

Detroit Free Press

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Housing in Detroit

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE VACANT

1 FERRY
at Brush

100%
Occupancy

2 CHARLESTON
between 7 Mile
and Penrose

40%
Occupancy

3 DELAWARE
at East

100%
Occupancy

Nobody's home in 1 out of 3 city lots, but most houses OK, survey finds

By JOHN GALLAGHER
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

A landmark survey has found that a third of Detroit's residential parcels are either vacant lots or abandoned homes, but that more than 90% of the city's occupied houses remain in decent condition.

Released to the Free Press exclusively by the Detroit Data Collaborative, the results portray a city of contrasts: deep in distress in many areas, but surprisingly strong in others. The survey, which did not include business sites or apartment buildings, found more than 30,000 vacant residential structures, with more than 10,000 of them open to trespass and in dangerous condition.

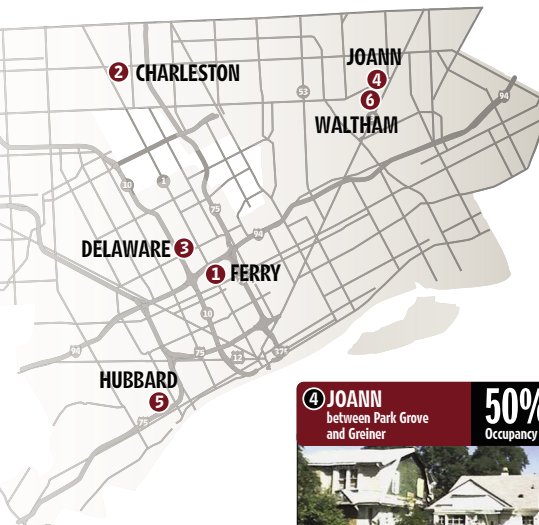
Organizers of the survey accented the positive.

"It is significant that there are more than 200,000 single-family homes here that form a foundation for stable neighborhoods and growth," said Diane McCloskey, director of community initiatives for Detroit's Office of Foreclosure Prevention and Response.

"What this survey really tells us is that we can't paint Detroit with broad brush strokes," said Kurt Metzger, a demographer and director of the nonprofit agency Data Driven Detroit, which helped conduct the survey.

One key statistic: The survey found 91,488 vacant residential lots in the city. But surprisingly, 26% of those vacant lots were improved in some way — fenced, mowed, planted with a community garden, or in some other way reclaimed from abandonment.

■ GOING BEYOND THE SURVEY DATA. 9A



The three most and least occupied areas of the city

5 HUBBARD
between Porter
and Bagley

100%
Occupancy

4 JOANN
between Park Grove
and Greiner

50%
Occupancy

6 WALTHAM
at Minden

46%
Occupancy

Note: Areas include block groups with 100 or more residential parcels
Sources: Detroit Residential Parcel Survey, Google Street View

MOSES HARRIS, ERIC MILLIKIN,
KOFI MYLER and KRISTI TANNER
/Detroit Free Press

Inside: Take a closer look

See results of the Detroit Data Collaborative's survey. Two pages of graphics examine vacancy rates, structural conditions and housing stock. PAGES 8-9A



COVER STORY HOUSING IN DETROIT



A city block in the State Fair neighborhood shows vacancy typical of many areas.

