



TRANSCRIPTION:

Next Generation of Parks: Maurice Cox
November 2016

Tom E. :

-by inspiring and creating the Next Generation of Parks and public spaces. We serve as a bridge between the public and private sector. We deliver our mission in three ways. Tonight is one example where we bring inspiring ideas and leaders who are thinking about parks differently to our city, so that we can continue to have an aspirational park system. We guide philanthropic investment to ideas that maybe the community need and vision, and push our park forward.

Finally, we're an implementing partner to make sure those big ideas get done. Tonight we hope we can inspire you. I'm really thrilled about what we have to bring for you. Before I want to begin, I want to thank MN Public Radio for being our presenting sponsor in this series, and particularly Brandt Williams, who will be leading the discussion portion of the evening. I also want to thank the University of Minnesota, the Cynthia Froid Group, and the Walker Arts Center for their support and sponsoring the Next Generation of Parks lecture series.

Before we bring on Maurice Cox tonight, we're really doing three parts of the evening. Before we bring on Maurice to give his presentation followed by a conversation, I want to bring a wonderful group of city visionaries, introduce them to you, that the Minneapolis Parks Foundation has been working with over the course of the past year. With the support of the MN Twins Community Fund, we were able to hire Juxtaposition Arts, an amazing nonprofit working in North Minneapolis to reimagine our city and spaces through art, to help us work in re-imagining some of the new public spaces along the Mississippi River, as it flows between North and Northeast Minneapolis into downtown. This is a priority the Minneapolis Parks Foundation called RiverFirst, in re-imagining this part of the city, and finally reconnecting trails and public space. We're thrilled to have Juxtaposition reimagine that.

Sam Aero Phillips, and Coal Dorius, along with their environmental design apprentices, have been exploring with us how park spaces might serve a new generation. In turn, how do we bring new voices to the process of designing our public spaces? The challenge of bringing in new voices to create our city and reimagine the city's public realm is a critical opportunity facing Minneapolis as we go through our master design plan, and as the park system goes through their area master plans.

The more we bring emerging communities and new voices to the process, especially the voices of the young, the more successful we are going to be in designing a city for the future. Before I bring them on, I want to share just a short video that was produced by D.A. Balluck with the group to outline what they've been working on. Then I'm going to have Sam and Cole and the students come up and talk for just a brief bit.

Sam: My name is Sam Ero Phillips. I am an artist, designer, educator, and a native of North Minneapolis. I've had the pleasure of working with Juxtaposition Arts over the last couple of years. They are an art nonprofit that does work in the heart of North Minneapolis. It's a really cool program. We have the VALT program, which is the visual art literacy training that serves as an introduction to get youth jobs and different creative fields. We have different labs, such as textile design, screen printing t-shirts, graphic design, contemporary arts, tactical urbanism, and environmental design, which is the lab that Cole and I teach.

We work with architects, landscape architects, urban planners, product designers, and we do public art. We've worked with a wide variety of clients and partners such as Hennepin County, the city of Minneapolis, Metro Transit, the University of Minnesota, West Broadway Business and Area Coalition, and of course the Parks Foundation. I'll let the apprentices describe what we've done a little bit more.

Tati: Hi, my name's Tatiyana Gross. I go to North High School. I'm a junior. I've been with JXTA for six months.

Qadiym: I'm Qadiym Washington. I'm 16 years old. I'm a junior at Park Center High School. I've been with JXTA for about two years now. JXTA was hired by the Parks Foundation to hear the youths voice in North Minneapolis, and connect the people to the river. The Upper Harbor Terminal site is a little over two miles from downtown Minneapolis. It has excellent freeway access, and our goal is to transform this 48 plus acre site from historic use, to a combo of riverfront park area and private development.

We went on a biking trip, and this biking trip allowed us to stop and look at many parks, and see the pros and cons of each park. This served as an inspiration to help brainstorm ideas for the upper harbor terminal site. The existing green space in the parks will feel nice and warm and if connected to the new green space on the site. Also, we became more familiar with the parts of North Minneapolis.

Tati: We went on a kayaking trip just to see how it would feel in the water. When we got in the water, it was basically history in the making, because it's like boats are going down there shipping goods. Seeing the stuff that's on the Upper Harbor Terminal was different because it's like you can see a whole new way without walking it.

The history was it would ship goods from Minneapolis and Saint Paul. It got closed down in 2014.

Qadiym: 26th Avenue North location serves as a natural pivot point bringing park users and bike commuters from North and Northeast Minneapolis across the city into downtown. The 26th Avenue bike trail was completed last year and leads right into the heart of North Minneapolis.

Tati: North Minneapolis and the Mississippi River is cut off because of I-94 and the industries and businesses. With that being stated, we're cut off from the city. A lot of people aren't connected to the river because they can't get there as much because of the businesses and I-94.

