

Building the Engine of Community Development in Detroit

5TH ANNUAL SUMMIT

A Virtual Gathering of Detroit's Voices of ALL Ages

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After six breakout group discussions, participants reconvened to report out and talk through what they heard, learned and want to focus on.

Breakout Session 1: Mental Health in a Time of Virtual Learning

We started off talking about what 482Forward is - a citywide education, organizing network that is based in Detroit. We talked about what 482Forward does, which is Invest in my Health and Safety, which is referring to investing in our youth's health and safety in school, the community and in our neighborhoods. We want to put the mental health of our students over funding police in our schools so that we can make sure that our students are getting the best learning environment that they can. We based our discussion mostly on how we would reimagine our schools, mental health in our schools and what we can do to make sure that our students are getting the best education that they can get. We talked about what investing in schools and investing in the students with the students' best interest looks like to the students, teachers and to the parents. We created a [jamboard](#) asking ourselves what a fully funded school - focused on the best interest of students and teachers looks like. Now, students don't have enough supplies and teachers need to take money out of their own pay to buy school supplies for students. We talked about a lot of common issues like that in schools, and it was really collaborative and really productive conversation.

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Breakout 2: Policy and Politics in the Neighborhoods

We had Councilwoman Lopez and Barry from Pro Tem Sheffield's Office and Branden Snyder from Detroit Action. We started out talking about how policies influence communities. One such policy as I mentioned was social security. People don't think about that a lot anymore until you reach the social security age. When social security was invented, it was built on injustice and they didn't allow it for agricultural and domestic workers to receive those benefits. That was a policy built with inequalities in it. And it wasn't until 1948 and 1950s respectively that domestic workers and agricultural workers were able to start receiving those benefits. So as we look at the policies that have come out now, as a result of COVID-19, especially those that prior to COVID-19 according to our mayor, was not a public health issue. Now that it is a national health crisis, and they've made allowances for people to have water, how does this impact us moving forward? And so with that, Councilwoman Lopez and Barry shared with us the Detroiters Bill of Rights that's been recommended to be inserted into the City Charter. The bill states the people's rights to be free from discrimination, right to water, right to safety, right to health, right to their environmental health, right to recreation, right to access and mobility, and right to the basic needs and quality of life. We discussed what it was like getting involved in that effort and all the advocacy groups that came together, because we were more powerful together than we are separate. And so this is a real, true demonstration of that and it's all those advocate groups that came together to help structure and build this Detroiters' Bill of Rights that will hopefully be the key to some of the issues that people will be coming out on as the COVID restrictions become lifted. We certainly have people, families and children and vulnerable seniors who are involved and really concerned about their quality of life, but hopefully this bill will be implemented. Of course, bills take a while and we're working on this for August of 2021. We shared information on how you can get involved. It was a very fruitful, touching and productive conversation.

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Breakout 3: Development in the Neighborhoods

We had a great panel with Lauren Hood, Chase Cantrell from Detroit Will Breathe and Sam Butler from Doing Development Differently in Detroit. We started out talking about what equitable development is and we said it's a combination of an inclusive process, as well as outcomes. Lauren went a bit further and said that she thinks development is only equitable when reparations are given and the people who've been harmed in the past are the ones who benefit in the future, currently or in the development's happening over time. We talked about the inequities in having market forces determine the value of development - because sometimes it costs more in construction and in labor, then the building or the development is worth in the open market. Unless there is some government subsidy or government is building houses as is true in other countries or in other places, It's really hard to actually get some of the things that communities might want because the capital has to come from somewhere. We also talked about this idea of an "equity scorecard" - somewhat based on what is happening in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis, St. Paul). There are five categories: equitable community engagement, equitable land use, equitable economic development, equitable housing and equitable transportation. We had a lot of debate back and forth about first, whether having a scorecard and having a score is really what's important; or having people have the power and have their voices to be heard so the things they actually want are built into some new developments. We thought it might be useful to have a different "AMI" than the regional AMI making sure it's 50% or less so Detroiters, with the revenues and the income they have, can actually afford it. We need to have a way to retain current residents so they aren't displaced, and this idea of maybe also having money go to some sort of a fund that will be for local residents for things like home repair so that people aren't forced out of their communities. This conversation is not ending. We welcome anyone who's interested in this conversation to continue engaging because it's going to be an issue that has got to continue to for years to come.

