

DETROIT IN 10 YEARS > 2020 VISION

Welcome to the city of our future

In my Detroit, a decade from now, there are no blocks with one burned-out house. Those eyesores have been leveled. Grass and trees have taken their place.

In my Detroit, people leave work and walk home, because they live in the city, they don't just enter and exit.

In my Detroit, the auto business is important, but it's hardly the only industry.

In my Detroit, there are insurance firms, banking, health care, high tech — all drawn by tax breaks and cheap, available buildings.

In my Detroit, there are neighborhoods thriving, houses being remodeled and kids playing in well-planned park areas.

In my Detroit, the waterfront is full of shops and restaurants, with apartments above them, each with a river view.

In my Detroit, there's an upscale shopping mall, smack in the middle of downtown, because if you build it, they will come.

In my Detroit, we connect city buildings with outdoor walkways — as other cold-weather cities have done — so that winter doesn't turn us into a barren wasteland.

In my Detroit, the city is smaller but more crowded, and people want in, not out.

Easier ways to get around

In my Detroit, a decade from now, the city charter has been thoroughly revised to make sense for its future, not its past.

In my Detroit, all City Council members are elected by district, none can serve more than two terms, and the City Council is only a watchdog on the mayor's office, not a roadblock.

In my Detroit, all mayors have term limits, transparency is mandated, and corruption is cause for instant removal.

In my Detroit, all city contracts are reviewed by an ethics board to look for conflicts of interest, favoritism or cronyism, because if you catch it before it starts, it



MITCH ALBOM HAS A WISH LIST FOR A NEW AND BETTER DETROIT

won't start.

In my Detroit, corruption in certain areas — education, police — is reclassified as an offense that comes with heavy jail time. Nonnegotiable.

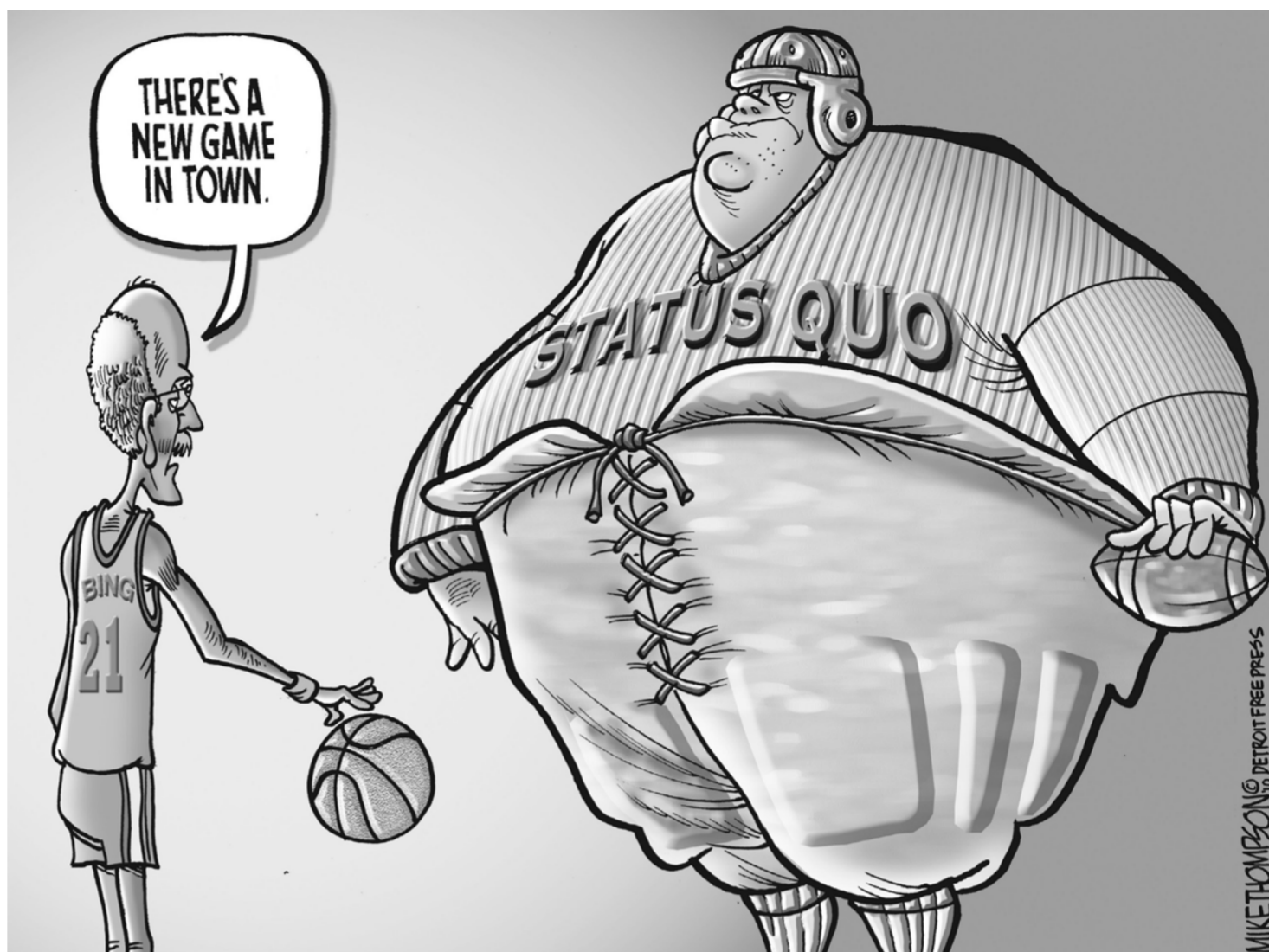
In my Detroit, people no longer act as if the city is supposed to be black, the suburbs are supposed to be white, and the two are supposed to be at war with each other.

