Practical Community Learning Project

Project Proposal: Flint Businesses Resource Toolkit

Fall 2022

Introduction

The University of Michigan- Flint’s Office of Economic Development seeks to partner with the University of Michigan’s Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy to develop a business resource toolkit for neighborhood-based business and building owners.

In July 2022, the City of Flint, Michigan, after a stalled 9-year Imagine Flint master planning process, approved a new form-based zoning code that introduces new opportunities and restrictions for land use in the city. Many residents and business owners are not knowledgeable about the zoning code changes or their implications for current and future businesses. In addition to this information, neighborhood businesses need information and guidance on the necessary steps in the redevelopment and start up launch process.

Scope of Work

Students will collaborate with the City of Flint’s Economic Development Department and UM-Flint Office of Economic Development staff to develop a guide for new and existing businesses to understand, act on and sustainably operate in Flint.

1) Engage in conversations with key city of Flint and UM-Flint Office of Economic Development staff to understand existing resources and resource gaps for businesses and commercial property owners;
2) Engage in conversations with key business and building owners in neighborhood districts to understand gaps in service and knowledge that exist;
3) Assemble a list of resources and appropriate steps to follow when looking to locate a business in an existing neighborhood context along with complementary business-related resources like how to write a required business plan to access funding.
4) Create physical and digital versions of a short document summarizing key points and resources from the database
5) Present resources and document to community in Zoom-based webinar and Invite relevant organizations to speak about their individual resources

Expected Results

Upon completion of the independent study, students will have produced a database on local resources for neighborhood-based businesses and building owners. Resources include but are not limited to programs, key contacts, and funding opportunities directed towards assisting
businesses and entrepreneurs within the city of Flint. The short document will be succinct, use QR codes when needed, and provide direct contact information.

The resource list and associated document will be influenced by conversations with key city and UM-Flint staff and with key neighborhood businesses and entrepreneurs. At least one student from the designated team will be present at each resulting conversation and record the session. Students will be expected to listen and use the information shared in the conversation to direct research on resources to include in the subsequent document.

Students will also be expected to present their results over Zoom alongside a panel of relevant experts. In addition to the local business community, the partners listed in the document will be invited to speak on a panel about their individual services. Students are expected to help facilitate the invitation of the webinar to the partners listed in the document, invite local business and building owners, and assist on the day of the event.

Communities across the U.S. have similar infographics and educational materials for new and existing businesses, some relevant examples are included below for reference in addition to the city of Flint’s master plan document library:

https://www.gardencitymi.org/DocumentCenter/View/33/Seven-Steps-for-Opening-a-Business-PDF?fbclid=IwAR3dQPIHnukJ1254PzLRz91xvJigJ0NsZZTNWF07LCd7wAV6XlIPwaX-Vpc

https://www.culvercity.org/Services/Business-Resources/F-Business-Owner-Resources

https://www.pa.gov/guides/starting-a-business/

https://www.imagineflint.com/pages/resources

For more information about UM-Flint’s Office of Economic Development, please visit www.umflint.edu/oed or contact Paula Nas at pnas@umich.edu.
Introduction

The Ford School’s Program in Practical Policy Engagement (P3E) is partnering with the Office of Detroit City Councilmember Gabriela Santiago-Romero to assist in researching and aggregating information related to demolitions in the city of Detroit. Councilmember Gabriela Santiago-Romero is an immigrant from Mexico, raised in Southwest Detroit and an active organizer in Michigan. She has spent her whole life fighting for justice and brings her core value of putting people first to local government. Councilmember Santiago-Romero is the newly elected Detroit City Council Member for District 6. She currently serves on the Budget, Finance & Audit Standing Committee, and is the first Latina to ever chair a standing committee, Public Health & Safety

Scope of Work

Students will gather and synthesize information about local demolition practices in the city of Detroit. Given the lack of cohesive and publicly available information currently available from Detroit’s Demolition and Buildings, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Departments, the primary responsibility of the students will be researching the topics of demolition practices, resident rights, and demolition funding. This research will include:

Dangerous buildings & emergency demolitions processes
  ● Criteria for selecting buildings
  ● Communication and noticing from Buildings, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED)
  ● Funding sources for demolitions

Resident rights and advocacy
  ● How do residents request demolitions?
  ● How do residents understand what properties in their area are slated for demolition?
  ● How do residents stop or prevent demolitions?
  ● How do residents report issues and concerns?

