

Five Action Areas on Vacant and Deteriorated Property for Detroit's Next Administration

Over the last decade, Detroit has made significant progress in addressing vacant property—tax foreclosures are at record lows, more homes are being rehabbed, demolitions have slowed, and more people are moving into the city.

Detroiters are transforming vacant properties from symbols of neglect to places that build neighborhood pride, celebrate local history, and provide for residents' needs. A future of diverse, thriving, vibrant neighborhoods is taking shape.

Still, almost 175,000 properties remain vacant and many neighborhoods are trying to find solutions to these run-down or empty houses, vacant lots, and neglected commercial and industrial properties.¹ With Detroit's first mayoral administration transition in 12 years coming in 2026, the next mayor has a critical opportunity to build on past progress and commit to bold, coordinated strategies and actions that solve widespread vacancy and deterioration.

The Center for Community Progress reviewed 15 years of vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated (VAD) property recommendations and interventions in Detroit—what succeeded, what fell short, and most importantly, what must still be done.² Solving widespread vacancy and deterioration is a complex, challenging journey for any community. **It requires sustained focus, innovation, and a commitment to strategies grounded in data- and community-centered approaches.**



To address Detroit's vacant property challenges, the next administration must make considerable progress in five key action areas:

1. Unite vacant and deteriorated property efforts under a collective, comprehensive vision.
2. Strengthen tools for property tax and code compliance.
3. Establish an integrated open space network.
4. Accelerate residential property rehab and repair.
5. Maximize strategic infill development opportunities.

Addressing vacant and deteriorated properties is an important part of Detroit's revitalization, but it is also just one part. The City must employ a VAD property strategy together with strategies that attract and grow jobs, invest in transportation options, and improve public education. Still, successfully addressing vacant and deteriorated properties can strengthen neighborhoods and increase property tax revenue, which can then contribute to improvements in the City's services and lay the groundwork for lasting change.

¹ Calculated by aggregating vacant structures and vacant lot parcels on Regrid.com.

² Community Progress, with the support of local philanthropy, embedded local, dedicated staff for more than a decade to work alongside partners to understand and resolve Detroit's VAD property challenges. This analysis included our work and that of countless partners and other organizations.

1. Unite vacant and deteriorated property efforts under a collective, comprehensive vision.

Nearly 45 percent of Detroit’s properties are vacant (either unoccupied structures or structure-free lots).³ What happens with these properties will shape the city’s future, either driving renewal or eroding progress to date. **The City must develop a unified, citywide strategy for reusing these properties that positions it as competitive**—not just in southeast Michigan, but across the Midwest.

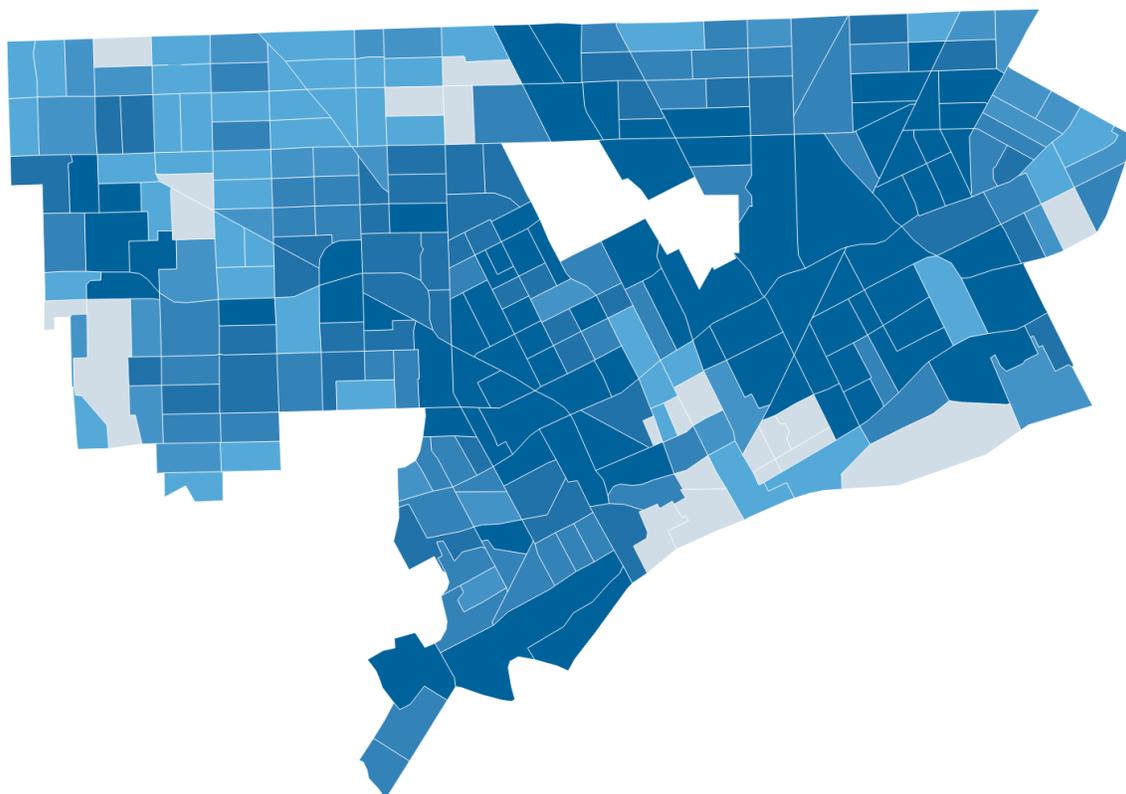
In the 2010s, Detroit’s response to VAD properties was rooted in crisis management. At the time, that approach was necessary, but it sometimes came at the expense of coordination and long-term strategy. It is time for Detroit to shift from “crisis mode” to a proactive, integrated strategy that sets a national example for solving vacancy and deterioration at scale.