Qadiym: Okay, behind me we have pictures of the domes and the existing graffiti. Is it up there?

There it is. We have pictures of the existing domes and graffiti. Basically, these domes hold as structural art, you don't usually see dome shaped buildings around. We feel like the art on the site can be a good attraction point, and a nice site to see.

Tati: Those salt that you guys just seen up there, it's for the roads and it causes a lot of pollution. When you're in there, you can just hear it simmering down. It's really cool and quiet.

Qadiym: The idea we came up with was transforming four silos into spray paint cans, and I feel like this is a good idea because if you look at a spray paint can, you know how it sprays paint. Instead of spraying paint, we thought of a light tower and how it emits light. Instead of showing spray coming out, we could have light that shines on the water. That would look really pretty at night and really nice.

Tati: Having the existing buildings with the Mississippi, and how the big the structures are, it would make it really nice just to keep the existing buildings and characteristics of them.

Qadiym: We talked with the community and found out what they wanted to see on the sites. We got the people involved. The majority of the things we heard from the people were how they wanted to get access to the river and be on the water more.

Tati: JXTA, well the Enviro Lab, we sat there for hours on end just drawing and sketching. We really wanted to come up with ideas that we really needed there. We came up with green space, having more parks and having people more connected, having jobs and housing, affordable housing, and more people need jobs and more people need places to live, and keeping the existing buildings because that's history of Minnesota.

Qadiym: The partnership feels the youth should have a voice in the new development near them. They feel this was because we are the future, and we should have a say in what happens in our community.

Tati: We feel like the North side has a say in it and has a voice in it because they're closer to it and that's what they're going to be doing. Their kids are going to be playing there. The next generation is going to be there. Thank you.

Bruce C.: My name is Bruce Chamberlain. I am really honored by the opportunity to introduce our Next Generation of Parks featured guest, Maurice Cox.

I'm a landscape architect that practices as an urban designer. I'm the inaugural Parks Fellow with the Minneapolis Parks Foundation. The Parks Fellow program was created in 2015 to forge and revive public space pathways between imagining our city, and achieve the city we imagine, carrying vision to reality. Cities have assumed a pivotal role in the human trajectory. For the first time in history the majority of us live in one. They're centrifuges of learning and making and innovation. At times, they can seem filled with insurmountable strife and questioning that tears at our souls. At their best, they're rich canvases for expression, for growth, and for the human experience.

It's in the public realm, especially parks, where we forge meaningful and enduring human connections that will carry a city to its next generation. For any city to reach it's potential, we must find the pathways that achieve our collective imaginations. Those that succeed hear all voices to determine the wise pathways forward, even young voices.

Detroit built itself as an economic and cultural icon. Because of a convergence of forces, became a city in peril. Because of the wisdom of those engaged in it's struggle, the world is witness to Detroit's emergence as a beacon for the city of tomorrow. Detroit is on the cusp, and actually in the process of a dramatic transformation that finds parks and public space emerging from the intersection of design and social justice. From the city's famed international riverfront, to a bold ecological typology and recent four million Civic Commons grant, design based on community voices is at the forefront of Detroit's future.

Maurice Cox is Detroit's visionary and influential planning director. He's a graduate of Cooper Union, where he received his architecture degree. Mr. Cox has taught at the University of Virginia, Syracuse, and Harvard's graduate school of design. He was the design director for the National Endowment of the Arts in Washington after serving as a counsel member and then the mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia. Maurice is a Harvard Loeb Fellow, and has received numerous awards and honors for his approach to urban design and community engagement.

Most recently, Mr. Cox was the associate dean for community engagement at Tulane University School of Architecture. As Tom and I were talking about the

trajectory of Maurice's career, Maurice goes where the need is and where he can have the greatest impact, and that's obvious in the kinds of moves he's made in his career, and the kinds of things he's done for this nation and the communities that he serves.

Maurice is a convener who empowers community to change the world through design. Please join me in welcoming Maurice Cox.

Maurice Cox:

I had a two hour tour of the Grand Rounds, which is really an inspiration. I'm already taking away more than I'm probably going to give you tonight.

It's wonderful to be back. It's wonderful to be here talking about a city I love, I think a city that we all love. I want to share with you just a few reflections on the work that we're doing, and put the city a bit in context for you. Detroit matters. Detroit matters for a host of reasons. For me, the city ... That was actually okay. The city matters because it's, well it's the city that reinvented the American industrial manufacturing process, taught America how to drive, for better or for worse, matters because it actually gave an entire generation a sound track for their lives. Hello.

More recently, it gave an entire world a sound track, techno music, again was invented in Detroit. It matters because it's probably the largest city. The population loss of about 1.2 million people who left, left a city that's still the largest African American city in America, with 700,000 lives.

