TrailNation Summit, October 2025

Overcoming Obstacles To Trail Network Implementation

Lessons and Case Studies for Urban Communities



SMITHGROUP



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO TRAIL NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION

MASTER CLASS AGENDA

INTRO (15 MIN)



CASE STUDY (45 MIN)



ACTION PLANNING (30 MIN)



TODAY'S EXPERT FACILITATORS

MEET THE SMITHGROUP TEAM



CASSIE GOODWIN CIVIL ENGINEER, PE MADISON, WI



ELLEN SCHMIDT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, PLA CHICAGO, IL



SmithGroup Mobility



OLIVER KILEY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, PLA ANN ARBOR, MI

NATIONAL STORY, MIDWEST ROOTS

1,500

Multi-Disciplinary **Professionals** #8

Architecture & Engineering Firms, *BD+C*, 2024

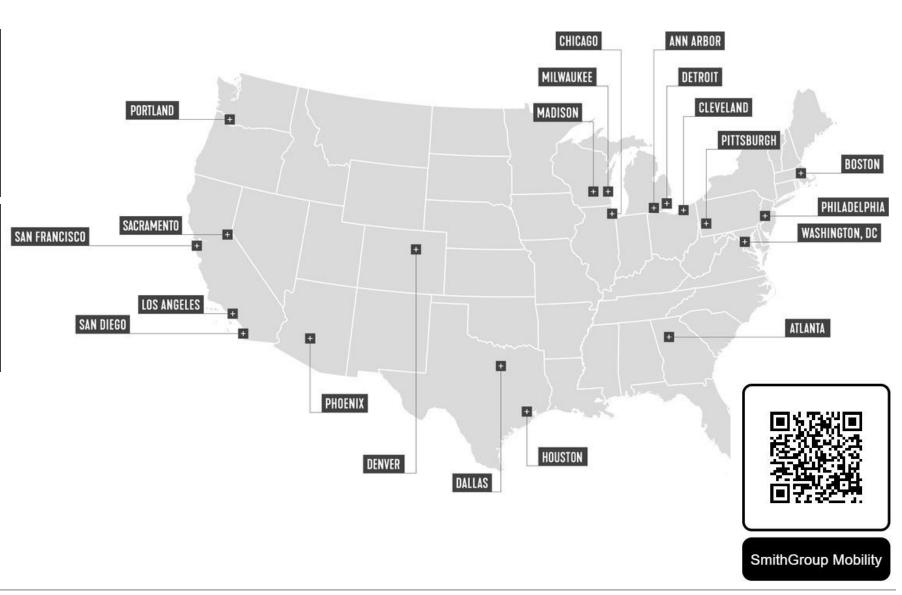
Fast Company Innovation by Design Awards in 5 Years

\$84B

in construction costs for LEED projects

ENR Midwest Names SmithGroup Design Firm of the Year





OUR TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY PRACTICE

COMPLETE **STREETS** 84 **CORRIDOR DESIGN**

> Kercheval St Detroit



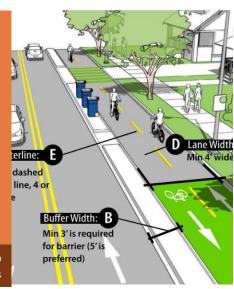
TRAILS & **GREENWAYS**

> Dequindre Cut Greenway Detroit



MOBILITY POLICY GUIDELINES

Kalamazoo Design Guidelines



PLACEMAKING TACTICAL URBANISM

> Ann Arbor State St Curbless Street



MOBILITY & TRANSPORTATIO **PLANS**

> St. Louis **Mobility Plan**



TRANSIT & **TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMEN**

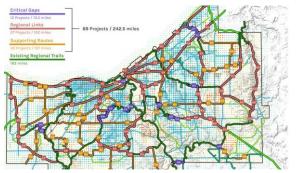
> Fresno Station & TOD Plan



TRAIL PROJECTS THAT ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE



DEQUINDRE CUTDetroit, Michigan



CUYAHOGA GREENWAYS PLAN Cleveland, Ohio



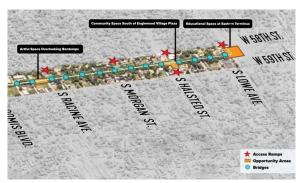
HANK AARON STATE TRAIL, LAKESHORE PATH Milwaukee, Wisconsin



GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY, BRICKLINE St. Louis, Missouri



HARBOR DISTRICT RIVERWALK Milwaukee, Wisconsin



CDOT ENGLEWOOD TRAIL DESIGN Chicago, Illinois



MARQUETTE GREENWAY/SOUTH SHORE RAIL AND TRAIL HEAD Porter, Indiana



GLASS CITY METROPARK
Toledo, Ohio



BRONZEVILLE TRAIL MASTER PLAN
7 Chicago, Shripthagroup.com



GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY, GATEWAY MALL
St. Louis, Missouri
Overcoming Obstacles to Trail Network Implementation



CLEAR LAKE GREENWAY
La Porte, Indiana



ROUGE RIVER GREENWAYWayne County, Michigan



MISSION DRIVEN WORK

IMPORTANT DRIVERS OF OUR WORK



EQUITY

We recognize the impact that transportation has on how people access needs and opportunity in their community.



HEALTH

We recognize that the safety and comfort of transportation systems is a matter of public health and basic welfare.



PLACE

We recognize that transportation systems continue to negatively impact the cohesion and identity of communities.



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

LET'S START WITH SOME TERMINOLOGY

OBSTACLE

a thing that prevents or hinders progress

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

LET'S START WITH SOME TERMINOLOGY

OBSTACLE

a thing that prevents or hinders progress

ISSUE

context-based fact contributing to the obstacle

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

LET'S START WITH SOME TERMINOLOGY

OBSTACLE

a thing that prevents or hinders progress

ISSUE

context-based fact contributing to the obstacle

DYNAMIC

emotion at play in the situation creating the obstacle

WHAT IS AN OBSTACLE YOU HAVE FACED?







OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO TRAIL NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION

CASE STUDY PRESENTERS

RURAL CASE STUDY: COWBOY RECREATION AND NATURE TRAIL



HANNAH JONES

Planning & Development Administrator Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

SUBURBAN CASE STUDY: CAROLINA THREAD TRAIL



BRET BARONAK

Executive Director,Carolina Thread Trail

URBAN CASE STUDY: JOE LOUIS GREENWAY



DANIEL STEFANSKI

Real Estate
Development Manager,
Joe Louis Greenway
City of Detroit Planning
and Development

