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Bing's secret relocation plans Neighborhood analysis to be released March 30

By **Eric T. Campbell**
[The Michigan Citizen](#)

DETROIT — While the major media continues to roll out stories about Mayor Dave Bing's desire to move citizens from the more sparsely populated neighborhoods of the city, the mayor is not only keeping quiet about what his Detroit Works Project is, but closed a recent Task Force meeting to the public.

Community activist Russ Bellant and Task Force Co-chair Phil Cooley say that while they remained in the closed meeting Jan. 6, held at the University of Michigan-Detroit, they rebuked Bing's staff for closing the meeting. Nothing was presented or discussed at the Task Force meeting that needed to be kept from the public, they said.

"This is a closed meeting to prepare for the launch of the next phase and finalize a draft presentation before the MATF to provide feedback before going to the community at large," Bing's press spokesperson Dan Lijana said while requesting that a reporter leave the meeting.

Lijana said the Task Force presentation was to outline challenges and opportunities for communities and how to address the strength of housing stock, volume of vacancies and transportation issues.

The closed meeting came after five citywide forums that attracted tens of thousands of citizens in total and after nearly a year of public relations campaigns promoting "downsizing."

The Bing administration has promised that the next phase of the Detroit Works Project would begin early this year with a series of 40 neighborhood meetings.

City planners have still not scheduled those meetings.

"We want to complete a certain level of analysis before asking people to move in order to maintain diversity and give people options based on analysis and neighborhood indicators,"



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Marja Winters, City of Detroit Planning and Development Department Deputy Director and co-director of the Detroit works Project, told the Michigan Citizen.

Winters says the first quarter analysis is due out on March 30 and will guide the city planning process.

That report will focus on the costs of moving residents from one neighborhood to another and which neighborhoods will be targeted.

Based on the citywide forums, the next round of public meetings will certainly include concerns about forced relocation. But Winters insists that the Detroit Works Project will make relocation voluntary.

"If it's optional it has to be desirable and attractive for people," Winters says. "We certainly understand there will be people who don't want to move. We're looking to find that balance of equity — not where some people win and some lose."

Winters could not be specific about what kind of incentives the Detroit Works Project would provide for residents asked to move. She did say that the city is looking at federal HUD monies as one source for financial backing of any relocation program.

In 1980, George Corsetti documented the relocation of 3,500 Poletown residents to make way for a Cadillac plant.

Then, the city of Detroit, under Mayor Coleman Young, and General Motors utilized the state's power of "eminent domain" to complete the project. Poletown residents who disagreed with the way the auto plant project was designed, initiated legal action. They challenged the city's use of "eminent domain" — the taking of private property for public use — and also disputed the amount of money residents were offered for their property.

Corsetti says it remains to be seen what parallels can be drawn between Poletown and any plans offered by the Detroit Works Project. He does predict that people, if asked to move, should expect substantially more for their property than the market value.

"People will respond to the money situation. Homes will be worth more because of new demand for the property," Corsetti told the Michigan Citizen.

Corsetti says, historically, urban renewal projects that include relocation programs are tougher on elderly residents who are less inclined to move and incur more damaging health issues as a result.

Maps of detailed neighborhood surveys provided by Data

Driven Detroit (D3) offer only a guess as to where the city will concentrate relocation efforts. The highest rates of foreclosure have occurred in the densely populated areas on the outskirts of the city. The areas with the least housing stock occur in a ring around the downtown district. This geographical reality contradicts any belief that Bing will attempt to shrink the city by moving it inward.

"The city can't come in from the edges, because that's where the strongest housing is," says Kurt Metzger, Director of Data Driven Detroit. "It would make sense that neighborhoods with existing housing stock and high population would be targeted for stabilization. In fact, the areas with the best housing stock have the best potential for moving folks to."

Metzger says that if the city is successfully tracking foreclosed homes, then housing and relocation solutions should be initiated with the cooperation of the banks, whether voluntary or forced.

Jerry Goldberg, of Detroit's Moratorium NOW and the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (MECAWI), says the mayor's office has refused to use federal funds to remediate foreclosure issues.

Those actions indicate a stronger relationship between the banks at the center of the foreclosure crisis and Detroit Works Project designs, he says.

"Every plan to remove or relocate people has been at the expense of the poor," Goldberg says. Goldberg submits that the city of Detroit has resisted opportunities to use federal funds to purchase foreclosed homes for the purpose of keeping owners in them through land contracts.

"Why don't they use these resources to repopulate?" asks Goldberg. "What's at the root of this is a corporate effort to remove poor people."

A certain indicator will be who will control or own any Detroit land vacated through a removal program. Marja Winters says that the city will look at different viable land uses for different neighborhoods, but that land is not being cleared for large commercial entities. She adds that neighborhood cluster meetings will begin either at the end of the month or in February and will be a part of the city's March 30 analysis.

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