

Hood Research

Your NeighborHOOD RESEARCH Group and Think Tank

February 6, 2006

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To: The Honorable Mayor Kwame M. Kilpatrick
From: Hood Research

Brief Summary of Issues Affecting the City of Detroit Issued by Hood Research

The following pages cover issues and areas of concern or things of notable mention. Each has a brief summary offering suggestions and ideas on how to make improvements, value added additions and changes to benefit the city. In all suggestions the key issues of cost and a return on investment have been considered. For this summary, technical, financial and other detail information has not been directly included. This is not intended to be a proposal. This report represents a framework for a higher level of overview.

There are many items to consider with each issue. These offered just scratch the surface. As in the past Hood Research will be looking into these issues and convening with the public to address the items affecting our community.

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Rosa Parks Boulevard and Black Historic Districts

- Three years ago Hood Research took a proposal before Detroit's City Council to beautify Rosa Parks Boulevard. Hood Research has refreshed this proposal and is introducing it again this year. As a Majority Black city with many heroes of Black History as well as the city playing a major role in Black history, the lack of city identifiers with Black history is a shame. Further, the fact that Rosa Parks herself lived in Detroit for over 40 years and never had the benefits of a Black city properly giving her respect is a negative against Detroit. But this can be rectified. Rosa Parks Boulevard needs to be a showcase street in the city. Then Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard needs to be done the same way. Where the two streets meet there should be statues. The children of Detroit and the visitors to the city need to be reminded of Black history and the champions of this world. Other towns and countries honor their local heroes and patrons. We still look at streets with names of persons long since dead with whom in modern times they would not be so honored. But few like Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr. who came to Detroit and made the city a base of their efforts should not be left to mirror others of history who have done less.

Taxes

- Is there a mechanism by which you can confirm the appropriate tax due to the city? Business Tax, Property Tax, Income Tax, etc.
- Has any one audited, reviewed the taxes collected? All contractors, agencies and others involved in the collection of taxes?
- Modernize the tax system to better use computers, tie into the State and Federal tax system to identify taxable organizations and allow for projections and audit assistance on collectable taxes.
- Need to track who actually works in Detroit and does not withhold or pay taxes. There have been known instances of companies not withholding city income taxes. This causes Detroit to lose money during the year and perhaps lose it altogether if they don't know the revenue exists.
- What about Canadian residents and taxes?
- Perform an audit on all businesses in the city, calculate what amount of employees exist on average per company then compare the taxes collected by that business to determine if they reported all existing taxes.
- Are companies breaking the law by not withholding city taxes from employee's checks?
- Is the city collecting all known property tax revenue?
- Is the city able to adequately assess the taxable value of commercial property in the city?
- Is the tax system smart enough to track and check individuals like city employees who do not live in the city? Has the process of non-resident taxes been audited?

Residency

- Hood Research applauds Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick on the rule for appointees moving back into the city. This is a positive action that not only supports Detroit but shows that the city thinks Detroit first.
- What can be done to continue to come up with other ideas to encourage employees to move back to Detroit or stay in Detroit. Hood Research has several incomplete ideas. Some of which include advertising campaigns, incentives not based on financial gain, or perks which are enjoyed by residents and would be unavailable to non-residents. Also there is the pride factor which has not been explored in making residents who may be new or recent residents proud of Detroit.

City Service

- The condition of city buildings needs improvement. While the city fines private residence or local business for code violations, the city itself violates these same codes. Weeds, curbs in need of repair and other hazards or sight pollution need to be addressed.
- With the end of Bulk Pickup the city will have to deal with a non-existent plan to address yard refuse. This is primarily the annual amount of leafs each year. It will be a shock to the city when the residents must deal with

leaf removal. Some residents who live near vacant land of city parks will increase their illegal dumping. But the city could mirror some programs from the suburbs where the city has residents collect their leaves at the curb while a leaf truck collects the leaves at given times of the year. This allows some suburbs to collect the large amount of leaves while not being obligation to remove large bulk items. Leaves not properly disposed of end up clogging up the city's infrastructure. Part of this will be in the sewer system as more leaves end up in the road sewer drains. This will cause more sewers to backup into homes and cause more consternation for city residents.

- Small gestures that have great consequences such as city departments addressing the needs of the local residents and business owners need to be emphasized. For instance on Joy Road near Manner (near Wyoming) a bus stop sits in front of a Bank branch. As does happens this bank has been the victim of crime and a bus stop which offers cover to a loiterer or worse can easily be rectified by moving it one block in either direction. As a Bank is a special type of business it deserves increased attention. But the city has been lax in responding to its needs. This leads to ill feelings and bad impressions. Perhaps the city departments are overwhelmed with work but each opportunity missed is an opportunity for the city to get additional bad comments. Not to mention an increase in the crime rate.

Government

- The lack of a firm ethics policy and adequate enforcement takes its toll on the confidence of Detroit office holders, both elected and appointed. The city needs to get tough on an ethics policy and insist that the City Council embrace this policy for their offices.

