



Fighting for Equity in Development

The Story of Detroit's
Community Benefits Ordinance



The mission of the **Equitable Detroit Coalition** is to foster beneficial relationships between developers and the Detroit community by facilitating open and honest dialogue and to assist developers funded by public dollars to become corporate neighbors who are transparent in their relationship with the community. We believe that public investment entitles residents to be stakeholders.

The **Detroit People's Platform (DPP)** is a broad network of Detroit-based social justice organizations, activists, and residents committed to bringing about just transformation in economics and social dynamics through popular education, celebration, and organizing. We use data, analysis, advocacy, media and organizing to protect and increase participation in the democratic process and to demand that state and local decision makers consider racial equity and economic justice in their planning, funding, and policymaking decisions.

Acknowledgments

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The Detroit People's Platform serves as the institutional anchor for the Equitable Detroit Coalition.

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Introduction

In January 2014, a group of Detroit community leaders convened to discuss a vision for a new policy that no city had ever successfully pursued: a community benefits ordinance (CBO). The policy would require every developer or project in Detroit that received above a certain threshold of city tax breaks or public funds to sign a community benefits agreement (CBA): a legally binding agreement with an impacted community to define a set of needs and standards the developer would meet to earn local support.

In recent decades, city leaders have spent or conceded more and more public resources for ambitious projects to fulfill their economic agendas. In response, community groups across the nation have turned to CBAs to prevent such projects from benefiting new high-income residents at the expense of services and amenities for high-poverty communities that remain, often just blocks away. This sense of inequity is especially acute in Detroit, the city with the nation's highest unemployment rate,¹ highest poverty rate,² and one its highest rates of inequality: in 2012, the 95th percentile of its earners (\$101,620) made over 11 times more than the 20th percentile (\$9,083).³ Yet as most of Detroit continues to face dire poverty and disinvestment, its downtown has begun a resurgence. In 2016, Detroit's greater downtown was home to 110 development deals, with projects growing in scale.⁴ Many received public funds.



33%

One in three Detroiters
are members of households
that make \$20,070
or less each year.

Each of the leaders who met on that January day—the majority of whom were local women of color—had fought battles for CBAs or other agreements on a range of projects in Detroit, from supermarkets to streetcar lines. And most had faced the same roadblock: other than their voices, they had no leverage. They saw that a citywide CBO would not only provide this leverage, but would fundamentally alter expectations on how development is done in Detroit by normalizing a community-driven approach.

Their meeting marked the launch of the Equitable Detroit Coalition, which over the next three years advanced a CBO campaign from a stalled City Council bill to a ballot initiative in Detroit’s 2016 elections, propelling it into a bitter public battle. Ultimately, Equitable Detroit’s CBO—“Proposal A”—lost narrowly to a far less powerful alternative introduced by Detroit’s City Council—“Proposal B.”

Nonetheless, Equitable Detroit members already regard their campaign as a success for several reasons. First, Proposal A garnered almost 100,000 votes, a major portion of Detroit’s population. Second, while Proposal B was not the CBO they wanted, their efforts still directly led to the passage of the nation’s first citywide community benefits legislation, a stepping stone to greater inclusion of community voices in development decisions. Third, the attention they generated—even in the form of backlash—increased awareness and dialogue around the concept of community benefits by leaps and bounds.

Most importantly, by relying on tireless grassroots organizing and community outreach, Equitable Detroit planted seeds for a broader movement for equitable development—one that they hope will extend beyond one policy and one city. “If we are as successful as we want to be,” says Angy Webb, an Equitable Detroit member and leader of Joy Community Association, “we will be a model for everyone.”

This report documents the national model on which Equitable Detroit is building, the inequalities that it aims to address, and the way in which the CBO can further propel the community benefits model. It details Equitable Detroit’s campaign and strategies to date and offers some lessons that its members have learned or reinforced in the process, which they will use to move forward and which community leaders in other cities may find useful in pursuing their own CBO campaigns.



“If we are as successful as
we want to be, we will be a
model for everyone.”