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Breakout 4: Justice and Police Behavior in the Neighborhoods

Our segment was a discussion with the Detroit Justice Center, Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability, ALPAC and Detroit Will Breathe. We had a sobering and difficult yet open, discussion that was grounded in us watching a video that was presented by the Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability around the police shooting and death of Hakim Littleton in the neighborhood. From there, we asked the question what does it mean to create policing and safety for communities and what are our thoughts about that? It brought up questions that range from the ways in which black and brown bodies are criminalized, including young black and brown bodies like children and how children aren't seen as children. We talked about the ways in which the question of policing is tied to not only systemic racism, but in particular, the policing of black bodies and where they can and can't go - in a way, maintaining racism and segregation that exists in society. We talked about what it means to put resources into communities that actually keep folks safe and what it means to listen to those communities when they say what resources they need in order to do that. It was a conversation that needs to continue and really more about people. It was expressing their concerns, knowing that the issue of safety is a real thing. But also, we were thinking of how to reimagine that without the punitive practices and policies of the police department.

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Plenary 2: Day 2, Ending Plenary

Breakout 5: Equity and Property in the Neighborhood

Nicole Brown, Pier Davis, Kimberly Faison of Detroit Future City and Ashley Clark of DFC's Center for Equity, Engagement and Research, facilitated a discussion about land use and acquisition and transparency in that process. The conversation centered around three different programs and really looking at how to Detroit Future City, as an innovative Think and Do Tank and stewards of the Detroit Strategic Framework, are able to utilize the to DFC programs work with community partners to be able to help them with their work within these areas. We talked about how do you navigate the land ownership and purchase process to be able to equitably utilize open space. They lifted up the importance of working with and building capacity of neighborhood organizations to be able to navigate lots of city systems to be able to actually access that land and be able to make it into an active space within the community that is led and shepherded by community members. We focused on what does it really mean to have a housing market that is strong and looking at how can we work with community development organizations to be able to creatively implement an acquisition and rehab program that, when it is complete, is working with a robust set of community partners from local CDOs to CDFIs and the city of Detroit to be able to ensure that at the end of the pilot program there are 70 new home owners of single family affordable housing in Detroit neighborhoods. We rounded out our conversation, led by Ashley Williams Clark, around what does it really mean to have an economically equitable City of Detroit and really looked at the definition that was created and led by community members: "a city where all the Detroiters are meeting their unique needs prospering and fully and fairly participating in all aspects of community within a thriving city and region." We were able to have a really robust conversation with our community stakeholders on the call and really pulled apart what are some of the barriers, but also what are some of the opportunities that they're seeing to move this kind of work forward. One of the big things that came out was the importance of being able to navigate relationships within the community and all the stakeholders that you need to be able to move this forward, but also really looking at how are we building up the capacity of our community organizations, and our block clubs who are really on the front lines of fighting this fight, and being able to make sure that they have the resources to be able to take control of land and homes in their community and really be able to transform those spaces into places for all the Detroiters to be able to live and thrive equitably

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Breakout 6: Revolutionary Love between the Generations

