



Left: "Splitting: Four Corners", Gorden Matta-Clark, 1974<sup>1</sup>; Right: Blue-collar housing development, Detroit's West side, 1927.<sup>2</sup>

# 1, Detached

Renewed and emerging housing in Detroit

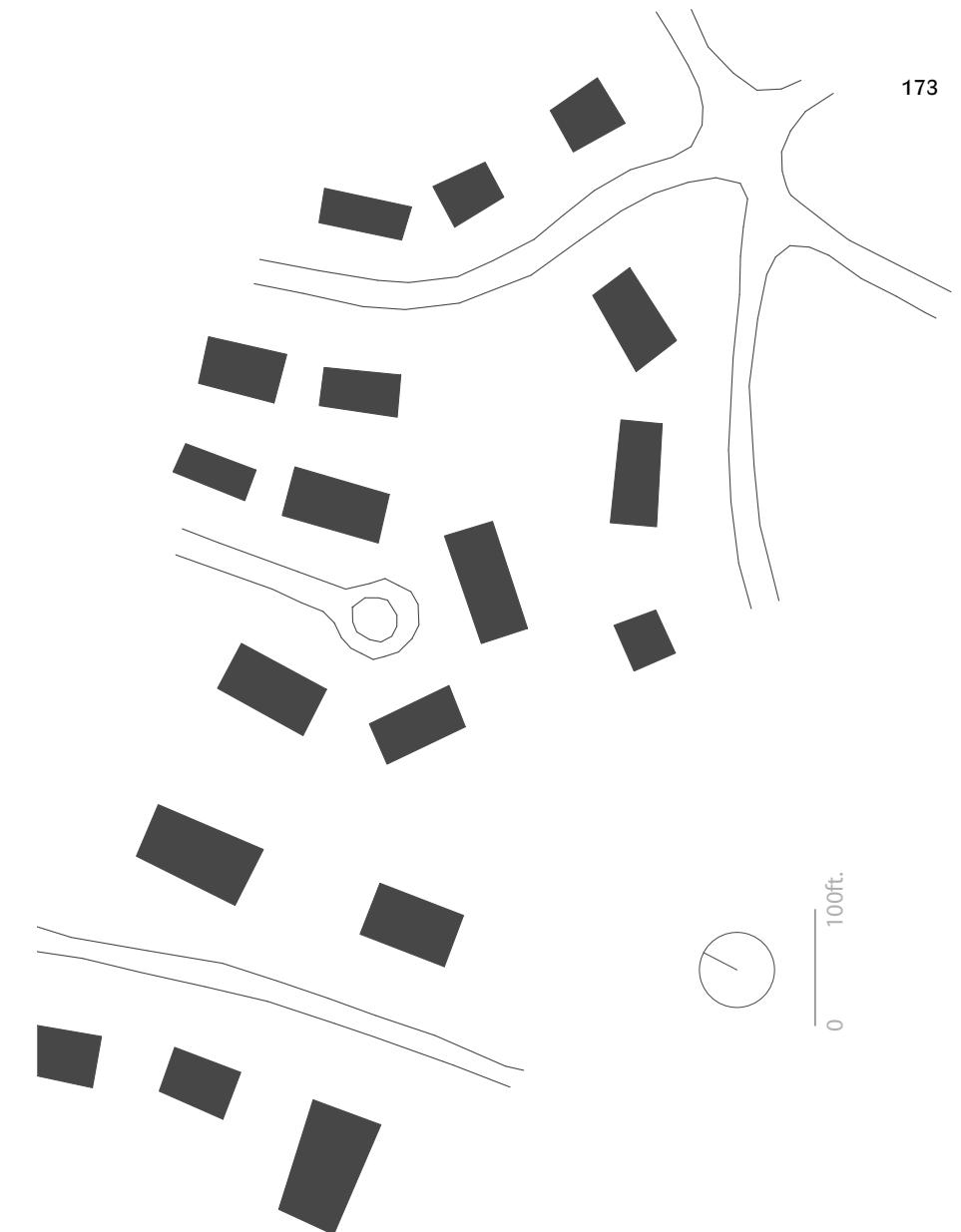
Aaron Weller

1,349,900 single family,  
detached units, 2003<sup>3</sup>

2,956 new housing permits in the city, 2005<sup>4</sup>

300,726 new housing permits in the suburb, 2005<sup>4</sup>

Over 67,000 foreclosures vacant, 2009<sup>5</sup>



"Decentralization is taking place. It is not a policy, it is a reality—and it is impossible for us to change this trend as it is to change the desire of birds to migrate to a more suitable location."<sup>6</sup>

—Seward H. Mott, Senior Federal Housing Administration official, 1939

"This inconsistency in the application of building and other restrictions to subdivisions in the same area, is merely one indication of the effect of lack of control and coordination."<sup>7</sup>