Detroit has always mattered. It's ingrained in our popular imagination. I think we all have visions of this city. I want to take you through a few of those visions, and start with a vision that Marvin Gay created. I'd love that to be higher. Great. In the 1970s, Marvin Gay penned this song for Motown in Detroit at a time when the city was going through decades of decline, but also there was the emergence of the environmental movement in America. He was capturing this through a love song to the earth, but also to the city that he called home. It paints a picture that has been going on for about 50 years, and can paint an image of despair of a place that is dying before our very eyes. In fact, this is a popular vision of Detroit.

The challenge is I would not be seduced by this the way so many artists and people have. How much urban decay can you possibly take in? I think we have gotten to a point where this is no longer the image, this is no longer the narrative of Detroit, but it's through a period, the city has gone through an incredible traumatic experience for the past 50 years. The stats are alarming. The largest city in America to go through a structured bankruptcy with 100,000 creditors to be paid. The poverty rate about 36,000 have lost about 1.2 million in it's population.

Just a few years ago, 40% of the street lights didn't come on at night. It has created a narrative, which is very much identified with Detroit. It's us versus

everybody. It's the slogan of a community that feels that they have been left to die. In fact, it was very much, I think, a fascination that the nation had that we were actually going to see a city die. It built up a sense of resilience in this community that is very palpable when you're there.

There is a very, very different Detroit that I see and live in everyday. It's rare that you would see it, but it's a very optimistic, a very resilient community. You see juxtapositions of things you would see in no other city. Young people taking claim to public space in creative and constructive ways. People inventing new ways to see the city, thousands of people coming out weekly to slowly roll through the city on bikes. Just the most gorgeous neighborhoods that you would ever want to see.

Young people, young families moving back in. The neighborhoods each with an identity and a character sitting spaces that are being reinvented before our very eyes. These are the streets that we walk in Detroit. These are the houses that a whole range of people live in. The artists that are reinventing the city with materials that they've been given. It's a different Detroit. It's a Detroit that you don't see in the national press. It's a city that's reinventing itself, new crafts, the same skills used to build an auto industry being repurposed for new. Then the places where urban life is incredibly vibrant like the characters of neighborhoods, like the largest collection of architecture by Mies van der Rohe, Lafayette Park.

Also, just folks who have taken on the role of stewards of this city, whether they cut the lawns on their block, or whether they're moving back into the housing stock, same generation that left, finding that their children are coming back to populate the city. When you hear Millennials coming back to Detroit, you probably don't think of them of children of families that left and who are now coming back and are changing the city.

You come away with the sense that really nothing can stop Detroit. It's a very optimistic community that is reinventing itself and changing the popular narrative about the city. I come to Detroit from an experience of thinking about living in socially, economically, environmentally healthy cities as a basic democratic right that we have as being citizens of a democracy. For me, it's no different than access to public education or access now to quality public health. Can we imagine a place where living in a socially, economically, environmentally healthy neighborhood is a birthright?

I think that's the task that we have when we talk about democratizing design and engaging an entire community and re-imagining what's possible. For me, democratic design involves genuinely sitting down with community and tackling challenging issues, being willing to share that work with the people who will be affected by it, and then problem solving according to their values. When I go out into communities, I am fond of citing this South African slogan, nothing about us without us is for us. It's a very high bar for a planning department to live by, but

I sincerely believe that the only way the city will reinvent itself is if we make it of those people.

What's the challenge? What's the magnitude of the challenge? Just for those who want to understand how big the city is. This map is about 10 years old, and it superimposed the city of San Francisco, Boston, and the island of Manhattan within the 138 square miles of Detroit. Despite those total populations, this land mass has 700,000 people now. It was 200,000, it was over 900,000 at the time of this map. It's now 700,000.

The other part that's interesting about this map is the amount of land which is publicly owned is the size of the island of Manhattan, which makes the experiment in Detroit like none other in the country. It presents itself in ways that are, you can't do another Central Park. It's the pattern is like a series of green spaces that connect discrete parks of the city, like an archipelago floating in a sea of green. But this map that came out of Detroit, featuring cities a large planning exercise didn't reveal the fact that still tens of thousands of people live in those green areas. It presents a particular kind of challenge of how you thread the city together into a coherent whole using the landscape. These areas have already been settled. They have blocks, they have streets, they have alleys.

Our first challenge was to get a handle on the scale, and try to figure out a way to make cities within a city. We created distinct regions, the east region having 200,000 people with a group of young design professionals who are charged to steward the built and natural environment of that area. Then the west side led by Dave Walker, another architect, again with an interdisciplinary design team of architect, landscape architect, city planner, urban designer, and architectural historian, and then the central district that includes the downtown, the riverfront core.

Part of it is trying to find a structure by which you can begin to tackle this enormous opportunity, and also just to realize that there have been a lot of people who have waited for a very long time for something I am calling the big payback. Seriously what we're talking about is folks have been waiting for their return on their investment for decades. We have a responsibility to give them their return on their investment. In Detroit, we do it in a very soulful way. There is a real sense and belief that there is something unique about Detroit and how we're going to come back. That's the challenge that I've been given. Try to bring Brother James down a little here.