~ ANGY WEBB

The Promise of Community Benefits Agreements

In a 2005 report, Julian Gross defines CBAs as “deals between developers and coalitions of community organizations, addressing a broad range of community needs.” He continues: “[CBAs] allow community groups to have a voice in shaping a project, to press for community benefits that are tailored to their particular needs, and to enforce developer’s promises.” The underlying premise of community benefits, Gross explains, is that “the main purpose of economic development is to bring measurable, permanent improvements to the lives of affected residents, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods.”⁵

CBAs can include a range of benefits to fulfill this vision, but many focus on similar basic needs of low-income communities: local living-wage jobs; decent affordable housing; accessible public amenities; environmental safeguards. Many of these traits can be found in the CBAs that community coalitions have negotiated in at least 15 cities across the country over the last twenty years. For example:

- In 2001, the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice negotiated the most prominent early CBA with the developers of the Los Angeles Sports and Entertainment District, which is adjacent to its Staples Center arena and received over \$150 million in public subsidies. The CBA included a commitment that 70% of created jobs would pay a living wage; a first-source hiring program targeting low-income workers; increased affordable housing requirements and funding; and a \$1 million commitment towards a community park.
- In 2008, Pittsburgh’s One Hill CBA Coalition signed a CBA with the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Penguins to ensure that their new hockey arena and its surrounding development—which received over \$47 million in public funding—would provide living wages for all permanent jobs; prohibition of development interference with union representations; a \$2 million donation towards a full-service grocery store; and over \$6 million in funding to meet needs of the surrounding community, including a multi-purpose youth center and health services.
- In 2016, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) signed a CBA with Sagamore Development for the \$5.5 billion Port Covington development, which received \$660 million in tax-increment financing from the City of Baltimore. The CBA included the provision of \$25 million towards a Workforce Development Training Center; \$10 million towards small business loans and investments; a commitment to hire 12% of workers from local apprenticeship programs and a target to hire 30% from within the City of Baltimore; an enforceable living wage; and almost \$15 million towards scholarships, recreation centers, after-school programs, and a farmer’s market.

These and other CBAs represent the result of months of negotiations, and no community group has received every community benefit that they believed to be justified. CBAs are also difficult to enforce and monitor over a long period of time, and developers can manipulate them by signing them with weak or compromised community groups, as was the case with the Atlantic Yards CBA in Brooklyn in 2009.⁶ Meanwhile, most developers continue to forcefully resist CBAs as unnecessary hurdles or threats to their projects, often using “divide-and-conquer” techniques among community groups and persuading city leaders to reject a CBA out of fear that it will drive away economic development.

Still, CBAs have by-and-large had a positive impact. They have leveled the balance of power between developer and community; have resulted in substantial and tangible benefits for people facing poverty; have inched their public and private sectors toward a systemic elevation of equitable development; and have spawned strong community alliances. Finally, every development that has signed a CBA has come to fruition and become profitable, offering proof that strong CBAs are not antithetical to economic growth. These assets are why, despite their pitfalls, so many community groups see CBAs as such a promising tool in their toolbox for equitable development.



Bringing the CBA to Detroit

Community leaders in Detroit first met to explore CBAs in 2010. Their conversation coincided with the growing national momentum around community benefits, but was chiefly driven by local changes. Most immediately, the city had proposed a new light rail line that would traverse the deeply under-served North End neighborhood on Woodward Avenue, and transit-dependent residents who had organized at the Storehouse of Hope Food Pantry sought to ensure that they and their neighbors would benefit equally from the service and related development. However, they knew they were not the only neighborhood in Detroit where community benefits were of imminent concern.

- In Southwest Detroit, Marathon Oil was employing a \$175 million City of Detroit tax break to expand a refinery, and Sugar Law Center was working to address local concerns around environmental impacts and the physical displacement of homes and businesses.
- In Midtown, the City of Detroit was providing Henry Ford Health Systems with tax credits for a \$28 million medical distribution center as the catalyst for future expansion, and residents were concerned how the development would reshape their part of town.
- In Delray, initial plans were being made for the Gordie Howe International Bridge, a massive publicly funded project that would require the relocation of neighborhood residents.





"All of these projects were happening at the same time," says Rashida Tlaib, a former Michigan State Representative and an attorney at Sugar Law Center, "and there was an awakening that most of them were being done with public investment."

The attendees were united by the belief that if tax dollars of Detroit residents were used to support a project, they should have a say in what benefits it offers them.

