

Mayor Dayne Walling Transcript

REX:

I'm Rex Lamore, I'm with the Michigan State University Center for Community and Economic Development and I'm pleased to welcome you to today's webinar session: Re-sizing Communities in a Just and Equitable Manner. And today with the Mayor of Flint, Mayor Dayne Walling, we'll be looking at his "Is Sustainability an Alternative to Shrinking?". Let me just say a little bit about the webinar series. It's been designed to provide information from leading practitioners and scholars from across the world on methods and strategies for resizing communities in a fair and equitable and manner. We hope that this webinar series will facilitate thoughtful discourse and innovative collaboration amongst community partners and stakeholders engaged in resizing their communities.

But it's more than just a webinar series, let me say a little more about what we have available, making available to you. The seminar series is being archived on the web and is available to you to call up at appropriate times when you may be in community settings across the nation or you might like to talk about this and listen to some of the presentations that are being prepared. In addition we have a number of materials that we have made available on our website at ced.msu.edu about re-sizing communities in a just and equitable manner. So again we're hoping to build our understanding of the challenges that we face in resizing, to learn more from our leaders that are engaged in working in communities and that are addressing these challenges, and then help you guide conversations at the local level to help others in this regard.

If you haven't registered already it's no big deal, however we would like to ask you to register at our email address at ced@msu.edu so that we can keep you informed of other opportunities and events that may follow this webinar series.

And as we go through this series today, there is a chat room box on the lower left hand corner of your screen that you can enter questions in and we will ask our presenters to give response as time permits.

And with that let me introduce our presenter today, Mayor Dayne Walling. He was elected Mayor of Flint in 2009. His message of new jobs, safe neighborhoods and great schools has resonated with Flint voters who gave him a commanding victory in that election. The Mayor's past professional experiences include owner and manager of 21st Century Performance; work with the Genesee County Land bank, affiliated with the Genesee Institute and founder of Flint Club. Mayor Walling has also worked the Urban Coalition of Minnesota; he was an aid to Washington D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams and worked with Congressman Dan Kildee. The Mayor was born in Flint and was a graduate of Flint Central High School and has the distinct honor of being Flint's only Road's scholar.

The Mayor has a extensive higher education portfolio receiving his Bachelor's of Arts Degree in social relations from James Madison College here at Michigan State University, a second Bachelor of Arts in Modern History from St. Peters College University of Oxford, and a

Master's of Arts in Urban Studies from Goldsmiths College, University of London. He's also pursued Doctoral studies in geography at the University of Minnesota with a fellowship from the National Science Foundation.

He's an active member of the Court Street United Methodist Church in Flint. He and his wife Kerry have two sons, Bennett and Emery and they live near the community college in Flint. I am very pleased to welcome Mayor Dayne Walling.

MAYOR:

Thanks Rex, it's a real pleasure to be a part of the series here. It's the first time I've used this particular technology so I hope everything goes smoothly I look forward to the discussion and certainly getting into some of the questions that I hope some of our other attendees will have.

One of the things I want to do is talk about sustainability as a framework for urban development, specifically as we've applied it here in Flint. Along the way there's some departure points where I'll touch on some state and federal policy issues and also some of the more theoretical or philosophical reasons why I work within this framework and what I see as some of the deficiencies or at least certainly under theorized approaches that have been bandied about around the re-sizing and the shrinking. So I really hope we'll have a constructive dialog here that you'll learn something about what we're doing in Flint, and through the discussion I'll learn something from each of you.

So to go ahead and jump in here, I can advance the slide; I am going to discuss sustainability as a framework. And as you can see there are three key points that I think undergird this framework. One is the assumption is central cities have present value, they're valuable places even today and they also have assets that are necessary for our future. You can talk about that future in terms of higher education institutions, the medical and life sciences, you can talk in terms of national defense, in terms of national/international infrastructure, so that's meant to be broadly defined.

So the other part of this framework is that it recognizes the primary challenge is to recycle land in ways that generate new value. And I like the word recycling because by definition it means to find value, it's a creative process of reuse. And that value can come in many different forms, it'll likely come in some forms that are new in the sense that in the history of American cities at least, or U.S. cities is that they're constantly creating new land forms, new places to live, new places to work and those come to have value in ways that are often not predicted by earlier paradigms. So we'll talk some about that.

