 2014). This was largely to preemptively combat the increase in housing prices that would likely come as a result of the new development and ensure that there would still be options available for low-income residents. One year later in April 2015, the Detroit City Council passed a resolution requiring that ODM restore a historic building called the Eddystone Hotel, which would consist of 20 percent affordable housing (EHR, 2015). This, however, was not necessarily in response to the wishes of the NAC, and rather was agreed to by the developers in exchange for a permit that would allow for the demolition of the Eddystone's neighbor, the Park Avenue Hotel (EHR, 2015). Nevertheless, the promise to restore the Eddystone was restated in a letter that ODM sent

to the NAC in response to a series of questions they had posed, with the developers saying that the rehabilitation will "begin during construction of the Detroit Events Center and be completed well ahead of its required schedule" (ODM Response, 2016, p. 4).

Another issue regarding affordable housing, which ended up culminating into a series of hearings at Detroit City Council, was also a matter of historic preservation. According to the NAC, ODM lobbied city council members to vote against the creation of a new historic district, called the Cass/Henry district, which falls within the purview of the District Detroit's boundaries. This block contained two apartment buildings that had exclusively naturally affordable units ("NAC Final Presentation", 2020). The NAC stated this lobbying was because ODM wanted to demolish the buildings in order to make way for newer, unnamed development, which would be more difficult to do if the district was designated as historic (2020). *Curbed Detroit* similarly reported that the developers "actively fought against" the establishment of this district (Mondry, 2019b), which would have caused a significant number of people to be forcibly removed from their homes and with few other prospective choices to move to.

The final point related to equity that the documents discuss is in regard to the NAC. The CMA mandates that ODM consider advice that the NAC presents to them concerning "the needs of the community and consider requests from the NAC on behalf of community organizations" (CMA, 2014, p. 116-17). Despite this article, there is no requirement for ODM to actually follow through on any of the recommendations that the NAC provides.

Outcomes

Following the same order as the intentions that were outlined above, the actual results of those intentions will be subsequently described. The broad proposals that ODM put forward in the LTA were met to various degrees. One objective to highlight, which has been a point of

contention for Detroit residents, is the language surrounding the community investment that ODM promised to make. A key feature of the CMA was that should ODM, or one of its affiliates, build an additional $200 million worth of development in the District, the developer would receive a reimbursement of $74 million (2014). ODM met this relatively easily, however this was partially the result of the DDA having permitted two parking garages to comprise over a quarter of this total (Ikonomova, 2019). The rest of the amount was fulfilled by the construction of an office for Google that is attached to the arena, and the new Little Caesars headquarters whose opening has been delayed over a year due to engineering issues (Shea and Pinho, 2019). Residents expressed that this was not the vision they had been promised, and that despite these structures not providing any sort of community benefit, ODM was using them to be compensated with the additional money that came from public tax dollars.

Returning back to contracts and employment, most of the information that is known about the outcomes of these commitments comes from ODM themselves. The developer reported that throughout construction of the arena, over $300 million in contracts were awarded to Detroit businesses and over $500 million were awarded to Michigan businesses (“Opportunity”, n.d.). Neither the total number of contracts, nor the time at which these numbers were reached, could be found. Across the District, ODM recorded that 64 percent of construction contracts were awarded to Detroit companies, surpassing the 30 percent required in the CMA (“Progress”, n.d.). Additionally, nearly 70 percent of contracts given during the building of Little Caesars headquarters were allocated to Detroit companies (“Little Caesars”, 2017). The same was not true, however, for individual workers. Nearly $3 million in fines were issued to contractors working on the arena, though not to ODM itself, for failing to meet the required 51 percent of

working hours by Detroit residents. Instead, this number was an average of 27 percent of hours between April 2015 and March 2017 (Aguilar, 2017).

ODM did fulfill some commitments to other aspects of social equity, though. The developers utilized an apprenticeship program when building the arena, of which over half of the cohort consisted of Detroit residents (Aguilar, 2017). Additionally, in order to staff the arena following its opening, multiple job fairs were hosted on site by Olympia Entertainment, who shares owners with ODM (Nagl and Clifford, 2017). But while there were over 1,100 jobs established at the arena, there is uncertainty as to how many are actually held by Detroiters (Shea and Pinho, 2019). A report commissioned by Councilwoman Raquel Castañeda-López, an advocate alongside the NAC, found that the DDA had not followed through on verifying the employment data, and as of 2019 requested a meeting with ODM to discuss the issue (LPD, 2019). No further information could be obtained in regard to the matter, however. The same report shows that the utilization of Detroit businesses has also met an unknown fate. The fulfillments surrounding community youth and development programs have been similarly less-than transparent. *Deadline Detroit* found that the DDA did not request, and ODM did not freely submit, the contractually obligated annual report detailing its efforts concerning such programs (Ikonomova, 2019). An issuance made by the Detroit City Council Legislative Policy Division wrote that a DDA representative admitted to delaying request for the report, but said that the information ODM did ultimately provide showed that they had followed through in their donation and program development obligations (LPD, 2019).