In the ensuing years, the community leaders began to work to put CBAs into practice. One opportunity emerged when Whole Foods Market made plans to build a store in the growing Midtown neighborhood using city tax benefits. With assistance from Building Movement Project, Midtown residents and supporters formed a community advisory group, engaged in internal discussions on their community benefits priorities, and arranged biweekly meetings with Whole Foods' leadership to discuss their objectives and what support they would offer in return.

After 18 months of discussions and negotiations, Whole Foods committed to 50% local hiring at above-minimum wage salaries (they eventually hired 70% of their workers from local communities), to working with local small businesses and produce vendors, and to assuring that local artists had the opportunity to complete a mural on the building. However, although the effort produced positive outcomes, community members still had no means to compel Whole Foods to sign an enforceable CBA and to assure that it would fulfill its promises, because the company had already received its tax abatement.

Meanwhile, Detroit's decades-long economic crisis reached a breaking point in July 2013, when the city filed for bankruptcy with over \$18 billion in debt—the largest ever bankruptcy filing of a U.S. city—a result of declining revenues, cuts to state revenue sharing, and the expenditure of public subsidies for major projects. In response, Michigan's governor appointed an emergency manager, who took control of Detroit's governance for the next 18 months, a process that Detroit voters opposed. "It was devastating, and there was absolutely no democracy," says Sister Gloria Rivera, a member of the Great Lakes Bioneers and of Equitable Detroit. "But the flip side was that it really mobilized people."

While Detroit was reconciling its debt, other major publicly-funded projects had continued to move forward with minimal community input, including the International Bridge and a new hockey arena that received \$250 million in local subsidies. The proposed Woodward Avenue Light Rail had been replaced by the M1 Trolley, which was scaled back to a new route that would serve more prosperous neighborhoods but no longer extend service to the more impoverished North End. And Marathon Oil was failing to meet its commitment to hiring Detroiters, as only 30 of 514 of its employees resided in Detroit as of 2014.⁷

Coalition members found a growing indignation among residents as Detroit dedicated public funds to large, concentrated economic developments while they continued to face a shortage of resources for their abandoned homes, struggling schools, and shuttered local health and recreation centers. "You can live and see two Detroit's that are being created, one at the expense of the other," says Reverend Joan Ross, a leader of the North End Woodward Community Coalition and an Equitable Detroit co-founder. "Over 20 schools are being closed in Detroit," adds Ms. Tlaib, "and so much low-income housing is being converted to large-scale housing developments, and a lot of our Detroiters, especially our seniors, are being pushed out of the downtown area."

Amidst the turmoil, Rev. Ross gathered a group of local activists to propose to Detroit's leadership that, if the city was to continue spending on development, the people they represented should be able to secure benefits. In doing so, they learned that, in 1984, the Detroit had actually passed a resolution that communities should be involved in local developments. "Why can't we broaden this?" Rev. Ross asked. "Why can't we expound on this with the years of experience we have around the country?"



The Fight for a Community Benefits Ordinance

Shortly after their meeting, the City Council passed a motion to create a Community Benefits Ordinance, and Rev. Ross called the citywide gathering that would create the Equitable Detroit Coalition and launch the grassroots campaign to support CBO legislation. Several leaders who had negotiated for community benefits with Whole Foods used their experience to compose an Equitable Development Toolkit, which they shared with fellow attendees as a tool for educating residents about CBAs and their potential role in economic development.

Over the course of 2014, Equitable Detroit worked among its members, with a work group convened by city council members, and with Sugar Law Center to build consensus on draft language for a CBO, which would mandate that developments receiving over a certain threshold of public funds negotiate a CBA with the surrounding community. In preparation for an eventual CBO, the coalition built its collective capacity to organize and negotiate for community benefits, engaging an instructor to lead negotiation trainings so that communities could act as soon as legislation was passed.