Google Street View

WIDE OPEN SPACES

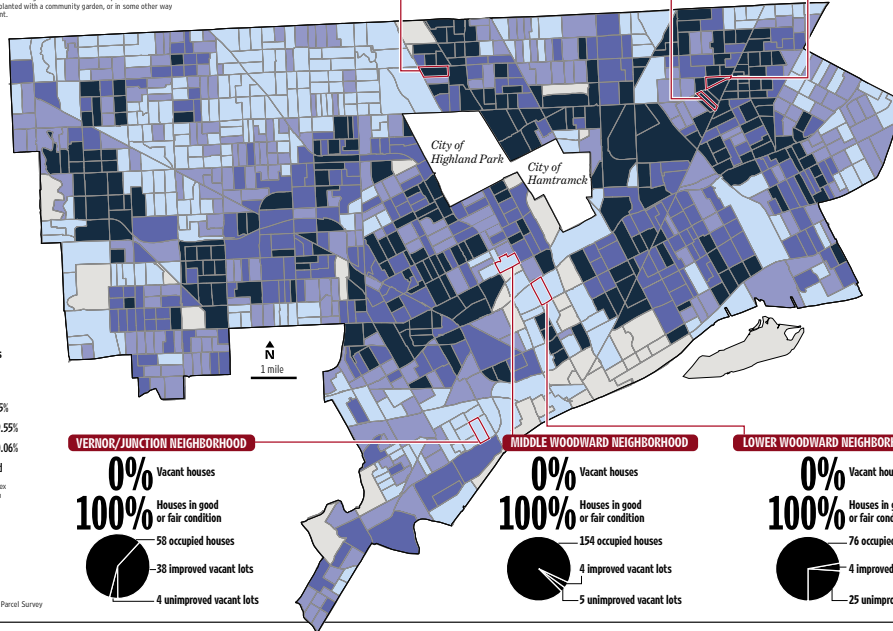
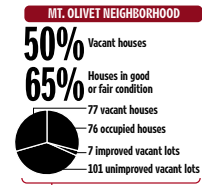
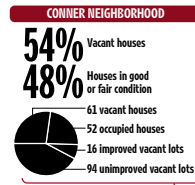
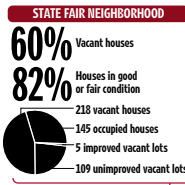
Graphic by MARTHA THIERRY, MOSES HARRIS, ERIC MILLIKIN, KRISTI TANNER and JOHN GALLAGHER/Detroit Free Press

It's hard to move a city forward without a precise understanding of its housing stock. Thanks to a landmark new survey, Detroit now possesses its most precise mapping of its residential parcels — its strongest neighborhoods and its abandoned districts alike — for use in planning new efforts toward recovery.

VACANCY RATES

For the first time, Detroit now has an accurate picture of residential vacancy, thanks to the new survey by the Detroit Data Collaborative. Vacancy is widespread, with approximately 91,000 vacant residential lots and about 31,000 empty residential structures. We highlighted the three highest- and lowest-vacancy areas in the city to demonstrate the variety of neighborhood conditions. The darkest areas on this map show the concentration of highest vacancies. The lighter blue areas show the areas of least vacancy — the more solid neighborhoods that will anchor the city's redevelopment efforts.

NOTE: Some vacant houses remain in good or fair condition. Improved vacant lots have been fenced, moved, planted with a community garden, or in some other way reclaimed from abandonment.

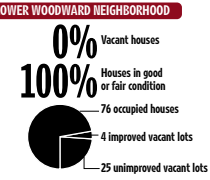
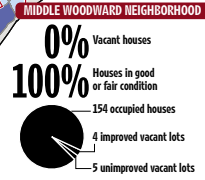
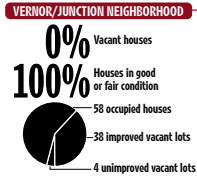


Percentage of parcels with vacant houses

- 0% - 7.02%
- 7.03% - 12.5%
- 12.51% - 19.55%
- 19.56% - 60.06%
- Unsurveyed

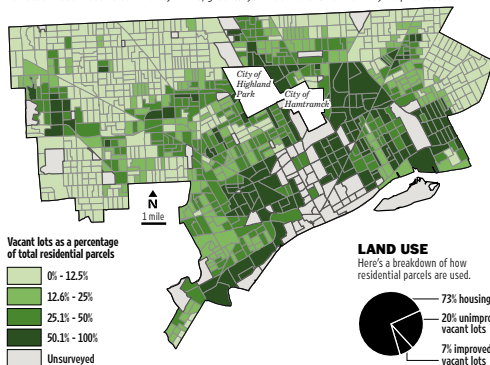
NOTE: Includes single, duplex and multi-unit houses up to four units.

