

MAJORITY BLACK DETROIT WE WIN WHEN WE FIGHT BACK

DETROIT People's PLATFORM NEWS

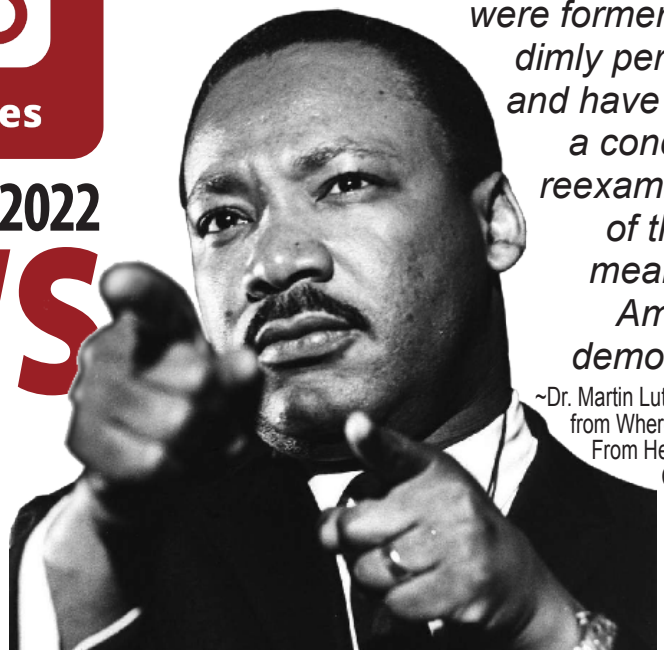
Vol. 21 - MLK Day 2022



@DetroitPeoples

"Negroes have illuminated imperfections in the democratic structure that were formerly only dimly perceived and have forced a concerned reexamination of the true meaning of American democracy."

~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
from Where Do We Go
From Here Chaos or
Community?



2022 AND THE "SHOUT OUT" FOR THE FUTURE

Detroit People's Platform (DPP) and our network of supporters across the seven (7) city council districts welcomes the newly elected and returning City Council members. DPP's near decade long vision for a just and equitable Detroit is rooted in our belief that government has a critical role to play in advancing the economic and social well-being of majority Black Detroit. **We believe that when majority Black Detroit prospers – all Detroiters prosper.**

However, when we look across our city there is evidence that city government, as most Detroiters experience it on a daily basis, is not working on their behalf. In the recent past the city administration and city council allies have embraced a philosophy that asserts that when the rich, white and powerful benefit, Black Detroiters will also benefit. Hence, the rationale for diverting millions of dollars in public tax revenue in the service of corporate welfare with the promise of jobs and pathways to middle class prosperity for Detroiters.

Sadly, the recent census data and research contradicts this proposition and documents the following:

- Declining rates of Black home ownership (a much herald barometer of economic mobility and security) in contrast to the increasing eviction rates among majority Black women led households with children;
- The flight of the Detroit Black middle class to nearby suburban locations;
- Stagnant income growth for the average Black Detroiters in contrast to the double digit income growth among white Detroiters;

We WON a modest increase in **AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOME REPAIR** in municipal budget for 2021-2022.

#2

- The many left behind neighborhoods that exist in the shadow of growth and segregation in select neighborhoods that attract whiter, wealthier and younger residents – built on the public dole of corporate welfare and tax subsidies;
- Until the covid pandemic, the routine denial of basic city services like water to low income households had become justified
- Enactment of zoning laws along with planning variances that enable industrial polluters to reign environmental havoc on long time Black neighborhoods.

Contrary to the typical 'Blame Detroiters' narrative, what is illustrated by the above is a broken government that lacks vision for how to address 21st century urban problems. The over-reliance on a failed mid-twentieth century model with inherent systemic and structural biases in governance, planning and community development is stunning!

Once known as the birthplace for many Black radical and progressive movements, Detroiters are now the victims of a politics that weaponize Detroiters against one another using fear and favor. Recent news articles reveal that elected council members have organized with dark money interest to undermine the voice and power of Detroiters.