Joe Louis Greenway

Urban Trail Case Study

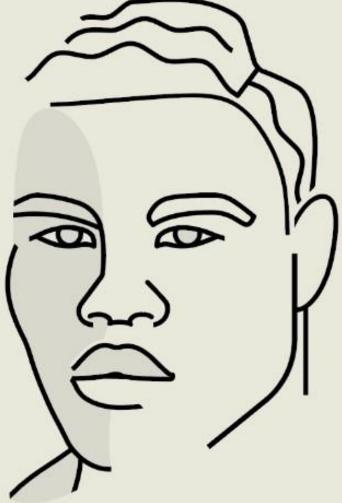




SMITHGROUP



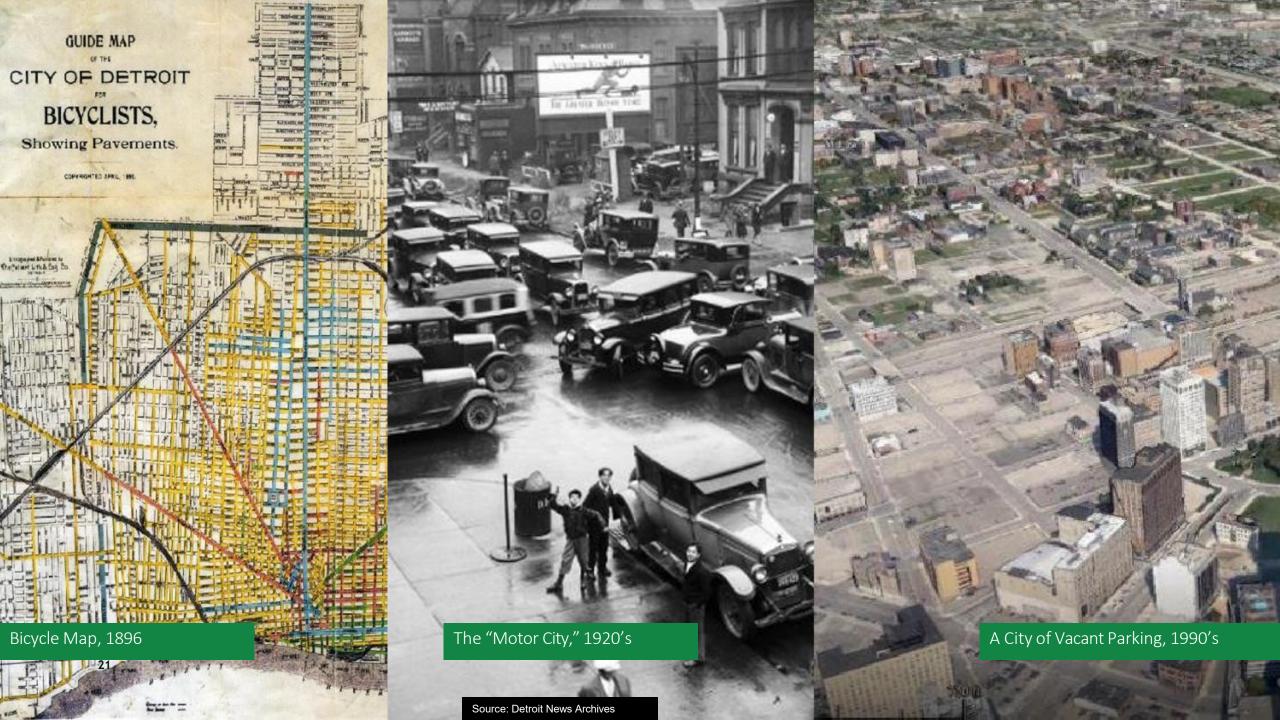




JOE LOUIS GREENWAY

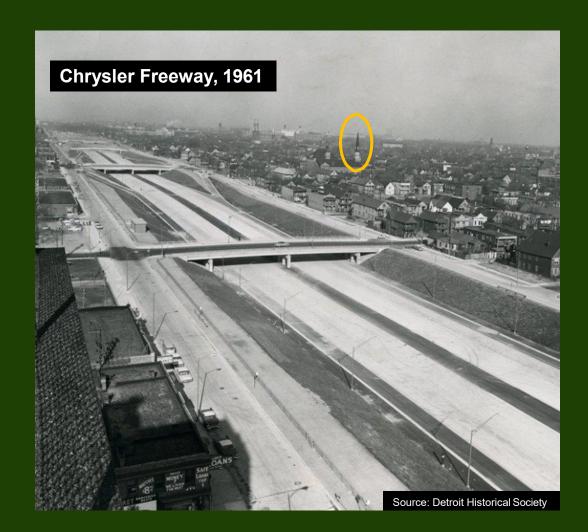






From a History of Inequity...

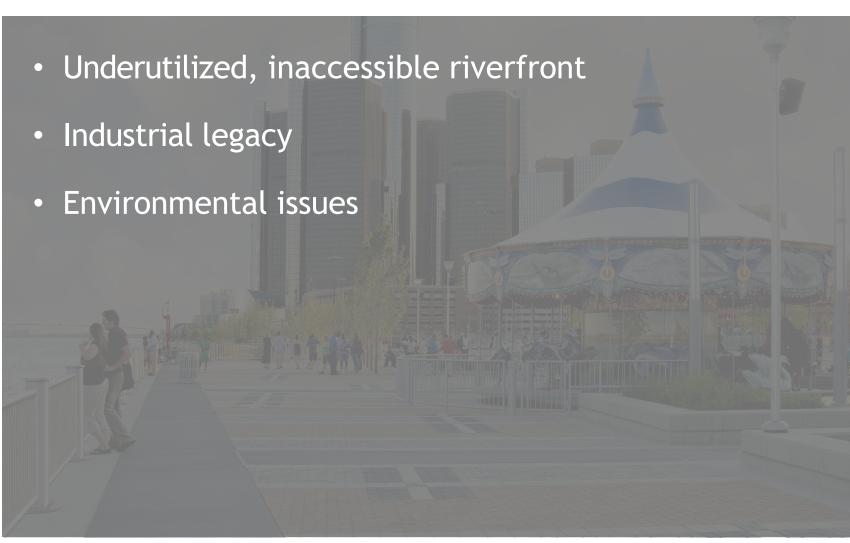






It's happening: Detroit RiverWalk



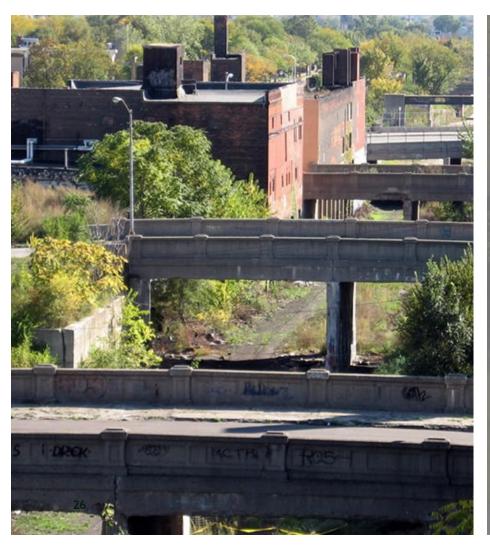


It's happening: Detroit RiverWalk



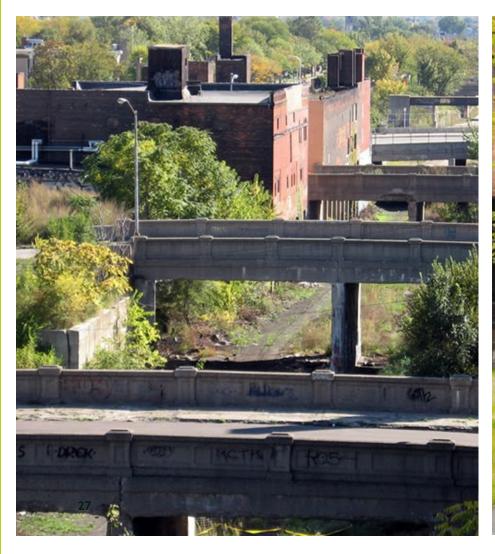


It's happening: Dequindre Cut Greenway



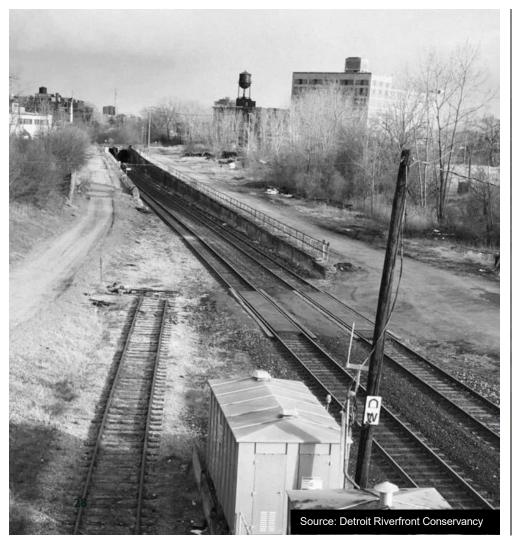
 Inactive railroad corridor Eroding infrastructure Opportunity to connect riverfront to Eastern Market

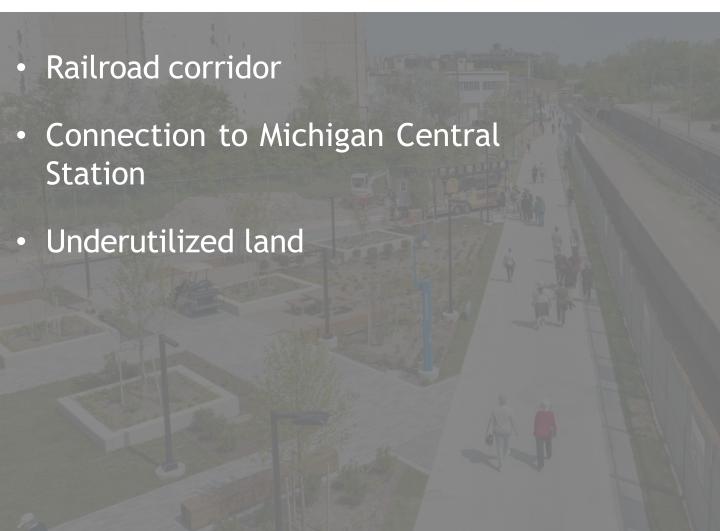
It's happening: Dequindre Cut Greenway



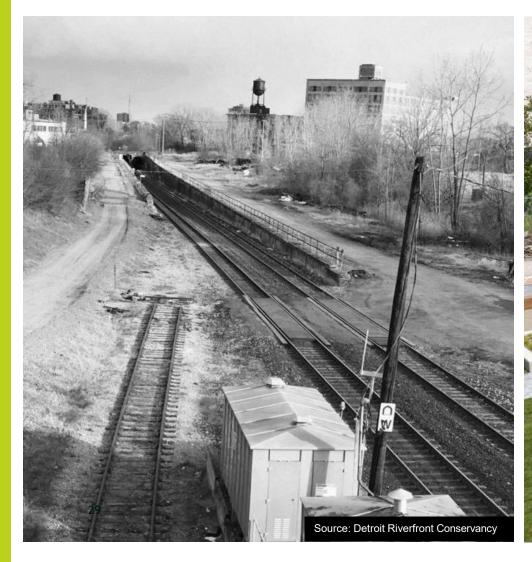


It's happening: Southwest Greenway



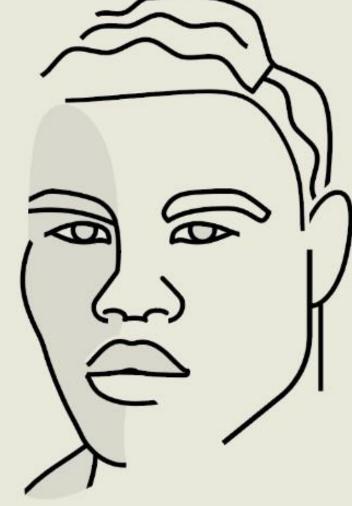


It's happening: Southwest Greenway









JOE LOUIS GREENWAY

JOE LOUIS, ADVOCATE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Joe Louis called Detroit his home. He worked tirelessly to advocate for the rights of Black Americans and to promote social justice in the United States.