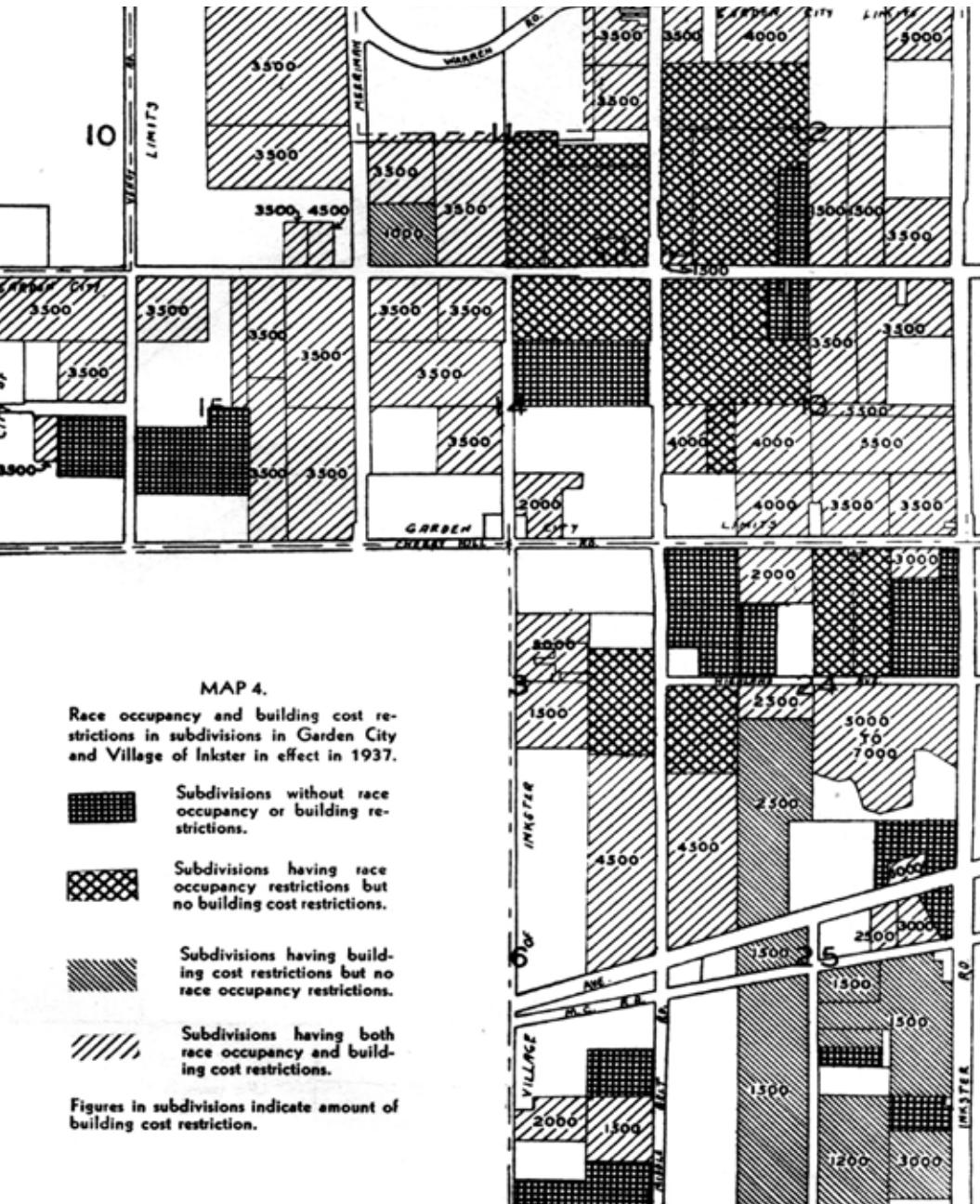
—Michigan State Planning Commission, June 1939

Post-war Detroit was beset with problems stemming from long-standing structural issues including housing shortages and an aging central city housing stock. Cities had not attempted to address the Great Migration of African Americans from the Southern United States, and continued immigration of peoples from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. For earlier generations of immigrants, already settled and economically mobile, the suburb emerged as a viable frontier to a burgeoning central city. A new house in the suburb put on multifarious guises. A new house in the suburb became an intimate domicile in close proximity to

'nature', albeit mythical. A new house in the suburb became a tendency induced by Federal policy encouragement, namely through long-term financing guarantees from the Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC).<sup>8</sup> A new house in the suburb became a reaction against misperceived threats to ethnic and urban identities.<sup>9</sup> A new house in the suburb became in vogue: ubiquitous electrification, variable point transport via roads and cars, and mass produced gadgets promising leisure all seemed congruent in vast open farmland. Suburbia emerged unplanned, however, it provoked a desire for order, and became a counterpoint against a decentralizing city.

In 1939, the Michigan State Planning Commission voiced concern regarding informal development occurring on the fringes of Detroit. The plan opposite, published by the State Planning Commission in 1939, exemplifies broad concerns on the part of stakeholders during this period. Subdivision homogeneity was prioritized over heterogeneity, both in terms of social and economic strata. The Michigan State Planning Commission was concerned with the diversity of restrictions in close proximity with no concern expressed regarding explicit discrimination, instead pronouncing a call to control this emerging type of habitation.

Right: Michigan State Planning Commission study of Carden City and Village of Inkster, 1939.<sup>10</sup>



Another incident of diversity in housing, here with desire for class integration, was consciously proposed in the late 1940s.

In 1949, The Federal Housing Act made available federal money for housing projects coordinated by local governments which could include private developers. Detroit prior to this federal assistance program initiated studies for a comprehensive master plan in 1946 (the plan was not approved as a cohesive document until 1951).<sup>11</sup> The plan aspired to confront issues posed by post-World War II cities, including housing.

Housing initiatives were coordinated as part of a general land use plan, one part

of a comprehensive plan that also included riverfront development, cultural and convention center development, and transportation. Through its planning efforts the City of Detroit was able to secure money from the federal government. Much of the money awarded to local municipalities was spent in the name of "urban renewal". Areas of the city were judged as blighted and slated for slum clearance. In addition to this general trend, The City of Detroit had plans to maintain and build new public housing projects. George Edwards, then City Council President who oversaw the City Plan Commission presented a document that proposed a number of proj-

ects that would accommodate the relocation of residents, largely African Americans, currently living in houses slated for clearance. The new public housing proposals were sited in dispersed locations throughout the city, not simply concentrated at the core. Instead, new public housing was proposed at the municipal edges. It was thought that public housing nearer to the most economic mobile would be beneficial. The proposals were never built. George Edwards was defeated by Albert Cobo in a 1949 Mayoral race. All public housing sites proposed at the city periphery were deleted between 1949-1950. However, urban renewal and slum clearance persisted.



