

Who:	Detroit Food Policy Council
What:	Education, advocacy and policy organization
Where:	City of Detroit

DETROIT'S FOOD POLICY COUNCIL TACKLES LAND ACCESS, AGRICULTURE ZONING

Bringing Detroit's abandoned neighborhoods back to bustling life is a job that residents like Jerry Ann Hebron are taking seriously and steadily, one vacant lot at a time.

The Detroit Food Policy Council (DFPC) is likewise on the job of making sure the city recognizes and supports the humble yet powerful effort Detroiters are putting into reclaiming and revitalizing their city through food. Healthy food and community strength often grows from those vacant lots, for example.

Starting in 1990, Ms. Hebron's church community at St. John's Evangelist Temple of Truth began cleaning and caretaking 10 adjacent vacant lots. The effort has resulted in significant neighborhood improvement. In the abandoned space it cares for, the church has watched the Oakland Avenue community garden and farmers' market take root there and new community life flourish as a result.

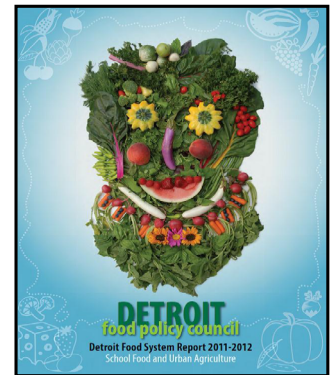
"It's virtually a place where people in the community can come and hang out and feel safe, non-threatened," she said. "They are respectful, clean, and they support everything that we do."

Ms. Hebron offered these comments at an August 2012 public listening session, which the DFPC organized in response to concerns about the city's process for selling mostly abandoned and tax-reverted land. The city estimates it owns 60 percent of Detroit's more than 103,000 vacant lots, according to comments from public officials at the listening session.

Ms. Hebron recounted how her church community has purchased three of the lots it maintains but since 1999 has been unsuccessful with ongoing efforts to purchase the remaining seven. This story of the neighbors' longtime struggle to buy the land, or even receive feedback and clear information from city officials, came in stark contrast to the city's pending sale of 140 acres worth of vacant lots to a development company.

The DFPC has outlined steps it recommends the city take to improve its land sale process. According to its land sale process report, "increasing and sustaining food security demands that policies and processes governing the disposition of city-owned land be fair, just and transparent and that they reflect the will and priorities of the community."

DFPC coordinator Cheryl Simon explains that addressing the city's land sale process is a major focus of the group, along with helping the city develop proactive and comprehensive urban



DFPC's Detroit Food System Report for 2011-2012.

agriculture regulations. Other areas such as leadership development and data collection are also part of its work to not only increase access to healthy food in the city but also build food justice and food sovereignty.

Food justice is about changing the system so it better serves Detroiters. “And food sovereignty is about the local economy,” she said ... “about Detroiters being owners not just employees, and really reaping the benefits of the food system.”

Ashley Atkinson, a member of the DFPC and co-director of Keep Growing Detroit, manages the Garden Resource Program which has grown to include more than 1,600 individual, school and community gardens.

“The DFPC allows us to focus on what we do best while leaving policy to the policy change makers representing us,” she said.

What

The Detroit Food Policy Council is an “implementation, monitoring and advisory body,” which the Detroit City Council established in 2009 by unanimous vote. This step came after citizen advocates, led by the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, developed a food security policy with a set of recommendations that the City charged the DFPC to address. The 21 members of the DFPC include 12 from various sectors of the food system, six at-large representatives and three governmental representatives.

Why

The DFPC envisions a food secure city in which all citizens are hunger-free and healthy and benefit from the food systems that affect their lives.

The DFPC’s vision encompasses a city with corner stores full of healthy food both from urban market gardens and nearby rural areas, building a more just and robust local and regional economy in the process.

How

The DFPC plays three different roles depending on the issue at hand:

- * *The group will take the lead role in situations that call for its comprehensive and high-level participation, such as urban agriculture ordinance development and food system research and data collection, which the DFPC releases in bi-annual reports.*
- * *Examples of the supporting role the DFPC often takes include supporting the federal Farm Bill policy work of the Fair Food Network, a nonprofit operating in Detroit that takes the lead on federal legislation.*
- * *The DFPC also plays the role of convener, co-hosting annual summits that bring people and organizations together for learning and networking.*

Learn more about the Detroit Food Policy Council at detroitfoodpc.org or contact the DFPC at detroitfoodpolicycouncil@gmail.com or 313.833.0396. The DFPC is located in Detroit’s Eastern Market at 2934 Russell St. Detroit, MI 48207.