"MY GIFT WAS FIGHTING AND THROUGH FIGHTING I WAS TO UPLIFT THE SPIRIT OF MY RACE."

-JOE LOUIS















GOAL 1

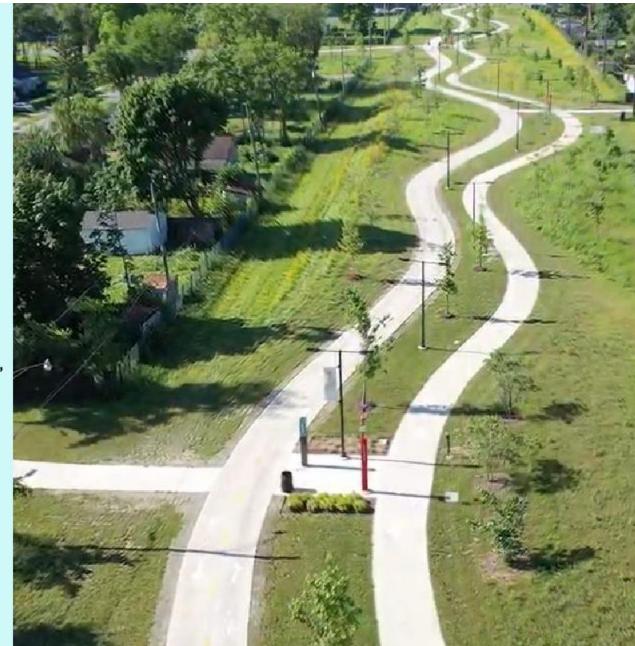
THE GREENWAY
WILL ENHANCE
RESIDENTS'
QUALITY OF LIFE
AND PROMOTE
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 2

THE GREENWAY
WILL PROMOTE
EQUITY

GOAL 3

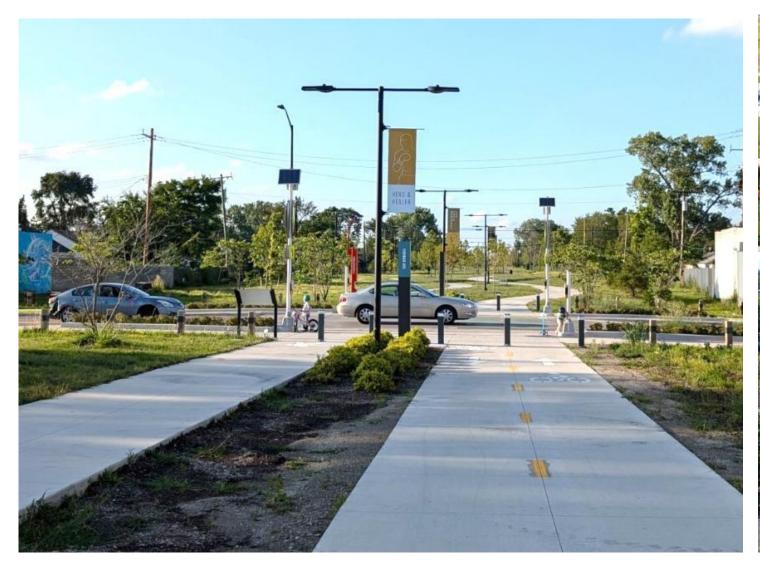
THE GREENWAY
WILL BE A UNIFYING,
CONNECTIVE,
MULTI-MODAL
TRANSPORTATION
NETWORK

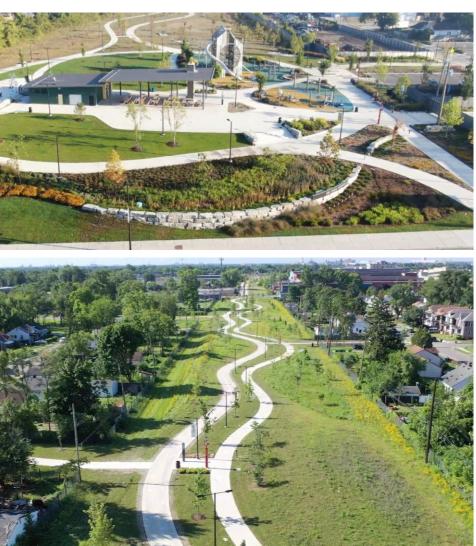


Community Driven Design



Beyond the Path





Topic #1:

Securing Space

Joe Louis Greenway Case Study

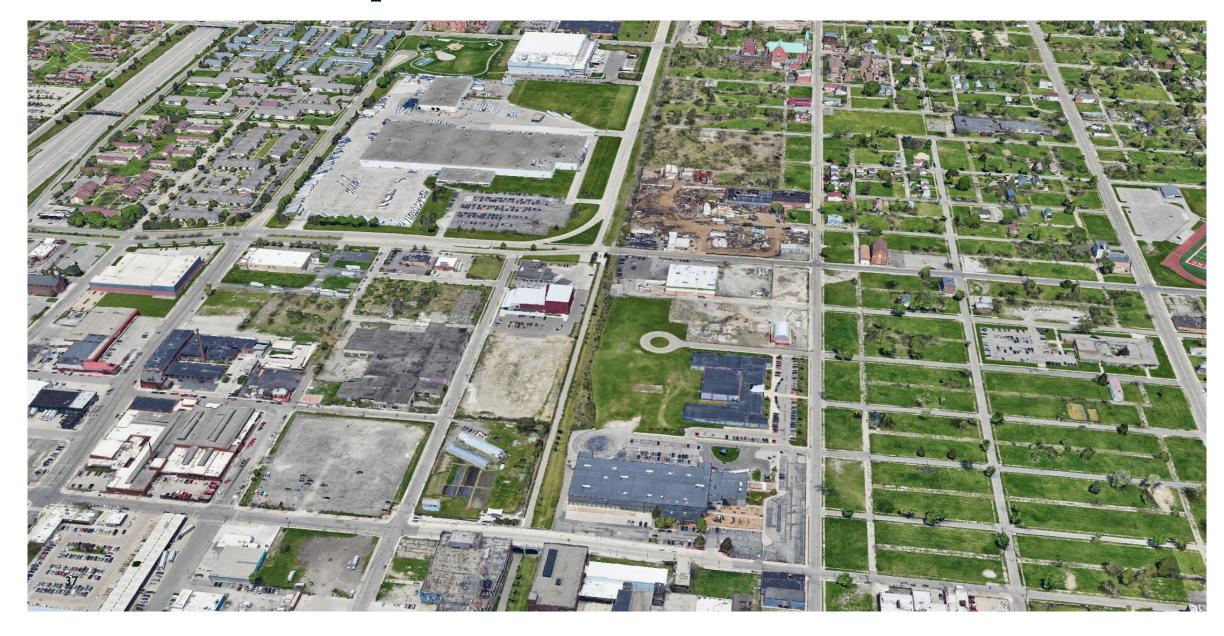




SMITHGROUP



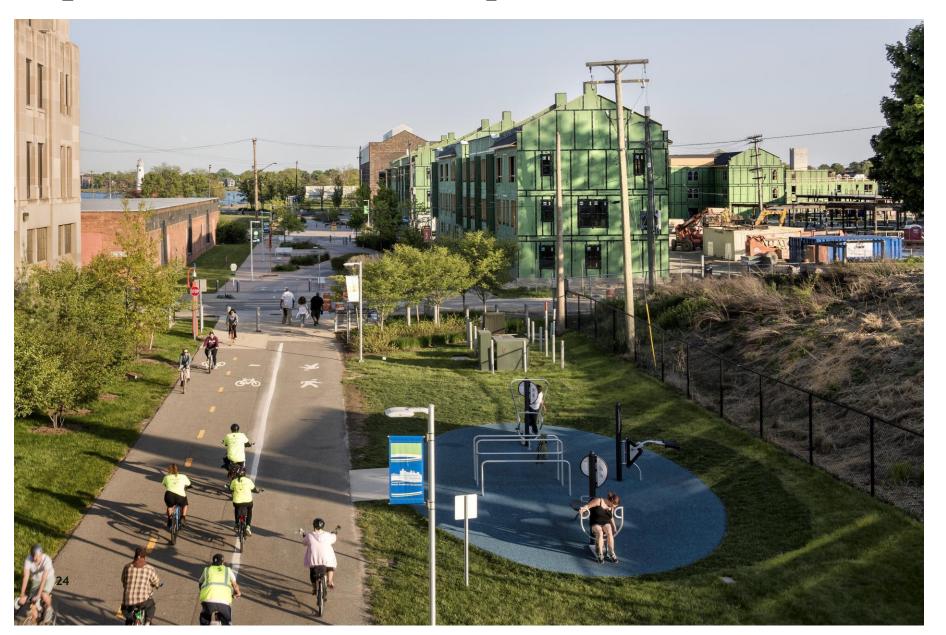
Trails Need Space



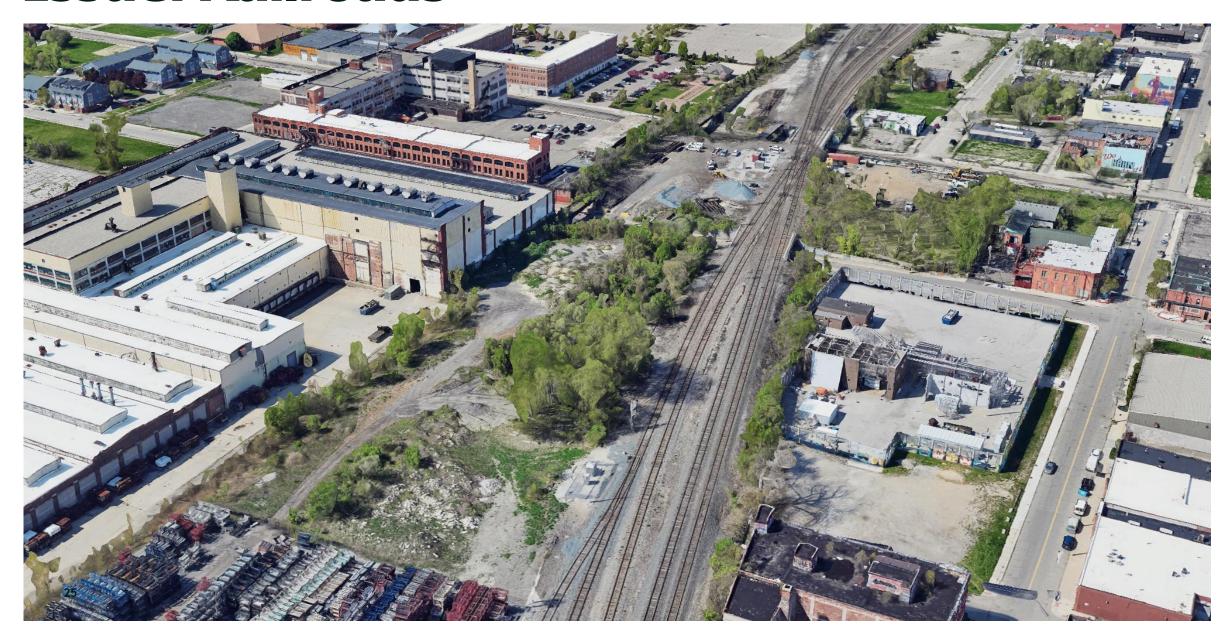
Dynamics: Land Speculation



Dynamics: Land Speculation



Issue: Railroads



Issue: Land Records





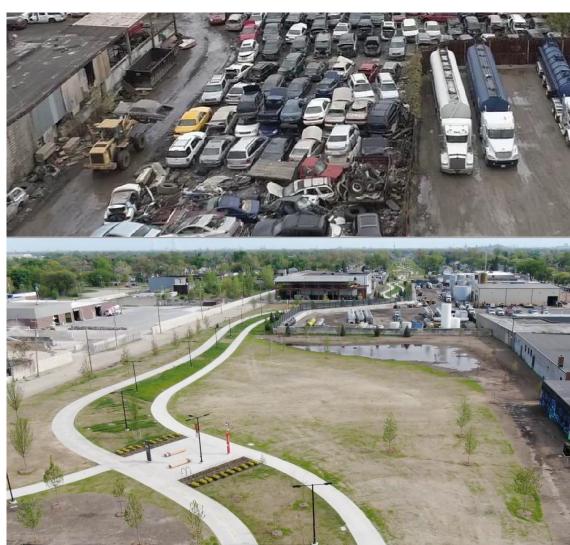
Issue: Land Acquisition





Opportunity: Land Swaps





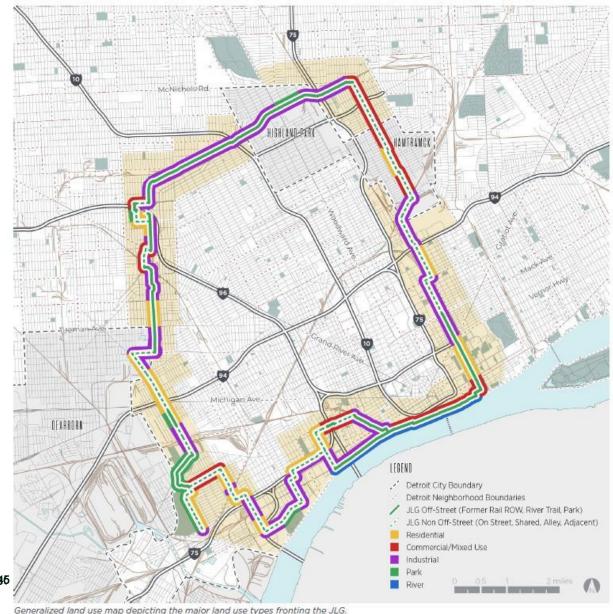
Opportunity: Land Donations







Issue: Site Cleanup & Industrial Legacy





Industrial adjacency on Lonyo



Industrial adjacency near Warren



Commercial adjacency at Tireman

Issue: Site Cleanup & Industrial Legacy















31,000+ tires removed



Opportunity: Legacy Uses



Opportunity: Adjacent Development



Opportunity: More than a Trail







Securing Space

Strategies Recap

Acquisition Strategies

- Blight Tickets
- Code & zoning enforcements
- Incentivizing sales (covering costs, sale price, environmental remediation)
- Trust Fund grants for rail acquisitions
- Title searches & survey work

<u>Transition Strategies</u> (when you can't get the land)

- Re-routing to public rights-of-way
- Land swaps & site reconfigurations

Topic #2:

Empowering Community

Joe Louis Greenway Case Study





SMITHGROUP



Why Build a Trail?