#### The FOUR ESSENTIALS

*Cities must make it possible for the automobile to move easily in own home areas. It replaces the four-wheeled horse.*

*SPEED—by means of expressways connecting cities with many interchanges, avoiding the use of expressways, and keeping highways away from high-speed roads.*

*SAFETY—by eliminating crossings rapidly without a continuing stream to wait for vehicles to change to a slower stream.*

*CONVENIENCE—by making highways in association with the best intercity routes. The route is designed to give fast connections to residential, commercial, and industrial areas, as well as to recreational and other public facilities. It also gives the opportunity for keeping beauty rather than traditional neighborhoods.*



#### DESIGN

*Functionality is a basic plan for the city as well as for the principles which the city should follow to meet the same as these which provide the ultimate objective of look in the creation of an attractive and attractive design for living.*

*To operate smoothly, a city must provide space for the basic functions.*

*1. CITY MUST PROVIDE SPACES FOR BASIC FUNCTIONS*

*Good residential areas under built-up conditions have single family dwellings, two-family dwellings, three-family dwellings and multi-family dwellings. These areas are required for basic functions. Residential areas and the city must be planned so that they can be used for other residential densities simultaneously. Indeed, there is much to be said for building time within every such as the uses and spaces which needs to be done.*

*2. CITY MUST PROVIDE SPACES FOR INDUSTRIAL USE*

*Industry is vital to the nation's well-being and must be located near transportation facilities, either in the open or near office buildings. Property densities are required for basic functions. Residential areas and the city must be planned so that they can be used for other residential densities simultaneously. Indeed, there is much to be said for building time within every such as the uses and spaces which needs to be done.*



#### FOR LIVING

*affection and affection design for living through the creation of spaces through the creation of spaces.*

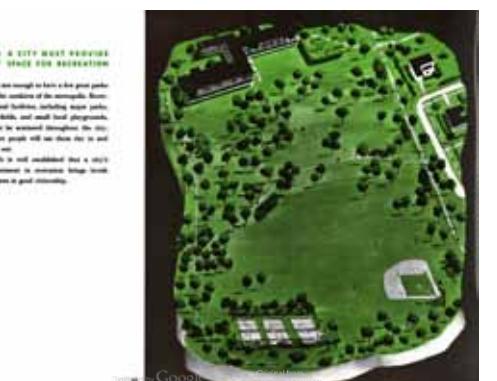
*To operate smoothly, a city must provide space for the basic functions.*

*3. CITY MUST PROVIDE SPACES FOR RESIDENTIAL USE*

*It is an integral part of a city plan that the city must be planned so that the residential buildings, including single-family, two-family, and multi-family dwellings, may be located throughout the city. These areas will be shown here in and their uses.*

*4. CITY MUST PROVIDE SPACES FOR COMMERCIAL USE*

*Like business, good commercial buildings should be placed where the city needs them. They should be located in business districts, near railroads, in strong local concentrations. Business areas and office centers are likely to be concentrated in certain areas which must be cleaned when they are used there and with*



Right: City of Detroit Planning Commission Proposed Generalized Land Use Plan & Proposed System of Trafficways.<sup>12</sup>

July 15, 1949: President Harry S. Truman signs the Federal Housing Act.

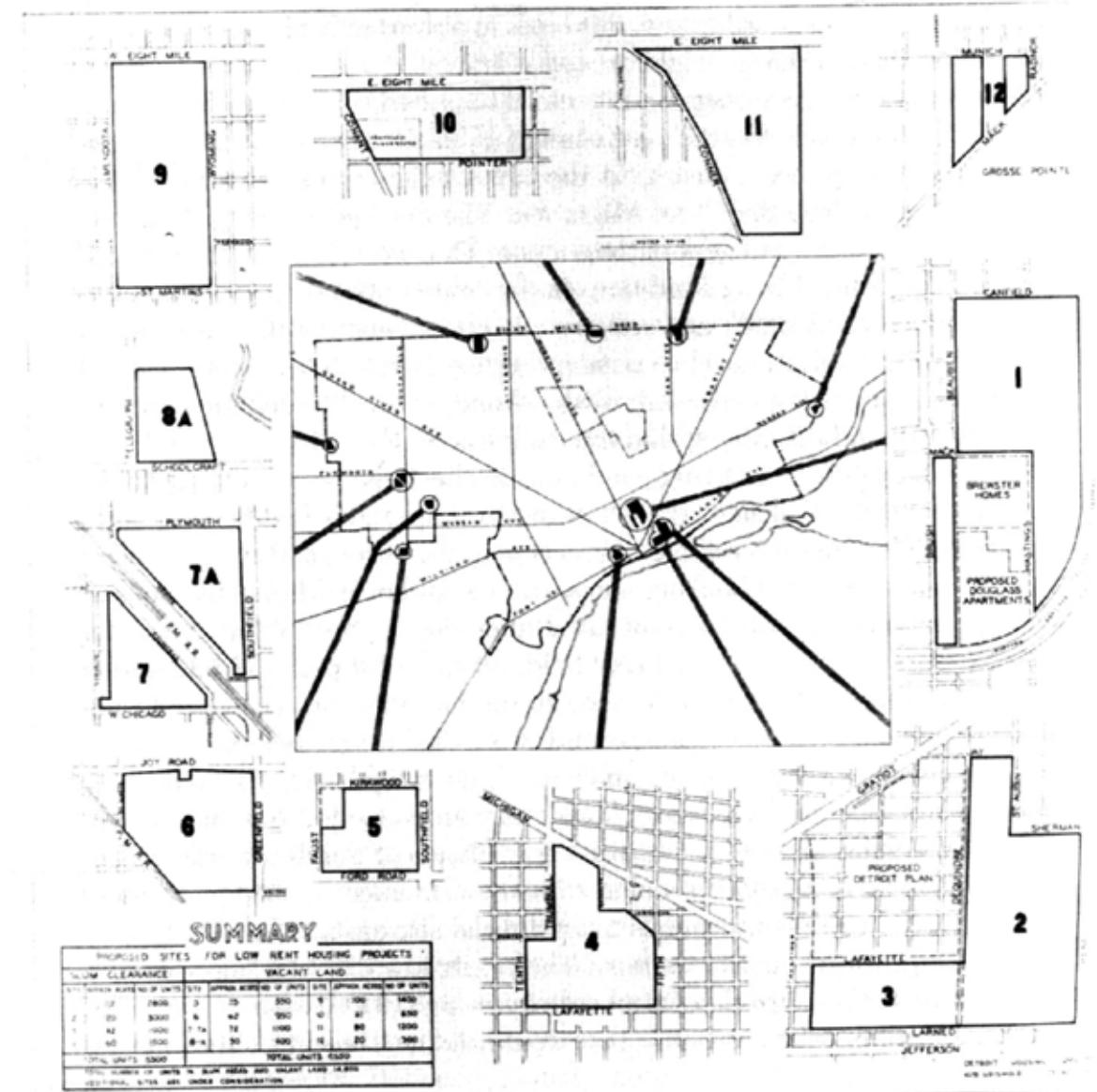
Fall 1949: Albert Cobo elected mayor, defeats George Edwards, then president of the Common Council (agency that overlooks City Planning Commission).