60% of Detroit’s Census Tracts Are High Vacancy

This map shows the percent of vacant residential properties (structures and lots) by census tract. The darker the shade of blue, the higher the percentage of vacant properties within the census tract. Tracts with 12% vacancy or higher are considered "high vacancy."

Percent Vacant, Residential Lots and Structures

< 4% 4%–8% 8%–12% 12%–20% 20%–30% ≥ 30%



Map: Center for Community Progress • Source: Detroit Future City, 2024; US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Q1 2024

³ Calculated by dividing vacant structure and vacant lot parcels (~174,000) by total parcels (~380,000), according to Regrid.com.

1a. Complete, adopt, and implement *Plan Detroit*.

Detroit needs a collective vision for its future—one that unites residents, businesses, policymakers, and elected leaders. That vision should live in a modern master land use plan. Detroit’s current plan **has not been comprehensively updated since 2009**, and a *lot* has changed since then. The ongoing update to Detroit’s Master Plan of Policies, [Plan Detroit](#), is the opportunity to define a roadmap for the future.

There is enough space in Detroit to support a wide range of neighborhood types and living experiences—from dense urban living to ecovillages. *Plan Detroit* can guide how Detroit should leverage its 175,000 vacant properties for housing, open space, neighborhood-scale commercial, and low-impact industrial uses that create healthier, safer neighborhoods and build prosperity.

The next administration must adopt and dedicate resources to fully implementing *Plan Detroit*, update related policies like the [zoning ordinance](#), and ensure VAD property strategies align with the long-term vision outlined in the plan.

1b. Align City departments to improve neighborhood property conditions.

Lasting neighborhood revitalization requires coordinated, block-by-block strategies, not fragmented efforts by disconnected departments. Currently, many City departments work in disjointed and disconnected silos, some of which stems from the lack of a unified vision.

The next administration should create internal infrastructure to align and coordinate all departments directly doing VAD property work. This could include a new or revamped cabinet-level position responsible for overseeing key departments like planning ([PDD](#)), housing ([HRD](#)), code enforcement ([BSEED](#) and [DAH](#)), and sustainability and urban agriculture ([OoS](#) and [UA](#)). This role, and their team, would coordinate VAD property strategies across all

City departments and partner agencies, including the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA).

Using the master plan as a foundation, this team would coordinate efforts across rehab and repair, open space investments, public acquisition and sales, new construction, demolitions, and code enforcement—ensuring all City actions align with and are accountable to the master plan vision.

1c. Design an “early warning system” for vacancy and property deterioration.

To develop an effective strategy for VAD properties, the City **must know where they are, what condition they are in, and where future ones are likely to appear.** An early warning system would bring together multiple data sources and neighborhood trends to flag properties showing signs of decline or abandonment.

This system should integrate parcel-level data from city data management systems (code enforcement records, utility information), county data (property tax delinquency), partner data (door-knocking, block clubs), United States Postal Service vacancy data, and regular parcel condition surveys. This would allow the City to **identify and address problems earlier**, before they get worse and impact quality of life and neighborhood stability.

Whether designed and managed by the City, a data consortium, or a data-focused local partner, the cabinet-level leader proposed in recommendation 1b should oversee how this tool informs proactive responses to VAD property across departments.

1d. Coordinate and consolidate public property disposition under the DLBA.

When a development project contains both residential and commercial or industrial property types, it must simultaneously navigate both the City’s and the DLBA’s disposition processes, which slows down projects and stymies redevelopment.⁴ **Consolidating all surplus public property—specifically all commercial**

⁴ Residential property was consolidated into the DLBA in 2015 and the City retained ownership of commercial and industrial property.

and industrial property held by the City—into the DLBA would make properties more marketable, enable strategic assembly, reduce development costs, improve project timelines, and make Detroit more attractive for infill housing and economic development projects.

The DLBA has [special legal powers](#) granted to [land banks in Michigan](#) and a decade of experience with residential property. A key legal power of the DLBA is **expedited bulk quiet title** actions, which enable the DLBA to rapidly and cost-effectively clear title on properties. **This power is especially valuable in Detroit**, where title problems are widespread and resolving them is critical to long-term neighborhood and market stability.

To support this expanded vacant property redevelopment role, **there must be changes to the DLBA's governance structure**. Specific changes should include (1) expanding the size of the board of directors, with at least two additional seats appointed by City Council; (2) adding new requirements for board members, such as specific skillsets or a minimum number of Detroit residents; and (3) updating board member terms and officer election cycles.

The next administration must recognize that a land bank is vital to Detroit's revitalization goals and support improvements to its governance structure. The City should fully leverage the DLBA's legal powers, substantial staff expertise, and information systems capacity to implement Plan Detroit and other priorities.

2. Strengthen tools for property tax and code compliance.

Delinquent property tax enforcement and code enforcement are two of the City's most powerful legal tools for reducing and preventing VAD properties. When used **intentionally and strategically**, they can improve neighborhood conditions. When misused or uncoordinated, they can harm residents, perpetuate vacancy, and further destabilize neighborhoods.

The City and Wayne County have made progress reforming property tax foreclosure

1e. Redesign the DLBA's sales programs.