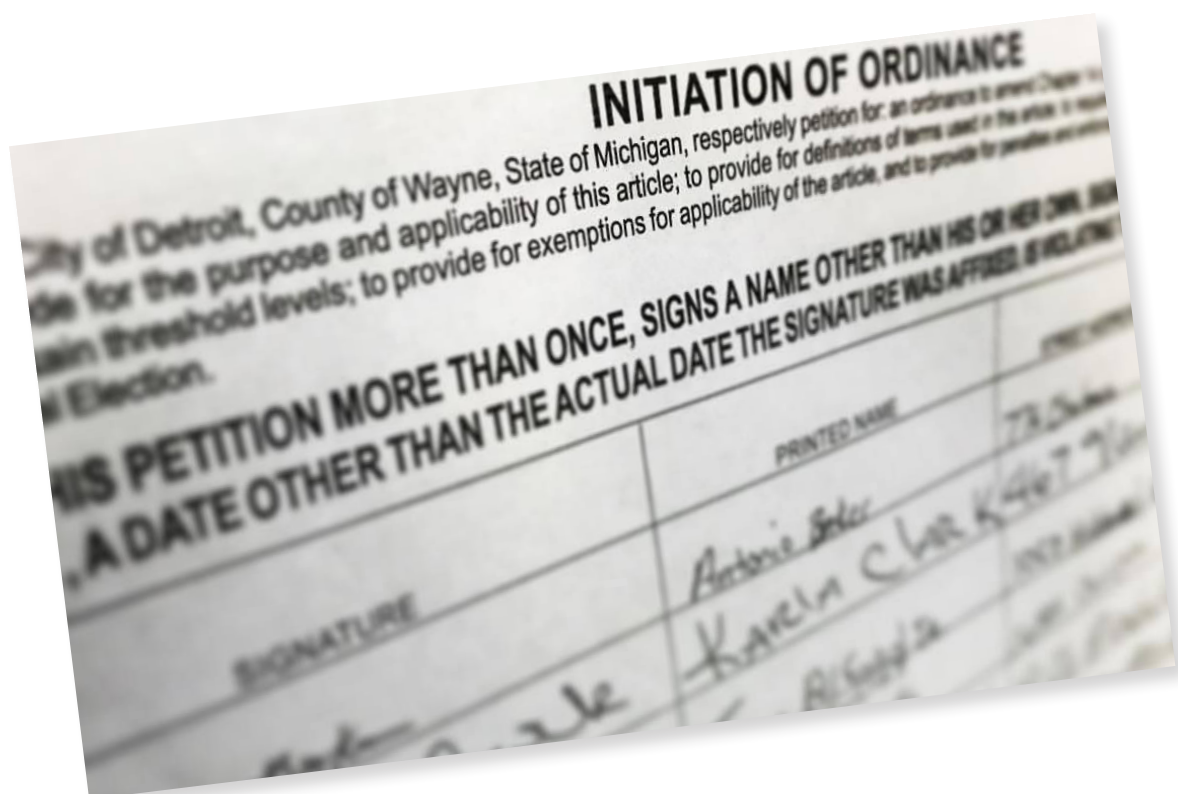
During the process, Equitable Detroit routinely engaged community groups around the city: together, they attended dozens of neighborhood meetings and knocked on thousands of doors. Their organizing work inspired new campaigns for local CBAs. For example, Brightmoor resident and Equitable Detroit member Bill Hickey helped form the Northwest Neighborhood Community Benefits Consortium, which sought a CBA with Meijer Corporation around local living wage jobs and historic preservation for a new local supermarket, and Angy Webb of Joy Community Association helped form a local coalition to seek community benefits from a DTE Energy project to build solar panels at a closed recreation center.

"The larger coalition supported the smaller local efforts," says Mr. Hickey, "and the smaller local efforts realized that the struggles we were having in our own neighborhoods dearly needed the support of a CBO." In this process, Equitable Detroit gathered continual community input and participation in crafting the evolving CBO legislation. Importantly, the majority of coalition leaders and community leaders were women of color, a population that is typically underrepresented and disempowered in economic development decisions.

After a year of working on the CBO, the campaign hit its first major roadblocks. Just as Detroit was exiting its bankruptcy and emergency management, the CBO bill moved to the City Council's Planning and Economic Committee. "They would put [the bill] on the agenda, and we would go downtown to give public comments," says Rev. Ross. "We would sit there for four or five hours, and they would just send it back to the legal department. We were silenced." At the same time, the state legislature passed a law preventing local governments from mandating CBAs, forcing the coalition to revise its language to avoid conflicts with new state rules.