The question that we pose, is it possible to use these unique set of advantages that Detroit has to create something that's distinctly Detroit. Is it possible to create a healthy, beautiful Detroit that's built on inclusionary growth, economic opportunity, and most importantly in an atmosphere of trust. That atmosphere of trust I can't emphasize it enough. That we can grow, and we can grow in an inclusive way that we can create opportunity, economic opportunity, and do it for all is a challenge that we are faced with.

Part of how we want to begin that conversation is just starting to talk about neighborhoods again. Most of my work is trying to reimagine the Detroit neighborhood as a 20 minute neighborhood. Some of you may be familiar with that term, we borrowed it from Portland, Oregon. It essentially means it's a place where the kind of convenient, safe, pedestrian oriented development happens, where you can get all of your daily needs within a 20 minute walk or bike ride from your home. That means without relying heavily on a car, which in Detroit, it's almost sacrilegious.

People still remember the time when these commercial corridors were main streets. It's just that today, this very image that I show is fundamentally illegal. You have to get a special use permit, a variance for this, and a zoning change for that, just to create this image. The core components of it exist, and they have to do with the scale and the character of the buildings, the mixture of uses, the density within a walkable area, transit options. Detroit is going to be opening it's first light rail in decades this year on Woodward with very clear ideas of centers and public spaces, both local parks and regional parks, accessible high quality design, and of course a pedestrian street network to get around.

My first challenge when coming to Detroit was to try to figure out where the foundation of 20 minute neighborhoods could be. Looking at neighborhoods that were outside of the downtown core that touched the borders. These are as far away from downtown as you can get. This is where Detroiters really live. Part of it is finding the places where we can increase the density, where we can create main streets, where we can serve them by transit. Then take the foundation of an inner circle green way, which has been built along the riverfront, and a north align, the Dequindre Cut, and to turn that into our own grand rounds. The Dequindre cut, the Inner Circle Greenway, and to tie these neighborhoods that had no relationship to each other together through this Greenway. It's a 31 mile loop. It passes that blue area, it passes through the area of the highest or the lowest percentage of car ownership who live in that area do not have a car.

Imagining tying the land use together with this open space system to increase the housing options, and to increase the level of density. This is a vision that we are pulling together linear mile by linear mile. Here are some of the pretexts for these neighborhoods. 82% of the housing stock was built before 1980. It was built fundamentally as single family homes. That means for decades, we have not been building the missing middle housing of the city. Our challenge is to now go back and find areas of density, and build all of those housing options that so many of us live in from duplexes to live work, to townhouses, row houses, mixed use buildings, and fill in the housing options that make neighborhoods walkable, that make communities vibrant.

This is in the Brush Park area, adjacent to downtown. Signaling to people that as these extremely popular areas change, that we are going to put affordability and workforce in the forefront, so 35% is what we are aiming for in the eastern market. Those are workforce housing above retail market stalls. The reality of

what Detroit's neighborhoods are made up of look like this. In a given neighborhood you might have an entire block which is occupied, and begin to see the kind of missing teeth. Then at the bottom, a sense of the vacancy that has crept into many of the neighborhoods.

This is the condition that we have to start with when we think about re-imagining a system for a city like Detroit. The first project that we are about to realize is the Fitzgerald redevelopment. It is to try to redevelop this neighborhood without building a single new house, simply rehabbing all of the vacant houses in the neighborhood, and repurposing what amounts to about 25 acres is a quarter square mile, where every vacant lot will have a landscape purpose.

What it attempts to do is to bring the pattern and the productive land uses that we might think of in a rural area, and bring them into the more populated parts of the neighborhood. How do you take the community garden as a pattern and begin to find ways to create neighborhood friendly businesses within a settled area? This is the Fitzgerald area, about 30% of the lots are owned, publicly owned, they're vacant, they're about 100 homes. A single developer would come in, renovate these homes, and the landscape architect would come up with a set of typologies for the vacant land.

The first thing we did, this is the work of Elizabeth Mossop out of Louisiana, was to quantify the opportunity to build landscapes in a neighborhood, and then develop a set of typologies that go from crops to hops to orchids, to low maintenance landscapes with high visual impact that take off the mowing regime of many, many of these lots.

Then try to find other purposes for vacant lots. You might have a business that has a gathering place, or you might have a contemplative space that recharges the water and manages storm water. Most importantly, particularly with these kind of flowering meadows, is this notion of people having signals that these landscapes are cared for. Developing a set of principles that then are applied across the neighborhood so that you have clues that people care for these landscapes. Embedded in the center of that neighborhood is a multi-acre park, an active space, that is connected to a trail that tries to take as many of the mosaic of vacant lots, and to knit them into a coherent bicycle and pedestrian system.