January 19, 1950: Housing Commission applies for two-year program reservation of \$4,311,440 in capital grants for slum clearance and urban redevelopment.

January 24, 1950: Common Council deletes site no. 11 from city's public low-rent housing program.

March 14, 1950: Common Council deletes sites no. 5, 6, 7, 7A, 8, 9; approves site no. 1, 2, 3 and 4.

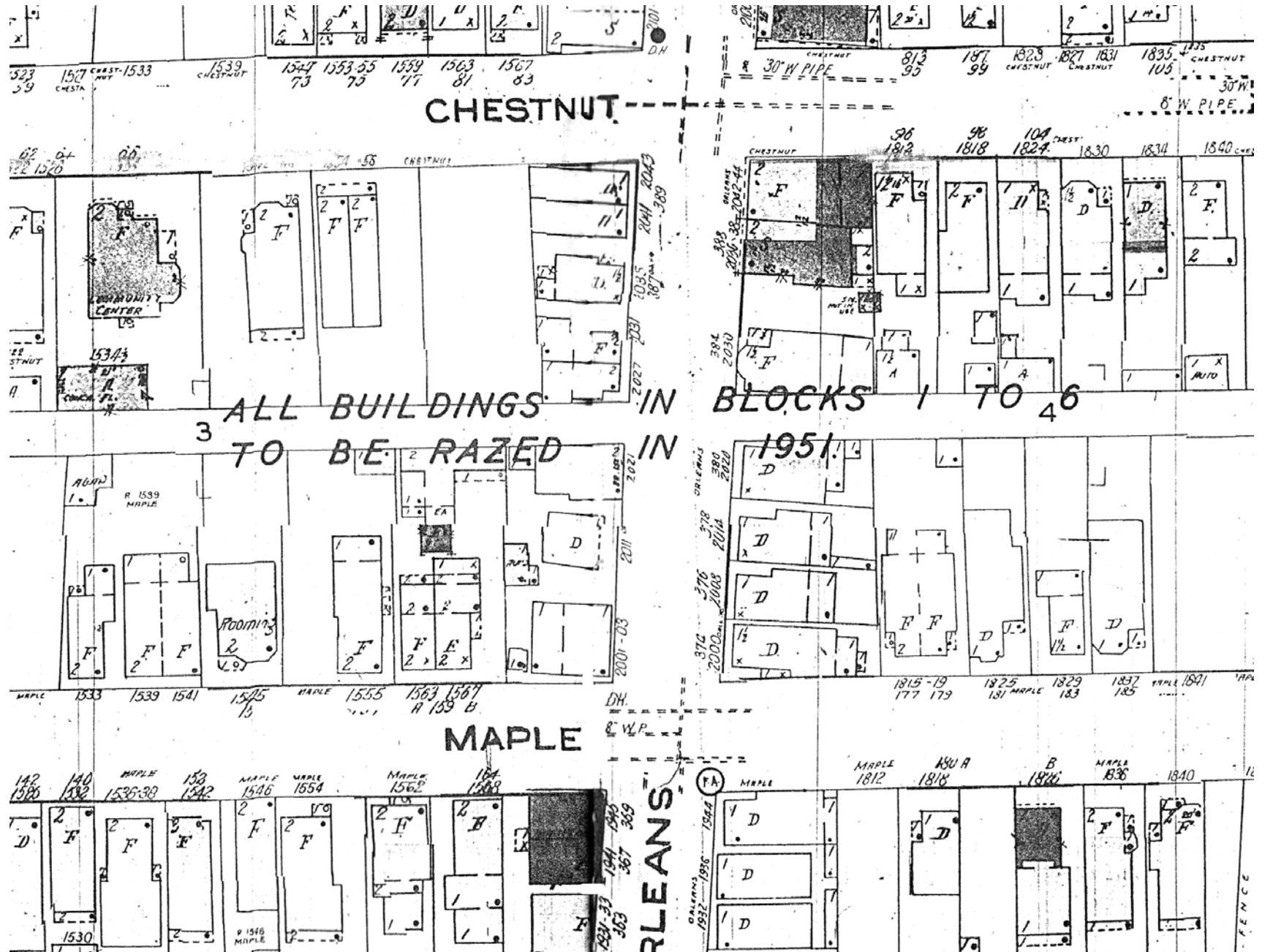
May 2, 1950: Common Council deletes site no. 4 from the city's public housing program.<sup>13</sup>



"Each side of a block was rated from a slowly moving automobile. Two raters were used in order to minimize individual bias. The ratings were based on two general criteria: 1. the condition of the residential structures; 2. the environment. It was found that the following external factors were indicative of poor housing: 1. structure out of plumb; 2. Rotting of building members; 3. makeshift or deteriorated roof; 4. poor foundations; 5. lack of central heating."<sup>15</sup>



Behind: Fisher Freeway, Detroit.<sup>16</sup>



Housing projects built during urban renewal benefitted families in need, however, many factors led to quick deterioration and subsequent demolition, not least was a high concentration of low-income families with minimal proximity to economic and social capital. Most public housing is situated in marginalized areas of the city, and is consistently adjacent to large scale infrastructure and industrial areas. As a result, public housing became politically difficult to defend. Federal support has waned during shifts in political power and during economic recessions.

