



## **“The Delray Initiative”**

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**The Delray Initiative** is a collaborative project between the Geoscience Institute for Research and Education (GSI) at UM-Dearborn (Dr. Kent Murray, Director), SDEV and the Detroit Public Schools. Funded in 2009, the project proposes to involve local earth science teachers and several of their students along with faculty and UM-Dearborn graduate students in a project to evaluate soil contamination in the Delray section of southwest Detroit. Students (grades 7-11) participating in UM-D's Geosciences Institute's spring workshops, and teachers and students (grades 8-12) participating in the Geosciences Institute's summer workshops would be involved in all aspects of the project design, soil sampling and subsequent analysis during their 8 week March/April and three-week workshops in July of 2010 through 2012. The workshops are funded by the NSF's Opportunity to Enhance Diversity in the Geosciences (OEDG) program. The students and teachers would interpret the results, develop GIS-generated maps and a poster of their research effort, they would also be involved in the dissemination of the results to community groups.

The Delray environmental assessment is to be conducted as a first step in acquisition of property by the State of Michigan in preparation of the construction of a second bridge across the Detroit River between Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario (Canada). The Michigan Department of Transportation has mapped out where the proposed span will go and what improvements to local freeways and streets will be needed. The University of Michigan –Dearborn is working with several community partners on this project, including Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (SDEV), a local grass roots environmental group, the City of Detroit, Department of Environmental Affairs, the Delray community Center, the Greening of Detroit, another local environmental group responsible for the development of urban gardens and farms, the Contaminated Sites Task Force, a pseudo governmental group linking potential developers to agencies such as the City of Detroit's Department of Environmental Affairs.

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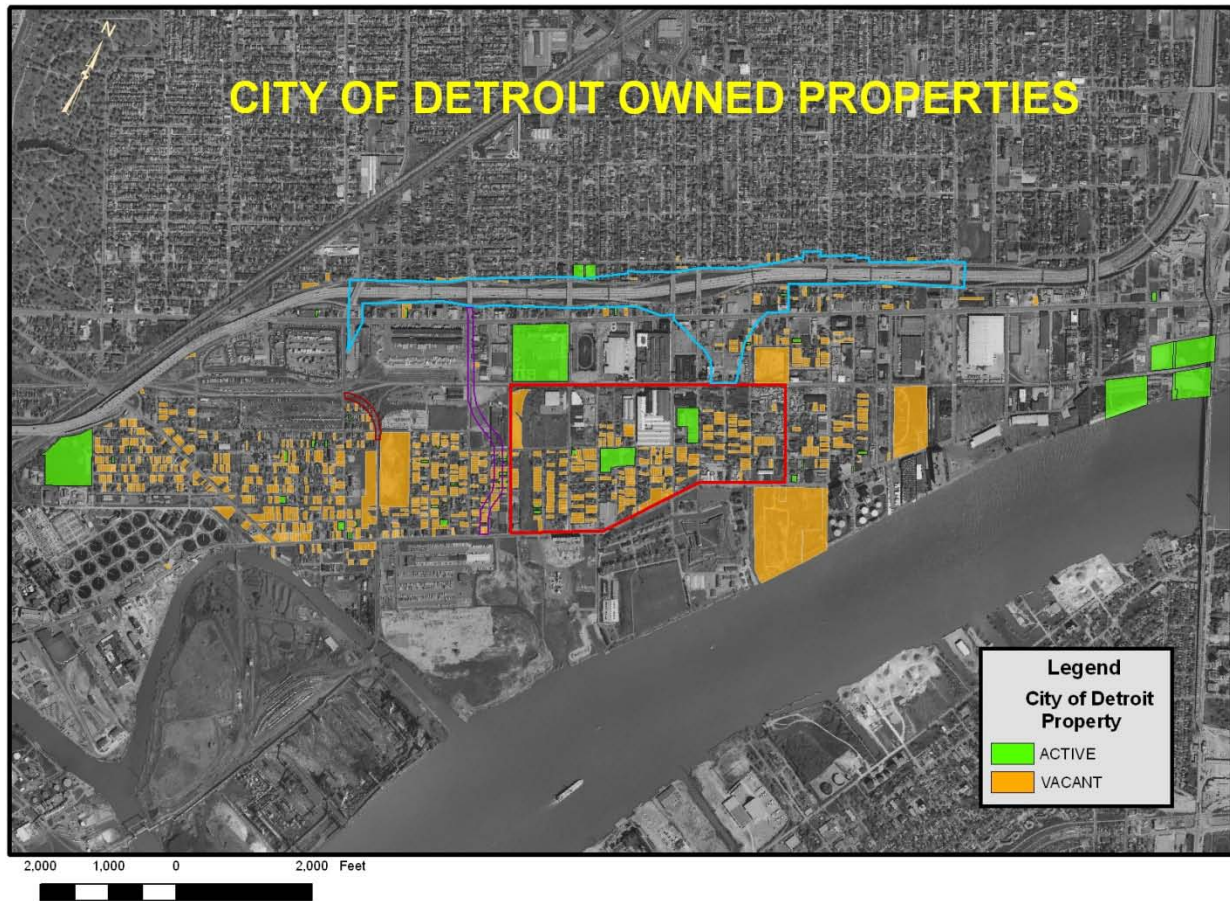
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Traditionally, Delray was a working class racially diverse community that depended heavily on industrial jobs provided by nearby factories. In the past the expanding local industrial economy attracted migrants from the rural South as well as numerous European countries, including Hungary, Poland, Ireland, Germany and Italy. Like many other communities in the rust belt, Delray has been economically hit hard in recent decades by factory closings, urban sprawl and the decline in manufacturing. Unemployment and poverty are major challenges confronting residents in Delray today as well as plans for a new bridge span to Canada. During the 1940s and 1950s, Delray was a thriving residential community with a strong commercial presence along Jefferson Avenue, which included variety stores, the impressive Grande Theatre, furniture stores, live poultry stores, bakeries, barber shops, fine restaurants like Joey's Stables, "beer gardens," many elaborate old world style churches and the well-kept, spacious George Patton Park, with indoor and outdoor pools, athletic fields and well-kept grassy fields. A large gothic looking Detroit City water works facility was located on the Detroit River near where the Rouge River flowed into it. Despite the blight, a number of longtime residents still reside in Delray, with former residents returning to church in Delray on Sundays and holidays. Detroit's Southwestern High School serves the area. Economic decline began in the 1960s when the United States steel industry collapsed and affluent second generation immigrant residents moved to the suburbs, taking their parents with them. Today the Delray community consists of mostly Latino and African American residents.

In addition to these economic problems, Delray has been afflicted by the same social breakdown found in other poor urban communities. Crime, substance abuse, high school and labor force dropout, are prevalent in the community. A recent investigate feature story in U.S. News & World Report found that the Delray had one of the worst slum areas in the United States. There is increased interest in this section of Detroit as a result of a proposed second bridge to Canada. The Michigan Department of Transportation is currently targeting an area of approximately 160 acres in Delray for soil sampling and analysis (Figure 2). This interest in this section of Delray is a source of concern for residents and may well be viewed as a social injustice issue. Regardless of the outcome of a decision on the bridge, the Delray community faces significant challenges and opportunities.



**Figure 2. Location of the Delray area in southwest Detroit. The Detroit River is shown at the bottom of the photograph. The Detroit waste water treatment facility is located along the western margin of Delray. Parks are shown in green and City of Detroit-owned parcels, primarily single family homes or lot (acquired by foreclosure) are shown in orange. The red polygon is the area being investigated by MDOT. Improvements proposed for I-75 are shown in blue.**