Regardless of whether it absorbs all public VAD property inventory, the DLBA's property disposition programs need a reset. The current auction program often puts Detroiters in difficult financial positions when rehabbing the vacant house ends up being more costly and complex than they anticipated. This undermines the goal of stable homeownership and neighborhood revitalization. Vacant land disposition should focus on connecting interested parties to the right program, rather than expecting individuals to navigate a complex set of policies and programs.

The DLBA's programs should align with *Plan Detroit* and a future open space plan, **ensuring properties are accessible, outcomes are predictable, and buyers are set up for success**. The DLBA is one of the only land banks in the country that relies heavily on auctions—Detroit can and should use other sales strategies to make properties accessible to a wide range of purchasers. There are several ways to restructure and improve the DLBA's disposition programs, which are detailed in [Next Five: 2025–2030 Strategic Plan](#).

The next administration should support the DLBA's efforts to restructure its sales programs, provide clear and accessible information, and align the land bank's tools to support City priorities.

policy and practices—expanding access to property tax reductions, payment plans, and forgiveness. That work should continue, with some additional improvements.

That same commitment to progress must now be applied to code enforcement. **Detroit's code enforcement tools are significantly underfunded and underutilized**. First, the City must establish policies that distinguish between property owners who *will not* comply and those

Detroit Has \$113 Million in Unpaid Blight Violations

This chart shows total payments made and total judgement amounts for blight tickets from 2005 to 2024. The area shaded in dark blue represents the outstanding balance still owed.

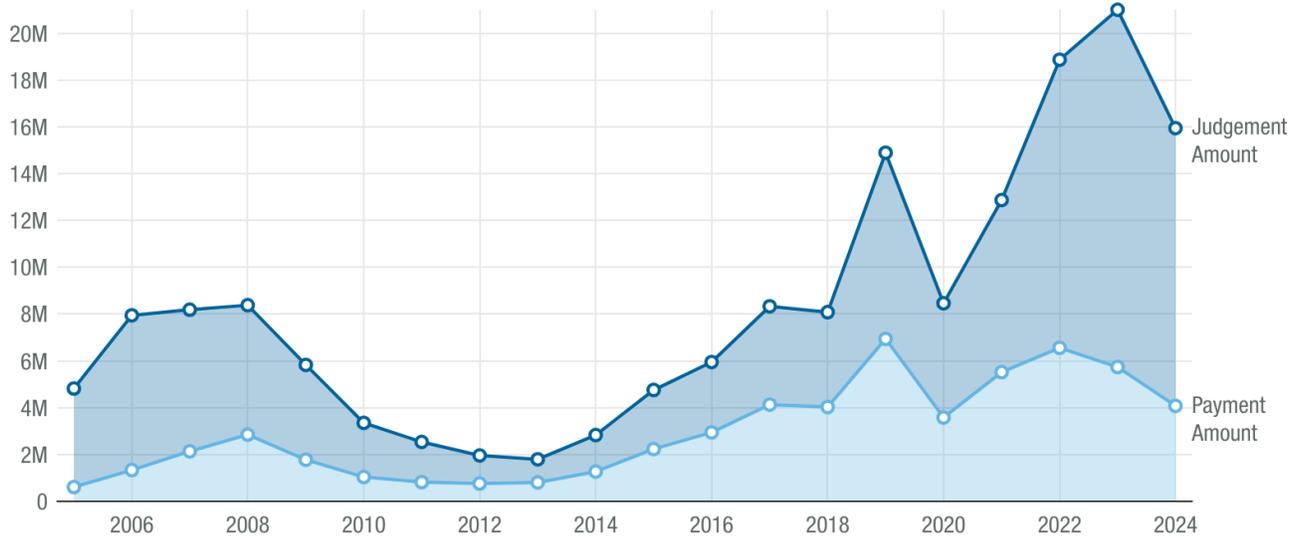


Chart: Center for Community Progress • Source: City of Detroit, 2005-2024

who cannot afford to. **The goal should be compliance, not punishment.** Tools should be tailored by property type—such as owner-occupied homes, rentals, vacant structures, vacant lots, reuse projects, commercial/ industrial—and combine support (“carrots”) with accountability (“sticks”).

Moving forward, the City should continue its traditional code enforcement activities, such as notices, tickets, and abatement (e.g., boarding, mowing), albeit with a more strategic approach that **prioritizes compliance while minimizing unintended harm to residents**; continue improving rental regulation activities; and improve its systems to better address (and potentially gain control of) vacant properties.

2a. Reduce property tax bills.

Detroit’s property tax burden is among the highest in the nation. In 2024, the millage rate was **85.27 mills**, and the effective tax rate (which calculates the tax bill as a percent of the property’s market value) was **3.13 percent**—

more than double the state average and the highest among the 50 largest US cities.⁵ This means a Detroit homeowner with a \$150,000 house pays over \$4,500 annually, while a suburban homeowner pays closer to \$2,250 for a home of similar value.

Detroit’s property taxes are out of balance with home values and services received. These high tax rates, paired with inaccuracies and inconsistencies in property assessments, have made homeownership in Detroit more financially burdensome and less desirable. Many Detroit residents cannot afford their tax bills, while others choose to live elsewhere for better services at lower costs.