This project is going to be realized as the first attempt to find a purpose for the pattern of vacancy that we all know in neighborhoods like this. The real invention has to do with the relationship between rehabbing and vacant lands. A developer rehabs the house, they take responsibility for the lot next door, installing a low maintenance landscape. That creates jobs for residents in the neighborhood who are trained in a blue collar workforce. Currently there are 15 members of this neighborhood who are paid a living wage, and their job is to maintain these landscapes. Again, the formula being based on the profits that the developer gets in the rehab.

This is a shot from about three weeks ago when we brought the finalists for this commission to the neighborhood. To our surprise 200 people showed up for this pitch night. It had never happened before where the community was introduced to the developers before the city selected them. Trust or transparency that's needed in order to do this work.

I'm going to talk about the riverfront, which Detroit is blessed with having one of the few international riverfronts in the United States, looking over to Canada and a stretch that's about two and a half miles from the core to Belle Isle. This was the riverfront 10 years ago, and as was mentioned, it has been transformed into a riverfront that truly reflects everyone, not just the city but the region. Our charge was how do you develop a framework where the riverfront remains a riverfront for everyone. We've seen many, many riverfronts across the country that become exclusive enclaves, and there is a determination in Detroit that our riverfront will look like Detroit and continually be the place where you can find the widest cross-section of the region.

Part of how we engage that was inventing as many ways as possible. I was taken by Juxta's work bringing young people to imagine the riverfront. Likewise, we invented ways, whether it's walking tours, biking tours, we filmed and interviewed literally dozens of hours of people talking about what the riverfront meant to them during the engagement process, and came up with a set of principles that took this project in places that I did not necessarily expect it to go.

The heritage and the uniqueness of the riverfront emerged, bringing the nature to all Detroiters, different kinds of landscapes, creating a place where people felt was walkable, connected, and safe, where culture could be understood, and where transportation was a big component. Our charge was to take landscapes that had been left derelict, and begin to imagine a two mile continuous connection along the riverfront that would take you for the first time all the way to Belle Isle.

The other part of this is, it's a 30 year vision. What is going to be the form, the urban form, that's made over the course of 30 years? This is a lot for a community to take in. Then was how do you start, where do you start, and why do you start there? We decided to do something, again, that was mostly informed by the people who engaged in the process, that we would start from the history and heritage of the site, that we would secure the vast majority of the riverfront for the public, and we would make strong connections back.

One is the relationship between bringing activity to the riverfront, leaving the space of the riverfront for the public, but then not demolishing the history of the site, but finding ways to incrementally increase the density and the mix of uses. Then the element that I'm most taken by, the importance of the getting beyond the barriers that separate the neighborhoods you see to the north from the riverfront. Those fingers that you see are the remnants of the ribbon farms that now snake through primarily low income neighborhoods.

Our primary decision was to work on the linkages between those neighborhoods and the riverfront. Instead of it being a long, linear, the river, it was mostly about connecting to those neighborhoods in the sort and re-imagining streets that fit now are nine lanes, and reimagine them as a green place, supported by transit, reduced to four lanes. Those same spaces, those unimproved parking lots that inhibited residents from getting to the riverfront, to actually create them as a set of intentional public spaces that invite those communities onto the riverfront itself. As I said, when we started the process, I had no idea that the community would champion connections of those communities that have limited access to the river, over the issues of the riverfront itself.

Then the last project is about as far away from the river as you can get. It's the old state fairgrounds, just below Eight Mile, 163 acre site that is emblazoned in the memory of most Detroiters as a place where they understood what agriculture was and saw farm animals for the first time. We gave this assignment to the landscape architect Walter Hood, out of Oakland, asking him to find a way to find and unearth the memory of this site. Through some exhaustive searching of images of what this used to be, came up with a structure that involved a series of blocks and parks, a grand circus, a lake, and then a panhandle. This is what it looks like today. A number of buildings that, the cattle barn, and the colosseum, and creating a framework that would give this area a downtown core, or center, and to do this primarily through landscape. You can see the series of squares that are made that run north, south.

The other re-imagining Chevrolet Ave, which you can see through that parking lot, that connects Woodward to the rail, and eventually to passenger rail. Then the element here with the circus, and an old amphitheater that gets repurposed, restored and repurposed. Then the circus, this enormous track that gets rescaled and becomes a public space, and interim strategy, and then final strategy.

It's a very quick cross-section of types of landscapes that are trying to be constructed with a hope to rekindle a little respect. A respect for nature, as fundamental to our wellbeing. A respect for beauty and the desire we all have to be surrounded by beauty. A respect for mobility, a wide range of ways of moving around the city. A respect for the history, these kind of stoic buildings that we're stewards of. A respect for local entrepreneurs that are the folks who we want to populate these main streets. A respect for work, the dignity that work gives you. Most importantly, a respect for the community's voices as we try to guide and remake and regenerate our neighborhoods.