Source: Detroit Residential Parcel Survey



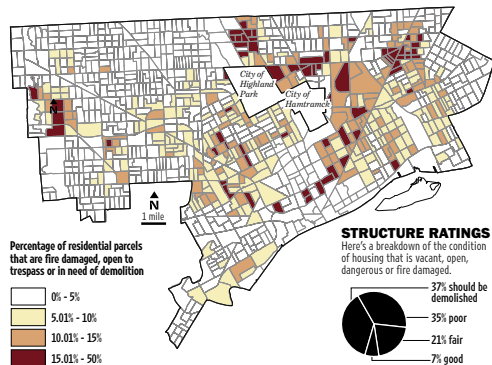
WHERE VACANCY PREVAILS

Vacant residential lots are not scattered evenly throughout Detroit but concentrated in the city's weakest areas. On this map, the darkest green sections are those where at least 50% of residential parcels are now vacant lots — the urban prairie. Identifying these lots precisely, as the survey does, allows Detroit to plan to reuse these areas as community farms, greenways and other environmentally helpful uses.



OPEN AND DANGEROUS STRUCTURES

Most of Detroit's residential structures are in good or fair condition. The darker areas on this map locate the concentrations of residential buildings found to be vacant, open and dangerous. These could be the areas targeted for crime prevention, demolition and other interventions.



HOUSING IN DETROIT **COVER STORY**



A block in the Middle Woodward neighborhood shows a high-occupancy area of the city. Google Street View

Many are gone, but more remain

Most occupied houses in Detroit still OK but amid vacant lots, survey finds

By JOHN GALLAGHER
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

A mammoth new survey delivers a sharply focused look at Detroit's housing stock and lays the groundwork for a sweeping debate about right-sizing the city.

The survey by the Detroit Data Collaborative gives an unprecedented view of the strengths and weaknesses of the city's residential areas. Results portray a city of marked contrasts.

A little more than 35% of the city's 343,849 residential parcels are either vacant lots or abandoned shells of buildings — a staggering burden for a city trying to reinvent itself.

But the survey also found surprisingly upbeat results in Detroit's most vital districts. The survey found that more than 90% of the city's occupied residential units are in good or fair condition — results that could lay the foundation for efforts to strengthen individual neighborhoods.

If nothing else, the survey promises to plug some giant holes in the city's understanding of itself. Detroit planners now have an accurate mapping of vacancy as well as precise data on the condition of individual residential parcels. Those should prove crucial for planning everything from private investment to government aid.

"I am absolutely delighted that that information has been released," said Robin Boyle, chairman of the urban planning department at Wayne State University. "I think it's going to be a very important step in moving the city forward in terms of understanding what we have in vacancy, where the vacant properties are, and how we can start to move toward consolidation of these."

Todd Swanstrom, a professor of public policy at the University of Missouri, agreed.

"The data is the first step,"

What could fill the vacancy?

Community leaders and city planners are trying to find new uses for Detroit's empty spaces.

Urban agriculture is getting a lot of attention as a possible use for the parcels. Residents already plant several hundred community gardens each year.

Activists also are mapping a network of greenways — non-motorized transportation corridors such as the Deguidre Cut — throughout the city.

Some planners would like to create windmill farms and other alternative energy centers in Detroit's open spaces.

What's next?

The Detroit Data Collaborative wants to work with community groups and others to put its survey results to productive use. Software will permit users to create precise maps of conditions in specific neighborhoods.