The next administration should explore ways to **reduce property taxes and create a more equitable taxation system** that (1) support those with financial hardship and (2) make homeownership in Detroit a more competitive choice. Reforms could include improving the timing and method of assessments, lengthening the appeals process, allowing a multi-year **poverty exemption**, and reducing the millage

⁵ Detroit is also second highest effective tax rate for commercial properties and fourth highest for industrial properties.

rate.⁶ A lower millage rate could ease the burden on individual homebuyers by encouraging more investment and stable homeownership, raising the overall property tax revenue the City collects.

2b. Protect and extend property tax payment plans.

Detroit and Wayne County have substantially slowed the rate of property tax foreclosure through reforms like payment plans that help residents pay off delinquent taxes and stay in their homes. **These payment plan options are critical foreclosure-prevention tools and must continue.** Specifically, the Pay As You Stay (PAYS) program, currently set to expire in 2026 per [state law](#), should be extended or made permanent.

The City and County Treasurer should work with statewide partners and the Michigan Legislature to ensure PAYS remains available. They should also **expand efforts to resolve heirs' property and tangled title issues** so otherwise eligible residents can access payment plans and other foreclosure prevention resources.

2c. Collect problem owners' unpaid code enforcement violations through the property tax system.

"Blight tickets" in Detroit are often ignored, especially by problem landlords and absentee owners. Over the past six years, **nearly half of the 100,000 tickets the City issued on rental properties alone remain outstanding.**⁷ To create meaningful consequences for problem landlords and absentee owners' noncompliance, **the City should attach unpaid tickets—including the full costs of any abatement work the City did—to property tax bills.** This enables the City to collect unpaid blight tickets in the same manner as property taxes. This

attaches the debt to the property (*in rem*) as opposed to the person (*in personam*), allowing the County to enforce payment through the foreclosure process if necessary. This practice, common in many cities, encourages most owners to either comply or pay the fines. *It should not be applied to owner-occupied homes.*

The next administration must support a stronger code enforcement strategy and end the cycle of unpaid blight tickets and continued noncompliance. This recommendation comes from [Investing in the Vitality of Detroit's Neighborhoods Through Improved Rental Regulation](#), which also contains a comprehensive set of rental regulation recommendations. For additional information on comprehensive code enforcement strategies see [Reevaluating Code Enforcement: A New Approach to Addressing Problem Properties](#) and [Revitalization in Michigan: A Guide to Transforming VAD Properties Through Code Enforcement](#).

2d. Fully leverage the property tax foreclosure process to acquire key vacant properties.

Detroit's real estate market has improved, leading to fewer tax foreclosures and increased sales at tax auctions. While this is a positive change, it also limits the City's ability to acquire vacant properties—to advance public priorities like greenways and parks, housing development, and economic development—before speculators do.

To make the most of this shrinking window, **the City, County, and DLBA should work together to develop a coordinated vacant property acquisition strategy.** This should include using [accelerated tax forfeiture and foreclosure](#) and exploring other tools like receivership and the viability of select right-of-first-refusal purchases to acquire key vacant, tax-foreclosed properties.⁸

⁶ There are multiple potential solutions for this issue. While a "land value tax" has been discussed by others, Community Progress believes more long-term analysis is needed and is particularly concerned the benefits for average Detroit homeowners will wane after a few years.

⁷ See [Investing in the Vitality of Detroit's Neighborhoods Through Improved Rental Regulation](#) for more details on code enforcement and rental regulation.

⁸ Right of First Refusal (ROR): Acquiring properties via ROR carries some legal risk due to the Supreme Court ruling in *Tyler v. Hennepin County* (2023) and additional pending cases at the Michigan Supreme Court and in the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. In *Tyler*, the Court ruled that foreclosing governmental units must provide those with ownership interest an opportunity to recoup any "excess value" generated in a property tax foreclosure sale. Excess value is any amount that exceeds what was owed in unpaid taxes, interest, fees, costs, and other public liens. Before pursuing additional ROR acquisition, the City, County, and DLBA should consult with local counsel and establish appropriate risk mitigation strategies. Relevant cases to monitor in Michigan include *Yono v. County of Ingham*, 2024, Docket No. 166791, pending before the Michigan Supreme Court; *Jackson v. Southfield Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative*, 2023, Docket No. 166320, pending before the Michigan Supreme Court. There are also various matters challenging elements of Michigan's tax foreclosure laws pending before the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

3. Establish an integrated open space network.

Detroit has about [18 square miles](#) of vacant land; it is one of the city’s largest challenges and greatest opportunities. While the population of Detroit is beginning to grow, the Detroit of the future will and must look different than the Detroit of the past. Instead of rebuilding on every lot, **this public portfolio of vacant land should be treated as a significant long-term asset.** Converting much of it into *open space*—structure-free land with a purpose—can help Detroit neighborhoods become healthier, safer, greener, and more resilient. Open space can support food production, jobs, stormwater management, clean energy, recreation, [crime prevention](#), [improved health](#), better air quality, and increase neighborhood stability and property values.