However in 1994, The City of Detroit instituted a notable urban revitalization program with 100mil. Federal dollars allocated to a seemingly arbitrary defined central city

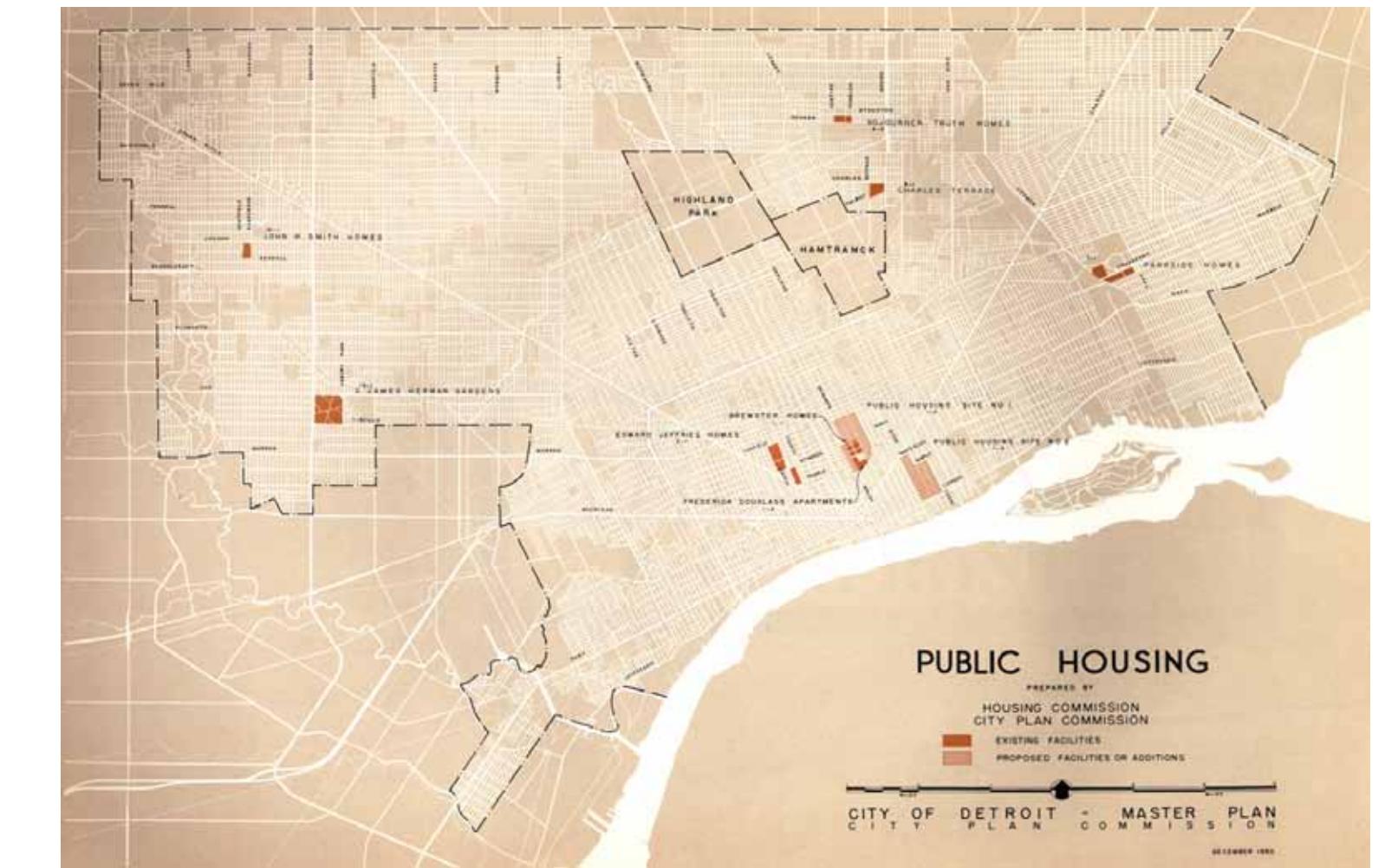
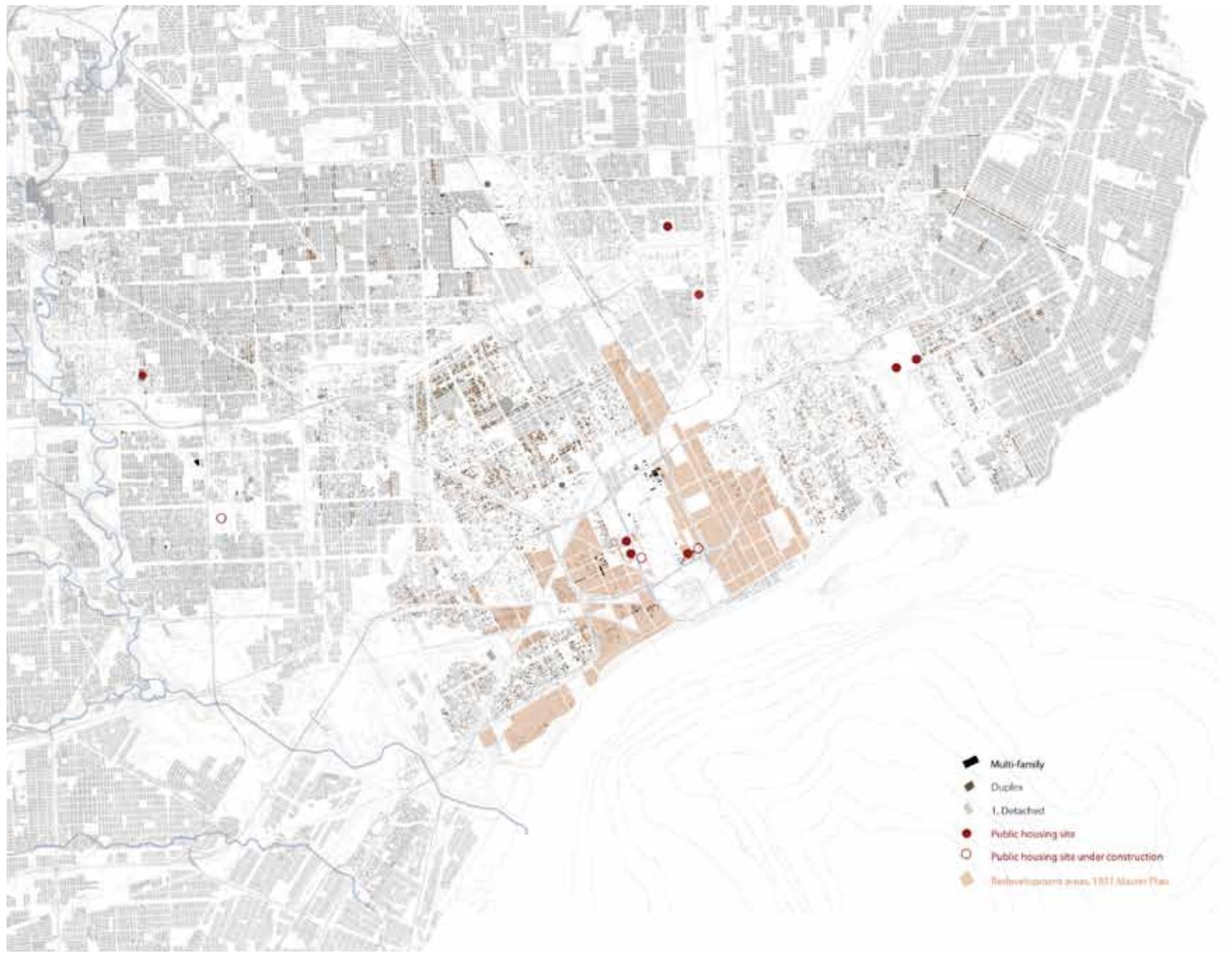
area.<sup>20</sup> Soon thereafter, demolition became an active revitalization strategy. Also in the 1990s, The City of Detroit applied for Hope VI Federal grants. This program was developed "to plan for the eradication of severely distressed public housing."<sup>21</sup> Hope VI has been instrumental in providing funds for the demolition and construction of new public housing in Detroit. Three projects are currently under construction, albeit in the exact same location as the demolished projects with only altered architectural characteristics. In most instances, stick framed townhouses have replaced brick veneered mega-blocks.