The other is that I don't want to get hung up on a long conversation about sustainability. I'm in this position as Mayor as a practitioner, so I look for very simple, common sense kinds of connections to sustainability in other dialogs or discussions about livability, resilience, community engagement, economic diversification. Again, that could be another full session just on what do we mean by sustainability? This is what I mean, I'm talking about places that are livable, that are resilient, that have serious and sustained community engagement, meaning they

have deep connections to their own people, and they're also places that are economically, socially, racially diverse. There's a lot of strength that comes from that.

Now this is also as this seminar series posed as I put it here, somewhat of an antidote. I think the framework of sustainability actually counters the view held by both advocates of urban sprawl and city shrinking that central cities are places of diminishing value. Now in a place like Flint we do have declining property values, we do have a loss of population, and I will address those. But to take that to a more theoretical level, to take that as a matter of principle, I think that there's actually and ironically an agreement between those who want to see the urban space continue to sprawl and those that want to see the city shrink because as you'll see in the case of Flint, a lot of what we're dealing with is much more about decentralization than it is actually about metropolitan shrinking and if that were the case I might pose a different solution. But in the current topography population distribution, economic distribution across our regions I think those who are looking to shrink the city and those that are looking to grow the exorbitant fringe actually have a lot more in common than they may want to acknowledge.

The other solution that sustainability answers or the problem that sustainability answers is that many of the older industrial cities like Flint were characterized by a boom-bust cycle. The auto industry was up, the city was booming, the auto industry was down, it was also down. You can say the same thing with the lumber industry, the same thing with the carriage industry. And we need to have a more sustainable, diverse base. I'm not going to talk as much about that in this particular presentation but I do believe that sustainability as a framework is an antidote to this boom-bust cycle that has caused a great deal of dislocation and has resulted in some concentrations of poverty, some unnecessary loss in valuable.

The last point here is that I also see sustainability as an antidote to this old illegitimate debate that it's either economic growth or environmental quality. I think there's a tremendous amount of research whether you look at individual neighborhoods, whether you look at industry sectors, whether you look at states or larger multi-state regions. The economic growth and environmental quality are actually advanced together, not in opposition to each other. There is certainly friction in that system, there are times when new laws or regulations are coming into place that causes short term dislocation, but long term economic growth and environmental quality are two sides of the same coin and the sustainability format or framework really I believe recognizes that.

So let's go right into a couple of the core challenges and get away from some of the general points on the framework. What's happened in the city of Flint? And you see in this that our population—the next slide will be on vacancy—has declined to a point of 102,434 people. We had a goal in the 2010 Census of counting more than 100,000 people here in the city of Flint and we did that but it still represents significant population decline. Later in the presentation we'll take up this issue around the regional composition and what we need to do and why I offer these particular types of solutions. But you see never the less that within the 32 square miles of the city of Flint there are many less people living here than there were in 1960 and 1970

although the expectation is that the population pressed just below 200,000 in those boom years and it's been a steady decline since then.

So that gives some sense of scale, essentially fifty percent of the population that we have now fifty years ago and as our county treasurer used to say, Dan Kildee, "People left but they didn't take their houses with them". And the resulting pattern is this; this is a land bank block by block map. It is 2008 so there will be some areas in here that would be actually darker than they are but you see the problem in Flint is a wide spread problem of vacancy. Now you do see along the central northern spine of the city that runs up I-475 corridor, the north Saginaw corridor, what's historically been called the Buick City Area. That has the highest level of vacancy but there's nowhere in there that we have a single block that's completely abandoned. So on a block where we still have 50% of the original occupants you have to remember that with that density level the city of Flint is still more dense than almost anywhere else in Genesee County. As a whole the city of Flint is actually, even with the population decline, more dense than anywhere else in the county. And that again I think represents a challenge to the thinking that cities that have lost population may not have the ability to provide services city-wide, may not be able to maintain property city-wide.

The fact is that we have a value challenge, not necessarily just population density challenge because we're more dense than anywhere else in the county. And even in those areas with high levels of vacancy, they're still more dense as neighborhoods than most of the other places within the county. So to put this in a more provocative way, I think instead of talking about shrinking the cities or re-sizing our cities we should actually be talking about shrinking the suburbs. Those are the resource intensive, resource wasting parts of our metropolitan region. They were built up by a series of state and federal policy incentives—we'll talk more about those later. Those need to be systematically reoriented so that our public investments have the greatest power possible; that means they have to go back into the built environment.