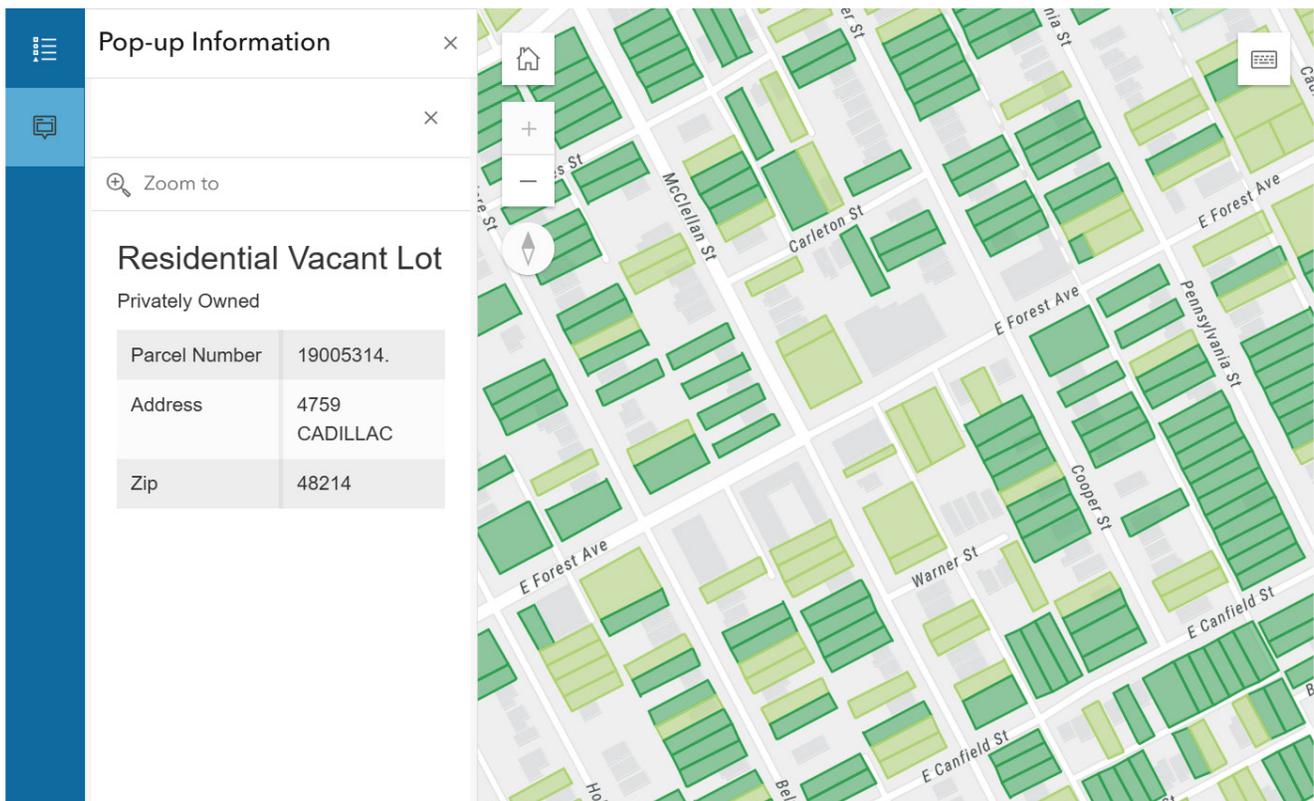
Open space projects can also **help direct future development more strategically**, improve access to goods and services, reduce infrastructure strain, and increase connection between neighborhoods.

Detroiters have already created thousands of open space projects. The next step is building an “**integrated open space network**,” a connected system of open spaces that is intentionally woven into neighborhoods and across the city. For more on this concept, see [Achieving an Integrated Open Space Network in Detroit](#) by Detroit Future City.

Detroit Has 18 Square Miles of Vacant Land, in a mix of public and private ownership

This map displays vacant (structure-free) parcels in Detroit. The dark green are publicly owned and the light green are privately owned. You can zoom out to explore other parts of the city.

To view the map in separate window, [click here](#).



Pop-up Information

Zoom to

Residential Vacant Lot

Privately Owned

Parcel Number	19005314.
Address	4759 CADILLAC
Zip	48214

3a. Develop and implement a comprehensive open space plan.

Detroit's large volume of vacant land demands a strategic, long-term approach. After completing *Plan Detroit*, the City should **immediately develop a comprehensive plan for open space**. This plan must be grounded in best practices (like robust community engagement), include a detailed inventory of vacant lots and reuse projects, analyze publicly owned parcels and the ownership of adjacent vacant lots, and examine site conditions such as vegetation and drainage.

The next administration must prioritize an open space plan that:

- Outlines a 20- to 50-year vision for vision open space citywide
- Assesses key constraints and opportunities within vacant lot clusters
- Considers environmental remediation needs, and opportunities to use vacant lots to further environmental goals
- Pinpoints areas suitable for by-right, medium- and large-scale open space projects
- Specifies ideal, potential, and acceptable use types and locations
- Codifies permanently designated open space areas
- Includes land currently zoned for residential, commercial, and industrial use
- Informs zoning ordinances, future land use maps, and public disposition and acquisition strategies

3b. Support the creation of an independent entity, like a land conservancy, to oversee long-term stewardship of open space projects.

Residents cannot be expected to maintain every vacant lot, nor can the City absorb every new green space into its park system—especially small-scale projects that present logistical maintenance challenges. Detroit needs an **independent, well-funded entity** dedicated

to the long-term creation, protection, and maintenance of open spaces in coordination with City and community partners. Detroit Future City has proposed a model for this in their [**Saving for the Future: Land Conservation in Detroit**](#) report.

An **open space land conservancy** coordinating with City and community partners could:

- Manage projects that exceed neighborhood capacity or fall outside the scope of city parks
- Use a variety of protection tools like conservation easements and temporary or permanent ownership models
- Support community groups already stewarding open space projects

The next administration should support the creation of this entity, provide staff support to ensure alignment with the [**Parks & Recreation Strategic Plan**](#), and explore providing municipal resources to the effort. Philanthropy, private donors, and others should consider funding this work through a dedicated endowment.

