

# AIA Detroit: Urban Priorities Committee

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**The UPC** is a volunteer-driven committee of the American Institute of Architects' (AIA) Detroit Chapter. UPC members strive to be catalyst makers... applying a design-thinking approach to form and execute projects that enhance, or improve the perception of, Detroit's built environment.



In short, we strive to improve local neighborhoods, encourage design thinking, and build connections/ relationships.

## PAST PROJECTS/ PARTNERS

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2015 + 2016: **Michigan Avenue Pilot Project**

**Execution/** Lawrence Tech University, Habitat for Humanity, Michigan Avenue Business Association, Southwest Solutions

2014: **Michigan Ave Strategic Visioning/** Urban Design Unit- Detroit's Planning & Development Department

2013: **Jazzin' on Jefferson Pop-Ups/** Jefferson East Inc. (formerly Jefferson East Business Association)

2012: **Detroit Riverfront Competition & Symposium/** Cranbrook Academy of Art, Drinks x Design, The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, The Detroit Institute of Arts Museum, and architects Daniel Libeskind, Lola Sheppard & Walter Hood

## PRESS

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UPC projects, events, and team members have been featured in the following media & publications: Arch Daily, Architect Magazine, Detroit Free Press, Metropolis Magazine, MLIVE, Model D & WDET Detroit

## MISSION

*It is our mission to promote the sustainable development of Detroit by partnering with civic, business, and community leaders and engaging in projects that contribute to one or more of the following goals: 1) Creating- or contributing to the creation of- replicable and catalytic models for improvement; 2) Illustrating the capacity for design oriented solutions to impact communities; 3) Increasing visibility of- and sparking dialogue about- Detroit's design community, architecture, and urban environments.*

## Committee Overview

# AIA Detroit: Urban Priorities Committee

2014-Present



## PARTNERS

Acute E, LLC

Bridging Communities

Business + Building Owners

- Prince Valley
- Detroit Moped Work
- James Chung'

Chadsey Condon  
Community Organization

Community Residents

Habitat for Humanity

Lawrence Tech University

Local Artists

- Cynthia Casey
- "Sleep" McDowell

Southwest Solutions

Urban Design Unit (of  
Detroit's Planning and  
Development Department)

Zion Chapel

Etc.

## OVERVIEW

UPC members partnered with local stakeholders and the Urban Design Unit of Detroit's Planning and Development Department to create a vision for the Michigan Avenue commercial corridor (between Martin Ave and the Junction of the I-96 and I-75 freeways). While initially planned as a single-year visioning effort, the Michigan Avenue project has become a multi-phased effort to spark the corridor's revitalization through two tracks:

1. Long-term visioning and advocacy (which includes efforts that can only be accomplished with consistent investment of resources over substantial periods of time), and...
2. Short-term programming (that provides community stakeholders with something they can "latch onto:" visible and tangible evidence of progress).

These two concurrent tracks complement each other, and their interdependence is vital to our strategy.



## Michigan Avenue Project Brief



AlADetroitUPC@gmail.com . www.AlADetroit.com

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## Mi Town / P(ART)icipate! Pilot Project



**GOAL:** The UPC, Acute E LLC, and Southwest Solutions partnered with community members, stakeholders, and volunteers, as well as students and faculty members of local universities to execute a pilot that- rather than being a “one-off”, contributes - and/or lends additional momentum- to the larger vision of the Michigan Avenue Business Association and it's initiatives. While the goal of the (UPC) Mi Town Pilot is “o activate a portion of the commercial corridor on the south side of Michigan Avenue between Junction and 33rd streets as a demonstration of the Michigan Avenue Visioning Effort,” the goal of the (Acute E) P(ART)icipate! effort is “to improve the perception of returning citizens and blighted commercial corridors, by implementing low-cost low-risk design solutions that showcase the potential of each.”