Affordable housing is an area that has been largely ignored by ODM. Despite saying that renovations of the Eddystone Hotel would begin concurrently with the arena's construction, progress on the building did not actually begin until August of 2019, with an expected

completion date sometime in the fall of 2021 (Mondry, 2020). Due in part to this delay in building, and to the lack of any other affordable housing being developed in the District, the NAC's goal of 30 percent affordable housing has, by default, not been realized. *Curbed Detroit* did report that the plan for the Eddystone Hotel, at least, is for 20 percent of units to be affordable, so if this stays consistent there will end up being a discrepancy between the NAC's wish and the outcome (Mondry, 2020). Turning attention to the affordable housing that was already present within the confines of the District, ODM's efforts to prevent the Cass/Henry block from being designated as historic ultimately failed, allowing the existing residents to stay in their units (Runyan, 2018). Additionally, in a 2018 city council meeting, Councilwoman Castañeda-López stated that in the discussions she has had with ODM, they had yet to provide a comprehensive housing plan for the District ("Detroit City Council").

While the goals for housing, particularly those of the NAC, have not materialized, the group was appointed a liaison by ODM meant to consider the recommendations that they made for how best to build the District. As previously discussed, though, there was no mechanism that required ODM to institute any of the NAC's ideas. To date, less than 10 percent of these proposals were enacted, while the rest were either rejected or have yet to see a definitive outcome (Mondry, 2019b).

Equity Analysis

The intentions that ODM had when proposing the District pertaining to social equity, as well as the two recommendations offered by the NAC, were met with mixed outcomes. Despite there being evidence that, either out of contractual obligation or on their own accord, ODM imagined a large-scale development project that would be at least somewhat advantageous to the residents of Detroit, it seems that the company has thus far fallen short. And for those

commitments borne out of legal necessity that have gone unfulfilled, the city government has not seemed especially eager to make ODM aware of these shortcomings. Beyond simply requesting that ODM comply, though, the CMA grants the city little power to enforce these agreements.

The areas in which ODM appeared to best live up to the deals it made were those that dealt with organizations and practices that the developer already had in place. The Ilitch family has long made contributions to local charities, and similarly had existing community programs prior to the announcement of the District that were able to be expanded upon. These ties likely facilitated an easier ability to follow through on related commitments. Similarly, ODM is no stranger to working with contractors in Detroit, with the owners having helped to fund the city's baseball stadium, renovate the historic Fox Theater, and demolish a number of other properties. This familiarity with the Detroit development scene likely was not an impediment to ODM successfully utilizing local construction companies.

Where ODM fell short, though, was largely around those intentions related to affordable housing, including a demonstrated commitment to individual Detroit residents. These both have been sore spots for the developer, having been long-criticized for their inaction on the nearly 100 properties that the Ilitch family owns that resulted in an indefinite stagnation of development in a large segment of the city, leaving the residents there stranded amongst the surrounding vacancies (Perkins, 2017). ODM has not historically dealt much in the residential sector, having worked instead largely on commercial projects, which may contribute to the lack of progress on housing.

A common theme evident throughout the research of these outcomes was the frustration residents have had with both the City and ODM. Many thought it was an asymmetrical deal from the start, with the Detroit government essentially handing over land to ODM and not gaining any sort of stable revenue in return. There was also no mention of equity, or anything related to it, in

either the design or construction portions of the CMA. The vivid renderings presented to locals nearly a decade ago have mostly yet to materialize, and many of the projects that have been built in the District to date have benefited primarily ODM alone. This uneven balance between where the net gains of the District are diverted indicates a need to address this disparity in the future construction that is set to take place within it.

Land-Use Sustainability Results

Intentions

Effective land use is particularly relevant to Detroit, where acres of land sit vacant or under-utilized. The land-use sustainability component is meant to ensure that future populations are not harmed by the planning decisions of the city's current residents. One effort that ODM made to prevent such harm was to conduct a traffic forecasting study. Since constructing the arena required shutting down segments of roads, it was necessary to determine how best to limit excessive traffic buildup in the area. Recommendations were first offered in a Traffic Management Study conducted in 2014, and then in a 2017 Event Transportation Management Plan, with there being considerable overlap between the two. The CMA also described the need for ODM to take measures to control traffic (2014), however there was no indication this was written with the long-term explicitly in mind.

