

Demographer projects Detroit population will dip to 650,000, but residents say it's no 'blank slate'

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By **Jonathan Oosting | MLive.com**

While other cities **worry whether their future will mirror Detroit's**, local residents say the city is full of opportunity -- for both insiders and outsiders. Just don't call it a blank slate.

First, the bad news: Local demographer Kurt Metzger predicts Detroit's population will continue to fall. Ten years ago the official figure stood at 951,270. Today it stands at 713,777. And Metzger **tells The Detroit News** he believes it will eventually settle at 650,000.

But of course, there's good news too: While the Census data has potentially devastating consequences for Detroit (see: **state laws written to benefit a larger city**), it also reinforces the opportunity for reinvention.

"There are a lot of funders now looking at Detroit for experimentation, to see what can happen to turn a shrinking city around," Metzger told The News.

Scott Martelle, a Detroit native working on a book about the city, expressed a similar sentiment in **a weekend editorial for the L.A. Times**, suggesting the nation has a responsibility to help Detroit and not just gawk at it like a crash on the freeway, blaming auto executives while ignoring the injured passengers.

Mayor Dave Bing, who is working to "rightsize" the city by way of the Detroit Works Project, said earlier this month that he is working with the Obama administration on plans to send a group of federal experts to help implement a number of development efforts.

But with all this talk of outside assistance, Nancy Kaffer of Crain's reports there's an emerging pushback from local residents who point out that Detroit is not a "blank slate." Rather, it's a city with a unique history that's hit hard times and a city full of hard-working people working to create change from the bottom up.

March 27, Crain's Detroit: There's a difference between "blank slate" and "opportunity," said Francis Grunow, a



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A look at the Greektown Historic District in Detroit.

Detroit resident, Declare Detroit member and law student who owns Midtown's Bureau of Urban Living with wife Claire Nelson.

"When you think of the word 'blank slate,' you think of a nothing, an openness, a lack of, and what people find problematic is that it's not the case," he said. "I think what is exciting about that idea is that there is opportunity here, there's a chance to do something in Detroit and with Detroiters that you can't do other places. ... We shouldn't push away people who have an idea who are creative and want to work with the stuff of Detroit as it is. ... The whole point is Detroit is a rich place of history, architecture and stories, and we want to build on that, and we see a reason to build on that."

Well said. Detroit's is a rich canvas whose colors are barely visible through the smog. Anyone with bright ideas should be welcome to work on the restoration, provided they respect the original art.

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