Even the courts seem to align against the rights of Detroiters as two lower courts ruled against advancing Proposal P (the revised city charter) to the ballot. Only the last minute intervention of the State Supreme Court resulted in Proposal P appearing on the August ballot. It is no wonder that many Detroiters have disengaged from the democratic process as reflected in low rates of voter participation. *Continued on back cover.*

2021 WINS!

In the midst of a difficult and disappointing 2021, DPP celebrates the organizing WINS based on the work of Detroiters across the city. Thank you for keeping the vision for a just and equitable Detroit

alive! **Read more about these wins throughout this issue!**

#1

The culmination of three years organizing and advocacy **DPP and resident leaders WON adoption of several key amendments by Detroit Charter Revision Commission** appearing on the Proposal P ballot by DPP and resident leaders including: adoption of Passenger Bill of Rights; Expanding the current CBA Ordinance; mandated funding for the Housing Trust Fund and local housing affordability formula.



Episode 3:
Renters Rights In the D

with Kea Mathis
Air Date:
January 19, 2022

Majority Black Detroit Talks is a Popular Education Podcast in which Detroit Residents from all walks of life speak on Detroit specific issues that affect themselves and their communities. Our mission is simple; Make the connection between the inequities Majority Black Detroit faces in our day-to-day lives and the elected officials that have the power to make the needed changes in policy.
Only on Spotify and Anchor!

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The year 2021 may be a year marked by efforts to recover the economy from the damaging effects of the covid pandemic. Congressional passage of American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) and Infrastructure Job Act, provided historical increases in federal investment for cities, states, and educational institutions, and direct aid for impacted families and individuals. **Essential bus riders including paratransit riders, individuals that cannot use traditional bus service, and require federally-funded and specialized transit vehicles, are in need and require special attention for pandemic recovery efforts.**

Instead of providing a platform for residents and essential riders to provide input on how American Rescue Plan (ARP) dollars should be spent, the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) resumed collecting bus fares in March 2021. Further, DDOT failed to publish an equity analysis detailing the likely impact on DDOT ridership – a ridership that largely includes essential workers who cannot work from home. These workers rely on transit to access critical jobs like health and medical aids, home-visit caregivers, grocery-store workers, individuals working in manufacturing, construction, public works, and restaurant workers. – all of whom are essential to economic recovery yet face the greatest risk to covid exposure and illness.

In November 2021, DDOT drastically cut bus service to 18 routes, slowing down bus service to every 20 minutes on some routes, and 30 minutes to an hour on many neighborhood routes: one-bus-per-hour service on weekends and ending 24-hour bus service on main routes like the Vernor #1, Michigan #2, and Jefferson #9 from 1am to 3am. DDOT also eliminated the 100 years old service on the Clairmount #11 route, along with a recently created connector-route in Southwest Detroit – the Junction #26, and the Tireman #47. Bus riders did not have adequate warning nor reasonable opportunities for public input about these changes.

DDOT also failed in committing to report on efforts to reform paratransit service. Bus riders who depend on para transit have been calling for a review of public-private control of operations, customer service, and vehicle dispatch - all of which are currently managed by a French owned company, TransDev. The privatizing of vital services such as para transit leaves the fate of thousands of Detroit disabled and elderly in the hands of decision makers with little of no direct accountability to Detroit residents.

In spite of these challenges, the Transit Justice Team were able to continue to organize essential riders on actions in response to service changes, turnout to DDOT monthly community virtual meetings, rally support around proposed DDOT Passenger Bill of Rights; and garner traditional media coverage highlighting the priorities and demands of essential bus riders in Detroit.

Members of the transit justice team successfully organized and won inclusion of recommendations from essential riders in the final revised city charter document brought forth under Proposal P. Those revisions were intended to expand the power of bus riders and Detroiters by mandating the creation of a new transit advisory board with increased oversight powers related to service planning, transit budgeting, and public input in decision-making. Also, the revisions would have mandated a low-income fare program to provide reduced fares and bus passes for veterans, returning citizens, those who are homeless and low to no-income families and individuals. In addition, the proposed DDOT Passenger Bill of Rights would have established obligations for DDOT towards the ridership ensuring equity in service investment and access; improved customer centered communications and engagement and better compliance and transparency with the mandates of Title VI in its transit planning.

The transit justice team anticipates that the organizing work in 2022 will provide opportunities for riders to become involved in the decision-making process with how the city will invest public resources in transit including federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) funds, the Infrastructure and Jobs Act monies and the upcoming 2022-2023 city budget. These budget decisions will be made under the leadership of the newly elected city council. Essential bus riders must organize and advocate for public transit that centers the priorities and rights of essential bus riders as reflected in the historical positioning of public transit as a civil rights issue and public transit here in Detroit as one of the basic services provided to residents.

#3

RESOLUTION by city council in support of **LOCAL AREA MEDIAN INCOME (AMI)** formula to address the Detroit affordable housing crisis.