Coalition members suspected that some council members did not want to advance the bill because of their allegiances to members of Detroit's business and economic development sphere. "It became obvious they were going to just stall and stall," says Rev. Ross, "and they could keep doing that for as long as we would let them." In March 2016, after months of internal deliberation, Equitable Detroit decided to forego the frozen legislative process in favor of a ballot initiative for the upcoming election.

The CBO ballot referendum they put forward to their communities would require each developer of a project over \$15 million—and one that received over \$300,000 in public resources (whether subsidies or land)—to directly negotiate a binding CBA with a host community. The CBAs could include requirements for local employment opportunities and living wages, job training, affordable housing, environmental mitigations, neighborhood amenities or infrastructure, and community oversight of post-development performance. Equitable Detroit used their community networks across the city to collect over 6,000 signatures, exceeding the requirements.



The response was swift. First, an unidentified legal source challenged the validity of the signatures, delaying the process, but a city clerk verified them again, and the CBO legislation was placed on the ballot as Proposal A. Then, two days later, a Detroit council member introduced a second CBO to the ballot as Proposal B. Proposal B elevated the minimum project size for a CBA to \$75 million and the minimum public funding to \$1 million, a threshold that would have included just one project since 2014.

PROPOSAL A VS. PROPOSAL B

Project Investment Levels/Public Support

All development projects are considered based on the amount of investments, divided into Tiers and the amount of Public Investment being used to complete the project.

Top tier:
Investments of \$15 million
Tier 2:
\$3 million up to \$15 million
Public Investment of at least \$300,000

Top tier:
Investments of \$75 million +
Tier 2:
\$3 million +
Public Investment of at least \$1 million

Community Engagement

Both proposals define an engagement process. **PROPOSAL A puts forth that Detroiters can negotiate without being monitored by City Council Members or representatives from the Administration.**

Residents in the entire census tract **within the city** are informed about the development. City Council calls first meeting but is not involved after this step. Developers sit at the table with residents, local businesses and non-profits.

Residents within 300 radial ft of project are informed of public meeting. City Council appoints liaison from Legislative Policy Division to monitor. Planning Director/City Council appoints the Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC).

Enforcement

Without a legally binding agreement enforcement is left up to the discretion of City Council and the Mayor's Office.

Community and developer negotiate a contractual agreement. Failure to comply may result in denial, suspension, termination, and revocation, or withdrawal of Public Support by City Council.

Community members bring violations to NAC who may report to an Enforcement Committee made of representatives from Planning and Development, Law, and other relevant City departments.

**PROPOSAL A
ends in legally
binding agreements**

**PROPOSAL B
just legislates
the Status Quo**

Proposal B also placed negotiating power in the hands of a city appointee and not an independent coalition, which Equitable Detroit members argued would strip the agreements of true accountability. "The fact that they would choose who is going to represent the community was an issue," says Ms. Webb. "What if the community doesn't want that person to represent them?" Each voter was required to vote "yes" or "no" on each proposal, with the proposal with more votes becoming law. "The confusion was deliberate," says Linda Campbell of Building Movement Project.

Over the next three months, campaigns for “Prop A” and “Prop B” became centerpieces in Detroit’s public arenas. “We were badly outspent,” says Mr. Hickey. “We had \$15,000 to put in our campaign, and the other side had something like \$1.5 million, so they did lots of television ads and mailers, and we did lots of canvassing and speaking to groups.” The Detroit Economic Growth Corporation came out with a strong statement against Proposal A as a barrier to future investment and growth in Detroit, as did local papers such as Detroit News and Detroit Free Press. “There was a humungous media campaign to demonize Prop A,” says Ms. Campbell. “They said that Prop A was a threat to jobs.”



In November 2016, Proposal B passed by a margin of 53 to 47 percent, while Proposal A fell short by a margin of 54 to 46 percent. Equitable Detroit members were not discouraged. “Almost 100,000 voted for [Proposal A],” says Sister Rivera. “That in itself is pretty amazing.” Ms. Campbell adds, “Those folks who voted for Prop B also voted for community benefits agreements, so they want something different in terms of how development is done in this city.” Ms. Tlaib notes the momentum that the coalition has gained. “Everybody is still talking about community benefits,” she says. “We’re feeling very motivated.”