It doesn't mean our neighborhoods will look the way they did in 1960 and 70, the housing market has moved on and we need to go through some pretty serious transformations. But we have areas in the city where some strategic investments would go an awful long way and the only thing we need to enable those investments is to cut off the building out of infrastructure in other parts of the metropolitan region. So that gives you some background on the city's population decline, what our current residential geography looks like, the fact that this is a widespread problem, not one that's isolated to small sectors of the city.

Let's go back out to thinking about sustainability as a framework for urban development and talk about what all it entails as we have laid it out here in the city of Flint. And I want to acknowledge that some of the language and points that I've drawn on here came out of something called the American Assembly. This is a long time nonpartisan group that was started under Dwight D. Eisenhower to tackle policy issues across the country and I was just a part of one in the city of Detroit about a month ago that dealt with cities with severe population loss. And some of the language I will be referring to in this, again, came from that assembly. The

assembly helped me see some of the bigger picture issues and some ways that the work we're doing in Flint could be more generalized and that's what I'm hoping to present to you here today.

So the framework components that we work under—you're familiar with these if you're a practitioner in the urban environment around planning, around community, around economic development—we start with a vision, we have engagement, we work from our assets and resources. We need to have integrated strategies both across sectors and also across issue areas. We need to have very deliberate processes in place to recycle our Brownfields, our residential properties, in some sense we need to recycle our culture and continue to grow and change as a community. We need to settle issues in a broader regional framework and collaboration is absolutely essential. And then some state and federal policy reforms that need to take place. So that's the framework, it is certainly not a one size fits all approach. I think you'll see in this what we've done in Flint but these are some common components that could be used or filled in by other communities. I think that's something else that's very important in a sustainability dialogue that we talk about specific places within a context.

So real briefly, this is the vision that we fashioned for Flint, a 21st century city with new jobs, safe neighborhoods and great schools. As I went door to door as a candidate and then later in our formal community engagement work we heard this over and over again from the community: jobs, neighborhoods and schools. Those three need to be interlinked with our strategies or we need to have a framework that integrates strategies for each of those areas: economy, neighborhoods and schools or education. And that's what you'll hear from me throughout the rest of the program here.

I also am a firm believer in this community engagement. Of course you do a lot of it as a candidate as you go door to door. I learned from D.C.'s mayor, Tony Williams, how this can be done city-wide and we adopted that format to our local community. We obviously don't have the same resources, we had to work from a shoe string but we went out and did serious community engagement in each of Flint's nine wards and we broke that down into three neighborhood areas per ward plus one in downtown where a number of ward come together. So we did 28 neighborhood area sessions: public safety, economic development, and infrastructure came out as the top priorities with public safety being actually number one in all nine wards. We had about 1400 total participants and we'll be doing another round of this with our master planning work. So very solid foundation around community engagement.

And again, people were talking about vacancy, talking about wanting jobs and we were listening. There wasn't much of any explicit discussion from residents about so called shrinking or limiting services to some parts of the city. What residents really wanted was investment, they wanted service. You can ask the question how do you do that without the resources the city once had? That's the challenge my administration works on every day. But again if we bring value back to neighborhoods in the appropriate way, break down some of our own thinking about what's urban, what's suburban, what's rural, what's natural space, where does agriculture go I think we can do some really exciting things. But we don't start from those endpoints, we start

from the principle of sustainability and working with the community to define a future that can be embraced and be tied to market forces and have real public support.

The next item here, I wanted to speak real briefly just to the assets and resources that we have in Flint, not unlike many older industrial cities. Extensive underutilized expressways, air, rail, water and sewer systems. We have a skilled workforce, we have training networks, colleges and universities located right here in our community. We have very well developed supply chains, particularly around the auto industry but also around higher education and education in general as well as healthcare and the life sciences. Those are all growing 21st century industry sectors. We also have incredible quality of life, a great network of museums, parks, medical centers, entertainment options, an amazing downtown. These are real assets for our entire region, we have foundations here, we have private capital and we have banks. So all of that infrastructure is here in our community and it needs to be used and not walked away from by state and federal decision makers.

