



## Sustainability and the HOPE Village Initiative

To support creative redevelopment efforts in Detroit, the Graham Sustainability Institute partnered with the Detroit-based nonprofit civil and human rights organization Focus: HOPE to conduct the Sustainability and the HOPE Village Initiative (HVI) Integrated Assessment (IA). The HVI is Focus: HOPE's comprehensive effort to better the education, economic self-sufficiency, and living environment for residents within the 100 blocks surrounding its campus in Detroit by 2031. Through collaboration among U-M researchers, Focus: HOPE staff, and residents around key sustainability issues, the IA project developed analyses and recommendations to help Focus: HOPE advance the HVI and revitalize the neighborhood.

### ACTING LOCALLY

Communities in Detroit currently face a range of issues, including unemployment, vacancy, low graduation rates, and degraded environmental health. While these problems often extend beyond single neighborhoods, efforts to understand and address them at a community level have the potential to make a difference locally and may shed light on larger-scale solutions that can lead to widespread change.

Working with this framework, the Graham Institute partnered with the nationally recognized civil and human rights organization Focus: HOPE, whose HVI aims to transform the neighborhood around its campus. To help Focus: HOPE determine how best to work toward the HVI's goals, the Graham Institute funded six multidisciplinary U-M research teams to examine environmental, economic, and social issues critical to the HVI's success:

- VACANT & OPEN SPACE
- SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS
- HOUSING
- EDUCATION
- BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### ENGAGING & EMPOWERING

Collaboration was a hallmark of the IA project and was evident in many aspects of the work. For example, Focus: HOPE's priorities and feedback guided the focus of the projects; teams addressed issues from multiple disciplines; and community stakeholders provided input and helped conduct the research.

By training residents in research methods and involving them in the process and work, the project approach helped develop human capacity and leadership skills in the neighborhood that extend beyond the IA itself. Graham sponsored a community block party to encourage further community involvement with the projects and support the HVI. The research teams also shared their work and solicited community feedback through a six-week interactive poster display at the neighborhood branch of the Detroit Public Library.

### U-M FACULTY LEADS

- Alicia Alvarez Law School
- María Arquero de Alarcón Architecture & Urban Planning
- Priya Baskaran Law School
- Craig Borum Architecture
- John C. Burkhardt School of Education
- Aline Cotel College of Engineering
- Margi Dewar Architecture & Urban Planning
- Eric Dueweke Architecture & Urban Planning
- Robert Grese Natural Resources & Environment
- Jen Maigret Architecture
- Lorelle Meadows College of Engineering
- Betty Overton-Adkins School of Education
- Bruce Pietrykowski Center for Labor & Community Studies, U-M Dearborn
- Roland Zullo Institute for Research on Labor, Employment & the Economy
- Paul Draus Public Affairs, U-M Dearborn
- Juliette Roddy Public Affairs, U-M Dearborn

### PARTNER

Focus Hope, [www.focushope.edu](http://www.focushope.edu)



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

For more than 18 months, the teams engaged in diverse efforts to support the HVI. They gathered data, identified opportunities, developed plans and recommendations, and facilitated several neighborhood improvements. Accomplishments include:

### OPEN & VACANT SPACE

- Playground renovations at Glazer Academy using designs developed with neighborhood and U-M students
- Visioning plans and design strategies for underutilized spaces
- Property research to help target stabilization and improvement efforts
- Assistance making Focus: HOPE a lead partner on the 26-mile Inner Circle Greenway that will convert an abandoned railroad bed into a multi-use trail
- Designs for transforming a vacant lot near Focus: HOPE's campus into an attractive, temporary public park

### SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

- Interdisciplinary inventories of the neighborhood's social environment through interviews, focus groups, and photographs that reveal residents' perceptions and concerns

### HOUSING

- Analysis of options to increase affordable housing availability

### EDUCATION

- Asset map of city-wide educational resources available to HVI residents
- Evaluation of options to mobilize a fundable community-based educational network and foster a college-going culture

### BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- Inventories of the neighborhood's physical environment to identify strengths and opportunities
- Streetscape plans and a traffic study to help make streets safer and more usable

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Master plan to improve and attract investment to the main commercial thoroughfare
- Audit of community-based skills that can form the basis of new economic collaborations
- Recommendation to create a local exchange system for residents to offer services through a time bank or utilize a local currency

“ It gives me hope that somebody's paying attention to the community and recognizing the importance of the people and the resources you can get from them. ”

*Lisa Robinson, Resident, Oakland Boulevard Community Association  
President, IA Community Researcher*

## LOOKING FORWARD

Recognizing that the implementation of recommendations will require additional resources, the teams developed project proposals that Focus: HOPE may submit to potential funders. While Graham's collaborative study with Focus: HOPE concluded in Summer 2014, the doors between the two organizations remain open for continuing to build hope in the neighborhood—and in the Motor City.



### READ MORE

For more information including copies of the reports;  
<http://graham.umich.edu/emopps/detroit/focushope>

### SUPPORT

The Graham Sustainability Institute engages, empowers, and supports faculty and students from all U-M units and integrates this talent with external stakeholders, fostering sustainability solutions at all scales. We believe that diversity is key to individual empowerment, and the advancement of sustainability knowledge, learning and leadership. Individuals, corporations, foundations, government agencies, and the University of Michigan support the Institute. See: [www.graham.umich.edu](http://www.graham.umich.edu)