Equitable Access to Healthy Lifestyles











Connecting Neighborhoods & Assets



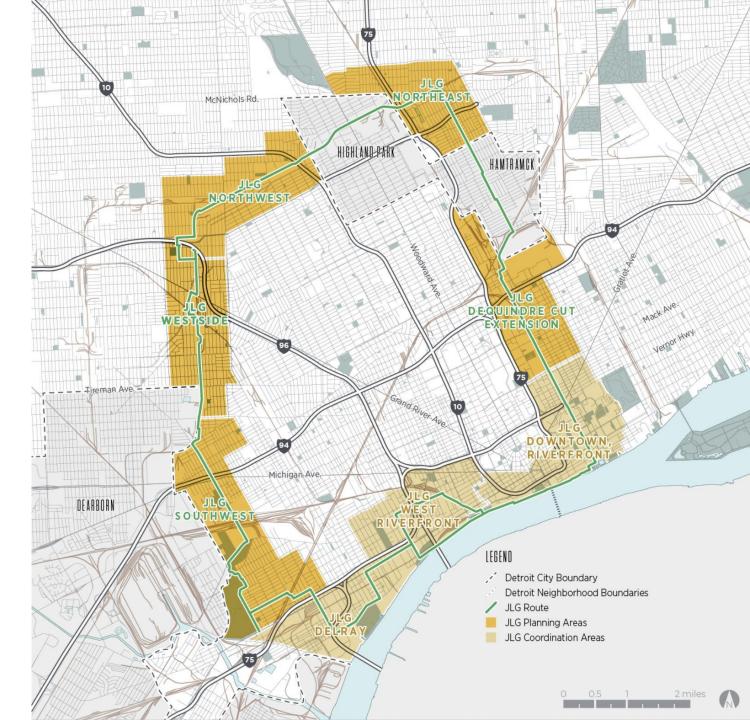




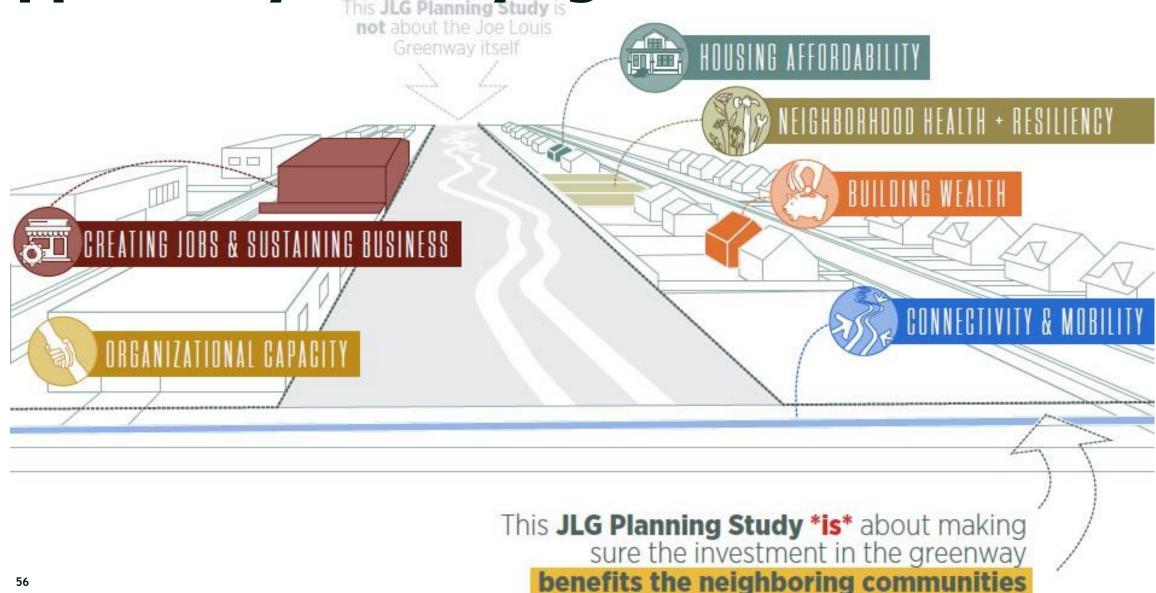








Opportunity: Conveying Benefits



Opportunity: Conveying Benefits



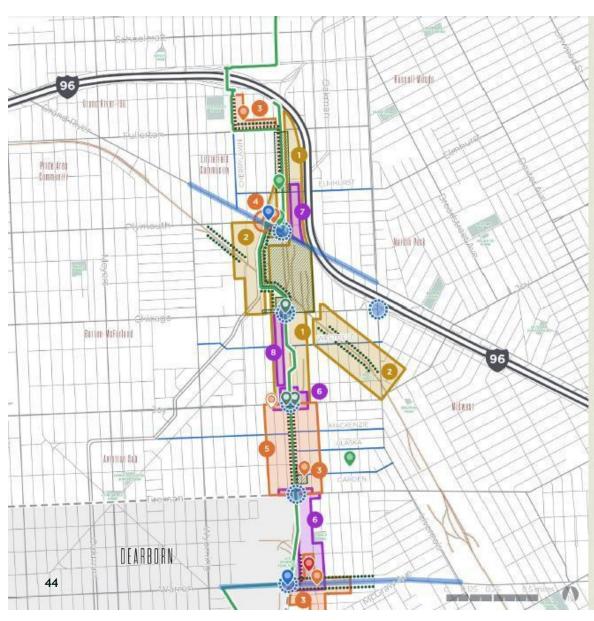
Improving access to the JLG through industrial streets.

Issue: Who is this for?





Issue: Who is this for?



JLG WESTSIDE - SUMMARY

ALIGN ZONING

- Downzone to light industrial and commercial uses
- Downzone to non-industrial uses
- Explore zoning changes to permit increased density by right

BUILD & STABILIZE HOUSING

- Focus multifamily infill near Fullerton Avenue, Alpine Street, and the Warren Trailhead to increase density
- Mixed-use node at intersection of Grand River Avenue/Oakman Boulevard with opportunities for second story apartments and multifamily infill
- Single-Family Housing Stabilization Pilot
- Multifamily infill opportunity on publicly-owned sites
- Multifamily rehab opportunity

IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY & ACCESS

Key intersections

- Streetscape improvements
- Potential mobility hub location
- / Key planned slow streets

CREATE & SUSTAIN JOBS

- 6 Industrial and commercial Blight-to-Beauty area
- Reposition as a light industrial district
- 8 Focus on partnerships with existing properties to increase commercial activation and neighborhood connections to the JLG
- Potential retail pop-up

BEAUTIFY & GREEN NEIGHBORHOODS

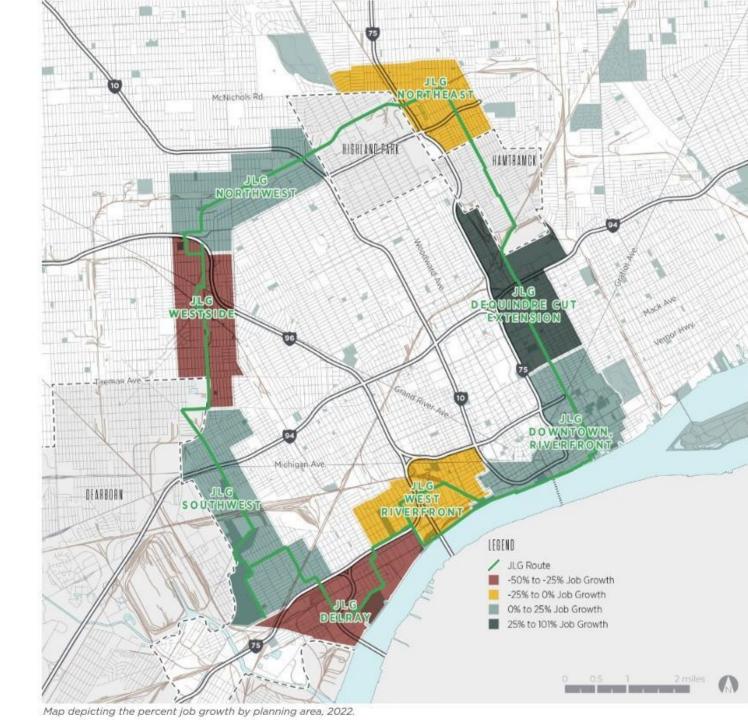
- Community/partner activation sites
- Potential new open space location
- Tree-buffering along the JLG and near industrial uses/highways
- Target vacant land treatments along/near the JLG

Issue: Understanding Impacts



Issue: Understanding Impacts

- Create jobs on and off the greenway
- Empower entrepreneurs, including small, minority and women-owned businesses
- Connect residents to jobs
- Enable existing businesses to benefit from the Joe Louis Greenway