Expected Results

Upon completion of the independent study, students will have produced a report on the various components of Detroit’s dangerous buildings and emergency demolition policies and procedures. Students will create a one pager aimed to educate and empower Detroit residents
involved in the demolition process. Further, student work will assist Councilmember Santiago-Romero in her legislative duties and helping residents within the city of Detroit.
Introduction

The Office of Flint Councilwoman Tonya Burns seeks to partner with the University of Michigan’s Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy to research best practices of municipal home buying programs. Councilwoman Burns is serving her first term representing Flint’s 6th Ward, which is located on the west side of the city. Burns was born and raised in Flint. She’s a business owner, a mother of three, and has been especially active in politics ever since she had a major health issue that developed during the Flint water crisis. She participated in protests along with running for local and statewide offices. Additionally, she worked for Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley’s administration before being elected in November 2021. Councilwoman Burns is focused on crime, blight, economic development, and homeownership.

Scope of Work

The sixth ward is located on the west side of the city, and covers the least amount of land of all the wards, at 2.2 square miles. The ward is home to Mott Park, the majority of Kettering University, and McLaren Hospital. According to the Flint Property Portal, the majority of properties in this ward are in “good” and “fair” condition. There are 2,838 properties listed as “good,” 975 listed as “fair,” 205 listed as “poor,” and 83 listed as “sub-standard.” There have been 549 demolitions in this ward, and the Land Bank has 88 more listed for demolition, four of which are funded. In an effort to provide Flint with increased home ownership, Councilwoman Burns is seeking to create a pilot program for city employees to purchase and rehab homes in the city. Students will research housing incentive programs nationally, with a focus on cities similar to Flint, MI. Students will gather data on the Flint housing market, Genesee County Land Bank properties in Flint, vacant homes owned by the city of Flint, and available city funds for home rehabilitation. Using researched data and information, students will create a summary report along with a one pager designed to inform residents of Flint, MI. Councilwoman Burns will give the students an opportunity to visit Flint and engage with stakeholders and community members to better understand issues facing the city.

Expected Results

At the end of the project, the final deliverable will inform Councilwoman Burns in her attempt to promote neighborhood stabilization. The pilot program seeks to increase employment within the city, provide a mechanism for homeownership, and utilize Flint’s housing stock. As it stands, unsold city owned homes are eventually transferred to the county land bank and city funds must aid in demolition if the properties fail to sell. The housing program aims to encourage people to live and work within the city, strengthening resident bonds to the city and creating deeper ties to
neighborhoods. By building a stronger sense of community, neighborhood stabilization has the potential to reduce crime and blight, build a tax base, and benefit residents across the city.
Practical Community Learning Project
Project Proposal: Detroit Environmental Health Hazards Risk Tracking and Data Collection
Fall 2022

Introduction

Planet Detroit seeks to partner with the University of Michigan’s Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy to assist with researching environmental risks for those seeking housing in Detroit communities. Planet Detroit is a weekly email newsletter update to help readers get smarter about the environment in Detroit and Michigan. Planet Detroit believes Detroit residents deserve better information access so that they can, at the very least, be aware of the harm to themselves and their families, and at most, take action to protect their health. They focus on explanatory, solutions-based, and investigative reporting, and have a deep commitment to community engagement around local environmental issues. Planet Detroit’s mission is to: raise awareness about Metro Detroit’s environmental and public health challenges and potential solutions; hold powerful entities accountable, and empower readers to take action in their communities.

Scope of Work

Students will identify and collect data that details environmental health exposure risks at the neighborhood and property levels, providing high-value information on risk and resources for mitigating risk. Examples of this are: the presence of lead paint, water damage, lead service lines, air quality, flood and basement back-up risk, heat exposure risk, and more. Students will then assist Planet Detroit with an inventory of all relevant data on environmental risks and exposures tied to geography, including public records, national tools, and government data. In addition, students will have the opportunity to engage with journalists, Detroit residents, and relevant stakeholders in the community.

Expected Results

Planet Detroit wants to understand how better information services for Detroit residents who are disproportionately exposed to hidden pollution due to structural racism can serve their community. Through collaborative research and engagement, the goal is to create an information hub for high-value information to help Detroiter identify these hazards and to make decisions for their families’ health, thereby building health equity in the city. Student work will populate a database and digital tool, created by Planet Detroit and its partners, allowing users to search property addresses and receive a report on all known and potential environmental hazards.