The Transit Justice Team is calling all bus riders, Detroit residents, and supporters of essential bus riders to organize for the passage of the DDOT Passenger Bill of Rights in order to create a Low-Income Fare Program, and implement the Transit Justice Team’s ARP Funding Recommendations and Guidelines for DDOT. The DDOT Passenger Bill of Rights implements the following standards for Detroit public transit bus service:

Detroiters should expect the following standards from its public transit service:

- Respectful, courteous service from DDOT personnel
- On-time bus service
- Clean, safe, and well-maintained public transit shelters and transit bus centers
- Receipt of transit information in a timely, transparent, with language accessibility
- Full ADA compliance in regard to access to shelters, transportation stops, and transit centers
- Adequate accommodations for a transit rider’s special and other reasonable needs
- Adequate and multiple means of notification of disruptions and delays in service
- A fare structure that aligns with the income of the majority of the bus riding public
- Multilingual transportation literature, signage and other forms of communication accessible to all citizens
- A fair, impartial, and expeditious process for the filing and resolution of complaints and grievances with the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT).
- Essential rider input on operations and service-related decisions to inform planning and implementation.

Finally, sometime in 2022 DDOT will announce dates for public hearings, called “Comprehensive Operation Analysis” which will detail plans to restructure bus service in Detroit. It is important that essential riders, and those who advocate AGAINST further bus cuts to neighborhood routes be present. The voice of essential bus riders is necessary for the restoration of appropriate levels of DDOT service since it is the essential riders who have the daily user expertise and knowledge of how bus service should operate in response to the needs and priorities of its essential riders. Detroiters must pass the DDOT Bill of Rights and thereby restore public transit as an important and basic service.

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INCREASED FUNDING FOR Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) for **PARATRANSIT SERVICES**

#4

READING BETWEEN THE LINES: BUDGETING FOR PRIVATE DEVELOPERS, NOT FOR DETROITERS



The administration has touted the financial state of Detroit as a sign of good governance, pointing to an arduous climb out of municipal bankruptcy to a \$100 million budget surplus, brought about by an increase in economic development resulting in an increased and significant revenue return to the city.

Just a few months ago in September 2021, the Office of Budget reported that, due in part to the administration's economic development plan, the city will bring in \$111 million more than expected in revenue, increasing spending by about \$12 million compared to last year's budget. On top of that, to help address some hardships caused by the pandemic, Detroit has received an additional \$826 million in federal stimulus funding to add to the city budget over the next four years. In budgetary terms, and in contrast to prior years, it would appear that Detroit's financial cup "runneth over".

At first glance all of this looks like a giant step in a positive direction for Detroit residents. The assumption here is that more money leads to more and improved services for Detroiters and overall improved quality of life. However, sometimes this assumption overshadows the real story that remains invisible to the average Detroiters and informs the reality that we see on the ground in our neighborhoods.

For example, for this current 2021-2022 budget year, the city is working with about \$1.1 billion in general fund money—city generated dollars that can be spent on any municipal service. About a third of that revenue comes from income taxes while only 10% comes from property taxes. Thus, most of the tax burden falls on workers—who are mostly Black and working-class Detroiters—and not owners of property—the latter who are largely non-Detroit residents, are wealthy, white land developers, like Dan Gilbert.

This taxing scheme is not by chance, it is by design. Part of the administration's economic growth model is to provide investors with huge tax breaks to incentivize economic development. That is, we pay people big bucks to create economic development projects and related businesses in Detroit. Currently, Detroit has 17 tax abatement programs totaling nearly \$100 million in tax giveaways annually.

\$3.4 million dollar investment from the Housing Trust Fund resulting in **100 UNITS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING** resulting in expanded housing opportunities for low income housing with children; vulnerable youth; and formerly homeless individuals.

#5

Tax-diversion and tax abatement schemes for economic development include policies like tax increment financing (TIFs), that divert much needed tax revenues from the Commons including public libraries, schools, and other public investments* that average Detroiters and their families could truly benefit from. If Detroit taxed land developers like they do workers, we estimate the city would have \$100 million¹ more in property tax revenue, which would make it the largest revenue source for the city (as it is in most cities).

Also, the state legislature just passed an amendment in SB 671 that makes these types of taxing incentives even more lucrative for developers and easier to obtain. This means larger tax giveaways and tax diversions from our general fund which consequently results in further public and community disinvestment and service and institutional decline in the neighborhoods and communities where the majority of Black Detroiters live.