In my Detroit, you cannot sit on vacant property in major development zones. Either you develop it, or you get fined so badly you'll sell it to someone who will.

In my Detroit, mass transit is not seen as the enemy of the automobile. We begin a smart, small system connecting the most popular destinations (stadiums, shopping areas) with the most populated suburbs (Southfield, Warren) and go from there.

In my Detroit, we have officials who design and revise a five-, 10- and 20-year city plan, and we display it for the citizens, so there is always a feeling of future, of growth and of thinking of our children.

In my Detroit, our home-



MIKE THOMPSON

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less efforts are coordinated, from shelter to counseling to transitional housing to employment, and companies that hire the once-homeless get a break, because they are investing in erasing a problem.

In my Detroit, we stop thinking like victims and start thinking like a jewel.

A motto for all people

In my Detroit, a decade from now, every inner-city church, mosque or synagogue is partnered with one

from the suburbs, because people of like minds and faiths are a fast way to break down barriers and distance.

In my Detroit, music is cherished, and incentives are given to employ live acts and teach young artists, because music brought youthful development to Seattle, to Minneapolis, to Nashville, and it can be a huge net here.

In my Detroit, we identify growth industries and give them special enticements, because we need the feeling of things getting bigger, not

smaller.

In my Detroit, we make Windsor a bigger partner, because how many U.S. cities can offer such a gateway to Canadians?

In my Detroit, we reach out and pull back all our famous and wealthy ex-citizens, we let them name buildings or businesses if they invest, because the loyalty of our ex-pats is deep, but has rarely been tapped beyond lip service.

In my Detroit, we have a catchy campaign that be-

comes synonymous with our town, more like "I Love New York" and less like "Say Nice Things about Detroit."

In my Detroit, we take our greatest asset, the people, and make them feel the city's growth is part of their destiny.

In my Detroit, a decade from now, all this comes true. But it's not my Detroit.

It's ours.

CONTACT MITCH ALBOM: 313-223-4581 OR MALBOM@FREEPRESS.COM. CATCH "THE MITCH ALBOM SHOW" 5-7 P.M. WEEK-DAYS ON WJR-AM (760).

City's other task: Attract middle-class families



STEPHEN HENDERSON
PEOPLE & POLITICS

Let fancy trains trundle up and down Woodward Avenue, and gleaming new facilities rise in the Detroit Medical Center.

Let's fix public education and rip down the jagged and charred structures that litter the city's neighborhoods.

By 2020, Detroit can accomplish all this and more, given the swell of energy and momentum that's building.

But none of it will matter much unless Detroit can also transform its population. For the city to thrive — economically, socially, culturally — it has got to re-establish solidly middle-class neighborhoods, populated with families who pay taxes, work and play in Detroit, and send their children to the public schools.