I'm not going to go much into this here; I just wanted to show that our strategies are integrated. We talk about trade, reusing Brownfields in our commercial and industrial spaces; Commerce Centers which is a policy proposal that I'll talk more about under the state policy sector; talking about pre-K through 20 education, so everything from early education all the way through college; and then innovation and entrepreneurship. So we're finding ways to integrate our strategies in all of those areas, so the Brownfields, the policy investment, education, our culture of innovation and entrepreneurship which is really what made Flint what it was. General Motors was not born this full size global corporation, it was acquired company by company, it was advanced innovation by innovation, investment by investment. So we're a community who knows what it takes to build a company a great deal of wealth. Somewhere along the way we started taking too much of that for granted, so we're back trying to promote innovation and entrepreneurship across educational and business systems.

I also wanted to put this up just to show that recycling is more than residential property, it's more than Brownfield redevelopment. We have the great Genesee County Land Bank in our community that has some very unique tools under Michigan law to deal with vacant and abandoned tax foreclosed properties both residential and commercial. We've done a lot of work to build collaborative initiatives around our Brownfield revitalization; we're also doing some very unique things with our waste streams, especially our sewage waste where we're working with Swedish Biogas International to produce energy and to reduce our waste disposal cost out at the waste water treatment plant by further digesting that sludge. And we're also have a number of areas where we're doing real ecological restoration which brings in land bank properties, it certainly is connected to Brownfield, but it's a different way to approach land reuse. Most of these are commercial or former in the back of the industrial space areas where we've been able to achieve some real ecological restoration in some unused areas. Bring some new value to what was essentially a couple of warehouses for instance. So all of those work together to create new value and to give us some new assets to work with.

This is one quick photo here of our Chevy in the hole Brownfield along the Flint River, about 180 acres. The city owns everything on the left side of the screen, what's south of the river. And we have a very simple, green concept that will bring value back to that river corridor, stabilize the existing neighborhoods, the institutional corridor of colleges, universities and medical centers along the north edge of the bank. We've done an investment in a new Flint River trail that connects the west side of the city through this space up higher on the bank so it's not down on the concrete slab of Brownfield into downtown and the University. So this is when I talk about sustainability and Brownfield revitalization using the river, creating some new ecological value, this is what we're talking about. This is an area that's already been removed of its high economic value, we're looking to bring some value back to this area through investment.

So this brings us to another point in the framework around regional collaboration. This is really important and I want to toggle back and forth between these next couple slides because you need to understand this fact to really deal with what's happened in our cities. The top spike you see there is Genesee County's population from 1960 to 2010. Essentially from 1970 to 2010 the county's population has been the same, so we are talking about a city has experienced severe population decline, but the region has actually been population stable. That is a critical fact in my view of how we need to approach these urban challenges from a policy, a moral, a philosophical perspective. Something is going on that has moved people within the same region from one side of center road to the other side of center road. And that is something that we should be able to deal with as a policy community rather than continue to devalue these investments. It's just a very wasteful system that we've created and it needs to be corrected.

So what do we do about that? Well we need to have much more regional collaboration, it's not rocket science. This community has often been divided between city and county and I've worked very hard to bring the city back to its rightful place within the county, the heart of the community. We've benefited by a couple key institutional changes here, we had a myriad of economic development organizations, some more connected to the city, some more connected to the county. A handful of years ago they merged, consolidated into the Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce which also provides economic development support. We also have under my leadership the first ever Flint and Genesee County U.S. Department of Commerce Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy; that was passed by both the city council as well as the Genesee County Commissioners by unanimous vote. And again this brings the city of Flint back to being the heart of this economic region that extends even beyond Genesee County.

It's going to take some real changes at the state and federal level for our central cities to live up to their potential and to live up to the return on investments for those investments that have already been made. A few quick points on this and then I want to wrap up and get into some discussion. Both at the state and federal level, mostly at the state level, there need to be strong preferences to already developed areas in funding transportation, sewer, water, and other infrastructure. This goes to what we call commerce center. It's a proposal that almost got out of the Michigan Legislature a couple of years ago and I think need to be resurrected with Governor

Snyder's intention to focus more on central cities especially Flint, Detroit, Grand Rapids and Saginaw, certainly others.