The traffic study demonstrates a very visible characteristic of Detroit - its reliance on cars as the primary mode of transportation. The city is low-density, expansive, and lacks adequate public transit. Consequently, it is assumed that both permanent residents and overnight visitors will require parking, and a fair amount of it. While there have been movements to develop a more robust busing system, in the meantime ODM needed to allot parking for the arena, and the NAC pushed for a prioritization of parking structures over surface parking lots (District Vision,

2014). Given the abundance of existing parking lots, they argued, adding more would only exacerbate the reliance on cars, and would also limit the possibilities of future, more substantial, development.

An excess of concrete with insufficient outlets for water can also give way to environmental issues, though these were not heavily discussed in any of the documents analyzed. The CMA did state that both ODM and the DDA would be liable for failing to comply with any relevant environmental legislation, but it does not go into detail as to what the consequences are for doing so (2014). This liability also extends to "releases of contaminants caused or first introduced by [ODM] to the Events Center Property, as well as liability for any costs specifically attributable to exacerbation of contamination caused by [ODM]" (CMA, 2014, p. 67). This is the extent of the official commitments that were made connected to the environment and its preservation, however the NAC did make several related recommendations.

The first of these was that all buildings in the District be LEED certified, meaning they are energy efficient and reduce waste (District Vision, 2014). The NAC also recommended that a purchasing policy be implemented at the arena, which makes use, and properly disposes, of compostable and recyclable packaging materials (District Vision, 2014). Finally, in the same document, it was proposed that ODM incorporate public green spaces throughout the District. These spaces should include "environmental[ly] sustainable practices" that could work to prevent problems such as storm water runoff (2014, p. 2), which can be symptomatic of the aforementioned abundance of concrete. A Community Needs Assessment conducted in 2017 of the region that the District occupies likewise cited the need for more parks and open areas. In fact, ODM themselves advertised green spaces as being a component of their plans for the District during its' initial announcement ("Ilitch", 2014).

The greenery that ODM publicized was described as working in tandem with five new neighborhoods that were going to be created in the District. These would each feature unique characteristics, and be adorned with inviting names (Aguilar, 2019). These areas would have plenty of mixed-use development and be pedestrian-friendly, which coincided with one of the aspirations that the NAC put forward. A walkable district, that integrates the new construction with the familiarity of the pre-existing structures, was the first item to appear on the District Vision (2014). While also encouraging alternative means of navigation aside from cars, such an area would also minimize any distinction between old and new and help to aesthetically blend the architectural styles.

Maintaining a sense of cohesion was important to residents, but so was maintaining the neighborhood that the arena was situated in. To prevent degradation of the area surrounding the arena, called Cass Park, the CMA mandated that ODM upkeep it "for the benefit of the public through appropriate City processes. [ODM] or its Affiliates will support and participate in community clean-up activities in the areas surrounding the Events Center Project, which may also include street sweeping, trash removal services, and other activities" (2014, p. 117). Such practices aimed to combat any buildup of waste as a result of events hosted at the arena.

Outcomes

The results of many of the commitments related to land-use sustainability are a bit more ambiguous, however there are at least some indications as to what direction most are heading in. Looking at traffic management, it is unclear if the recommendations proposed in the studies conducted were heeded, and there has been limited feedback from those in the area. *The Detroit News* did publish an article immediately following the opening of the arena, which detailed the increase of traffic in the area surrounding the arena, subsequently causing delays for the city's

streetcar, the QLine (Williams, 2017). Detroit police did not express concern over these issues, however. Little else has been reported on the state of traffic near the arena today, though the NAC's website does state that small businesses in the area gave "poor to mixed" accounts of the handling of traffic, and frequently complained about the performance of the city police in doing so ("DistrictDetroitNAC"). While it is not clear at what point in time these statements were made, a woman residing several blocks from the arena did comment in 2019 that when events are held at the arena, "there's a flood of traffic, and we are just kind of trapped" (Aguilar, 2019).

Another oft-repeated complaint of residents is the amount of parking that exists in Detroit. It was for this reason that the NAC emphasized that if any more parking were to be built, it should not be surface lots. This is not the reality of today, however. In 2016, ODM "built, expanded, or renovated 18 parking lots" (Aguilar, 2019), and to date this number has risen to 27 parking lots and six garages ("DistrictDetroitNAC", 2020). Further, the website states that excluding the arena and Little Caesars headquarters, parking has constituted the largest investment that the Ilitch family has made in Detroit.