Rev. Ross, meanwhile, is ready to begin the fight anew. “Let’s go back to the ballot,” she says. “We don’t get discouraged, because nothing was passed on the first try. Civil rights didn’t go through the first time, they had to last longer and fight longer than that.”

“Civil rights didn’t go through the first time, they had to last longer and fight longer than that.”

~ REV. JOAN ROSS

Ten Lessons from Detroit's Fight for a CBO

As Detroit completes its first year under the new legislation, Equitable Detroit is adopting several strategies and priorities to further advance the movement they have begun. Members are working to ensure that the city enforces and monitors Proposal B's implementation for several new or proposed projects and are organizing surrounding communities to prepare them to push for the benefits they want to see. The coalition also continues to push for independent CBAs for smaller developments that are below Proposal B's threshold, and it is debating whether to petition to have Proposal B amended at the end of 2017 or to attempt to put Proposal A on the ballot again. Meanwhile, they continue to engage, educate, and increase awareness of community benefits among local communities, expanding their base.

As the coalition works to build on their momentum, they continue to incorporate the lessons they have learned into their ongoing efforts. Many of their lessons are applicable to any coalition that seeks to pursue a CBO in their own city.

1 Prioritize Outreach and Education

From day one, Equitable Detroit prioritized grassroots community outreach above all else. "There are hundreds and hundreds of community meetings in Detroit," says Rev. Ross. "Before we even talked about the next campaign move, we needed to start to attend those meetings." Says Ms. Campbell: "We focused on educating Detroiters and deepening their understanding of what was happening with economic development." This education and outreach was how the coalition gained the signatures they needed, how they won votes for Proposal A, and how they prepared residents to lead CBA negotiations in their neighborhoods if a CBO was passed. "There's no one-size-fits-all," says Rev. Ross. "We want whoever is in the footprint of the development to have a say in what goes on in their community."

2 Build on Neighborhood Organizations

To reach community members across the city, Equitable Detroit involved and aligned Detroit's existing neighborhood organizations. "The coalition consisted of folks that were already leaders in their own communities," says Ms. Campbell. "They already had their networks. Our job was to build capacity of the leaders and to train and educate them, and they were responsible for educating their own communities." For Mr. Hickey, the Equitable Development Toolkit was key to this process: "it gave a helpful template for how you might go about working on a community benefits ordinance."

3 Capitalize on Pivotal Moments

In every city, residents in poverty face moments where their disadvantage is especially pronounced. In Detroit, bankruptcy was such an occasion, and in particular, the fact that it coincided with several major public expenditures for downtown projects. “The ground was fertile,” says Sister Rivera. “People were looking at their communities and thinking, how can we take care of ourselves, because the government isn’t going to? We were fertilizing them.” Ms. Campbell says that, in talking with communities during emergency management, a theme emerged: “They would say it’s not fair what’s happening to us. Detroiters had concluded that what was happening was not fair.” The coalition channeled this sentiment into community involvement and momentum towards a CBO.


4 Nurture the Coalition

Before a CBO campaign was even an idea, Equitable Detroit members had a strong foundation. “You have to have a shared vision, and that vision has to be supported by shared values,” says Ms. Campbell. “We had a set of trusting relationships that we had cultivated over the years working on a variety of issues in communities. When the time arrived to bring people together around this big citywide thing, there was already a history many of us shared with each other. That is what kept people at the table.” This process must continue beyond any campaign, says Mr. Hickey, both among Equitable Detroit members and in the communities they support. “The ordinance provides a framework and a structure,” he says, “but the community still has to come together in a way in which all voices are heard.”

5 Control the Narrative

One-on-one organizing was Equitable Detroit’s primary tool, but as the issue of a CBO became more prominent, the coalition also had to broaden its message and fight competing public narratives. First, it had to combat the story that Proposal A would thwart economic growth in Detroit, and as opposition mounted from special interests and other opponents, it also had to control its own story. “We were being positioned as the anti-development people,” says Ms. Campbell, “as the radical folks who were completely out of touch and unreasonable to deal with.” To counter opposing campaigns, Equitable Detroit consistently reinforced a message that resources were being diverted from neighborhoods where the majority of Detroiters live, and that residents were being denied basic services like affordable housing, recreation, and jobs, all so that developers could profit from public investment. “We built on the narrative of a ‘Tale of Two Detroits,’” says Ms. Campbell. “It started to catch on as the development in Downtown and Midtown Detroit become more obvious, and as other Detroiters


were being left out.” Finally, says, Sister Rivera, they needed to shape the narrative on Detroiters and their abilities. “Detroit is 80% African American, so there is the question of, ‘oh, well Detroiters would not be able to be part of a community benefits agreement.’” Rev. Ross expounds on this point: “Developers have sold our communities this notion that we aren’t intelligent enough to sit down and negotiate with them.”