We need systems that incentivize life-cycle budgeting and finance planning. That may be a demolition tax credit; it may be a demolition fee that can be assessed. The fact is you shouldn't be able to use a building, make tremendous profit, gain wealth for yourself, walk away from that and leave it to the land bank to deal with. This is what you can describe as privatizing all the benefits and socializing all of the cost. And that system needs to be tweaked and I think it can be even within our system that of course very strongly privileges private property rights.

Another thing we need to do is encourage our central city investments with tax policies and resource allocation formulas, community development block grant for the federal level where the state puts tax incentives. It doesn't have to be specifically a Brownfield program, it can be other kinds of criteria that simply say that investments need to first be made within existing built environments and only if no suitable space be found will any business growth be incentivized in other areas.

And finally a very general point here about needing to see more coordination from state and federal agencies to promote sustainability. And I want to lift up a couple of great federal examples. One is the Partnership for Sustainable Communities with EPA, HUD and the U.S. Department of Transportation. They have adopted six livability principles, you can look those up. And there are also a round of HUD/DOT Sustainable Communities Grants. The city of Flint was very excited to receive one of those; we're doing our first master planning since 1960 and it's because of a 1.5 million dollar grant from HUD as part of its part in that program.

There's also TARIC, the Taskforce for Advancing Regional Innovation Clusters. This, again, creates a more integrated top to bottom economic development strategy with the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration efforts, U.S. Department of Education, Small Business Administration, and also the Department of Labor. So you see that integration of labor, workforce, economic development, promoting regional competitive advantages and existing regional business clusters. Again, investing in areas that already have established competitive advantages and have the culture of innovation to drive those forward.

Last thing here, to bring this home to a specific project. And I do want to apologize, I had a video but I didn't get it in the right file. So what we're doing in an area just north of downtown is building the only new subdivision in the county in 2011. It's called New Smith Village and it's an area that's had extraordinary vacancy. And you can see there we will be building 83 new homes constructed on 300 vacant parcels. I say we because this is a city of Flint development project using primarily neighborhood stabilization phase 2 funds. And I want to focus on the math there when we think about how to reuse urban space. In a neighborhood that used to have 300 very small houses, very small lots we're going to build 83 contemporary, updated, somewhat traditional urban designs, somewhat more contemporary urban designs but it's on a footprint that keeps the neighborhood walkable: sidewalks, front and/or back porches. So we're integrating some various architectural themes and we're not looking to just recreate the neighborhood there from the 1930s, we don't think that would be competitive within our regional housing market.

But we also don't want to see a purely suburban, classic suburban development pattern that doesn't have sidewalks, that doesn't have a classic urban street grid. So construction on that will begin in 2011 and I'm very excited about that.

Again, this next slide will be a skip because of the video. And then I wanted to just briefly show off what our Downtown looks like. The Downtown is actually the fastest growing neighborhood in Genesee County right now. We have a couple thousand people living in Downtown and it had never been a place historically where people lived. We had a 20th century Downtown that was essentially a mall before there were malls, so that's what you see in the far left in the historical photo. We've rebuilt the arches Downtown with a philanthropic effort. It's a wonderful atmosphere, new businesses, especially restaurants, building on that interest in there being a Downtown destination for restaurants and dining. But it's a real live, work, play community and we're investing a lot of dollars in Smith Village, but I wanted to say a couple things here about Downtown because I see a lot of opportunity for us to build in this new market for urban walkable and in this case primarily loft apartments although there are a few condo projects as well.

So you can see what we're working on across the city, I hope some sense of how we're approaching this, how we're trying to find value in every part of the city. I think at the end of the day, as I started to mention there with Smith Village, we're trying to approach reusing and recycling the city in a way that really breaks down some old ways of thinking about what is urban, what is suburban, what is rural? You'll see in our designs we are integrating more green space but we're doing it in a way that adds value to the surrounding businesses, institutions and neighborhoods. We're looking to add new residential units into our community in places where there is market demand, but we're doing it in a way that's updated and we believe can compete in the regional housing market.