Remember, any budget is a moral document and statement of values and priorities, whether it's a budget created by an individual, a family, a school, a city, or a nation. How resources are allocated identifies what is important to the creators of the budget. To understand the whole picture, however, we must look at the fight for resources before they are budgeted. It is helpful to evaluate how the city's current economic development policies and the accompanying tax benefits are used to build luxury hotels, apartments, stadiums, entertainment districts, etc. and how that model of investment actually starves our Commons that includes our neighborhood libraries, parks, schools, and transit system. The conclusion is that the current model of economic growth prioritizes private developers and not Detroiters (**YOU**).

This month, starting January 18th, the City of Detroit will hold its annual Budget Community Forum in each City Council District so that residents can directly tell the city how they want city budget resources to be spent. **Let's show up and demand our public dollars back so we can in good faith begin to truly build a budget that reflects the morals and priorities of majority Black Detroit.**

The Budget Priorities Community Forum will be a virtual community outreach meeting. For more information about how to participate: detroitmi.gov/events/notice-public-outreach-annual-budget-priorities-forums



HOUSING TRUST FUND
A community driven solution to provide homes for all!

In 2017 Detroit housing justice advocates and residents organized and WON the creation of Detroit's Affordable

Housing Trust Fund (HTF) passed through the City Council's Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance.

What is a Housing Trust Fund?

Housing Trust Funds (HTF) are created by city, county and state governments to direct specific public funding to support the production and preservation of affordable housing. In Detroit Housing Trust Funds increase the opportunities for families and individuals who make \$35 thousand dollars are less to have quality and accessible housing.

How the Housing Trust Fund Works in Detroit. Money for the Housing Trust Fund is made available in the annual Detroit city budget and includes 20% of the net profits of city owned commercial property sales. Developers who do not meet the requirements of the ordinance may also have to pay a fine into the fund.

Who Benefits from the Housing Trust Fund? The HTF is intended to develop and preserve affordable housing in Detroit for Individuals and families who earn less than \$35 thousand dollars a year – NOT high income earners.

Recently the HTF helped to develop the following

- provided new and renovated housing for families and roughly 100 children
- new apartments for adults who were formerly homeless,
- housing for vulnerable youth in need of safe housing with special services.

Clearly the HOUSING TRUST FUND is a success and is meeting a real housing need in Detroit!

What Detroiters Need? INCREASED FUNDING for the Housing Trust Fund that will produce MORE affordable and accessible housing for Detroiters.

#6

CITY COUNCIL PASSES NEWLY AMENDED CBA ORDINANCE

that mandates greater transparency for Neighborhood Advisory Council members; More timely document share and reporting by Tier 1 and Tier 2 developers; Resident seat on the powerful Enforcement Committee.

* See goodjobsfirst.org/subsidy-tracker and <https://www.freep.com/story/money/business/john-gallagher/2019/06/04/downtown-detroit-property-taxes/3626319002/>

¹This 100 million dollar figure is based on our own calculations of tax capture by Brownfield TIFs (can provide data if necessary) and 1) property tax subsidies calculated by Good Jobs First: taxbreaktracker.goodjobsfirst.org/prog.php?state=MI&state_jurisdiction1=MI+Detroit&state_jurisdiction2=&state_jurisdiction3=

2) tax capture by DDA as reported by Free Press: freep.com/story/money/business/john-gallagher/2019/06/04/downtown-detroit-property-taxes/3626319002/
Good Jobs First reports about \$40 million in subsidies but does not contain DDA tax extraction and Brownfield TIFs. Free Press reports \$35 million in taxes captured by DDA. And our data shows Brownfields are now capturing about \$25 million. This adds up to \$100 million in property tax losses.

Beniteau

In December, the City of Detroit hosted the annual Stellantis/FCA Community Benefits Agreement update. During the meeting Stellantis reps claimed that *"The odor issue at the site, which we're working to address, is **NOT A HEALTH RISK**, and this is what we've determined through modeling that we've done."* In addition to the strong odors residents have reported headaches, burning eyes and throats. Their experience directly contradict this dismissal which is based on models rather than actual data. **THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE.** EGLE will host a public hearing on Jan. 27th to address enforcement due to the violations. Learn More:

detroitpeoplesplatform.org/justice-for-beniteau-residents/

SMELL THAT?

