

# Community Resilience Hubs: Everyday and Emergency Infrastructure in Detroit's Neighborhoods

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**In Detroit, community hubs are emerging as essential sites for a myriad of services contributing to both short term disaster response and long term community resilience. Community hubs have long been spaces of convening, information sharing and other elements of social infrastructure for all ages. Increasingly, hubs are intentional spaces for cultural production and community cohesion, contributing to strong neighborhood networks, as well as sites for disaster response, including heating and cooling in cases of emergency and provision of health supplies and food. This paper documents an ongoing research-based professional project focusing on existing community resilience hubs in two Detroit neighborhoods that meet everyday community needs and offer opportunities for a more robust collective network that integrates emergency preparedness and building performance to enable function in times of crisis. This work includes study of hubs in other cities and considers the link between cultural and climate resilience and how community hubs are spaces for both. This project is part of a larger collaborative planning process that centers resilience and health equity outcomes, focusing on access to resources in Detroit neighborhoods of varying density. This includes visions for current and future hubs that contribute to local definitions of resiliency.**

## INTRODUCTION

In Detroit, as in many cities, community hubs are emerging as essential sites of both social and physical infrastructure. Long-standing intergenerational gathering spaces, hubs embedded in neighborhoods serve to underscore community and celebrate culture. In recent years, community hubs are trending nationally and internationally as spaces to help people meet dire needs in climate and health emergencies. In Miami, mobile resilience hubs house service providers and cell phones chargers alike. In Toronto, hubs house multiple nonprofit organizations, host youth programming and are coupled with emergency preparedness plans. In Detroit, community hubs are gaining traction as trusted spaces to distribute food, find personal protective equipment, file flood claims, cool down, warm up, create media and do Zumba. Sustainability leaders

are collaborating to mount solar panels and storage on hubs and demonstrate green stormwater best management practices. Importantly, community hubs in Detroit augment more centralized municipal recreation centers, creating a dispersed resident-led model for resilient social and spatial infrastructure ingrained in neighborhoods. This opportunity for a dispersed network of resource provision and community connection offers more accessible ways for residents to access both everyday and emergency resources.

This paper will share ongoing research and planning pertaining to existing community hubs in Detroit spearheaded by resident leaders, supported by community development partners and building performance technical assistance. The assessment offers lessons from hyperlocal hubs for design, programming, and sustainable features for spaces grounded in neighborhoods that meet a myriad of community needs. The presentation of Detroit hubs focuses on two neighborhoods – Springwells in Southwest Detroit and Good Stock on the city's eastside. This work is part of a larger ongoing and research-informed planning effort in both areas centering strategies for responsive and resilient planning, community connections, and access to health resources in Detroit neighborhoods of varying density. This larger body of work focuses on supporting thriving communities that are self-reliant in the face of future hardships. The in-progress planning process and engagement findings are documented here as context for community hubs in their relationship to neighborhood fabric.

## PLANNING FOR RESILIENT HUBS + NEIGHBORHOODS

This project is couched in three current areas of research and practice that have implications for planning, design, policy, and social service delivery, among other essential elements of neighborhood life. Planning for resilience is top of mind worldwide as climate change impacts regional and neighborhood norms. Related work and research is layered, including: general sustainability planning toward more resource-efficient and healthy neighborhoods; emergency preparedness planning for cases of climate catastrophe such as extreme heat and major storm events; climate-impacted infrastructure such as massive flooding associated with stronger and more frequent storms coupled with aging and inadequate infrastructure; and public



Figure 1. Key planning categories determined through an analysis of health and sustainability planning frameworks. Engagement materials seek community feedback on related assets and deficits in Detroit neighborhoods. Image credit Detroit Collaborative Design Center (DCDC).

health emergencies where access to resources, information and safety supplies is critical.<sup>1</sup>

Social infrastructure as a key element of community resilience is likewise a prominent current area of study rooted in history. The importance of social networks and the spaces that enable and support civic life and engagement are well-documented and well-funded.<sup>2</sup> Social infrastructure and “civic commons” contribute to healthier communities, greater access to information, resources, and neighbors that in turn contribute to more resilient networks of people. An important new term is also pertinent here: cultural resilience.<sup>3</sup> Culture contributes to social infrastructure as an essential element of community wellbeing. In Detroit, cultural connections and celebration are the underpinnings of social networks and community spaces.