And then we're building on this unique asset in downtown and I can tell you looking at those two pictures there at dusk and under the lights, when we have a big car show in the summer and there's a couple hundred thousand people on the streets and that Saginaw street corridor is still brick and you have the historic arches that were put up to get electric light on the street in the late 19th century. They don't put out much light, incidentally, but they look great. It creates a real world class atmosphere and that's valuable and we can build on that and we can reconnect our commercial corridors, we can better utilize our parks and green space and river that we had—like a lot of other communities—turned our backs on for years. And I think when we do that, it's not hard to envision how we fill up the 33 square miles of Flint, Michigan even if there are a number of blocks that are only fifty percent vacant today.

So with that I thank you again for the invitation to present what we're doing here in Flint to talk about one of my commitments to sustainability. And certainly Rex and others if there's questions that come through I'd like to hear that.

REX:

Thank you Mr. Mayor, I very much appreciate that insight on where you're trying to lead the city. As people are formulating questions, let me point out the chat room on the left side of your screen where you can enter your questions. Maybe I might start while they are entering questions, Mr. Mayor.

Could you say a little more about the master planning process that Flint will be undertaking here? It's been since 1960, obviously overdue. What's your vision of how that may occur and your hope is for it?

MAYOR:

Yeah I do, that is something I definitely can elaborate on here. We're working on a three year process, gain because of that support from the federal government And you may be surprised to know this but over the years the city of Flint had completely walked away from all of its urban planning capacity so I have to tell you even today we don't have an urban planner on staff so interviewing candidates to fix that with the grant dollars. That has to be a big part of why Flint's in the condition that it's in. Yes there's been global economic change, yes there's been some regional multistate disadvantages in terms of international trade policies from the U.S. side, there are the issues of degradation and degrading of the assets that we have here over time. But the fact that this community didn't have a proactive approach, it didn't have a plan, we have to shoulder some of the responsibility and blame for what's happened over the years and I'm committed to fixing that.

So not surprisingly since it was funded under the HUD and DOT Sustainable Communities Program, these principles around sustainability are right at the heart of where we're trying to go. We do want to reduce our green house gases and our carbon footprint, we want to offer more transportation options, we want to offer a more diverse set of housing options, we want to attract and encourage a great and more diverse industry sectors here and we've had some success with that.

We're doing this is three phases. The first phase is a pretty traditional review of existing data and reports. The last phase is also pretty traditional, that's where we do the technical land use planning. What's really interesting is what we're going to do in the middle in our phase 2. We're going to create a planning framework that's driven by the community and we're going to create the principles that the master plan and technical work will have to abide by, we have a steering committee in place. We dedicated over a year in our three year plan to HUD to this urban development framework process, of generating that. So that is the time where our community will wrestle with a lot of the issues that I presented here today: the vacancy, the population decline, looking at the assets and the institutions that we have to build from. And I suspect that we will continue to see some answers put forward by the community consistent with where we're going. But we're definitely open minded about the public agreeing or wanting to see some things that we haven't yet proposed. So stay tuned we'll continue to work on that, we expect we'll start doing our very intensive community engagement around that planning framework at the very end of this calendar year.

Now if I could, I'm watching the questions here, we've got a couple coming in if I can scroll up. Okay let's see here, okay so the first question was, "are we partnering with the Center for Community Progress"? Great question, this is the organization that our former County Treasurer Dan Kildee is now the, I believe President is now his title. I do work very closely with him personally and we have a letter of support from the Center for Community Progress to continue to work with us through our master planning. That organization now has a national scope, so they're doing work in a lot of communities. One of their offices is here; a lot of their staff are local residents who are involved in different committees and commissions, so we are very closely working together there. The American Assembly project is something that Dan Kildee was at and I certainly, again as I mentioned, took a lot from that.

The next question here was something, "say more about concept/examples of ecological restoration". Here's the best one and I talked about how it's tied together with the land banks work and what we're doing with Brownfields. There's a few acres behind a historic hospital building and between an old rail line that actually was the site of one of two natural springs in the city of Flint and this is called Spring Arbor. And through a grant through the EPA and work on with the leadership of the land bank before I was in this office and started leading a broader sustainability approach, they had already started on restoring this wetland and this natural spring to something closer to what you could call its natural state. So that Spring Arbor project has really come a long way, it's added a lot of value to the adjacent neighborhood, and it begins to show kind of what the rest of that Chevy in the Hole corridor can look like. So one small example but that is concrete and I think the other is our general plan for the Flint River in terms of removing the large dam that is in place, creating a series of cascades that will allow for fish passage and recreational use. There still will be some concrete in that channel so it won't have, it's not a pure ecological restoration the way the Spring Arbor project is but it's trying to go in that same direction.

