

20 May 2005

Waterfront East Development Project Citizens District Council and
Economic Development Corporation of the City of Detroit Board of Directors
211 W. Fort St.
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Sirs and Madams:

Cityscape Detroit strongly urges you to reject the request of the staff of Detroit Economic Growth Corporation to pursue the demolition of six city-owned buildings located within the Rivertown district along Franklin St. These structures are integral to the holistic redevelopment of the district, and the request does not make either economic or urbanistic sense.

Simple urban redevelopment principles, proven country-wide, clearly demonstrate that redevelopment grows out from historic preservation projects (especially in urban areas that have relatively stagnant population growth like our own). Seattle, Portland, and Denver, where new construction of high-rise districts has occurred, are not in our same league because of their significant regional population growths.

This proposed demolition will nearly obliterate the semblance of urban character left within the Rivertown district. As you are keenly aware, new construction often doesn't have the densities and the character found in older buildings. In addition, rehabilitation projects have additional built-in subsidies that new construction does not. Rivertown is Detroit's place where redevelopment could begin with adaptive reuse followed by new construction at heights of 5-7 stories. Demonstrate the market with less risky adaptive reuse projects first.

Our fight has been to not only restore and reuse the structures, but also to accentuate the sense of livable, walkable, mixed use, truly unique neighborhood that Rivertown could again become, through a proposal we call "Franklin Street at Rivertown."

Rivertown still retains the pre-1900 tight street grid, and these zero lot-line buildings frame the Renaissance Center towers in the background.

There has never been an RFP release to rehabilitate the buildings so we cannot judge the interest in the property.

Rivertown is one of two or three places where Detroit can create a dense urban fabric where young adults will choose to live. Until that occurs, this region will continue to have a major brain drain. Where have your own and your friends kids chosen to live? Over the next decade, significant tax revenues would be created by this type of development. As a former seven-year resident of Rivertown, I am keenly aware of a

huge market for living in a "warehouse-esqe" district. A large percentage are individuals who would be renters and wouldn't want to buy newly built condos.

Of course it appears to be easier to do new construction on vacant parcels, but I will guarantee that they won't be zero lot line buildings taller than three stories. Detroit's development community doesn't know how to build in Detroit in an urban manner.

Why not build on vacant city-owned parcels and spend the money on mothballing the buildings for future redevelopment?

On a tangent, show me a City that is doing intelligent redevelopment that clears buildings along one of its major arteries within 1/2 mile of the CBD. Cities encourage rehabilitation and new multi-story construction, not parking lots for car dealers.

Thanks for allowing me to vent. I am convinced that sensitive redevelopment of Rivertown led by rehabilitation of its significant properties is a savior for the City. Ten thousand residents could be living in Rivertown within ten years. Rivertown could be Detroit's Royal Oak, but only new construction isn't the way to accomplish this effort.