Finally, resilience hubs are gaining traction as an emerging element of regional, municipal and neighborhood infrastructure. There are many interpretations of “resilience hubs” in the field today, including disaster response sites, collective social service centers, heating and cooling centers, and dispersed health clinics, some modeled on the community school concept.<sup>4</sup> The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) leads the field with an initiative focused on resilience hubs as “community-serving facilities augmented to support residents and coordinate resource distribution and services before, during, or after a natural hazard event. They leverage established, trusted, and community-managed facilities that are used year-round as neighborhood centers for community-building activities.”<sup>5</sup> This model merges sustainable building performance with community services and emergency response, and includes guidelines for implementation and design.

## RESILIENCE + HEALTH EQUITY PLANNING WITH DETROIT NEIGHBORHOODS

A larger planning project with two distinct Detroit neighborhoods provides a backdrop for hubs research and documentation. This ongoing practice-based and research-informed effort is planning for thriving communities that are healthier and more resilient day to day and when facing challenges related to climate, health, and other emergencies. The planning project will result in actionable steps for neighborhoods that benefit existing residents and communities of color. The focus geography of this work is the eastside’s Good Stock area and Springwells in Southwest Detroit, neighborhoods of varying density and character that both have recent land use plans in place and robust community development leadership and social infrastructure to build upon. The planning effort will result in community level strategies as well as guidelines for other neighborhoods throughout the city and policy recommendations.

### *Team + Operating Values*

The highly collaborative project team includes the Detroit Collaborative Design Center at the University of Detroit Mercy as design lead, neighborhood based community development organizations Eastside Community Network (ECN) and Urban Neighborhood Initiatives (UNI) and the Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD), as well as national advisors and local funders. The team established project values at the outset of the process including both operating values (center care in the process, work proactively, be adaptable, prioritize building relationships, language inclusivity) and outcomes values (led by neighbor priorities, honor existing





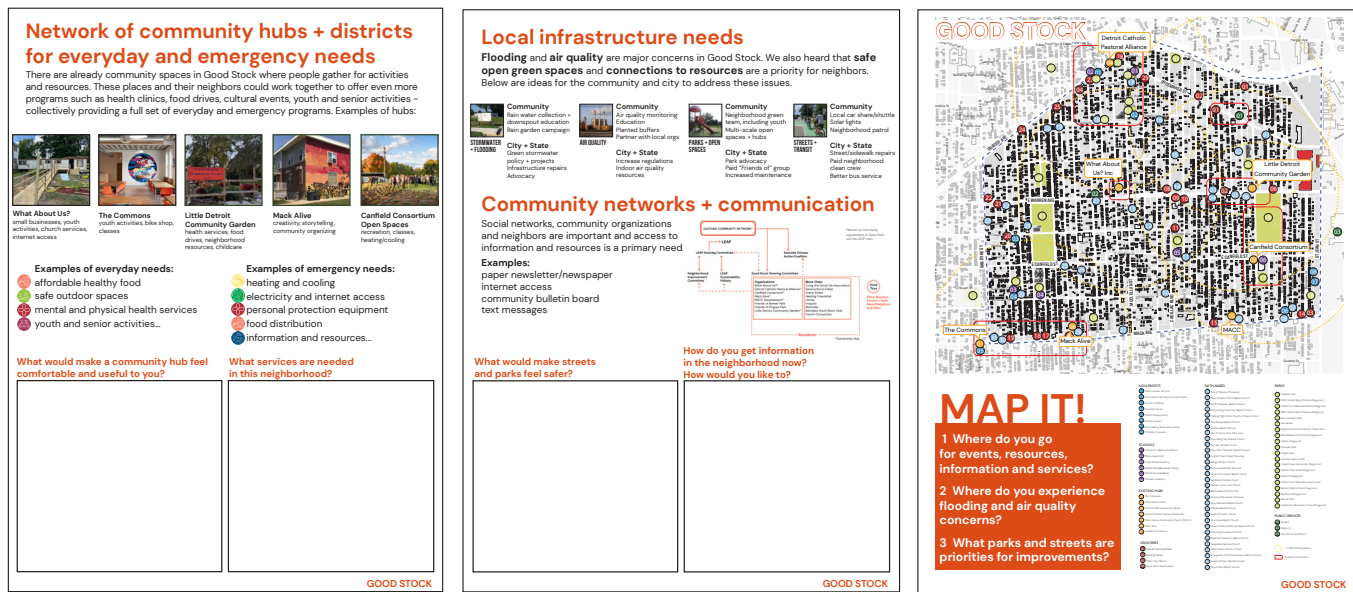


Figure 4. Example engagement materials from Good Stock including distribution of community hubs in the Good Stock area. Image credit DCDC.

and a sense of safety walking through the neighborhood as primary needs. In both communities, creating safe spaces for children was continuously elevated. As on the eastside, community connections were specified as a necessary element of a healthy neighborhood, and cultural assets were identified as both a strength and opportunity.

### COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HUBS: LESSONS FROM DETROIT AND LEVERAGING OTHER PLACES

In both Good Stock and Springwells an emphasis on the importance of social networks and access to information and resources, as well as urgent climate and health equity concerns, speak to the importance of community hubs that house emergency services and resources and also serve a convening role, contributing to social infrastructure that reinforces channels of communication and builds trust in the community spaces themselves. Both neighborhoods boast assets in the form of existing community hubs, resident leaders and organizational conveners, and strong cultural identity. The newly formed Southwest Organizing Network is part of the convening team for the work presented here and includes representatives from five grassroots community development groups that offer grounded cultural programming and social services as well as shared spaces for convening, performing, playing, working and organizing as central to their work and operation. On the eastside, the lead community development organization ECN convenes a civic network known as LEAP, with residents serving in leadership and on committees. These resident leaders in turn run block clubs, local nonprofits, youth groups, community gardens and more, which offer physical space to meet, break bread and offer programming that meets locally defined needs. This distribution and mix of spaces contributes to a dispersed

model of micro hubs that, with support, have to potential to grow and further meet both daily and emergency needs as a holistic neighborhood network.

### Programming + Spatial Considerations

Everyday and emergency programming contributes to the current efficacy and future potential of Detroit's hubs. This project includes documentation of local and national hub models. In an analysis of existing hubs in both neighborhoods, as well as a handful from other cities, frequent and primary areas of programming emerged: youth and education; senior activities, career development; health and wellness; arts and culture; faith; and food. In Springwells, three relatively new organizational spaces by project partners UNI, Grace in Action, and Inside Southwest Detroit are located in close proximity, offering a series of programmed community spaces. One hub, 8869 Avis, houses Inside Southwest Detroit programs that include graffiti art workshops, radio broadcasts, storytelling events, and low-rider meet ups, among other creative pursuits. This work is derived from and responsive to neighborhood interests and emphasizes youth activities. Another faith-based hub around the corner houses worker-owned start-up businesses, an equitable internet initiative, and community organizing space. And a few blocks over, a new youth center and resilience hub houses a bike shop and youth leadership meetings, which will soon spill out to an outdoor classroom on a lot across the street.<sup>11</sup> In Springwells, youth programming, arts and culture, and community organizing are the prominent hub programs. In terms of design considerations, arts integration in the built environment is central across spaces, with murals adorning many surfaces and ironwork created by local craftsmen lending a sense of security. Another constant is indoor space coupled

with and spilling out into outdoor gathering spaces designed with intention. At present, sustainable building features are not in play at these sites, but this current planning work is leading to discussions of water catchment, solar power, and other localized measures of resilience. the planning process also seeks to identify an additional layer of resource distribution at hubs where people are already gathering in spaces for arts, culture, and entrepreneurship.

On the eastside, and in Good Stock in particular, community hubs take different forms. What About Us, Inc. and the Belvidere Youth Block Club now have a trailer they are converting into a resiliency hub, with aspirations of generator power to lend additional emergency purpose to the space they now use for youth tutoring, workshops and organizing. MACC Development is housed in The Commons, a coffee shop, laundromat and community space that hosts a myriad of meetings and events at all scales. Two open space initiatives at varying scales are contributing to neighborhood health and wellness via cooking classes, a community garden, and recreational activities in a city park with limited infrastructure and a robust history. On the eastside, in these community hubs and others, youth activities and health and wellness programming are prominent.

Importantly, ECN is a leader in the community resilience hub momentum on the eastside and are modeling a holistic hub in the Stoudamire Wellness Hub.<sup>12</sup> The Stoudamire follows the USDN model and houses a robust set of everyday programming including organized Zumba, bingo, comedy hour and the like. It also hosts resident leadership and organizing events and has served as a site for filing flood claims and picking up PPE, two essential climate and health related emergency services in the last few years. And now, along with two other eastside hubs, The Stoudamire will benefit from significant investment in solar power and green stormwater infrastructure as a means to model sustainable practices and create spaces of refuge in cases of climate emergency, offering heating and cooling as well as charging, internet and more. The mix of programs builds community throughout the year so that residents might feel comfortable accessing critical resources and information in times of need.