I have another question here about the type of incentives that we're using to try to encourage Downtown development. Over the last few years our Downtown developers have used Brownfield tax credits, they've used historic tax credits, they've drawn on city of Flint revolving loan funds, they've drawn on city of Flint section 108 loans that have been approved through the Department of Housing and Development. It's also been driven by a private investor group called Uptown 6 and they had to put real money into the game in order to get these incentives and foundation support really moving. So it does take the incentives but it also takes the private sector stepping up, and in our case it was a group of very committed business men who grew up in this community, who wanted to give back to this community, actually who all still live here. So they just set off an amazing chain of redevelopment. So however these state incentives get refashioned I'm certainly going to be pushing for them to be applied in our urban areas where we already have a built environment and where there's a clear market success there for us.

One other question here and then I'll get down to the end if we're getting some follow-ups. It says, "In terms of regional collaboration if central city residents have different priorities

than residents in the suburbs, how do you go about reconciling”? Yeah, I don’t know if we have different priorities, I think what we have is different levels of revenue. And that’s why I think the solution here for many of these challenges are at the state and federal level. Let me be very specific about this, it’s both about revenues and also about legacy costs. You can imagine a city or a family that resided in the city of Flint that paid their taxes, that raised their kids, that used the schools, they did everything right, they played by the rules. They got to a point in their career where they wanted to buy a new house unfortunately the city of Flint didn’t offer one to them, there literally wasn’t one you could buy anywhere in the city twenty years ago. So they went out to a growing community somewhere else in Genesee County.

The problem is, as Dan Kildee notes, you don’t take your house with you and you also don’t take your legacy cost with you. So we had employees that were working to provide essential services that were racking up extraordinary benefits and pensions, those weren’t fully funded, so now today I’m left figuring out how to pay for those with city council’s input. But that family’s not here anymore, they’re not an income tax payer in this community anymore, so by not taking fully account of that life cycle budgeting, the total cost of the service, the total cost of the building, we have an economy that really subsidize this wastefulness and that needs to change. I don’t think there’s any level of creativity, I don’t think there’s any number of urban gardeners or farmers who can figure out how to beat this system if we don’t have a more fundamental restructuring of how we collect revenues, how we pay for services. That doesn’t mean you have to change political boundaries, I’m not actually one in favor of regional consolidation but I do believe that the playing field needs to be fair, and it hasn’t been for a long time. The politics of that are probably tough in a state legislature but a smart, strategic proposal like this commerce center concept I think could go a long way.

Another question came up here, “How important are things like greenways, trails, bike lanes, etc”? We did hear a lot about those things in our neighborhood action sessions. They weren’t that top one or two priority, but once you got down into talking about infrastructure, schools, there was a lot of conversation when you scratch the surface about bike lanes, about the desire to see trails, safe pedestrian traffic, safe bicycle traffic throughout the city. We probably have 25% of our city families that don’t have a good working private vehicle, so we need to be able to move around in some others ways that are safe and convenient. And that is something that we have done through a complete streets agenda. Downtown we’ve created bike lanes, we’ve done some bike lanes in a couple other corridors as they’ve been redesigned and we’ll continue to look for ways to do that. It takes, for us at least, some foundation funding combined with some state Department of Transportation enhancement dollars and other environmental quality funds have allowed us to do that. So again it takes local, regional, state, federal working together on the same ends to make it work in a place like Flint where we don’t have a lot of our own tax base and resources to work from.

So those are things we are certainly focusing on, maybe not on the scale that we could but if there were some changes in the state Department of Transportation in how these dollars could be used. They were more seriously invested in areas that were already built up that had high

traffic and high need as opposed to being spread quite so thin across the whole state. Again, that's contentious when you talk about a state legislature, but at some point as a state and as a country we have to be a lot smarter with how we're growing and changing.

