

What Helps or Hinders Community-Based
Developers in Reusing Vacant,
Abandoned, and Contaminated Property?
Findings from Detroit and Cleveland

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Moving towards Solutions: Research & Policy
on Vacancy & Abandonment

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Why does this matter?

Detroit



Cleveland



Why does this matter?

Philadelphia:

26,000 vacant houses;
31,000 vacant lots (~2000)(~10%)

Cleveland:

6000 tax-reverted lots;
17,000 vacant lots (~11%) (2003)

Baltimore:

12,700-42,480 abandoned houses;
14,000 vacant lots (~2000)

Detroit:

36,000 tax-reverted lots (2004);
90,000 vacant lots (23%) (2001)

Comparing two cities

Detroit



photo by: Philip Greenspun, MIT

Cleveland



photo by: Margaret Dewar

Indicators of demand for land in Detroit and Cleveland

	Detroit	Cleveland
Population change, 1950-2000	-48.6%	-47.7%
Manufacturing employment change, 1947-92	-81.6%	-73.4%
Retail employment change, 1948-92	-71.0%	-56.6%
Poverty rate, 1999	25.6%	25.6%
Median household income, 1999	\$ 29,526	\$ 25,928
Per capita income, 1999	\$ 14,717	\$ 14,291

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, censuses of industry, population, and housing, various years.

Outline

- The record of community-based developers' reuse of vacant, abandoned, and contaminated property in Detroit and Cleveland.
- Explanations for the differences in the community-based developers' records in the two cities.

Methods

- Derived lists of nonprofit developers' purchases of city-owned, tax-reverted land.
- Determined whether and how that property had been reused.
- For sample of 30 nonprofit developers in each city:
 - determined the extent of their redevelopment projects from Cleveland's NEOCANDO data and from aerial photos for both cities.
 - determined which of these properties had been abandoned, vacant, and/or contaminated prior to reuse.
- Interviewed leaders of nonprofit development organizations, intermediaries, city agencies; used documents and literature.

Community-based developers' reuse of city-owned land purchased for development

	Detroit (1983-May 2006)	Cleveland (1988-May 2005)
Number of city-owned properties purchased for development	2756	3393
Per 10,000 parcels of city property	71.2	208.2
Per 10,000 city residents	29.0	70.9
% of these properties remaining unused	29.2	27.3
% of properties purchased before 2004 remaining unused	22.5	4.6

Sources: Calculations derived from data in Detroit City Property Inventory System and Cleveland City Register, State of Michigan Revitalife records, U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000, GIS maps from Detroit Planning & Development Department and Cleveland Planning Commission, aerial photos of both cities.

Percent of community-based developers that reused almost all or none of city-owned property purchased for development

	Detroit	Cleveland
% reusing at least 95% of property purchased	36.4%	78.8%
% reusing none of property purchased	28.1%	0.0%