*Leveraging Other Models*

While community resilience hubs are increasingly discussed and implemented both nationally and internationally, and many models are included in the team’s research, this paper will comment briefly on the Community Resilience Hub Program in Baltimore. There, six community-managed resilience hubs located in community centers, churches, schools and other publicly accessible buildings are designed to provide safe shelter, backup electricity, fresh water, medical supplies and services, and other resources during weather-related emergencies. Additionally, the city plans to collect and analyze data to identify gaps in services, support, and outreach. That

Location	Organization	Space	Youth & Education	Senior	Career Development & Resources	Health & Wellness	Arts & Cultural Enrichment	Faith	Community Engagement & Service	Food	Meetings / Community Org space
SW Detroit	Grace in Action (GIA)	GIA Church	Guitar Classes		Crafting Classes Data Security & Privacy Classes Digital Literacy Classes		Breakdancing classes Art & Clay camp	Sunday Services & Liturgy			
SW Detroit	Grace in Action (GIA)	Family Night Building					Friday Nights - Singing	Friday Nights - Prayer		Friday nights - Dinner	
SW Detroit	Inside Southwest Detroit	8889 Avila Green Space Project?									Workshops Events Private office meetings?
SW Detroit	UNI		Hanging out & socializing Programming for multiple youth groups Gaming Leadership development & Skills Training			Bike building class Park Conservation & Beautification education	Evaluation & Storytelling Art workshops				Meeting space for multiple UNI & Youth groups
SW Detroit	UNI	Los HQ	Youth leadership development & leadership programs			Short-term counseling services					Meeting space for groups
SW Detroit	Garage Cultural	3439 Livernois	Educational programs?		Educational programs?		Art on the block Public art installations				
GS	MACC Development	The Commons	Literacy events After school Tutoring Business NO COST Harris Literacy Program	Senior Laundry Days	Digital Wednesdays	Plant Sales Healthy Foods for events	Open Mic Nights Digital Wednesdays				
GS	Mack Alive	Mack Alive Community Resource Center	Outdoor Summer Program After school homework for kids			Butterfly Pollinator and Art Garden Partnership for drug free Detroit	Annual Parade and Rally Ambassador Fine Art Curators			Food Bank	
GS	What about us?	Building Canfield Consortium Lots?				Outdoor Summer Program			Parent Community meetings		Parent Community meetings
GS	Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance	Building	Youth programming	Senior Network	housing development and outreach training sessions		Worship & Service Urban Parish Coalition	Change Makers Community Action Committee			
GS	Little Detroit Community Garden	Garden	Tutoring Youth Volunteering		DIY Kits	Plant workshops Harvesting	Kwanzas events?		Volunteering Food & Resource Dives		
Eastside	ECN	Stoudamire Wellness Hub			Digital Technology education Environmental education Political engagement	Health Management, prevention, treatment	Podcast and studio recording equipment			Food & Nutritional resources	
Eastside	?	New Leroy Building in AB Ford Park									

Figure 5. Snapshot of an in progress analysis of community hubs in Detroit’s neighborhoods. Image credit DCDC.

information can then inform decisions about the location and services of future hubs. These hubs are embedded in neighborhoods and repurpose existing buildings, retrofitted for a more resilient future. Importantly, community leaders run each site, localizing the hub and contributing to a welcoming and rooted space.<sup>13</sup> In Baltimore, hubs are city-run. While Detroit too has municipally sanctioned heating and cooling centers housed in recreation centers and schools, they are deployed at an institutional scale with limited capacity to build community cohesion, social networks and trust.

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

*Dispersed Hub Network*

A dispersed network of community hubs, and resourcing existing trusted community spaces to function as spaces for neighborhood resilience, reinforces social connections and creates a denser and more trusted field of community nodes, and in turn supports social interaction and infrastructure.

*Build Trust and Social Infrastructure*

Hubs have the potential to couple with neighborhood network building efforts and support community connections by creating spaces for organizing and coming together on a regular basis for basic needs, everyday activities and a sense of community. Leveraging existing hubs maximizes trust building. Community organizations and leaders provide scaffolding for

social infrastructure that contributes to a sense of community wellbeing and vitality.