The question about the new subdivision, "is it going to be owned by the city of Flint or privately"? It is being funded with city of Flint dollars, well actually federal dollars through the city of Flint and the land bank. The homes will be sold so they will very quickly move, we hope, from the city's hands into the private hands of individual families. So there's a developer who is involved with the general contracting and managing the project, but that developer is not taking ownership over all the properties.

So some great questions, I think I got through them. I don't know if there's other follow-ups or things you'd like me to elaborate on?

REX:

Any more questions? We have time for maybe one or two more questions for the Mayor. I don't see any Mr. Mayor I can only—oh here comes one, we've got one more.

MAYOR:

Real specifically, "will the lack of the Brownfield by dollars...?", I'm assuming you mean the proposal by the Governor to not have Brownfield tax credits in place? Again, the issue there, in my mind I don't have a strong preference as to whether we label something, we work it as a tax credit whether we do it as a developers agreement and we call it an incentive. The issue is what development do we subsidize? And this is where I want to see very strong criteria written that requires if not encourages, if not requires certainly strongly encourages those incentives to only be applied and available when sites within the existing built environment are going to be utilized.

Now I should say that in a place like Flint under the current Brownfield criteria essentially everything's a Brownfield. It's all underutilized and it's not what most people think of when they hear the word "Brownfield". So we have these classic Brownfields: the former Buick City site, the former Chevy in the Hole; I actually think we need specific and new and different programs for those *real* Brownfields. A lot of that is interagency collaboration; it has to be a much closer working relationship at the state level between Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Environmental Quality or whatever it's being called right now. Without that the regulatory environment is so challenging that it becomes about more than money, it becomes about a larger business climate issue, I don't want to double take on environment.

So those are my thoughts on it. I am optimistic that this can be worked out in a way where we can still see good Downtown projects, which again is where a lot of our Brownfields have been used, or the tax credits have been used. But we need some real specific, strategic interventions to deal with those classic Brownfields so they don't get lost in the mix. Because

that's where this whole policy focus started fifteen, eighteen, maybe twenty years ago and somehow we got almost too broad to be strategic on it.

REX:

One last question Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR:

There's one here on the schools, and I appreciate you bringing me back to that because I focused here more on the land use issues. But that pre-K through 20 system is a big part of our overall strategy. By charter our comprehensive plan forces us to deal with social development, so it's not just a land use plan that we're working on. The Flint Community Schools signed on as a partner to that master planning. We will be doing a combined capital improvement plan; that probably doesn't get to the issue of what makes a school great. The curriculum reform, the after school activities, that requires a broader conversation with traditional public schools, the new growing sector with charters and then the traditional private sector schools. And we're just beginning to have that conversation. We have some church organizers who have been promoting that really again, to think beyond traditional public and school board kinds of issues and get to real educational quality across the whole system. I am up for reelection right now and that is one of the things I will be focusing a lot more on in 2012 and beyond.

REX:

Thank you Mr. Mayor. I want to thank you both for your presentation today and your leadership in Flint, one of our great cities in Michigan and helping us to get it right, so thank you so much.

MAYOR:

Your welcome, I hope this has been a contribution to the series and I appreciate everybody tuning in and the great questions, that was great.

REX:

Thank you, sir. Now let me just close out here on this session and I would note that we have other sessions that are coming yet today and later this next week. You are invited to participate in additional webinar sessions that will look at issues of relocation in a socially just and responsible way, ways that we can distribute the cost. Dan Kildee will be talking with us on the 24th; the 26th: "What Does the Future Hold?"; the "Master Planning Process" where we'll be hearing from some Youngstown Ohio; "Planning for Re-Sized Cities"; and "Implications for Public Policy". So please join us for those additional sessions. I'd also invite participants if they are able to join us here in East Lansing on June 7th, we're hosting a gathering at the Hannah Center in East Lansing to bring together participants from the webinar series to share what we've

learned from the series, what are the implications, and what strategies might be appropriate for Michigan leaders to pursue.

Again if you have not registered please do so so we can keep you informed of other events that will be occurring around this topic, not only through this webinar series, but other opportunities that may present themselves. I also want to thank our co-sponsoring organizations that have helped us promote this event and contributed to identifying speakers and presenters. And finally the planning committee members who have helped us conceive of this opportunity.

With that let me note that our next webinar will begin in approximately five minutes.