Thank you.

Brandt W.:

I was really struck by your comparing design as being a democratic right. As you know, in this country, sometimes we don't exercise all these democratic rights, especially like going out to vote and voter turnout. Did you have that issue in

Detroit in getting people to come out and give their input into the design of iterate?

Maurice Cox: Yeah. I think I was there for Detroit to be a little bit cynical and a little bit bitter from having been left and forgotten about. To my amazing surprise, I actually found people who I guess having been off of the radar and having been left alone produces an incredible sense of self confidence and resilience. People, they actually don't have any expectation that the government can do anything for them. They're doers. They don't wait for the regulatory process to enable. They just go and find it.

Then there are people, these are the folks who stay. They stay. That's because they love their city. They sense that they're the ones that can make it better. When you call a meeting to work on the future of your neighborhood, people come out. People come out, and they come out with a sense of optimism that I have rarely seen. It may also be that it's been a long time since they've seen a plan in anything. They have no expectations that I can do anything for them, so they are wide open.

It's actually been quite wonderful and amazing the wisdom that's in the eyes of these communities.

Brand W.: I will also ask you, what was the first day of your job like?

Maurice Cox: I remember the mayor said to me, "What is it going to take to make the best planning department in the country?" He said, well you can start by giving me like 25 new design professionals. He also, I remember him saying ... I had gotten an invitation from the local chamber of commerce. They wanted me to be a guest speaker. He said, "I don't want you to do that. I want you to be known as the champion of neighborhoods. If you go to downtown chamber, you will be just like every other planner that people imagine. I want you to be known as the champion of neighborhoods." I thought that was a pretty powerful mandate directive that he gave me.

I also just remember trying to get a handle how big the city was. I had my staff produce a map of the city that's in my office today that is 16 feet long and nine feet high. Every building that's still standing is on that map, and every vacant lot that's available to be re-imagined is on that map. Everyday I look at the pass and I am humbled.

Speaker 1: Keep passing questions down. All right. This first question from the audience asks you to please talk about your million tree initiatives.

Maurice Cox: I remember, we have a lot of really successful nonprofit, the Greening of Detroit, that plants thousands of trees a year. When I met with them, they also do the workforce training. They do green-collar workforce training. Met with them and I said, thousands of trees a year? How about a million trees a year?

They were taken aback that we had that aspiration. It made me realize that people can try and do these things without government, without impact and ability of government. The difference between planting 1,000 and a million trees, which is you're restricted to the public right of way, the sidewalk, the median, well they had never had access to the portfolio of publicly owned land that was the residential properties. All of a sudden, their planning director, who can give them access to hundreds of acres that they had never had access to before.

We started on this journey of trying to imagine not how we can create the 100, the one million tree program, which is done with sweat equity and pro bono weekend labor, but how we can create a green collar workforce. Those are jobs. Those are jobs. They have now, with Greening of Detroit, have trained about 150 green collar work groups since I have been there, and they're trying to take the scale so that every time a house comes down, a row of trees is planted in its place. That's the goal. Once again, if you can't get to the land that is inventory of houses that have to be demolished, you can't go to scale.

Part of this is trying to make it part of the system. Those are the two ways we're doing it, working with when a house is demolished a row of trees are planted in its place. Green collar of the Greening of Detroit trains residents in green collar employment that hopefully will be the force that realizes these intentional landscapes and then paints them.

Brandt W.: Bruce, also feel free to jump in where you feel like you have something to bring in as well. This is actually another resource question. This question is as water becomes more scarce throughout the country, have you given thought to Detroit's access to the Great Lakes as an asset to economic development? If so, how?

Maurice Cox: Well, I think the whole Great Lakes, we are finally in the right spot. Yeah, I don't want to quicken climate change challenge, but we are blessed-

Female: I'm not sure what you said.

Maurice Cox: We're blessed by location. In fact, Detroit is now one of those key points in the Great Lake region. I think we have significant challenges relative to storm water management and approximate. It represents, again, an opportunity more than a liability. It is painful to see the city grapple with what it means to actually have to manage their storm water on site. We started to literally charge fees, which other communities are already accustomed to having, Detroiters were not, where the run off from the site is your responsibility to slow it down before it goes into the public system.

I think of it, again, it's another opportunity to make visible places as a result of something that we are required to do.

Bruce C.: I think one of the interesting parallels between what Minneapolis has built itself around and what Detroit is working to become in its next generation, has to do with connection and flow and water. Water can be such a powerful way of leading us to greater connections between neighborhoods, or between the physicality of place, and the way we live life and city, that water can become, I think, a really powerful simple force in leading us to new innovations and new ways of thinking about city.