3c. Proactively acquire and prepare property for future open space use.

Thousands of vacant lots are privately owned, often by speculators who do not maintain them and are years behind on property taxes. These lots are frequently adjacent to or between parcels of public land, making it difficult to assemble them for larger revitalization, including open space projects. The City and the DLBA should identify areas with high concentrations of publicly owned properties or distinct open space needs, identify privately held lots, and **develop a strategy for the DLBA to acquire and “bank” parcels for future use**. The City and land bank's tools, like code enforcement, property swaps, and donations, can support this effort.

After identifying assemblages, the City and the DLBA should explore ways to prepare lots for reuse, such as rezoning and lot combinations, environmental remediation, and site clearance.

With the grounding from the open space plan, the next administration should establish **clear priorities for acquiring, holding, and preparing vacant land** for open space use and work with the DLBA to implement those projects.

3d. Enable, support, and fund innovative new uses.

Detroiters are creative and resilient. Residents have long led the way in transforming vacant land, often without municipal support and enabling zoning. **The City should make it easier to test and scale innovative projects on vacant land** by updating zoning and other regulations for more flexibility. Detroit can be a

national leader and incubator for developing new approaches to vacant land reuse such as green infrastructure, habitat restoration, small-scale community solar hubs, geothermal energy, and vegetative buffers between industrial and high traffic routes and residential areas.

The next administration should fund non-municipal open space projects (like the [Neighborhood Beautification Program](#)) and support open space organizations like a future land conservancy. The City should also evaluate how to better use existing resources and capacity, like comparing the cost of mowing to instead changing the plant mix on new demolition lots.

4. Accelerate residential property rehab and repair.

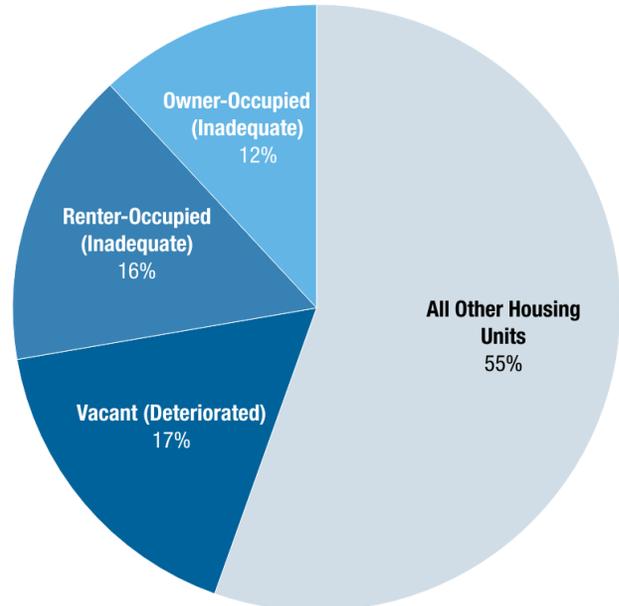
Detroit cannot solve widespread vacancy without major investment in home rehab and repair. **Housing deterioration accelerates neighborhood decline**, lowers nearby property values, and forces residents to live in unsafe conditions—driving further abandonment when they cannot afford to make repairs.

Homes in Detroit need an estimated **\$4 to \$20 billion** in rehab and repair to bring them all to minimum decent standards for safe, healthy housing.⁹ About **43 percent** of Detroiters report at least one major home repair need and **37,630 households** live in substandard conditions. While many programs attempt to address that need, current funding falls far short of meeting the scale of the need.

Homes are critical infrastructure. **Investing in existing homes is an investment in the future**—both occupied homes (in this section referred to as “repair”) and vacant homes (“rehab”).

Nearly Half of All Detroit's Housing Units Are In Inadequate Condition

This chart shows the estimated share of inadequate residential units by property type.



There currently is no single data source that captures home rehab and repair need. To estimate the need, we combined data from two sources: the 2021 Detroit Metro Area Communities Study, which surveyed Detroit residents (renters and homeowners) on the condition of their housing, and the 2019-2023 ACS 5-year estimate for "Other" vacant, a term used by the Census to categorize housing units that are neither being held for future occupancy nor used only seasonally. "Other" vacant units are thus likely vacant for an extended period of time and in need rehab before occupying.

Chart: Center for Community Progress • Source: Detroit Metro Area Communities Study, 2021; American Community Survey, 2019-2023

⁹ The range is so large because there is very limited local and national aggregated data on property condition and what repairs are needed.

4a. Create a comprehensive funding strategy for residential rehab and repair.

Traditional financing tools, like home equity loans, are ineffective or inaccessible in much of Detroit due to low incomes, low property values, and the substantial inventory of publicly owned vacant houses. Detroit needs a **comprehensive rehab and repair funding strategy for all housing types**—owner-occupied, rentals, and DLBA-owned structures—that serves a range of income groups.

Eligible uses of the funds should facilitate everything from “whole home” repair (similar to the [Detroit Home Repair Fund](#)), DLBA pre-sale investments in major systems and structural repairs, and even home maintenance education.

Funding deployment must align with neighborhood strategies, support robust outreach efforts, integrate with code enforcement improvements described earlier, and continue strengthening the network necessary to complete this work. **The next administration must champion a robust funding and financing solution.** This will likely include a mix of loans, grants, public funding mechanisms (bonds, [TIF](#), [millages](#), etc.), donated time and materials, escrow programs, and other new or redirected public, private, and philanthropic tools and programming.