Public Safety

- Hood Research recommends off duty policing become an official policy. Some police officers already engage in this practice. If the city supported such activity and then instituted controls to help define the boundaries it would allow for this activity and protect the city by providing rules and conditions for the officers. This then lessens the possibility of civil actions against the city for off duty police activities. Further, the city's rules could be enforced to only allow Detroit residents to conduct off duty policing or at least restrict such activity to Detroit Police officers. This can be done through some form of registration. It would secure revenue for Detroit and allow control by the DPD.

Revenue

- Detroit needs to increase revenue. Detroit also needs to reduce its revenue reliance on its homeowners. This can be accomplished. Hood Research strongly recommends the elimination of the DDA, Downtown Development Authority. This agency is a revenue roadblock. It negatively affects the property value in the Central Business District. It will prevent Detroit from absorbing the benefits of an increasingly wealthy downtown. Other cities in Michigan have gotten rid of their DDA agencies. Further, the size of Detroit's central business district makes the current DDA obsolete. The city can perform these same services of the DDA without the additional cost and consequence.

Quality of Life

- This is one of the most important issues and the least addressed by government. It directly affects the people who make the city and then indirectly affect those who visit the city and come in contact with the people. There are several things the city can do immediately and to plan for to improve.
- Recreation is one of the biggest factors. The cities park system is one of the largest in the country and underutilized when compared to other parks. Only the State of Michigan in the local vicinity exceeds Detroit in the depth of parks and availability to the residents. Back in the 1990's all attention was on Belle Isle and the rest of Detroit's parks were ignored. But Belle Isle is not the only city gem nor is it the largest city park. Both Rouge Park and Chandler park are nearer the residents and offer more opportunities for improvement. They need to get state of the art treatment under a plan for improvement. This can be done within the budget and without

additional taxes or park fees. Of course Belle also falls into this category as well as Detroit's numerous smaller neighborhood parks.

- The Detroit Zoo also received millions of dollars in the last decade but still exists in deficit. This has to do in part with the management style and past decisions. But location is another key factor. Rather than sell the zoo to another municipality as some have suggested, Detroit would see enormous benefits if it moved the zoo into the city boundaries and crafted a plan to form an area that used the zoo as an anchor to support recreation, business and tourism. Other cities have zoos that perform better financially, but Detroit has land and opportunity to remake its zoo for the future. Even a partnership with the city's school system would be realized with a city zoo inside the city. Then a decision to outsource management would not be a negative but a positive as the zoo served a purpose as more than housing for exotic animals.
- Also a large factor of quality is visual. For years city residents have been the brunt of insults and criticisms as people blamed them for creating a dirty city. But the city residents are not to blame. Venture down the residential streets and all look good and some look great. It's the major thoroughfares that bring in the trash. These are the avenues that visitors take and then use to form opinions. People from the suburbs or beyond are not touring residential areas to form their opinions of Detroit. Local businesses must be forced to live up to city codes. The buildings must be made safe, secure and be free of sight pollution. Additionally, zoning needs to be addressed and enforced to allow for commercial signs and to remove those that reduce the quality of an area. The suburbs had the benefit of using the city as a template and then made new laws and rules to achieve immediate results. Detroit can use this timing of a city primed to explode with new ventures to remake many of its older laws.

Transportation

- With the desire for a mass transit system for the Metro Detroit area and the reality that such a system would cost more money than the regional government's wishes to commit to such a project, Hood Research believes that the existing DDOT bus system can meet the needs of transit and perform within the confines of cost. DDOT should be looking for expansion rather than continue the plan from the 90's of allowing SMART to expand at the expense of DDOT. There exists enough need and revenue to support DDOT on an expanded system.

Technology

- Wireless technology is no longer the future but a necessary tool for the present. Oakland County has the jump start on providing this technology for their residents both business and homeowners. This allows Oakland County to provide an important business tool which has far reaching benefits. The value of this is far into the millions of dollars. For residents, non-business owners, while not a business tool, it allows for competitive offerings for internet access. This access has quickly become a standard for homeowners. Additionally, the school systems can utilize this feature for both in school and at home work by faculty and students. Detroit needs to do the same and offer wireless internet connectivity for every square inch of the city. This expenditure can easily pay for itself while providing a positive return on revenue.

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Thank You for taking the time to review this report. While this does not offer a thorough examination of each issue, it begins to present ideas that Hood Research is addressing. Please contact Hood Research for more information and to continue discussing these issues as well as developing plans to best address each item. This is not an all encompassing list but a start. It may mirror efforts already underway and open up some pathways to new paradigms.

We provide this document first to the mayor because these issues are instigated and planned through the mayor's office. Hood Research also does not take lightly the role of the City Council and a copy will be presented to each City Council member.

Very Truly Yours,
Theo Broughton,
Reggie Crawford
Henry Teutsch

A carbon copy will be provided to the Honorable City Council members and made available on the Hood Research web site, <http://www.hoodresearch.org>

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