It was a robust and great conversation. Orlando Bailey, Alondra Alvarez, Donna Givens and Maria Salinas led a conversation in regards to intergenerational work and how do we get better in this era, right now, to create something that will be practical and effective for the now. We understand that there's been a lot of things that were done in the 60s and 70s, but how do we really let young people and elders come together naturally and effectively now. Communication is huge as well as the narrative we construct. How do we make sure that our young people (14 to 25), the millennials and all the inter-betweens (40, 50, 60, 70 year old) utilize each other to build power? Young people that are in the movement with Black Lives Matter and everything that's happening on our streets are out there every day. How do we create visibility so that there is an understanding that people have their backs that are working on ordinances and policies and laws that complement what they're doing? A lot of times they feel alone out there, and we want to make sure that they know that they're not alone. We have to respect the young people and create space. We learned about using verbiage like "enlighten" versus "educate" and "awareness" versus "education." When we talk about educating our people, it makes it seem like they're not educated. Detroiters are the smartest people in the world. We talked about really just trying to figure out how do we do something different so that young people create the space for their voice and their value to be at the front lines of what we're creating, but also respecting and understanding that there's older people that have resources and relationships. So some things also came out like how do we help fund this movement if we have those relationships and how do we do that without taking it over? We want to be a part of it - even if we're not there, we want to be there in some sense and create an aura or presence without imposing. Currently, CDAD will be taken on BECDD as our backbone and they are creating a youth council. That's going to start, hopefully, structuring and creating this mechanism. But, we also said that what's going on now is like never before, so let's not do something that's already been done. Let's do something that needs to happen now, so that everybody that are in their 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s have the backs of our young people in this movement so that we can be more effective and more powerful that way.

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Biggest Takeaways from the Summit - Quick Comments from Participants:

Kimberly Faison: Yes! We have power.

Asandi Conner: We (mature leaders 50+) have a responsibility to be a resource for our young people in a way that respects their leadership journey. Create spaces that truly welcome and foster community engagement

Barbara Beesley: Equity provides safety, not police

Rumi Weaver: Priority for me is to figure out ways to support building community and connections that addresses people's needs

Izzi Figueiredo: Support DPS students right now!

Chase L. Cantrell: Reparations > "development" (we need to locate our battles at the policy level.)

Pat Butler: Yesterday's conversation centered on a new way of doing community. Yusef just mentioned going back to what works. I believe there is a happy medium. Change our language, change our thoughts, change our actions creates change.

Ben Ratner (he/him): We have to reimagine what expertise is and who the experts are in community development

Tristan Taylor, DWB: Public Housing! Stop relying on the "market" to provide affordable housing!

Black and Brown bodies and communities need to be invested in, not punitive institutions like prisons and police

Maggie DeSantis: Reimagine what we mean by "safety" and "police"

Stephen Boyle: Be vocal advocates and pathways for each other to be fully heard. Squash the Digital Divide across Detroit. We don't have effective communications with the existing divide present for 30-50% of our people. Acknowledge barriers to access exist for others that we may have no comprehension of.

Nicole Brown: The creation of inclusive policies designed to ensure equity is at the center for all aspects of community building - education, housing, land use etc. Investing in the next generation of community development leaders.

Susan Hooks-Brown: The Detroit Bill of Rights focus is on basic needs

Josh Budiongan: Equity in policy, education and training

Kenyetta Campbell: Continue to build authentic relationships across the city. Share best practices within the city.

Surabhi Prasad (she/her): Emphasizing student and youth voices, advocating for their voice to be heard and showing that youth voice matters.

Trina Shanks: organize across Black cities with common agendas around equity

Arlene Garner: My takeaway from my group is listen to our young people and make sure we understand them.

Loretta Powell: How we still have so many people who cares about building up our neighborhoods and helping the young people what they would like to see happen

Maria Salinas: Alignment between generations.

Donna Givens Davidson: We need to work harder to engage and listen to EVERYONE in our communities, to hear them and understand their perspectives

Phyllis Edwards: We need to honor the wisdom of seniors that exist in our communities

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The group then took a snap poll that prioritized the key issues that had been discussed in these “Reports Out.” The poll results:

Priority Issues

60% creating and sustaining equity and inclusion in community development

58% supporting and empowering youth

48% partnership, movement and coalition building

37% policy advocacy

27% communicating and listening

29% community-driven safety

23% community focused place-making

11% enlightenment and awareness building

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Discussion on the Snap Poll Results:

- Is there a way to incorporate some of those items together. For example, could we incorporate “community driven safety” into some of those others like the coalition building work?
- Safety is one of the big issues in our community. And I really loved the concept around rethinking what public safety looks like. And we keep on not really having those conversations.
- In order to have an equitable and inclusive community development sector, we need to listen, we need advocacy and we need to build power. It's hard to see these as separate.
- The emphasis is separate though, because we have tended to have policy and advocacy and supporting our youth without really having real focused and intentional efforts at communicating and listening. We don't have town halls where we're really going into the places where people who don't show up at meetings are. Brandon Snyder does a good job through Detroit Action of really communicating with homeless people, for example, or returning citizens, or people who are on the verge of homelessness. We hear from a subset of our community and then we consider that to be the listening that we need to do.....we go far enough.
- Truth be told, all this is a “both-and” and not an “either-or”. All of these should be added. We're doing a disservice to ourselves because all of them matter. The real work is connecting them and we can have sub topics.
- So if we collapse some of these and put them into one, is there a strategy to tackle all of these at once? Looking at all of these now it seems pretty big. What's the plan to chip away at this as a community development sector?

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- There's a lot of possible overlap with these too! for instance in the youth breakout session I just attended we discussed DPS students' push to reallocate funds going towards the DPS police department to go towards school counselors and other student resources instead in interest of DPS student safety
- We need to identify areas we're going to be involved in. So, for example if it's housing, then with housing we need to "create and sustain equity and inclusion" as part of it. We need to "support and empower youth" in discussing housing. We need a policy advocacy framework on housing; we need to "communicate and listen" on housing and we need a "partnership movement and coalition building." We need to do all of these things in some way to ensure that we're doing the right thing. If we're talking about police reform or changing the nature of policing whatever language we want to use as an inclusive language, I think we need to do the same things for that.
- You're saying, all of these are tenets that could be applied to different areas of work and advocacy or activism. So if we're about housing, all of these things need to go into our housing strategy; if we're talking about police reform, climate equity, youth development or workforce and jobs in the economy, they all need to be there. Yes.
- Pick a project and apply all of the strategies.
- Communicating and listening is where Internet access fits in these.

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- We care a lot about housing. We haven't talked about sustainability or climate equity and that needs to be on the table.
- We need to listen to empower youth. We need to create and sustain equity. We need to figure out what we're going to focus on.
- Youth are the primary users of public spaces. How often are their voices included in all of the constant new development and plans!?
- Youth are often consulted on "youth" issues, but why isn't land use or housing youth issues?
- I think one thing is that we really want to be true to youth voice. Everything we do with BECDD and CDAD needs to be done with youth voice so we have youth voice at every spectrum of work that is done under BECDD/CDAD.
- All issues are youth issues. Likewise they're senior issues, workers issues ...they are all of our issues.

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Concluding Thoughts from the Hosts:

How do we center equity? We're thinking about our mothers and our grandparents. Maria just mentioned that we don't consider them as educators, but they mean something. Their equity in the neighborhoods means something. When you don't have investment in neighborhoods, that's when we have police - when we don't have the things that we need. Every voice in our neighborhoods is valuable but the central thing is the neighborhoods. Our black communities have to move away from how we see our neighborhoods. We can't keep seeing it as a "hood" and start having pride in it. Neighborhoods means "we invest here." Moving out from the neighborhood doesn't make you a bad person. Being a bad person is when you don't want to connect and help someone, and forgetting where you came from. We have to get back to that. It's connecting the dots.

It's important that no one leaves this meeting thinking this is the one chance to add something to this list of things. This is really a forever and ongoing conversation. We're trying to prioritize some things here, but I want to make sure that we're in agreement that the results of this poll or whatever decisions we're making right now aren't long lasting. This isn't the time we have to decide everything; these are ongoing conversations.

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What types of partnerships can we build out of this? How do we intersect through the civic, the community development, the social and racial justice, the youth, etc.? Sometimes, it's only in these separate spaces that we see each other, and we say, "hey, we need to connect" and we don't talk about it until we see each other again in these spaces. There's ground level folks that are really out there struggling and fighting and making some difference. I think this is what equity has to look like; this is what our work has to look like. Again, you don't have to be from the neighborhoods, but you have to care about people. And I think this was the heart of what BECDD is and should be. If it's not what we want it to be, then join, sign up and get involved.