Maurice Cox: I certainly found myself lingering on your lakes, your lakes on the Ground Rounds. I was thinking these were created, some, some of them. I know that some you have a hard time keeping water in them. I just let that wash over me as a model to bring back the lakes along our Inner Circle Greenway. I know that there are a whole series of creeks throughout Detroit that were covered, and that you could daylight them. I'll share with you a bit of the challenge of where to start in Detroit.

A lot of the work that we've done is working in the neighborhoods that are strong, and with a set of strategies to make them stronger. How to densify those areas, which means that the large vast areas that are least populated, which represent the greatest opportunities to reimagine the blue and green infrastructure, are a little further off in the distance. Our main goal is to take all of those things that people have been doing, like urban ag, and bring them into the populated areas where people live, and turn them into intentional landscape, turn them into small neighborhood friendly businesses, and elevate it as an actual economic development opportunity within the city.

Every time I am drawn to the big vast empty areas, the mayor would actually direct me right back into the neighborhoods. It has a certain scale and residence, and we are fond of saying we want Mrs. Jones to see storm water being managed from her front porch. It's a different scale intervention.

Brandt W.: About the community engagement, here's another question about that. I think you mentioned a little bit in your presentation about the role of artists, but maybe to go a little bit more, this asks more directly, have you been engaging local artists in planning community organizing work, and if so how have you done that?

Maurice Cox: Well, I think this is something that's really dear to me, so much so that I have the ambition to help artists. You have to also remember in Detroit, most people did these things without government interference. Artists move into neighborhoods, they created a presence, and they lifted those neighborhoods up. Government was also unfortunately known to be the antagonist to the arts community, and probably the more celebrated example is the Heidelberg Project. Some of you may know of it, Tyree Guyton went into an area that was forgotten and started making art out of what he had, which were abandoned houses. He would make these incredible landscapes, hundreds of people would come to visit, at one point, his site, the Heidelberg Project, was the most visited tourist site in Detroit, hundreds of thousands of people.

Prior to Tyree's demonstration, would come by and repeatedly bulldoze it because they thought it was blank, or it wasn't the image that they wanted to export. We have an about face. Yesterday, we submitted a proposal to the Knight Foundation, coauthored by the planning department, and Tyree Guyton to imagine a Heidelberg Project in its 3.0. Just to say, we see that as the core, and often the soul, of neighborhoods that other people have forgotten. We're trying mildly to change the perception of what government will do.

Brandt W.: Another question, this is about you and the questioner asks, being a practitioner of color, do you think your presence influenced engagement of the community?

Maurice Cox: I think I get at least a free pass. They will entertain something I say. I've had a lot of seniors in the community that have heard me talk, and they never heard of a planning director talk like I talk, and they said, "Well, those are some sweet words but I'm watching you young man." I'm very mindful that at least I get an audience, but seriously I have one of the things that I knew going into this job was that I was going to have to work with community to win their trust.

When I decided to hire, and I did hire 25 design professionals, I made sure that those professionals looked like the community I'm trying to serve, so they are, 60% of our staff are people of color. 65% of them are women. The women are in leadership positions. When we go out into the community, we can speak their language, our planners are their nieces and their nephews, that's a nice young man I want my daughter to marry. Except it feels like we are part of the community.

Brandt W.: Very good. Here's a question to ask about some of your experience also with the state of New Orleans, the question is, do you see any similarities between New Orleans and Detroit?

Maurice Cox: They both have a lot of soul, that's for sure, and incredible spirit. They are resilient, and they're survivors. I was engaged post Katrina, when I remember as many of you might, the people were debating whether the city should be rebuilt. If you've ever been to New Orleans and you've ever lived there, that was like a non-question. That was not a question even to ask.

New Orleans is a phenomenal community. It's like none other in the United States. Then to my amazement, I get to work in another city that's like none other in the United States, that has the opportunity to reinvent. I fundamentally believe that the scale of it, the opportunity to reimagine landscapes, is something that no other city in America has. We're proving that.

I'm also very proud that we're including that in the majority African American city. If we can make these ideas work in a place where equity and access and opportunity are things we think about daily, just imagine what that might mean for small cities that are struggling to create an equitable landscape.

Brandt W.: You did have a chance to take a bit of a tour of North Minneapolis. We talked a little bit about this beforehand. I mentioned that at the height of the foreclosure process that there neighborhood on the north side, and that experienced a lot of lost, boarded, and abandoned homes. Did you get a sense of when you took a brief tour around there, what were your impressions?

Maurice Cox: I don't see Jayne, there she is. Yeah she was incredibly gracious. It was incredibly well narrated. A lot of my idiot questions she entertained. At a certain point, we were seeing these drop dead gorgeous parks, and were seeing really small houses facing onto them. I was actually taken aback that those houses hadn't been taken over by folks who would really want to live on a park front. There's something in the physical fabric that was built that resists massive gentrification and it may be the size of the houses, but the fact is they sit in front of the same beautiful landscape as the houses that are bigger and are more wealthy.