**PROJECT PARTNERS:** Representatives (including members, residents, student, faculty, and alumni )of the following organizations and programs participated in this effort:

AIA Detroit  
Acute E, LLC  
Bridging Communities  
Habitat for Humanity  
Lawrence Tech University

Local Artists  
Local Business/ Building Owners  
Michigan Avenue Business Association  
Prison Creative Arts Project  
University of Michigan

## Michigan Avenue Project: 2015 - 16

# AIA Detroit: Urban Priorities Committee



## Mi Town / P(ART)icipate Pilot Project

### Combined Goals of Acute E and the Urban Priorities Committee:

#### 1. Shift Perceptions

- A.** Reduce stigma of blighted corridor and returning (or returned) citizens by showcasing corridor potential, returning citizens' talent, and providing a forum (or forums) for returning citizens to interact with locals residents.
- B.** Encourage local residents and stakeholders to impact their built environment in a way that is "positive" and meaningful.

#### 2. Showcase the Importance of Design + Designers:

- A.** The "power" of design (even low cost low risk design to have real and measurable impact upon a community) and, therefore...
- B.** Make the case for the utility of designers (especially architects)

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PHASE 1 (WINTER 2015) PROJECT OUTCOMES: The project was funded for two phases by a local non profit organization. Phase 1 outcomes (pictured below) included the following:

- Community Engagement activities (including "dot boards" and surveys to raise awareness and gather resident input re: the neighborhood and the 2014 vision
- Design and installation of bench/bike rack/planter modules constructed from reclaimed wood
- Design and installation of community engagement space at 5433 Michigan Avenue
- Mural and Window installations (inspired by community feedback/ input)
- December Project launch event to engage local residents and business owners

PHASE 2 (SPRING 2016): Phase 2 of the Pilot Project will include a vacant lot activation/ pocket park installation as well as various activities increase awareness, engagement, and participation of community residents.



## Michigan Avenue Project: 2015 - 16

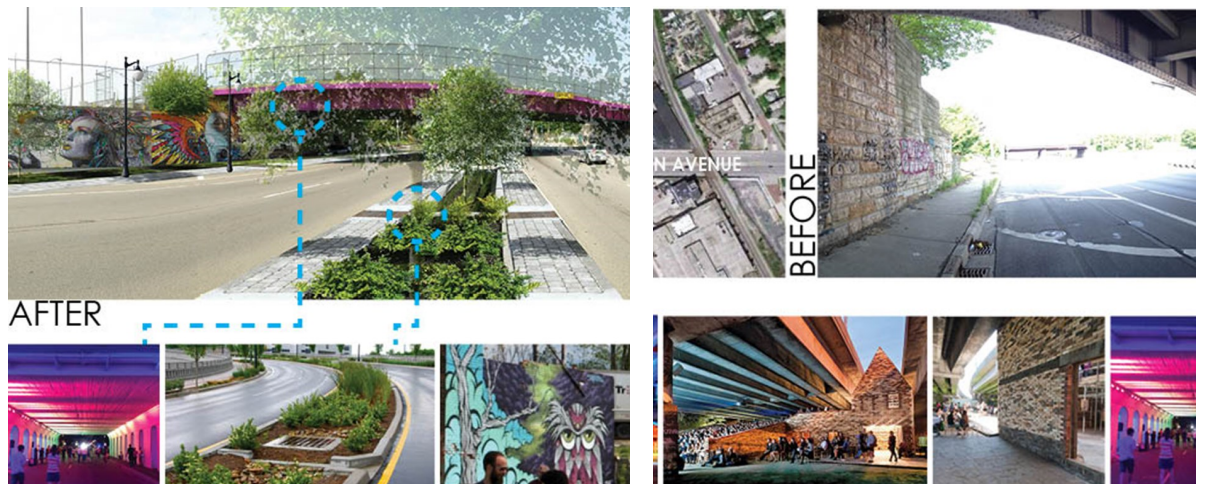
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## Potential Projects for 2016-2017