A GANNETT COMPANY

Why a community benefits ordinance would help Detroit

Bill Hickey, Free Press guest writer 11:04 p.m. EDT October 31, 2015



(Photo: Steven Senne/Associated Press)

A locksmith in Oakwood Heights, a southwest Detroit neighborhood, was recently forced to lay off his entire staff.

He is one of three small business owners who recently lost a court battle that could cost them their livelihoods. They took on Marathon Oil, whose massive expansion in Southwest Detroit involved buying out almost 300 homeowners.

But there was no buyout for business owners whose customer base drastically shrank. The business owners had no recourse but to fight for their businesses in court. They lost and that’s legal, but it’s not fair — and that’s exactly why a Community Benefits Ordinance is needed.

Democracy should include having a voice in projects that affect your community — especially if the corporation behind the project is getting a \$175-million tax-abatement, as Marathon did for its expansion.

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6 Redefine "Normal"

One upshot of the CBO campaign is that it provided an opportunity to foster a new cognitive normal among those accustomed to the current economic framework in U.S. cities. “In the culture of corporate greed and corporate money,” says Rev. Ross, “developers are galvanized to think, ‘anybody that wants to talk to me must want something from me. And if they want something from me I’m not going to make the profit that I make.’ If I sit there with no power, when will you ever change your perspective of me or give me the respect that I’m due?” Ms. Tlaib adds, “We believe we need to set a culture in Detroit, where if you take our money, and if we have to pay, we should have a say.” Equitable Detroit, says Sister Rivera, also had to overcome a culture of defeatism among some residents. “We internalize things after years and years...of poison that the dynamic of oppression has put on us,” she says. “The community has to get rid of all the myths about them that they have believed.”

7 Cull Legal Support

From a practical standpoint, Equitable Detroit needed a partner who knew law and could provide it pro bono. “We wouldn’t have gotten this far in the process without Sugar Law,” says Ms. Campbell. “They worked with us every step of the way in drafting the original ordinance. They did a lot of education and coaching with community members about CBAs. And they had a wealth of information on various CBA agreements across the country.” “Many of these developers have their own legal teams,” says Ms. Tlaib, “so it’s important for us to be there to push back on some of the farce claims on their part. Sometimes just being in the room makes the other parties more respectable.”

8 Build Political Support and Accountability

Equitable Detroit was not able to pass a CBO through the legislative process, but members saw the importance of building political allies and to first trying to pass legislation through political support. “My advice is to go through the legislative process,” says Ms. Tlaib. “You see if you have any allies on city council, and if you hit a wall like we did, go to the city charter and look at how you could get around the local legislative body to get it done.” Conversely, members now see a need to hold leaders accountable. Ms. Tlaib notes that Proposal A won in some districts in which council members opposed the measure, and Ms. Webb is working to ensure her own council member knows it: “I have let people know that our councilman, who some of us voted for, did not support this the way we thought he should have.”

9 Find New Ways to Raise Money

Equitable Detroit could never compete with the financial resources of their opposition, but they still needed funding to carry out their campaign. “If everybody in the city donated a dollar,” says Ms. Webb, “it would give us enough to push ahead and combat what is going against us—the wealth train. If you have a little money behind you, you can do a lot of things.” Rev. Ross has her own frustrations with the accessibility of funds: “All of the money we operate with is strictly foundation money or program money, and they write the rules. If they don’t want us to have it, they take it away from us. When we push back on them, they shut the fountain down.” Equitable Detroit has realized that, for future efforts, it must find new ways to find sources of financial support.