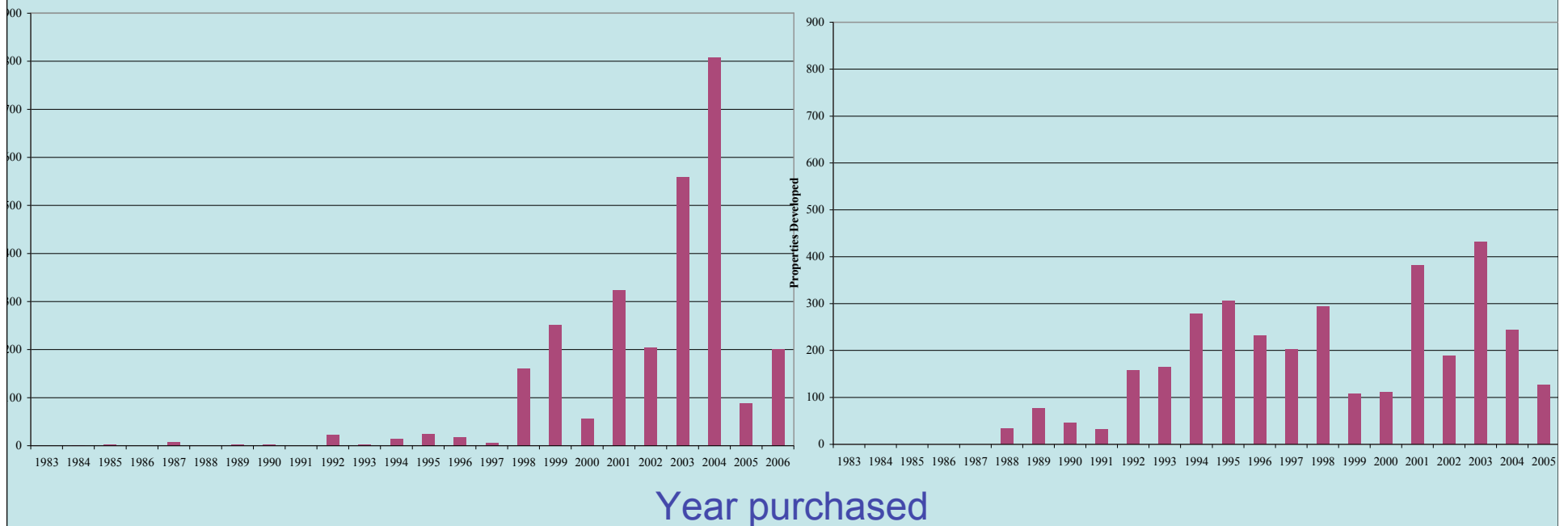
Sources: Calculations derived from data in Detroit City Property Inventory System and Cleveland City Register, U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000, GIS maps from Detroit Planning & Development Department and Cleveland Planning Commission, aerial photos of both cities.

Number of city-owned properties purchased by community-based developers by year

Detroit

Cleveland

Number



The Record

Community-based developers' reuse of vacant, abandoned, and contaminated property

Characteristics of reused properties

Type of Property	Detroit	Cleveland
% of properties vacant	84.8%	82.9%
% of area vacant	83.6%	78.4%
% of properties abandoned	75.9%	57.3%
% of area abandoned	75.4%	47.9%
% of properties contaminated	3.7%	0.6%
% of area contaminated	6.4%	6.7%
% of properties with none of these characteristics	6.4%	8.8%
% of area with none of these characteristics	6.2%	8.0%

Sources: Calculations derived from data in Detroit City Property Inventory System and Cleveland City Register, GIS maps from Detroit Planning & Development Department and Cleveland Planning Commission, NEO CANDO database at Case Western, aerial photos of both cities, historic Sanborn maps for both cities, state brownfield programs' records.

Four questions about community-based developers' use of vacant, abandoned, and contaminated property

1. Why have Cleveland community-based developers purchased so much more city-owned property for development than Detroit community-based developers have?
2. Why have Cleveland community-based developers been so much more successful in carrying out development plans?
3. Why did Cleveland community-based developers purchase city-owned property for development so much earlier than those in Detroit?
4. Why are community-based developers in both cities reusing so little contaminated property?

The Explanation

The community-based developers



The Explanation

Why have Cleveland community-based developers been so much more successful than those in Detroit in reusing property?

The community development system:

Political support

- The relationship with city council
- The mayor's agenda
- City departments

Intermediaries

Working relationships

The Explanation

Political support

- The relationship with city council



The Explanation

Political support

- The mayor's agenda



The Explanation

Political support

The city government institutions:

- Community development departments
- Systems for selling tax-reverted property
 - Status of property titles
 - Information about the inventory
 - Capacity to hold land for redevelopment
 - Land pricing

Intermediaries in Cleveland



The Explanation

Intermediaries in Detroit



The Explanation

Working relationships

Detroit:

- “A culture of distrust” between community organizations and city government.
- Predominantly white community development industry in a context of poor race relations.

Cleveland:

- A tradition of cooperation.
- Movement of community leaders between intermediaries and city government.

Why are community-based developers in both cities reusing so little contaminated property?

Amount of vacant property in Detroit and Cleveland, 2001

	Detroit	Cleveland
Number of vacant city properties as % of all city properties	almost 90,000 ~ 23%	~17,000 10-11%
Percent of land area vacant	~18%	~8%

Sources: Detroit Assessor's data; Cuyahoga County Appraisal Inventory file, prepared by Cleveland State University.

The Explanation

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Reused property, Cleveland