I will say, I was looking for diversity, because there were a lot of people out today. To my surprise, it wasn't. I didn't see as many folks that look like me biking and strolling. If you were in Detroit and you were taking a stroll along the riverfront, you would see everyone there. I appreciated that, and I still ... I was left a little puzzled as to how this incredible amenity is ... That I just didn't see the cross-section of Minneapolis that I know the city's composed of. I'm sure some folks out there can tell me why. It might have been that it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and people were working.

Brandt W.: Sure. How do you balance and connect 20 minute neighborhoods in such a geographically large city?

Maurice Cox: I think transit is going to play a big role in connecting ...

Brandt W.: There's a question, do you have any suggestions for millennials looking for careers in parks, landscape architecture or urban planning?

Maurice Cox: No really, it's amazing. If someone is looking to make a difference, you can make it in Detroit. I've watched, as we've attracted young people from wonderful cities that I got a landscape architect from New York, he's been out of school for two years, he's living in an apartment in New York with four other of his buddies. Now he lives in a house that he has bought, and he is doing Air BnB, living upstairs. It's amazing.

I think Detroit is going to be affordable for a very long time. I think the project that we're working on is a long term project. If you're still in school and you're wondering where you're going to have that first meaningful job, I would encourage you to consider Detroit.

Brandt W.: On those lines, this question asks, considering the common trend for revitalizations, especially areas with historic character, that leads to

gentrification, what are your strategies to ensure those areas remain affordable to the communities that shape your past and present?

Maurice Cox:

I mean, I think a couple of things. This first project, the Fitzgerald Project, is a quarter square mile, about 30% of the land is publicly owned. There are about 100 homes that can be rehabbed for affordable housing. When we set into that neighborhood, we were coming in and we're going to do this beautiful greenway that we will be able to bike through the neighborhoods, Central Park, and we'll renovate these 100 homes. There was a lot of suspicion in the community that really this is being done for someone else, that they were going to be moved out, and you're talking primarily about a rental community.

Then, we took that to heart, and also quite frankly with financing that we were putting together, 90% of the 100 homes will be reserved for affordable rental housing, and for the next 35 years. It took people aback that this housing might be for us, as we can control that portion of it, the rest of the neighborhood may change, but what we can assure is that there will be affordability for many decades to come.

There were things like that to reassure people that we intend to create inclusive communities. The riverfront is another example. Our goal is to reserve anywhere between 20 and 30% integrated into the houses. I think that there are really interesting ways, even typologically, to create what is multi-generational housing, or mixed income housing, where you might have a townhouse, and on top of the townhouse you have flats that assure that families with children will be living in the same building, as perhaps singles.

We're looking to find as many models as possible, that when we build this median density that we build in affordability. There was another part of the question that had to do with, quite frankly, historic preservation, which I could have given a whole talk on these extraordinary buildings that still stand witness to how ambitious this city was. The numbers are staggering. There are 70 schools that are vacant. There are dozens of churches that are vacant. There are banks, there are recreation centers, there are mercantile buildings, there are about 60,000 houses that are vacant.

When you think about what do you do when 1.2 million people up and leave, and they leave the buildings that they otherwise occupied still standing? You're in a city that could not even afford to protect them. We're going to take that on. We're taking it on. We're starting to conceive of an idea we're calling tactical preservation where if you can't occupy all 200 square feet of a school building, could you embed a 20,000 square foot program within that, and completely renovate that 20,000 square feet, and mothball the other 180 to another day, and create a destination. It's fraud with all kind of structural issues, from the financing, from the permitting, from the insuring, but we've decided to take that on, to a school, to a bank, to a church, to an mercantile building, do these typologies, can see if we can't offer community as a strategy for how to do

something now to preserve these buildings. It's the thing that keeps me up at night.

Brandt W.: We have time for just two quick, really short questions. First one is, how are you thinking about self driving cars?

Maurice Cox: Well, we are. General Motors is exploring this technology. They also ... I'm sure that given the concentration of engineers and people that feed the automotive industry, that we will be one of those cities piloting them. We're also working with the Uber Lyft, groups to try and understand how we can fold that system into our public transit system, kind of a first mile, last mile. Could you use access to an Uber as an incentive for people to live close together? That's one of the amenities you have a pass as a part of the transit system, or it might be the first mile, if you're in a depopulated area, could you have access to Uber that would take you to a trunkline line and an express service.

We're in the process of trying to conceive these fragments, both as an attractor, we have a lot of urbanites that love themselves some Uber. That are able to live in Detroit without a car. I'm one of them. We basically, I get around by bike, and by walking. You know if you're getting attractors but we can also imagine it being the place where we can no longer afford to support your typical transit options. Can we give that option to residents?

Brandt W.: Last question of the night, which is the most important question that I received here-

Thank you very much.