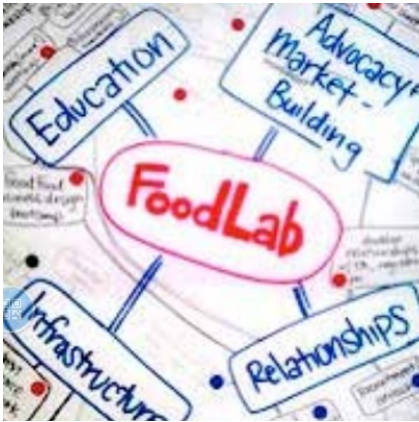
In response to concerns expressed by the stakeholders who live and work near Michigan Avenue, the UPC is considering potential projects for 2017, and the second half of 2016, that will make the corridor a more inviting and pedestrian-friendly space. Each (or either) project would be completed with intention of creating a replicable model for communities and cities to engage residents in the process of improving their streets and public spaces. CONCEPT 1: BUS STOP COMPETITION: Inspired by community design meetings that pointed out the need for better bus stops, the UPC could launch a competition to spur discussion and design around a city-wide problem. If this project is executed, the UPC will make an effort to engage our local transportation department, in addition to community residents and the City, to plan a national design competition. CONCEPT 2: VIADUCT ACTIVATION/ CORE CITY GATEWAY PROJECT: An effort to partner with community stakeholders, residents, and artists to transform viaducts/ overpass from imposing (visual and physical) "barriers" into welcoming spaces and community gateways.



## Michigan Avenue Project: 2016 - 17

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2015



"THE PROBLEM IS WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE DON'T KNOW": In 2015 the UPC was approached by Keep Growing Detroit, Detroit Food Lab, and the Detroit Food Academy. While, the organizations were planning to co-locate into a single space and were being approached by developers and building owners, they were unsure of where to start. As Devita Davison, of Food Lab Detroit stated: "The problem is that when a developer asks us what we need, we don't know. We don't know what we don't know."

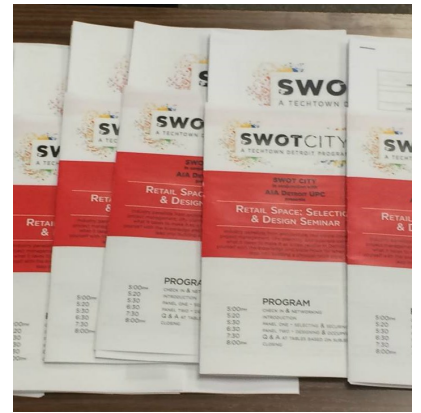
Rather than a formal program document (that identifies a scope of work), UPC members created a "considerations booklet" that included rough diagrams detailing space layout and flow approaches, as well as brief descriptions of potential spatial and location implications associated with selecting a specific approach (i.e. ideal building orientation, proximity to public transportation, opportunities for natural light, etc.) - with the intention that once the Food Lab Collective, chooses a building, that architects will be hired to complete a "formal program" and project design.



## Detroit Food Lab Collaborative

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2015



In collaboration with the Tech Town SWOT CITY program, the AIA Detroit's UPC worked to develop a workshop that connects local entrepreneurs and aspiring business owners with architects/designers, developers, and city code officials. The workshop was timed to align with Motor City Match: an effort to spur new retail development in Detroit by "matching" local building owners with business owners in need of retail and/or commercial space. Panelists provided information to equip would-be tenants with the knowledge and resources to make a more informed decision in selecting their space as well as an overview of the process of acquiring and renovating a space and the importance of engaging professional architects and designers.

## Techtown Retail Space Selection + Design

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2012-2013



JUNE ON JEFFERSON: In 2013, UPC members partnered with Jefferson East Inc. (formerly Jefferson East Business Association) and Revolve Detroit, as well as local entrepreneurs and artists to activate vacant retail space for June on Jefferson event, a month-long pop-up business series. UPC members acted as designers, installers and project managers. Project outcomes included Coffee and ( ), a coffee and bake shop, becoming a full-fledged business and permanent tenant of the Jefferson-Chalmers Pop-Up space.

DETROIT RIVERFRONT DESIGN COMPETITION: In 2012 the UPC conducted an international design competition to redesign public space along Detroit's downtown riverfront, including Hart Plaza. The goal of the project was to spark conversation re: the potential for Detroit's riverfront to become an even more engaging space, and to invite designers from the world over to provide their input. Within 8 weeks of the competition's launch, entries had been received from 18 countries in 4 continents, and the project's website had received over 175,000 hits from people in 100+ countries. Jurors included: Daniel Libeskind, Reed Kroloff, Walter Hood, Faye Nelson and Lola Sheppard.



Earlier Efforts