4b. Offer landlord training and support.

Poorly maintained rentals can depress property values and are more likely to become vacant. While some landlords intentionally keep their properties in poor condition (“milking” it for what little value remains before walking away), many small landlords—**70 percent of Detroit landlords own two or fewer properties**—simply struggle to afford needed repairs. The City must include rental properties in the funding programs outlined in 4a. To further support well-intentioned landlords, **the City should offer a training program** covering topics like rental regulation requirements and process; legal responsibilities and tenants’ rights; property

management skills like maintenance and record-keeping; and financing options. The City should work with responsible landlords, developers, and subject matter specialists to help shape the content. Participating in the training program could be a requirement for accessing funds outlined in 4a.

The next administration should continue improving the rental regulation system and fully implement recommendations from [Investing in the Vitality of Detroit’s Neighborhoods Through Improved Rental Regulation](#).

4c. Consider equitable exit strategies that allow owners to move on from distressed property.

The realities of Detroit’s housing market mean there are many homeowners who cannot afford to—or are unwilling to—repair their properties, and lack viable options to transfer ownership. The City should explore “equitable exit” strategies that **allow owners to responsibly move on from properties they cannot maintain** and expedite the transfer to new ownership, ensuring property owners have options besides “walking away” and the neighborhood does not experience the impacts of abandoned property. Some equitable exit strategies might include:

- **Landlord to tenant sales:** Help capable, willing renters buy homes from landlords uninterested, unable, or unwilling to maintain them.
- **Donation or sale to the DLBA:** Provide a streamlined process for owners to donate or sell unwanted properties, including donations through estate planning.
- **Home swap program:** Relocate residents with limited means from severely deteriorated homes into safe housing, either temporarily or permanently.¹⁰

The next administration should partner with philanthropy and other stakeholders to **research and explore the feasibility** of these and other strategies.

¹⁰ In alignment with the plans and strategies mentioned previously, the second two opportunities could be focused in areas of extremely low density to support strategic acquisition for open space.

5. Maximize strategic infill development opportunities.

Even with widespread rehab, repair, and demolition, **Detroit will still need new construction**—residential, commercial, and industrial—to attract residents and jobs and expand housing options.

Single-family homes comprise three-quarters of Detroit’s housing stock. The city has far less diversity of housing types compared to peer Michigan cities like Southfield and Grand Rapids, or other large midwest cities like Chicago and Cleveland. While single-family homes are essential, they do not meet the needs of every individual in all stages of their life.

Strategic infill development should help **diversify the housing and building stock**, such as “**missing middle**” housing types; increase density; and meet current resident needs while planning for future demand. A wider range of housing types ensures that people of all income levels and life stages can find a home in Detroit.

5a. Cultivate and promote new and different neighborhood types.

Detroit cannot rely solely on single-family neighborhoods to compete and grow. Future planning efforts, including *Plan Detroit* and the open space plan, should **support a mix of**

Detroit Has Far Less Housing Diversity than Other Midwest Cities

This chart shows housing inventory by total units in a structure to represent the mix of housing types available in Detroit and other Midwest cities.