Will a wholesale replacement do anything more than superficially confront low-income housing? Are not the same structural

issues in place that persisted previously, only now, in a new form? Does the housing shortage that inspired black "pioneers" to venture into all white neighborhoods after the 1948 *Shelley v Kraemer / McGee v Sipes* Supreme Court ruling in favor of open housing still persist? In the wake of urban renewal, "black bottom" and "paradise valley" evaporated, many public housing sites have only recently begun to bustle again with tractors moving dirt after 15-plus years left untended, and Detroit's central city single-family housing stock has steadily dwindled since deindustrialization and decentralization became prominent characteristics of Detroit. Yes, the population of Detroit has declined, but I wonder if in tandem with the demand for housing.



*Opposite left: Edsel Ford Freeway, Detroit. Opposite right: House near Mack Ave. & Gratiot Ave.<sup>22</sup>*



Opposite: occupied housing in Detroit, 2010<sup>23</sup>; above: City of Detroit Master Plan, "Public Housing", 1951.<sup>24</sup>



*Harriet Tubman Apartments*



*Village at Parkside IV, rebuilt*



*Scattered Sites, formerly Jeffries Homes*



*Jeffries Homes, rebuilt*



*Garden View Apartments, formerly Herman Gardens*



*Village at Parkside II, rebuilt*



*Sojourner Truth, rebuilt*



*Diggs Jr. Homes, rebuilt*



*New Brewster Homes, formerly Brewster - Douglass*



*Emerald Springs, formerly Charles Terrace*



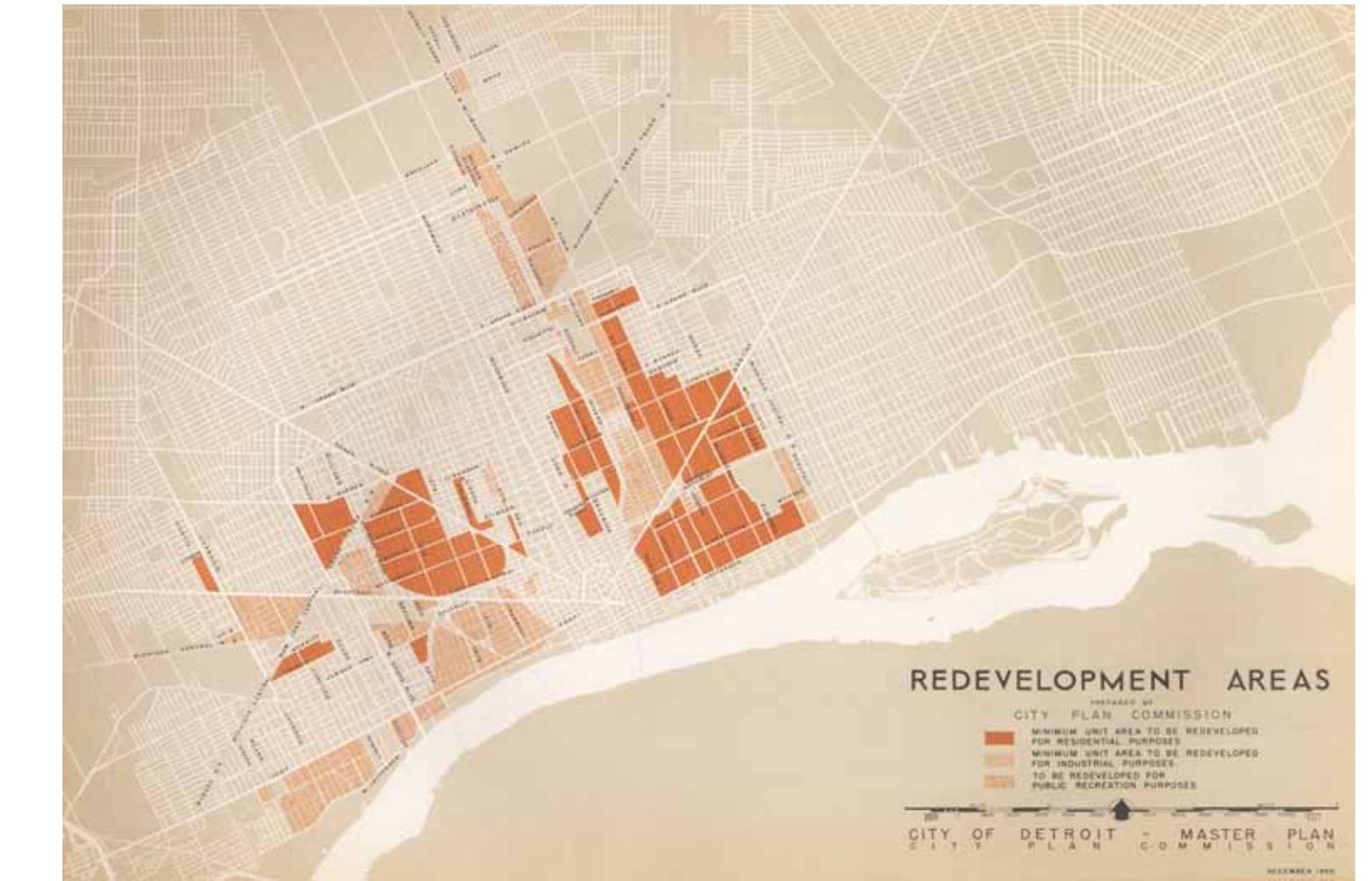
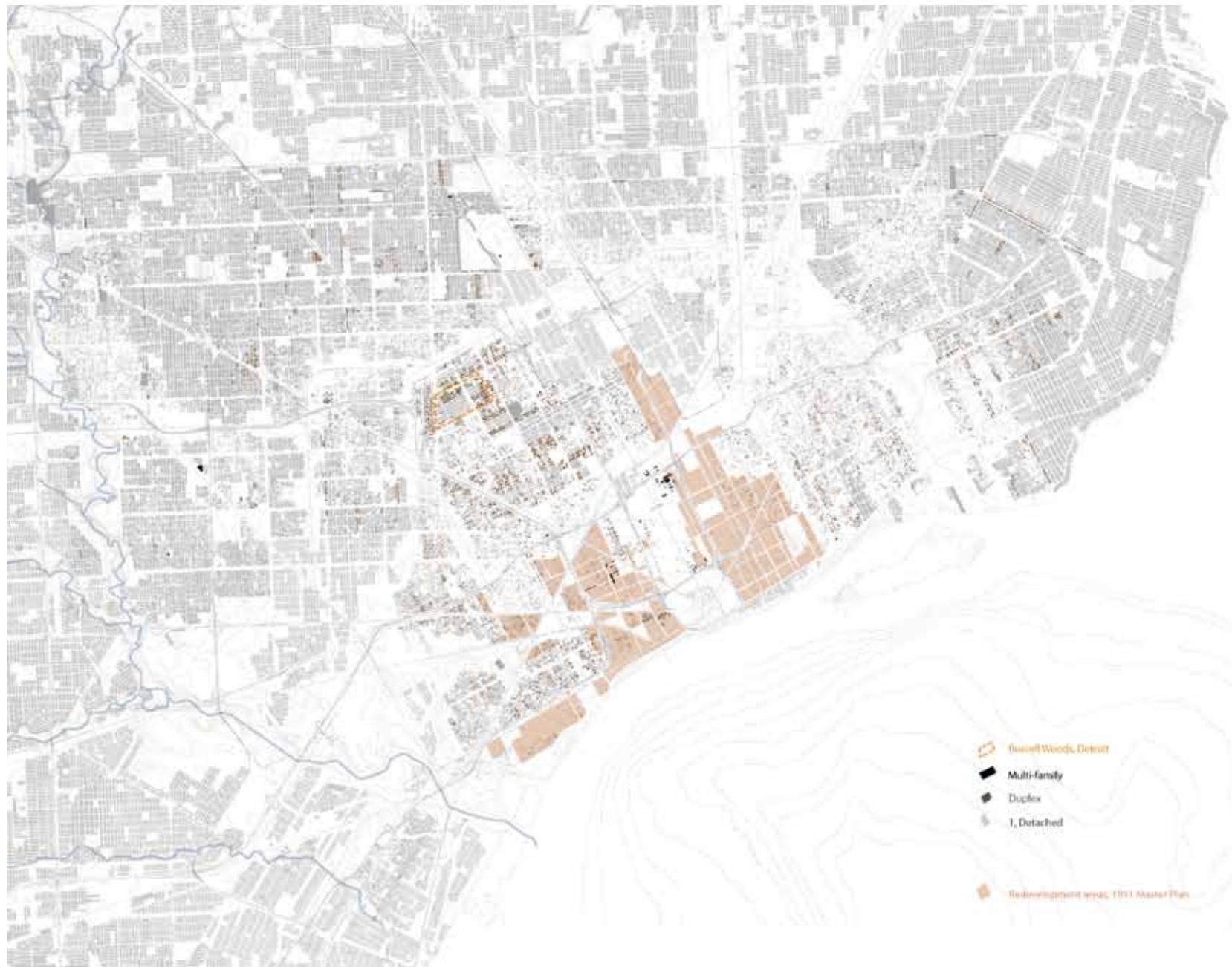
*Jeffries East, formerly Jeffries East*