Issue: Building Trust



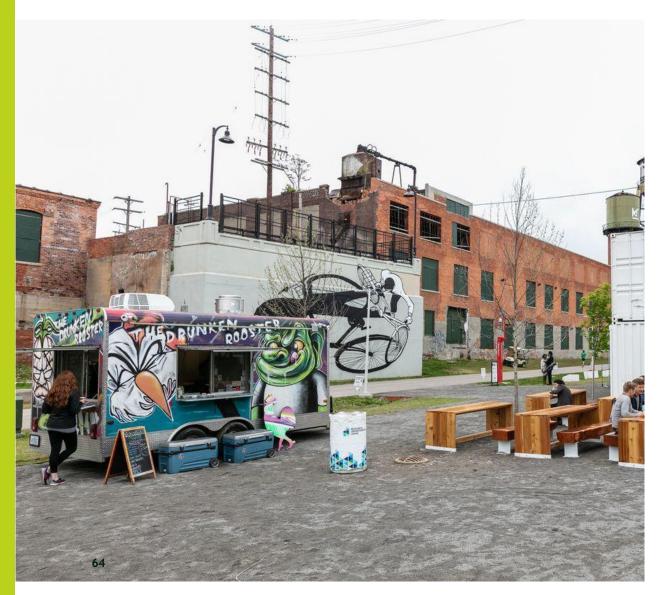


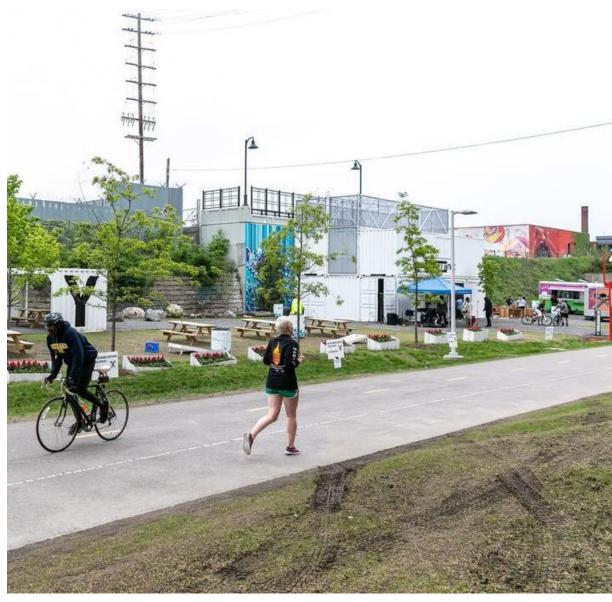
Issue: Building Trust



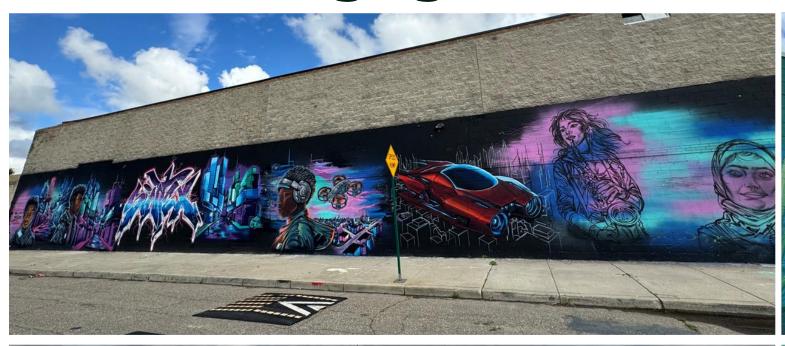


Opportunity: Activating Spaces





Issue: Belonging & Inclusion

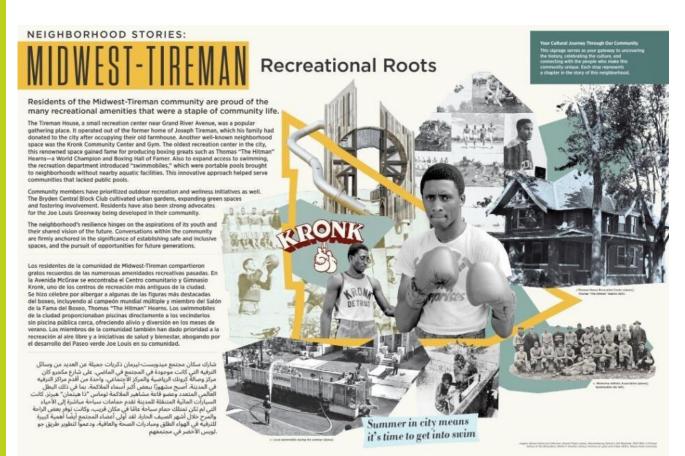








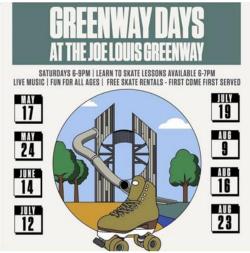
Issue: Belonging & Inclusion





Issue: Belonging & Inclusion











Empowering Community

Strategy Recap

- Frame the conversation around quality of life
- Communicate benefits
- Empower community leaders as trust builders
- Work together to address concerns
- Incorporate local artwork and engage local artists
- Let the community tell their stories
- Value belonging

Moving Forward

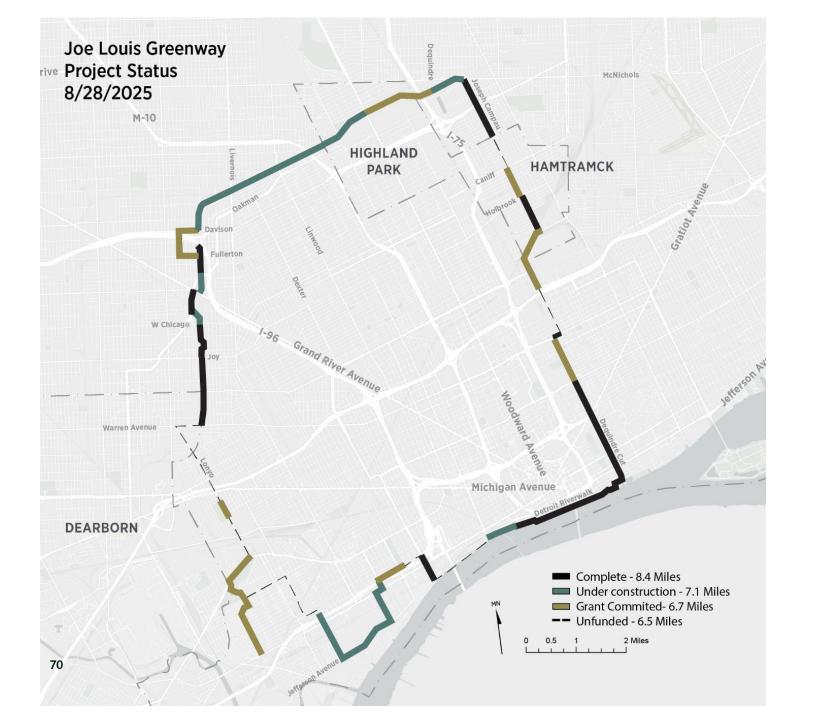
Joe Louis Greenway Case Study

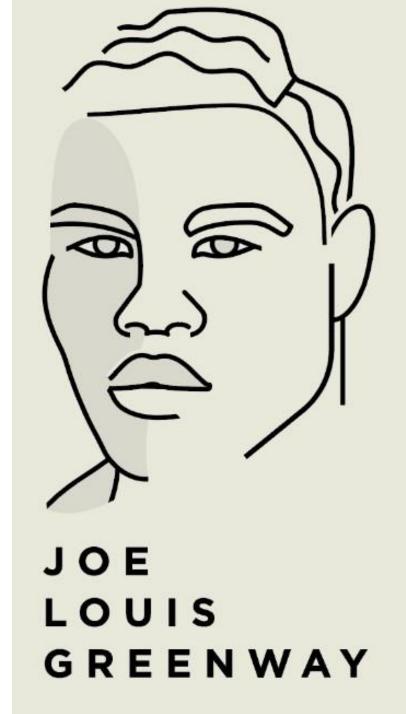




SMITHGROUP











It's coming together









Discussion



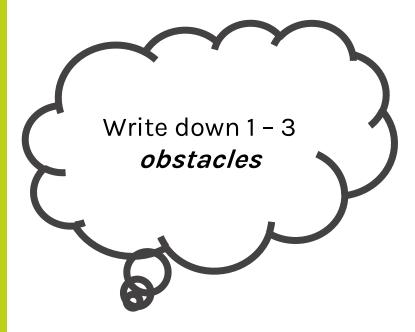
SMITHGROUP

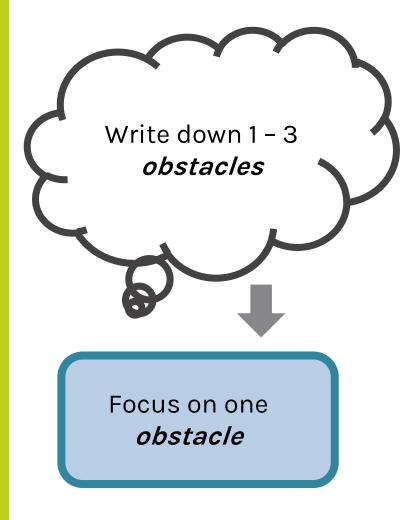


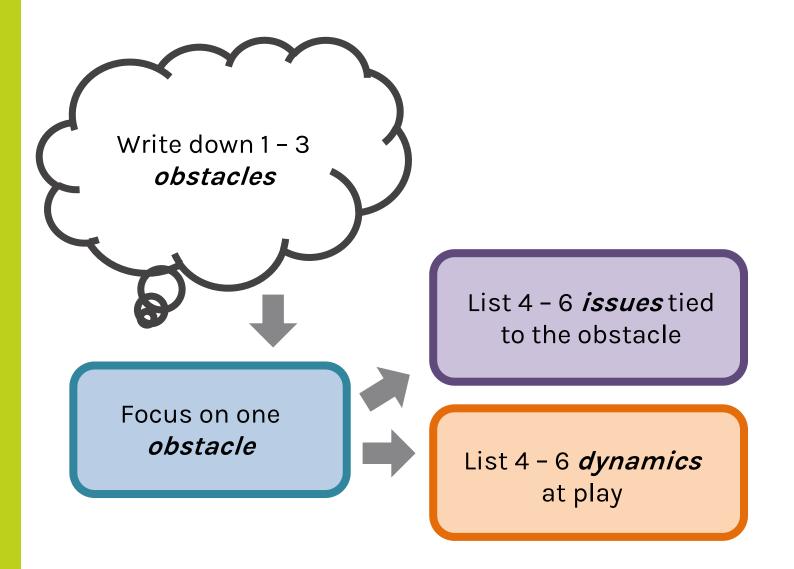
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO TRAIL NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION

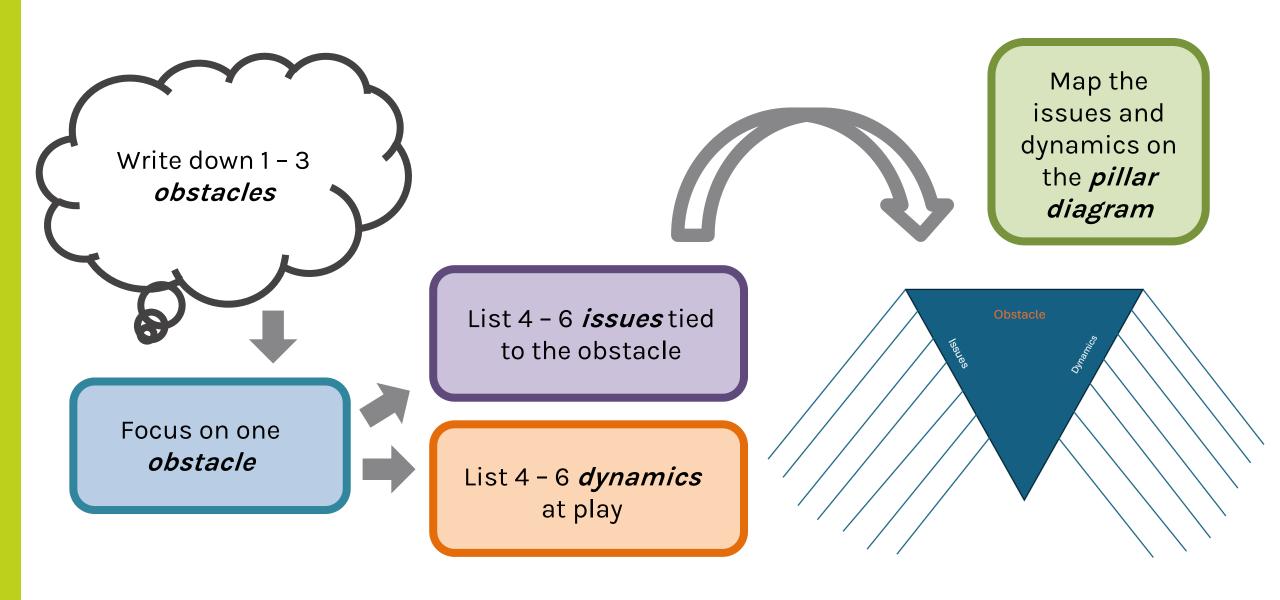
ACTION PLANNING

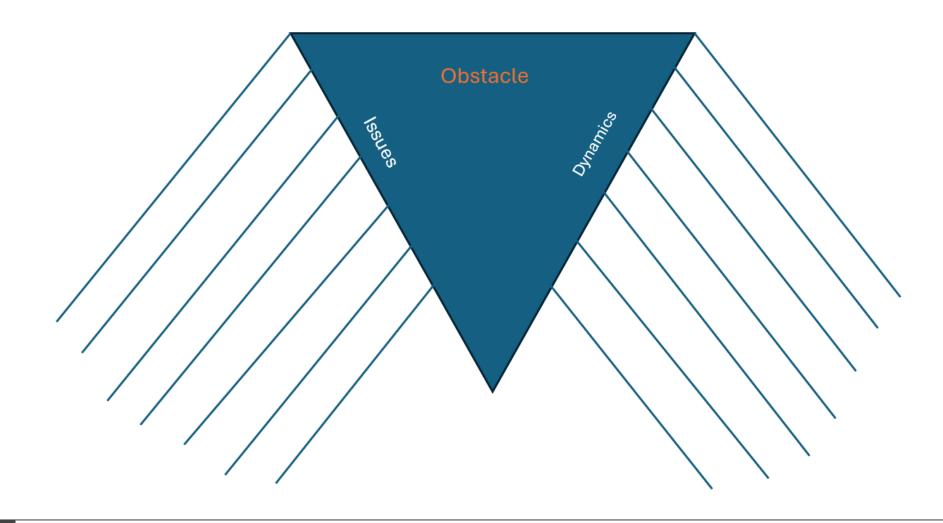


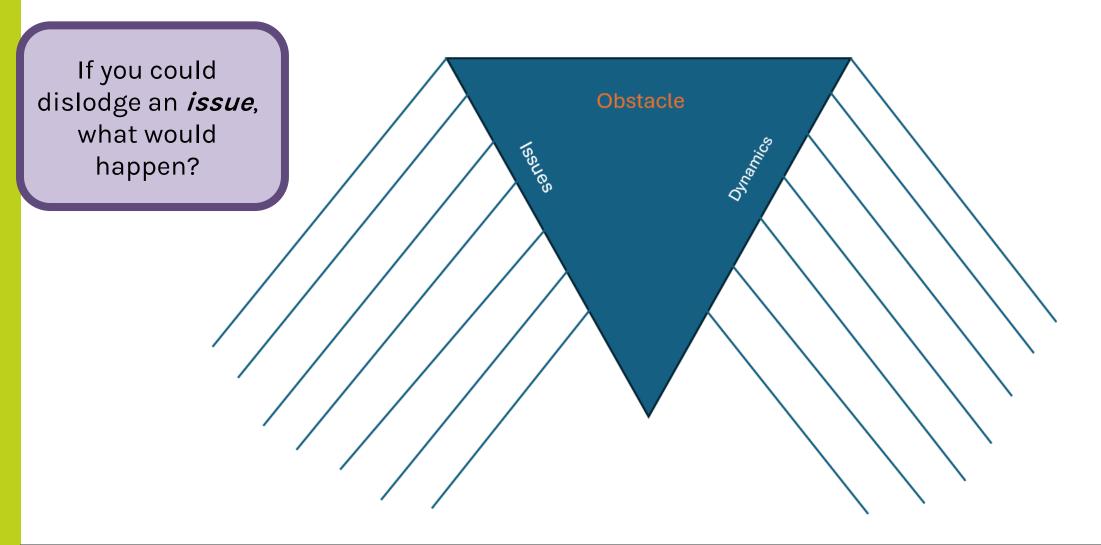


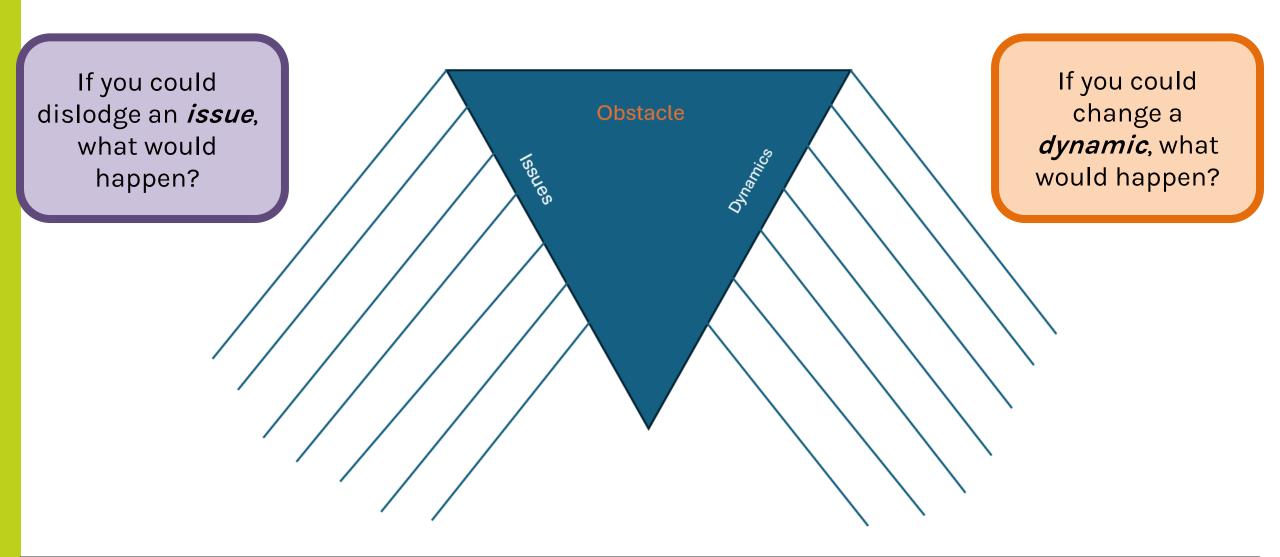


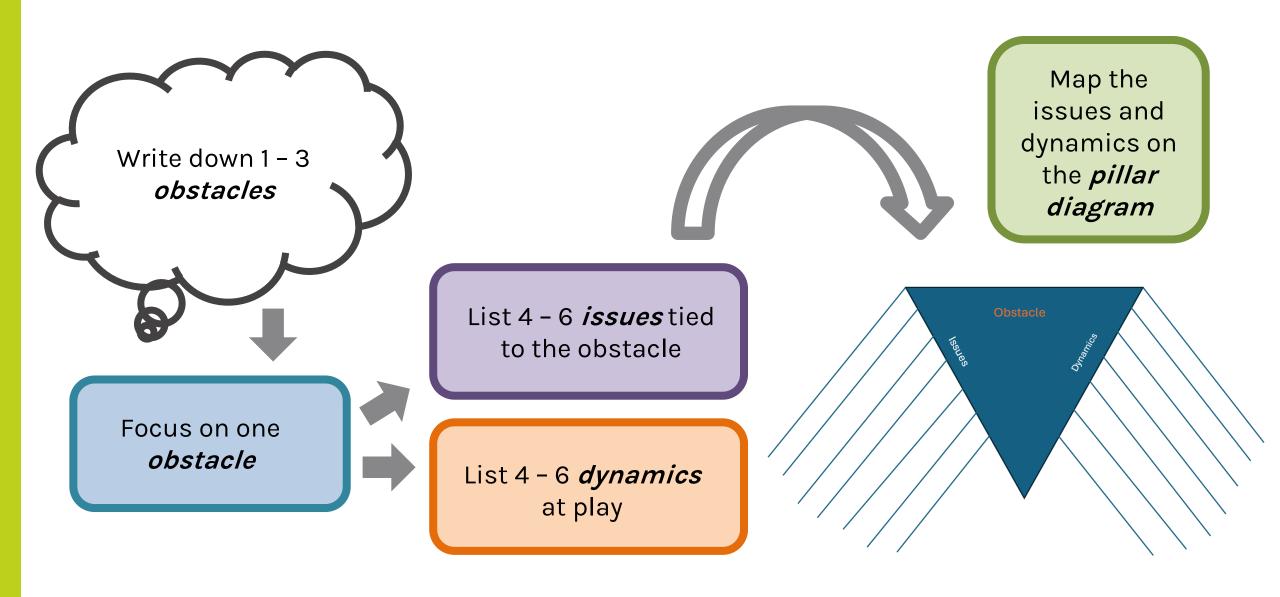


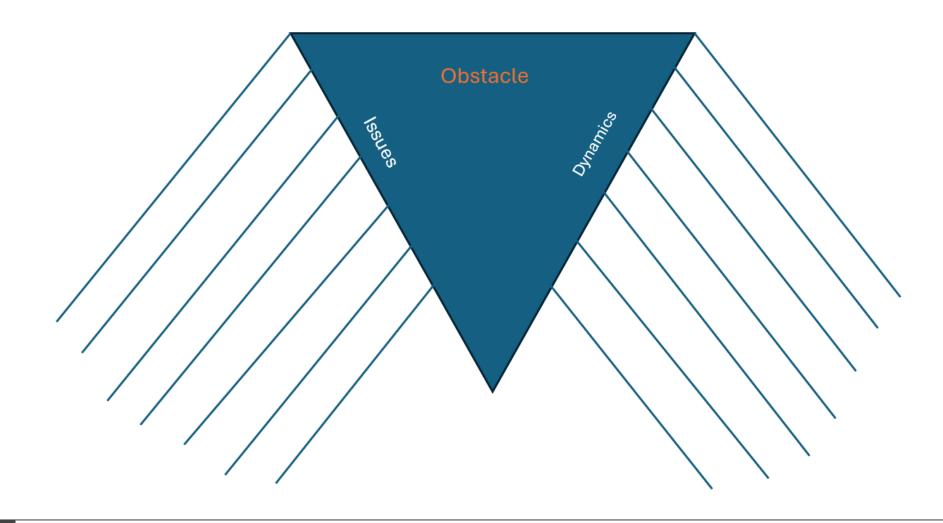


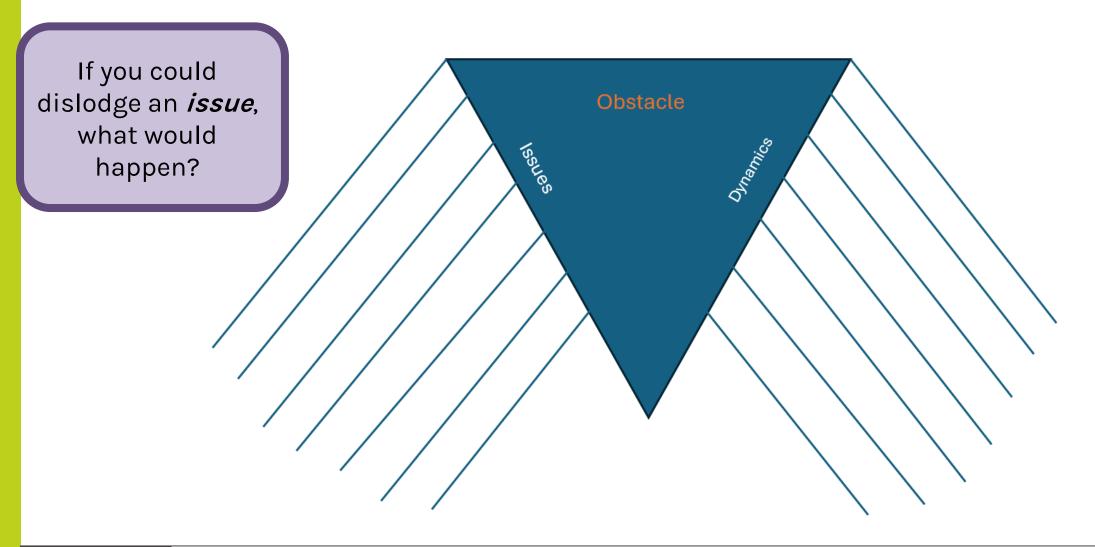


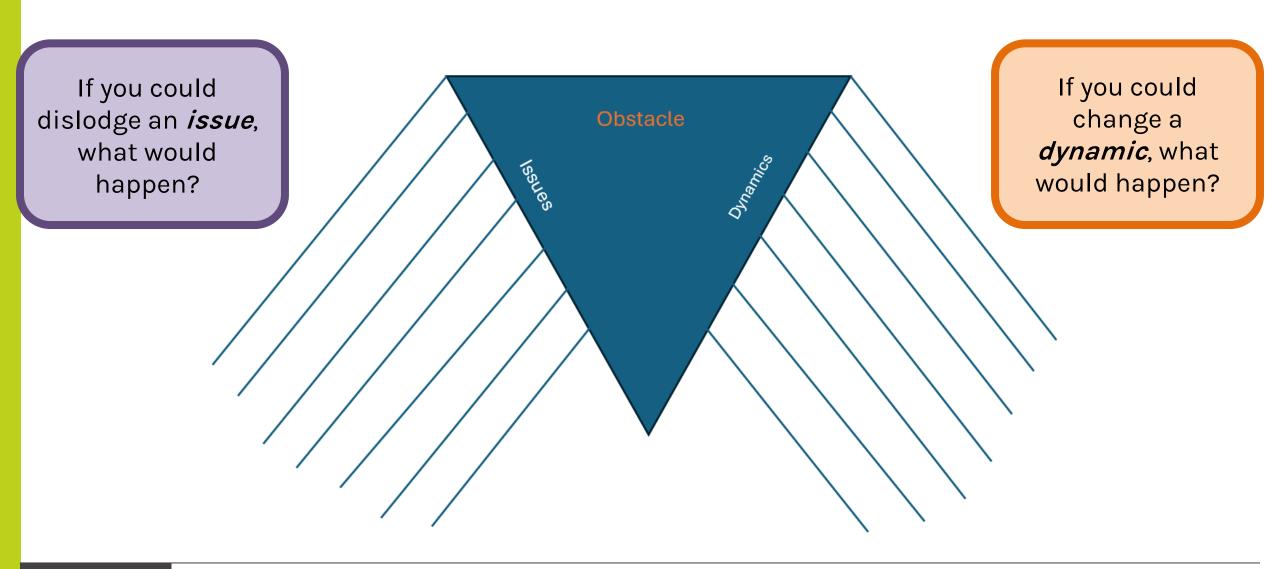












Make a Plan

Working in Pairs

Reach Out!

City of Detroit: Planning and Development

Daniel Stefanski-daniel.stefanski@detroitmi.gov

SmithGroup:

Ellen Schmidt - ellen.schmidt@smithgroup.com

Oliver Kiley - oliver.kiley@smithgroup.com

Cassie Goodwin - cassie.goodwin@smithgroup.com

Rails to Trails Conservancy:

Greg Lawson – glawson@railstotrails.org

Kate Foster – kate@railstotrails.org



SMITHGROUP