TELL EGLE



Point a phone camera here to
COMPLAIN
Web: bit.ly/AirComplaint
1-800-292-4706

Along with the FCA/ Stellantis expansion there has been an increase in industrial development - **REINDUSTRIALIZATION** across the city. This increase has prompted concerns about the cumulative health impact of toxic emissions, waste storage and disposal on Detroiters. **If you smell something, say something and complain.**

JUSTICE FOR BENITEAU RESIDENTS WINS!

The Michigan Dept. of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) cites Stellantis for multiple air quality violations vindicating resident-led complaints; Justice for Beniteau residents WIN commitment from **Detroit Planning Commission** members to conduct an equity analysis on the current zoning laws in the city of Detroit. City Council votes unanimously to advance a resolution to require a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) to include home repair OR voluntary relocation. Beniteau Residents have filed a Civil Rights complaint with the EPA against EGLE.

WE STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH BENITEAU!

#7

DETROIT HAS A TRANSPARENCY PROBLEM BECAUSE MICHIGAN HAS A TRANSPARENCY PROBLEM

Government transparency and accountability is foundational to a functional democracy, whether that government is city, state, or national. Detroit's transparency and accountability standards are set by state-level laws. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) allows the public to access existing records for a fee.

Under state law, local governments must divulge public records upon request, but are able to charge for the service. The fee is based on a staff member's hourly rate, but can include additional cost. Governments can- and have- assessed FOIA fees for thousands of dollars. Assessing such high fees essentially makes information a commodity that only the wealthy can afford. **The average Detroiter cannot afford to spend \$5,000 on information that should be shared publicly in the first place.**

There is very little enforcement built in to the FOIA request process. In fact, the law states that if the city doesn't respond to a FOIA request, that is a denial of the request. The only recourse is to sue in court for the government to release the information. This is, of course, also dependent on the individual's ability to hire and pay for a lawyer.

Adding to the issues already highlighted is the fact that governments are under no obligation to fulfill a FOIA request in a timely manner. In other words, a government can approve a FOIA request, but estimate that it will take years to complete. This is allowed under the law. Furthermore, cities cannot be penalized for failing to meet time frames established in the estimate.

This information should be public to begin with. A thriving, successful democracy requires not just the ability to participate by vote but also democratization of information.

Recently **Beniteau Residents** filed a FOIA Request with the city of Detroit..The request was properly filed and requested specific info about complaints regarding the Stellantis Project. In addition to missing deadlines and poor communication the city requested over \$5,000 to complete the request. This is unacceptable, especially when the information requested is about a project that has received over \$400 million in tax incentives, our money. You can ready the Beniteau FOIA and communications between the city and residents at detroitpeoplesplatform.org/justice-for-beniteau-residents/

#8

DPP and resident leaders who are renters participate in the **RIGHT TO COUNSEL COALITION ORGANIZING IN SUPPORT OF A STRONG RTC ORDINANCE** that aims to reduce household evictions and offers improved protections for vulnerable renter households.

SHOUT OUT 2022

Continued from front cover. Yet, and in the face of it all, the past decade has witnessed a renewed commitment by many Detroiters to organize and demand that government work for majority Black Detroit. Detroiters have organized and petitioned their government for action, created and advanced progressive and just public policy recommendations that speak to a Detroit that is equitable and just.

DPP believes that with the election of six (6) new city council members and new leadership at the table, this coming legislative year may present the opportunity to move a legislative agenda that is in service to and prioritizes the needs of everyday Detroiters. In support of that mission, the Detroit People's Platform offers to our city council the following guiding principles:

- **Be courageous and wield your power in service to the vision of the ancestors whose struggles and sacrifices made this time possible for you.**
- **Know the issues and do the hard work of legislating on behalf of your primary constituents – Detroit residents.**
- **Name the injustices and indignities that majority Black Detroiters are forced to confront and deal with on a daily basis.**
- **Center the values of racial equity and racial justice in your legislative efforts and all residents will benefit.**
- **Embrace the promise of Black liberation as real and worth fighting for in the nation's largest majority Black city.**
- **Align the work of the city council with the national movement to protect democracy and advance the democratic rights of BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) communities.**
- **Hear and respond to the calls for justice from your constituents no matter how imperfect the message or the messenger may be.**
- **Center human development as the key driver of economic success for Detroit.**
- **Safeguard and prioritize investment of Detroit's precious resources in creating a robust and sustainable Commons that benefits us all.**

We call upon our elected leaders to look beyond politics and accept the challenge and the opportunity and demonstrate courageous leadership.

THIS IS YOUR TIME!

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