



## Community Voices & Sustainable Economic Development in Detroit

*Left: Impact area for downtown Bedrock projects. Map image courtesy of the City of Detroit, available at <https://codstaging.detroitmi.gov>. Right: Conceptual image courtesy of CBS Detroit*

### GLOBAL IMPACT ARTICLE SERIES

Cities in the United States are growing and new developments are being constructed at a faster pace than in years past. When these developments are proposed, more often than not, local community members are not consulted. This is unfortunate because community engagement is necessary for the successful implementation of sustainable developments, and having a voice in the development decisions in your town or neighborhood is an opportunity every community member should have.

Throughout 2018, a team of University of Michigan (U-M) Dow Sustainability Fellows assessed the effectiveness of Detroit's Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO) by looking at two projects that occurred before and two projects that occurred after its enactment in 2017. Working with a Detroit-based nonprofit, Doing Development Differently in Detroit, the U-M team selected four development projects as case studies: Little Caesars Arena and Gordie Howe International Bridge (both pre-CBO) and Downtown Bedrock Developments and Herman Kiefer Redevelopment (both post-CBO).

### COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENTS & CBOS

Community benefits agreements are formal or informal contracts between developers, local governments, and community members. These agreements help community members feel included and can contribute to the formation of a Community Benefits Agreement. A CBO ensures that any incentives and funds awarded to the developer will yield benefits for the local community. The CBO requires large-scale project developers to consult with local community members to improve understanding of the concerns and potential development impacts. In the case study examples, Advisory Councils were designed, and members were appointed to develop community benefits requests considered by the developer.

"The CBO is a means of getting more community input as part of the development process," says Karen Goldberg, a graduate student member of the Dow Fellows team. "It is an ordinance that mandates that large scale development projects, that are receiving a tax break at a certain level, and [developers] have to include community members in their development process."

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The team traveled to Detroit to conduct a series of interviews and focus groups in the summer of 2018. Neighborhood Advisory Council members, city staff, city council members, developers, and residents were interviewed. "Our group sought to be a neutral third party when conducting the interviews," says Goldberg. "We wanted to hear from a variety of people to gain input from diverse voices."

Focus groups were conducted to include all community members. “We went to each development and impact area included in the CBO and went to houses and apartments and put up flyers saying everyone was invited,” Goldberg mentions. “We wanted to be as inclusive as we could. We asked those who participated in the process questions about engagement, knowledge of the project, and whether they felt included in the development process.”

Most interviewees and focus group participants were pleased to see economic development taking place, but they felt they did not have a significant voice in deciding what types of development would take place in their neighborhoods.

“Overall, the focus groups were a great way to engage community members; they were very insightful,” says Goldberg. “People felt strongly about what was going on in their neighborhood, and they felt they weren’t being represented properly.”

### CASE STUDY CONCLUSIONS

- Provide additional resources for the Neighborhood Advisory Council process to improve the quality of public participation and outcomes of the community benefits agreements.
- Engage community members earlier in the process.
- Provide technical assistance and resources to Advisory Council members to allow them to engage with developers effectively.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms to improve community trust.



### PROJECT TEAM

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### CLIENT

- Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit

### READ MORE

- Full Project Report
- Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit
- Dow Sustainability Fellows Program
- Dow Global Impact Series

This project addresses the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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