Much of what is unknown on the status of land-use sustainability progress concerns the environmental aspect of the project. Information supporting (or refuting) ODM's compliance with environmental laws could not be found. It is likely that this is because no policies have been violated, but this cannot be absolutely assumed. There has been similarly little discussion on if a purchasing policy was ever put into place at the arena. What is known is that both the arena and the Mike Ilitch School of Business were LEED certified (Pintos, 2020), with the former quoted as being built having "a primary focus on sustainability and being a caretaker of the environment" by an employee related to ODM (Editors, 2019). While this proposition was satisfied, it has also become evident that another one was not: the creation of new green space.

Some of this was described by ODM as integrating into the new neighborhoods that were planned to be built, and there were multiple recommendations for it to be woven throughout the District as well. No evidence of new green space has materialized thus far, and part of the reason is that neither have the five neighborhoods.

These neighborhoods were publicized as being key features of the plan for the District, yet construction on them never commenced. Indeed, in the time between the first announcement and now, their mention has been removed from the District Detroit's website (Pinho and Shea, 2019). Further, any sense of a "walkable district", at least created on the part of ODM, cannot be seen, according to one member of the NAC (Aguilar, 2019). The city has recently built hundreds of miles of bike lanes (Mondry, 2019a), and started a sidewalk repair program ("Hazardous", 2017), however neither of these measures are linked to ODM. A contribution ODM has made to create outdoor walking space is building a one-block promenade between Little Caesars headquarters and the neighboring Fox Theater, where after an excess of a year delay multiple stores and restaurants are beginning to open (Nagl, 2019). Finally, there have been no updates as to if ODM has adequately maintained Cass Park, however given that there have been no reports of failure to comply, this indicates a likelihood that they have thus far done so.

Land-Use Sustainability Analysis

Relative to equity, there seems to have been less progress made on those commitments pertaining to land-use sustainability, with even more unknown or mixed results. What is interesting here is that many of those proposals with indeterminate outcomes, or that simply were not implemented, were either legally binding or the ideas of ODM to begin with. That they have not come to fruition, or it is unknown if they have, speaks to the leniency with which the city has

provided ODM. Also, like equity, there was no discussion of land-use sustainability of any kind in the CMA's design or construction articles.

Regarding what was not accomplished, it is largely the case that ODM in fact did the opposite of what the original intentions were. This is especially evident in the case of parking, where rather than ceasing the construction of surface parking lots, the developer built nearly 30 more. This, taken in tandem with the elimination of the new walkable neighborhoods, shows how ODM, directly and indirectly, continues to incentivize the use of cars in Detroit. This is both more advantageous to those who live outside of the city, as well as less sustainable on a number of other dimensions; there is less room for residential and commercial development, and it does not align with the environmental needs of the future. This lack of environmental consciousness is also seen in the absence of the green spaces that were both suggested and promised, however it is noteworthy that two of the largest buildings in the District were LEED certified.

For those outcomes which were mixed or unclear, access to more information, especially from the city government, could likely provide more definitive answers. As mentioned previously, compliance with environmental laws, maintaining Cass Park, and the adoption of a purchasing policy at the arena are not exactly complex provisions. The ability to talk with the right person or people could easily resolve these questions, however both ODM and officials in the Detroit government failed to respond to inquiries related to this research, so no useful insight could be gleaned on that front. There is, at least, some perspective on the mixed outcomes. Traffic management has been said to be generally poor, but this differs slightly depending on who is asked. It is unclear, though, if the signage and traffic light recommendations of the traffic studies were implemented. Similarly, the advice of a "walkable district" was denoted as mixed,

although this is perhaps generous. The promenade does mark a step in this direction, however relative to the total area of the District it is a pretty small step.