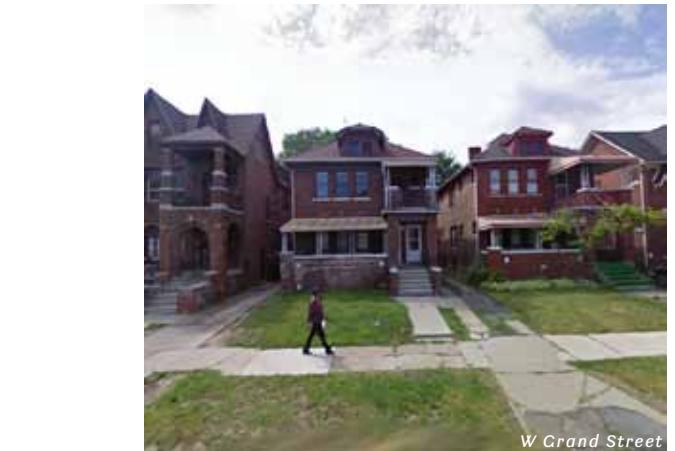
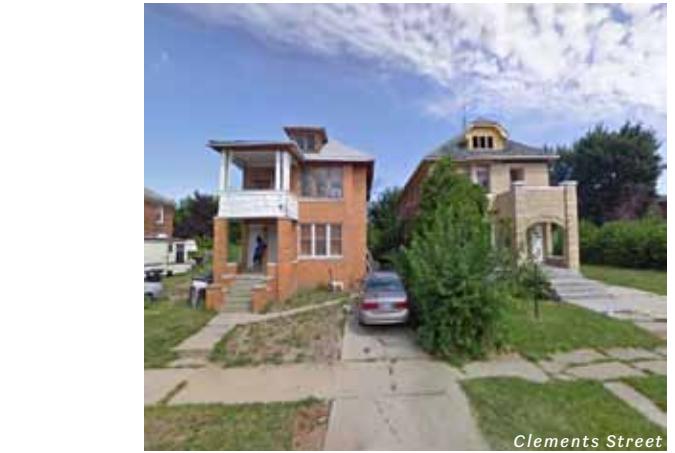
These modest and standardized houses in the photograph were built in 1927 for single blue-collar families and measure 2,600 ft<sup>2</sup>. The houses are located in and around the neighborhood of Russell Woods, which is situated within one of the largest areas not bisected by an expressway and in close proximity to the Central city and Hamtramck. The housing typologies emerging from this neighborhood stand in contrast to both suburban and public housing homogeneity and isolation. Today, most of these brick houses accommodate two residents.



*Blue-collar housing development, Detroit's West side, 1927.<sup>26</sup>*



Opposite: occupied housing in Detroit, 2010<sup>27</sup>; above: City of Detroit Master Plan, "Redevelopment Areas", 1951.<sup>28</sup>



Blue-collar housing development, Detroit's West side, 2010.<sup>29</sup>

1. Photograph of "Splitting: Four Corners". Gordon Matta-Clark. Englewood, NJ. 1974.
2. Photograph printed in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Thomas J. Sugrue. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press). 1996, 2005. p. 21.
3. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Census Bureau. *American Housing Survey for Detroit Metropolitan Area*, 2003.
4. "Shrinking Cities, Working Papers: Detroit". Office Philipp Oswalt. 2004. <http://www.shrinkingcities.com>. [accessed Jan 2011]
5. Detroit City Planning and Development Department. *Neighborhood Stabilization Program Plan*. Rev. January, 2009. p. 3.
6. Quoted in "Race, Ethnicity, and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration." Kenneth T. Jackson. *Journal of Urban History*, 6:4 1990. p. 420.

7. Michigan State Planning Commission. A *Study of Subdivision Development in the Detroit Metropolitan Area*. June, 1939. p. 20
8. See *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Thomas J. Sugrue. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press). 1996, 2005. Ch. 2: "Detroit's Time Bomb: Race and Housing in the 1940s". Also see *City: Urbanism and its End*. Douglas W. Rae. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Ch. 8: "Race, Place and the Emergence of Spatial Hierarchy." p. 254.
9. See *Origins*. Thomas J. Sugrue. 1996, 2005. Ch. 8: "Homeowners' Rights": White

- Resistance and the Rise of Antiliberalism".** p. 209.
10. Michigan State Planning Commission. A *Study of Subdivision Development in the Detroit Metropolitan Area*. June, 1939. p. 21
  11. Detroit City Plan Commission prepared a report in five parts consisting of: 1. *Proposed Plan for the Redevelopment of the Riverfront*, 1946; 2. *Proposed System of Recreational Facilities*, 1946; 3. *The Civic Center Plan*, 1946; 4. *Proposed System of Trafficways*, 1946; 5. *Proposed Generalized Land Use Plan: an explanation of a basic plan designed to make Detroit a better place to live and work*, 1947. pgs. 1, 12-15.

12. Detroit City Plan Commission. *Proposed System of Trafficways*. 1946. pgs. 1,8, 11.; *Proposed Generalized Land Use Plan: an explanation of a basic plan designed to make Detroit a better place to live and work*, 1947. pgs. 1, 12-15.
13. Time line from *Profile of a Metropolis: A Case Book*. Robert J. Mowitz & Deil S. Wright. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press). 1962. pgs. 25-26.
14. Document printed in *Origins* Thomas J. Sugrue. 1996, 2005. p. 21.
15. Detroit City Plan Commission. *Redevelopment Study: Selection of Areas and Assignment of Priorities*. June 1954. p. 6.
16. Photograph by Alex Mclean printed in *Stalking Detroit*. Georgia Daskalakis, Charles Waldheim and Jason Young, eds. (Barcelona: Actar, 2001). p. 152.
17. Map printed in *Case: Hilberseimer / Mies Van Der Rohe, Lafayette Park, Detroit*. Charles Waldheim, ed. (Munich: Prestel Verlag). 2004.
18. Photograph printed in *Origins*. Thomas J. Sugrue. 1996, 2005. p. 49.
19. *Ibid*. p. 20
20. *Detroit Empowerment Zone*. <http://www.detez.org/index.asp> [accessed, 2010].
21. *Hope VI*. <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/hope6> [accessed, 2010]. *Hope VI* is now *Choice Neighborhoods*.
22. Photographs by author, 2010.
23. Map by author, 2010.
24. *Detroit Master Plan*. Detroit City Plan Commission & The City of Detroit. 1951. "Public Housing". p. 89.
25. Photographs taken from Google Street Map, 2011.
26. Photograph printed in *Origins*. Thomas J. Sugrue. 1996, 2005. p. 21.
27. Map by author, 2010.
28. *Detroit Master Plan*. Detroit City Plan Commission & The City of Detroit. 1951.
29. Photographs taken from Google Street Map, 2011.