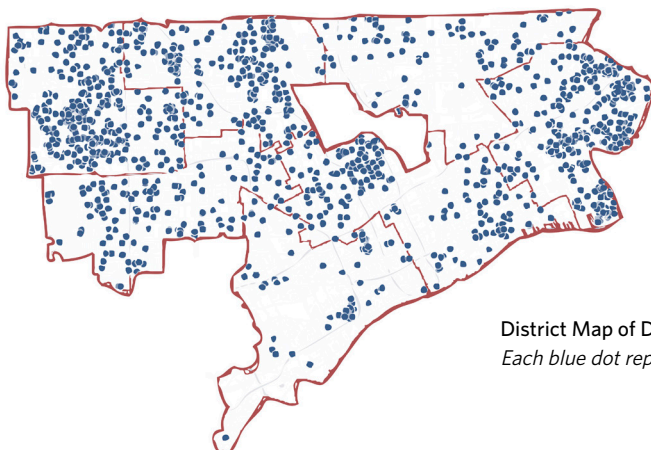
10 Be Holistic

By incorporating a range of unmet community needs into CBAs and into the CBO, Equitable Detroit not only demonstrated how many services communities were foregoing due to subsidies and tax breaks, but it also allowed the coalition to attract more leaders and community members with their own areas of knowledge and expertise. “We had at the table people who were interested in jobs, people who were interested in housing, people who were primarily focused on the environment,” says Rev. Ross. “Jobs, housing, displacement, environment, and safety had to be considered.” Ms. Tlaib notes that being holistic also counters the jobs-centered messages of proponents of subsidizing development. “Jobs don’t fix cancer,” she says. “When we talk about community benefits, we think they should wrap around other issues: environmental justice, housing, and so many other things.”



Conclusion

More and more communities around the country are pursuing CBAs because more of them are aware of how tax dollars are being spent in their cities and how decades of publicly-funded economic development projects have swallowed their tax revenues without improving their lives. While CBAs have gained traction and earned concessions in some communities, they have done little to fundamentally alter who has the power in cities like Detroit. Even groups who have been successful in pursuing CBAs must return to the drawing board each time the next major development comes along, with no guarantee that the next developer or city council will be as amenable as the last one.



District Map of Detroit:
Each blue dot represents one platform member.

A CBO would be a major step in solving that problem. It would normalize the idea that developers and projects that receive public subsidies must directly provide something in return to communities, and it would prove to doubters that equity and development can coexist. This is why Ms. Campbell says that the ultimate lesson after three years with Equitable Detroit is that a CBO itself is crucial to the future of any CBA movement, in Detroit or elsewhere. “Every community should know you need an ordinance,” she says. “You need legally binding agreements, and you need a framework that compels the developers to come to the table and negotiate with community.”

Yet, while the nation’s first truly effective CBO did not become law in Detroit in 2016, coalition members are above all else united in the message that a CBO is not their ultimate destination. Indeed, while the Equitable Detroit Coalition and the CBO is in one sense a culmination of decades of Detroit-based social justice movements and twenty years of CBA campaigns around the nation, in another sense it may be a first step. “We used the community benefits agreement as a movement-building strategy,” says Ms. Campbell. “At a time when a lot of our basic city services and commitments to the common good are being completely undermined, it could be that this is the beginning of a movement where folks will push back and challenge the whole concept of corporate subsidy and corporate welfare.”

Sister Rivera concurs. “An ordinance is not an end in itself,” she says. “It’s a tool. And however we learn to become better at creating development that benefits the developer, the workers, and the people in the neighborhood where the development takes place...then we have arrived only to start all over again. We start enhancing it, we start improving it, and it becomes a practice. We’re never really done.”

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~ SISTER GLORIA RIVERA



Endnotes

- 1 www.bls.gov/lau/lacilg16.htm
- 2 www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/09/16/census-us-uninsured-drops-income-stagnates/32499231/
- 3 www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Appendix.pdf
- 4 www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2017/01/12/detroits-development-deals-kept-booming/96523726/
- 5 <http://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/cba2005final.pdf>
- 6 www.law.tulane.edu/uploadedFiles/Institutes_and_Centers/Public_Law_Center/Summary%20and%20Index%20of%20%20Community%20Benefit%20Agreements.pdf
- 7 www.freep.com/story/news/local/2014/03/14/175m-tax-break-for-marathon-refinery-buys-detroiters-o/28936095/



For more information, please visit
The Detroit People's Platform at
www.detroitpeoplesplatform.org

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