#### *Focus on Access, Youth and Culture*

Essential program areas in hubs that bridge daily and emergency needs include an emphasis on access to resources, space and information, as well as youth activities, and the celebration of local culture that reflects local character and creativity. A balance between cultural activities and other programming layered with essential services supports access and also has the capacity to link residents to broader networks and grassroots resources.

#### *Build Resilient Physical Infrastructure*

Sustainable building features, most notably solar installations and generators that allow for essential functions during climate emergencies, enable hubs to serve a greater and more adaptable purpose tied to resilience in times of crisis. Furthermore, hubs integrating open space provide increased opportunities for community connection and access.

#### *Further Work*

This planning, research and hub documentation effort is ongoing. In Detroit, it coincides with the development of a citywide climate action strategy and the opportunity for investment in cultural resilience hubs as well as a regional focus on emergency preparedness at the national level. This collaborative effort aims to strengthen ongoing community-led work toward more healthy and resilient neighborhoods that are hyperlocal in terms of on the ground strategies and policy implications, with an emphasis on a dispersed network of community hubs as physical and social infrastructure that meet everyday and emergency needs.

## ENDNOTES

1. This body of work includes a wide ranging set of literature and professional work. The research that contributes to the planning effort depicted here includes research on planning for healthy and sustainable cities as well as emerging literature on planning for climate change.
2. A leader in research and publication on social infrastructure is Eric Klinenburt. Spatial implications of civic infrastructure are captured in his *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (Crown, 2018).
3. Meghan Venable-Thomas. *Can Creative Placemaking Be a Tool for Building Community Resilience?* Harvard University (dissertation), 2018.
4. Hubs considered in this documentation process include Baltimore Community Resilience Hub Program, New York's Neighborhood Health Action Centers, Vancouver's Resilient Neighborhoods, and others in Miami, Toronto, Minneapolis, Orlando and Oakland.
5. USDN's Resilience Hub document is robust and can be found here: <https://www.usdn.org/resilience-hubs.html>
6. Planning frameworks considered include: Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative; Change Labs; 9 Dimensions of Wellness; Enterprise Community Partners' Cultural Resilience work; Social Determinants of Health; Ecodistrict Protocol; Detroit Sustainability Action Agenda; ULI Building Healthy Places Toolkit; Pair of ACEs; UN Sustainable Development Goals; 7 Generations; Blue Zones
7. These past plans are specified because they either mark citizen-led planning efforts centering community development and environmental justice and/or link health and policy. More information can be found at the respective websites: PUSH Buffalo (<https://www.pushbuffalo.org/>); LVEJO (<http://www.lvejo.org/>); Health in All Policies (<https://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/2575/Health-in-All-Policies>); Take Care New York (<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/about/about-doh/take-care-new-york.page>). Additionally Dr. Jason Corburn has published extensively on health policy in Richmond, CA.
8. In total nearly 100 surveys were collected at a series of community events in Good Stock led by residents over the course of summer 2022. More than 250 surveys were collected in Springwells working in partnership with Urban Neighborhood Initiative, who went door to door in the neighborhood.
9. Stellantis environmental violations are well documented and extensively reported, including this national news coverage: Gabrielle Coppola, *Detroit Jeep Plant's Paint Fumes Trigger Air Quality Violation*, Bloomberg, March 29, 2022 (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-29/detroit-jeep-plant-s-paint-fumes-trigger-air-quality-violation>).
10. The Lower Eastside Action Plan is chronicled here: <https://www.ecn-detroit.org/leap>
11. Read more here: Kyla Wright, *Resilient Neighborhoods: This new youth center just opened its doors in SW Detroit, Model D*, October 19, 2021 (<https://www.modeldmedia.com/features/resilient-neighborhoods-LOS-HQ-southwest-detroit-youth-center.aspx>).
12. The Stoudamire Wellness Hub: <https://www.ecn-detroit.org/stoudamire>. More context: David Sands, *Climate resilience hubs find a foothold on Detroit's East Side by helping residents face disasters*, Planet Detroit, December 9, 2021 (<https://planetdetroit.org/2021/12/climate-resilience-hubs-find-a-foothold-on-detroits-east-side-by-helping-residents-face-disasters/>).
13. More information on Baltimore's Community Resilience Hub Program: <https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/baltimore-resiliency-hub-program/>. More context: Jared Brey, *Resiliency Hubs Help Baltimore Plan for Climate Emergency in Vulnerable Neighborhoods*, Next City, August 6, 2021 (<https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/resiliency-hubs-help-baltimore-plan-for-climate-emergency-among-vulnerable>)