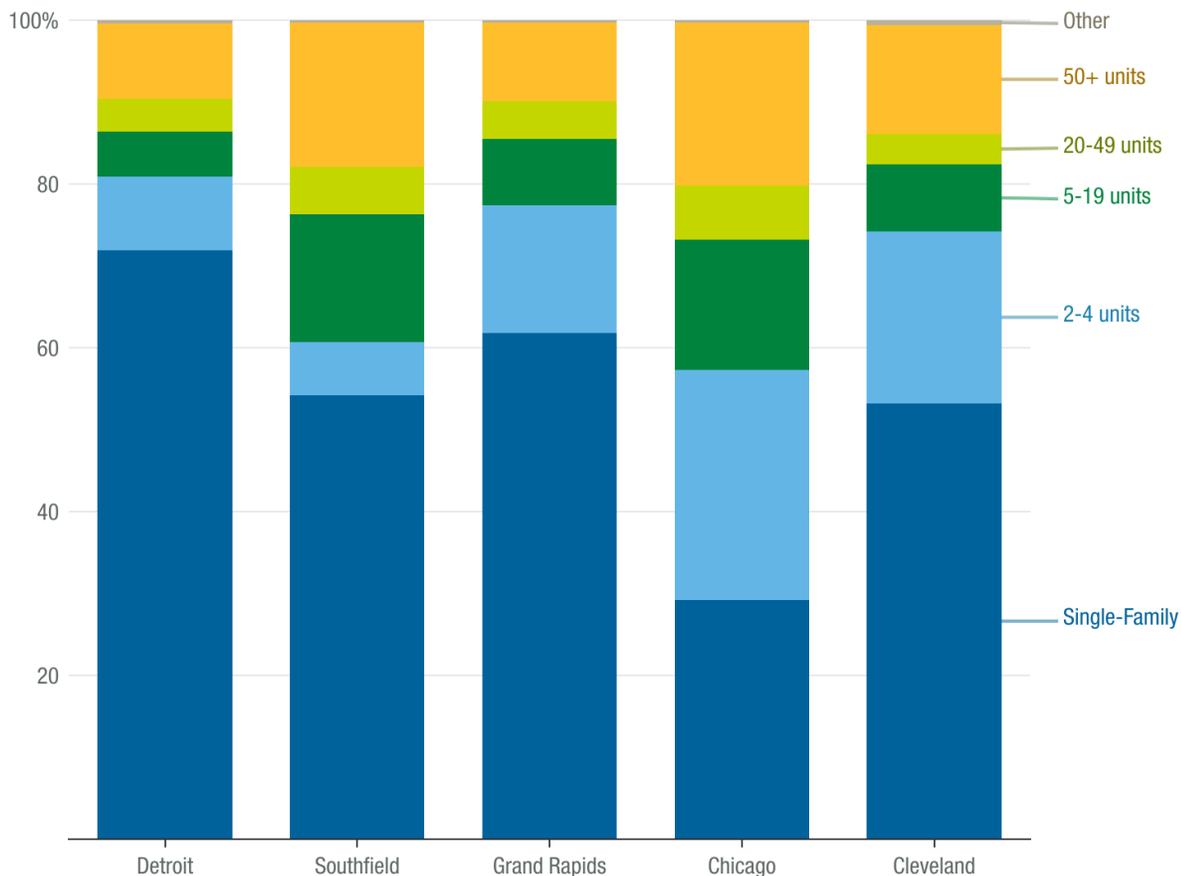


Chart: Center for Community Progress • Source: American Community Survey, 2019-2023

traditional and new neighborhood types.

Using zoning, public financing, and other local policy, Detroit should:

- Encourage infill development that offers a variety of building types and styles
- Align building design with neighborhood context—such as lower-cost modular housing construction in neighborhoods with high density of open space, or more modern construction on a smaller footprint in neighborhoods with high density of existing housing
- Support a range of resident housing needs, like multigenerational housing, affordable rentals, and homeownership

The next administration should embrace and promote a broad range of neighborhood types and building styles.

5b. Minimize and eliminate common procedural barriers to new construction.

New construction in Detroit is often slow and costly, especially when the goal is to develop projects at attainable price points. The City and its partners should **identify common obstacles** to new construction projects, and explore solutions like:

- Preapproved construction plans to expedite desired housing development
- Reduced or waived utility connection fees
- Flexible requirements for lot size, density, architectural design, parking minimums, and setbacks
- Fee waivers, reductions, or deferrals associated with permitting, zoning, and/or financing
- Expedited processing of applications, permits, and other approvals for priority projects

The **DLBA can also play a key role by completing pre-development activities** before selling properties, thus reducing costs and time for developers. This might include:

- Lot consolidations, subdivisions, and replatting
- Rezoning and variances
- Quiet title services
- Prequalifying purchasers
- Pre-sales investments, such as whiteboxing
- Depository program (for both publicly and privately held property)
- Environmental remediation

The next administration should work with public and private partners to explore these and other solutions to make new construction projects more feasible in Detroit.

5c. Look into physically moving salvageable houses.

Infill construction is expensive, and some largely vacant neighborhoods contain salvageable houses with architectural value. Detroit should **explore whether physically relocating these buildings** to higher-density neighborhoods could be a cost-effective alternative to infill construction. The analysis should weigh all of the associated costs with moving, including site prep on two sites; the preservation of value in the existing structure and the savings of avoiding demolition; and the environmental and historic preservation benefits.

If pursued, this strategy **must align with the open space plan to ensure the vacated lot has a future use.**

The next administration should do a full comparative cost analysis for relocating a select set of salvageable houses and consider a pilot study to test the process.

5d. Explore “pocket” commercial opportunities in lower-density neighborhoods.

Many of Detroit’s neighborhoods lack the density to support the city’s stretches of long, auto-oriented commercial strips, which **no longer meet modern needs and shopping habits.** To maximize its investment

in addressing commercial vacancy, Detroit should (1) identify key areas to promote dense commercial hubs and (2) explore creating “pocket” commercial nodes—clusters of three to four businesses—within lower-density neighborhoods. These compact hubs, located in new or fully rehabbed buildings, could help bring a sustainable level of amenities and services to a neighborhood. The City could support this by **adjusting zoning, strategically demolishing and preparing sites for new construction, and offering small business support.**

The next administration should leverage *Plan Detroit* and other neighborhood plans and efforts to determine where and how to support new commercial development.

Conclusion

The scale of VAD properties in Detroit is immense—but so is the opportunity to transform them into assets for a vibrant future. With new mayoral leadership in 2026, this brief focuses on what the City of Detroit could do locally. However, **regional and state-level action is also essential.** Michigan needs dedicated State funding for land banks, more investment in housing rehab and repair, and incentives that encourage regional cooperation.

Community Progress remains committed to working with the City, the DLBA, and other partners to advance these priorities and help Detroit realize a future where all neighborhoods thrive.

Project Credits

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We are grateful to the staff of [Detroit Future City](#) for their data analysis, insight, and review.

Read the Report Online

For interactive data visualizations and a sharable link, please visit <https://communityprogress.org/data-stories/detroit-vacant-property-recommendations-2026/> to read the full report.

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About the Center for Community Progress

The Center for Community Progress helps people to transform vacant spaces into vibrant places. Since 2010, their team of experts has provided urban, suburban, and rural communities looking to revitalize vacant properties with the tools and resources needed to address those properties at the policy and systems level. As the only national nonprofit dedicated to vacant property revitalization, Community Progress drives change by uncovering and disrupting systems that perpetuate entrenched vacancy and property deterioration. Community Progress has delivered customized, expert guidance to leaders in over 300 communities and provided hundreds of hours of free educational resources as well as leadership programming to help policymakers, practitioners, and community members across the country return properties to productive use. To learn more and get help for your community, visit communityprogress.org

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