

THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

COMMENTARY

Jackson: Redevelopment without displacement? Here's how it can happen.

March 12, 2024

Detroit



Livernois Avenue, in Detroit's Live6 neighborhood, was one of several sites to host a roving, light-up sign created by the Downtown Detroit Partnership during the COVID epidemic to bring life and community pride to commercial corridors. (Photo courtesy Downtown Detroit Partnership)

Wendy Lewis Jackson



“It seems like whenever development comes to your neighborhood, they develop the people right out of the neighborhood.” Those words from restaurateur Marvin Smith were heard across the country recently in a report aired on National Public Radio’s [All Things Considered](#) (ATC) program.

Smith was speaking specifically about Cincinnati’s Over the Rhine neighborhood, but the sentiment, the fear, echoes in Black communities across the country, Detroit among them. As the ATC program recounted, some murals of locally renowned artist William Rankins’ Jr. have disappeared from the neighborhood walls while others, like the one on walls of Smith’s restaurant, Ollie’s Trolley, are endangered symbols of a community’s uncertain future.

Which raises a question: Can we have redevelopment without displacement and erasure?

A [recent study](#) funded by Kresge from Brookings Institution Senior Fellow [Andre Perry](#) and Research Assistant [Hannah Stephens](#) looks at the trajectory of Detroit’s Livernois-Six Mile area and answers with a qualified yes ... if we work hard at it. (An accompanying [Brookings video](#) lets viewers see the neighborhood and hear some of the key voices of the study.)

Perry, author of the book *Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America’s Black Cities*, is one of our most important thinkers on urban life and development, whose work I’ve commented on [before](#). We couldn’t have a better scholar monitoring this geography of particular interest for Kresge’s [Detroit Program](#).

That’s because in 2014, we announced – along with the [University of Detroit-Mercy](#) (UDM) – the creation of the [Live6 Alliance](#). The idea was to bring the energies of revitalization from downtown and the Woodward corridor, for the first time, to the city’s neighborhoods. It has since become a model for what is possible.

Kresge; UDM; our philanthropic and community partners in [Reimagining the Civic Commons](#); the city of Detroit and [Invest Detroit](#), through the [Strategic Neighborhood Fund](#); and private businesses and residential buyers have all made a variety of investments in the area.

For Kresge, those investments include supporting the opening of a co-located community resource hub at [Neighborhood HomeBase](#) and support for the Live6 Alliance staff working there. And at the former Marygrove College campus, now helmed by the Marygrove Conservancy and home to the [P-20 cradle-to-career campus](#), we’ve planted an innovative educational model at the heart of the redevelopment effort. (Land Lines, the journal of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, covered the P-20 campus [here](#).)

As Perry and Stephens note, there has indeed been “an uptick in investment since 2015”:

In Livernois-6 Mile, new home and business owners drove recent population growth and positive change. Changes in the neighborhood’s physical condition are apparent: Renovated buildings, new streetscapes, a refurbished park, and improved greenways clearly mark recent boosts in investment from the city and philanthropic groups. Yet for many Black people in Detroit, such development is bittersweet after witnessing the displacement in downtown.

The Perry-Stephens paper traces the arc of the area from a “golden era for the city’s Black middle class” through the economic shocks of the housing crisis and the Detroit auto crisis of 2007 and 2008:

In less than a decade, an area known for manicured lawns, block parties and elaborate Christmas decorations became known for blight and vacancy. Businesses along Livernois Avenue closed and houses north and south of 6 Mile Road lay empty. From 2000 to 2010, the area’s population plummeted by 56%, going from 72,110 people to just under 32,000.

And since the investments that began in 2015:

From 2015 to 2020, the area's population rose by 2% – it's first increase in two decades. ... Despite the overall fluctuation in population, Livenois-6 Mile remained 90% Black. And while investment there has skyrocketed by 490% since 2010, median income has increased a modest 3%, to roughly \$44,000 per household. In the same period, home occupancy rebounded to 77%, with a 56% homeownership rate and a gradual increase in resident's educational attainment.

The report is well worth reading in full given its nuanced analysis of the factors involved here. It drills down into the data for each of the five neighborhoods involved: Palmer Park, Martin Park, University District, Bagley and Fitzgerald-Marygrove. It examines issues of public safety, home loans, housing prices, the affordability of rents and homeownership, education, etc.

But the authors make clear that to continue the dual aims of promoting redevelopment and preventing displacement will require "intentionality in future investments."

Specifically, they recommend:

- Creating educational and employment opportunities with local post-secondary institutions.
- Including long-standing community organizations in the investment planning process.
- Investing in affordable housing and homeownership.
- Paying attention to neighborhood dynamics and protecting legacy residents.

Those are all key issues that we've centered investments on. But there is much more to do on those issues and related issues such as poverty and housing instability.

Yet, beyond policy specifics, there is an overarching guiding principle to the report's recommendations that coincides totally with that of Kresge's Detroit Program and the work of the coalition of partners and residents to date. That principle, simply put, is that people come first in how we reinvest in neighborhoods; it's people that we must listen to, learn from and support. People are, in the words of the report, "the original assets of these neighborhoods."

And, I'll add, of neighborhoods across Detroit.

RELATED

NEWS

\$1.3M in grants available for community organizations through Kresge Innovative Projects: Detroit Plus

March 5, 2024

Detroit

NEWS

Trailblazing Chicana painter Nora Chapa Mendoza named 2024 Kresge Eminent Artist; annual award now \$100K

January 25, 2024

Detroit

Expanding Equity and Opportunity in America's Cities

3215 W. Big Beaver Road Troy, MI 48084 +1 248-643-9630

Contact Us 

© 2024 Kresge Foundation | [Legal](#) [Scam Alert](#)