V. Discussion

It may be useful to compare the case of the District Detroit with another one that was briefly discussed earlier, in Austin, Texas. This project paralleled the District in many ways, however resulted in vastly disparate outcomes. The development in Austin was called Mueller, and was a neighborhood built essentially from scratch following the closing of a city airport (Trudeau, 2018). Like Detroit, Mueller had also established a citizen advisory group before development commenced, and this group similarly advocated strongly for affordable housing, environmental consciousness, and a walkable design. There was additional emphasis placed on integrating Mueller into the surrounding Austin region (Trudeau, 2018). There were some key differences, however, that likely made the distinction between Mueller and Detroit so prominent. Mueller planners hosted a series of "high profile public discussions" to gauge community input (Trudeau, 2018), while in Detroit many residents said they were unaware that the NAC had even been formed or were unsure what purpose it served (Brennan et al., 2018). Another especially important contrast was the attitude of Austin's city council. They were already subscribers to the idea of Smart Growth, a method of planning which considers economic vitality, environmental sustainability, and social equity when building new development ("Smart Growth", n.d.). In Detroit, only the aforementioned Raquel Castañeda-López was an advocate of Smart Growth, while the remainder of city council was outwardly more reserved. As a result of their ideologies, Austin chose a developer who championed such ideas, while ODM in Detroit has historically behaved counter to these beliefs. An important distinction, though, is that ODM approached the city first, while the opposite was true in Austin.

It can be inferred, then, that a primary reason for the District having such a different fate than Mueller was the lack of government support. Despite widespread awareness in Detroit, both cities had strong community advisory groups that were persistent in their efforts to accomplish the vision they had for the projects being created. Only Mueller, though, had a city government that was both willing, and able, to support the goals of its residents. As Trudeau writes, "Public participation was necessary, but not sufficient, for the activation of social equity interests. The financial and ideological commitments of both city government and nonprofit housing developers play an important role in understanding how Mueller came to be" (2018, p. 605).

VI. Conclusion

The results of this research, while perhaps not surprising to those who have been witness to ODM's relationship with Detroit, reveal that there is a discrepancy between what the company promised of the District, and what to date has been realized. Equity has been made increasingly less of a priority, demonstrated by the relative lack of attentiveness ODM has paid in assuring an equal distribution of benefits to all of Detroit's residents. The arena, parking structures, and office buildings, all of which largely serve visitors from outside of the city more than those within it, have all been constructed prior to any form of housing and much of the promised retail that would provide for locals. Land-use sustainability has been almost equally unfulfilled, with many environmental goals pushed aside and ambiguity surrounding the extent to which neighborhood upkeep, traffic management, and walkability proposals have been achieved.

The District Detroit, though representative of a typical case study, does not necessarily ring true for all other large-scale development. The research by Trudeau (2018) cited earlier proves as much. The implication of this is that the findings of this research should not be assumed for every situation, which bears remembering when analyzing the factors most

accounted for in other projects. Further research into this case could possibly compare it to that of an exemplary case and assess where specifically the differences lie in achieving a socially better outcome. Another limitation, discussed earlier in the methods section, is the inability to obtain an equal perspective from all actors. For ODM in particular, direct quotes and explanations from the company were scarce, found mostly in news articles and outlined by Detroit government by way of resolutions and reports. Future investigation into the District would ideally be able to speak directly with staff at ODM, getting a first-hand account of what has motivated their decisions, and their response to the criticism that has surfaced about them.

While the contractual terms of the District are mostly finalized, there is still some room for the city to leverage the little power it has allowed itself to enforce the terms outlined in the CMA, a tactic which has seemingly gone under-utilized to date. The District, though, is still being built, leaving some room for change going forward. However, this would require that the city be less permissive than they have been with ODM. This research highlights how instrumental government involvement, or lack thereof, can be, and serves as a signal to other localities that it is much more difficult to execute development based on community needs when the community is the only entity holding developers accountable. This case can also serve as a lesson to the city of Detroit itself, demonstrating the need for more forms of causal action in new construction contracts that can be employed if necessary.

This paper has different takeaways depending on who the party is. For advisory groups like the NAC, the results may be more somber, as despite the years of hard work, the majority of what they fought for was ultimately ignored by ODM. As Trudeau (2018) writes, though, the citizen group in Mueller was still needed, and it may have been the case that in the absence of the NAC none of what they wanted would have been independently adopted by ODM. Second, there

needs to be some legal reinforcement when entering into contracts with developers, and the government needs to be an advocate of what is optimal for its constituents. Lastly, these findings show developers that, even though in some cases it is possible to work almost exclusively out of self-interest, that does not mean that it will go unnoticed by the community. Even if little legal consequences are faced, reputation can be equally as important.

Artwork on a wall along the Dequindre Cut, a railroad line turned greenway running through the city's center, reads: "A star is born through immense pressure / and we have had our fair share. That beacon of light you see in the dark / is our fair city rising from the night sky." While for the sake of Detroit's residents this sentiment hopefully is true, it is unclear if ODM will ultimately be an effective player in making it a reality.

VII. References

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