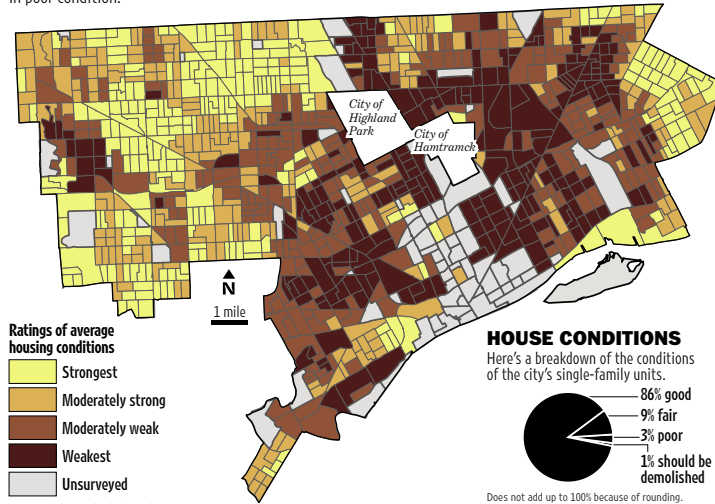
In this initial survey, the collaborative looked at only single-family houses and residential buildings with up to four units. When money becomes available, a future survey could look at larger residential units — apartment and condominium buildings — as well as commercial, retail and industrial parcels in the city.

he said. "Nonprofits and private investors and others now will have much more information about where properties are available, and to market them in some sort of more systematic way."

To the math-phobic, the mountain of new data may seem arcane or even boring. But to decision-makers, the survey promises to mark a leap forward in tackling Detroit's problems. In a world where investment decisions and government aid are driven by hard data, the survey offers an unblinking, parcel-by-parcel look of Detroit's condition.

A CITY OF CONTRASTS

The condition of Detroit's housing stock varies widely across the city. Many stronger neighborhoods, like some on the northwest or far east sides as seen in the yellow areas of the map, are composed almost solidly of homes in good condition. But many districts in the inner core of Detroit contain homes mostly in poor condition.



NOTE: Includes single, duplex and multi-unit houses up to four units.

Source: Detroit Residential Parcel Survey

MARTHA THIERRY and MOSES HARRIS/Detroit Free Press

"We really feel you've got to be able to show the data," said Kurt Metzger, a demographer and director of the nonprofit agency Data Driven Detroit, which helped manage the survey. "You've got to be able to show that you have the capacity to understand what's there and to measure outcomes and the return on investment."

The survey results will be available online at www.detroitparcelsurvey.org. As a safety precaution, the public will be allowed to access data only at the block level or larger, not the condition of individual houses.

Gregory Parrish, data manager for Data Driven Detroit, said that will prevent criminals from using the survey data to target empty houses.

Community groups, researchers and others will be able to work with Data Driven Detroit to create detailed maps of individual districts for study. And, in the future, the agency hopes to add advanced mapping software and other tools to its Web site to make the survey results more accessible and useful.

By the numbers

26%
of the city's residential parcels are vacant lots.

95%
of Detroit homes are deemed suitable for occupancy.

9%
of homes are generally in need of minor repair.

86%
of Detroit's single-family homes are in good condition.

Source: Detroit Data Collaborative

How survey was done

The Detroit Residential Parcel Survey was conducted during August and September using about 50 University of Michigan students and Detroit residents working in three-person teams.

Each team consisted of a driver and two spotters who rated the condition of individual residential parcels on each Detroit street. The teams had maps, lists of parcels and GPS units. They were trained to assess the condition of each parcel, looking for signs of occupancy or vacancy as well as the overall condition, including evidence of fire damage or houses that seemed suitable for demolition.

The teams did not leave their vehicles but made their assessments using visual inspections.

U-M's Ginsberg Center, which organizes community service projects, recruited and managed the survey crews. The nonprofit agency Data Driven Detroit manages the data and the Web site www.detroitparcelsurvey.org.

Detroit's Office of Foreclosure Prevention and Response administered the overall project. The nonprofit Community Legal Resources' Detroit Vacant Property Campaign provided technical assistance and training, and will work with community groups that will be using the data.

See the results

To view more results of the parcel survey, go to www.detroitparcelsurvey.org. The site is expected to be up and running this weekend.

property, and I think we need to get a very, very firm handle on what that is to move forward."

Mayor Dave Bing's office said the survey "can serve as a component in the decision-making and strategic process for the city as we look to develop a land use plan and demolition strategy for the city."

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We drove every street
One city, 2,100 streets, 2,700 miles.
Revisit our snapshot of the city:
freep.com/DrivingDetroit