Families are the lifeblood of any community, providing stability and economy. Families buy homes and support businesses. They put down roots that can spread for generations.

Too many reasons to leave

Over the past 10 or 15 years, the dissolution of Detroit has been best chronicled in the stories of middle-class



File photo by ANDRE J. JACKSON/Detroit Free Press

families who just couldn't take it anymore. The crime. The costs. The lack of city services. The awful schools.

Census data help illustrate the point. In 2000, when Detroit had just under 950,000 people, about 34% of the city's children lived in poverty, a key measure of family income levels. By 2008, though the city's population had dropped precipitously, the share of kids living in poverty had risen to 46%.

Meanwhile, median household income had plummeted 24%, to just over \$35,000.

The city's concentrated poverty makes every problem more difficult, from rampant

crime and underperforming schools to the crushing need for social services. It also makes life tougher for the poor population itself, which is increasingly isolated from opportunities to be found in areas with a healthy middle class.

Note that Detroit's problem isn't "white flight." Demographers say that peaked in the '80s and was largely done by the '90s. They expect the 2010 census numbers to show that middle-class African Americans were the ones who packed up, headed out and are now sustaining neighborhoods in the suburbs.

Detroit long ago stopped

THE CITY, AND POSSIBLY SOME NONPROFITS, NEED TO BE ACTIVELY PICKING OUT NEIGHBORHOODS THAT HAVE — OR WILL HAVE — THE THINGS MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES WANT, AND HIGHLIGHTING THEM TO POTENTIAL DETROITERS.

giving people of any hue many reasons to stay.

As the city works to become a different place, a more inviting place, by 2020, it has to start more actively recruiting all kinds of people, but especially families.

Fixing the schools will be a huge step. So will enhancing city services, beefing up mass transit and building up amenities such as the downtown stadiums, restaurants and bars and the city's cultural institutions.

Market life in the city

But beyond those things, there also needs to be an aggressive effort to sell the idea

of living in Detroit. The city, and possibly some nonprofits, need to be actively picking out neighborhoods that have — or will have — the things middle-class families want, and highlighting them to potential Detroiters.

"That's consistent with the overall strategy of downsizing or relocating people," said Charles Ballard, a professor of economics at Michigan State University. "You target certain areas for growth, make a core of success, and grow from there."

By the end of 2011, for example, Daniel Gilbert plans to move some 2,500 of his Quicken Loan employees downtown from the suburbs. Shouldn't the city be targeting these workers, selling them hard on the idea that they need not commute? Already, Lafayette Park offers signature architecture, sprawling green space, nearby shopping at Eastern Market and a public school, Chrysler Elementary, that has for years been a national blue-ribbon achiever.

(Full disclosure: I grew up in that area, and continue to live not far from it.)

Why not specifically pair up Quicken Loan families with opportunities in that area, and in the developments east toward Elmwood Cemetery? Why not do the same with GM, Compuware and other big downtown employers?

Other cities have had success with this kind of market-

ing. In Baltimore, where I lived for 10 years and continue to own a home, a nonprofit outfit called LiveBaltimore has spent 13 years marketing specific neighborhoods to people (many of them families) who want market-rate housing. The organization works with neighborhood groups to identify their selling points, leads tours of the areas it's marketing, and matches prospective buyers with incentives (including some sponsored by employers) for moving into the city.

Executive Director Anna Custer said it's hard to quantify the program's impact beyond the 100 people each year who purchase a home in the city directly through a LiveBaltimore-sponsored incentive. But since 2000, that city's decades-long population slide has plateaued, and in 2006 Baltimore experienced its first population increase in 50 years.

Can you picture that happening in Detroit by 2020? It's no more fantastic than the ideas of new transit, urban farming or new stadiums.

The movie line is, "If you build it, they will come." Unfortunately, not to Detroit. You have to sell the idea, too.

STEPHEN HENDERSON IS EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR FOR THE FREE PRESS AND HOST OF "AMERICAN BLACK JOURNAL," WHICH AIRS AT 2 P.M. ON SUNDAYS ON DETROIT PUBLIC TELEVISION, CHANNEL 56 IN DETROIT. CONTACT HIM AT SHENDERSON600@FREEPRESS.COM, OR AT 313-222-6659.