Civic Park Ubuntu Village Conceptual Framework

“I am because WE are”

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About the Civic Park Ubuntu Village

Civic Park was once the embodiment of the American Dream, built specifically for middle-class workers from local General Motors plants, but as America’s economy changed so too did Civic Park. As GM's presence in Flint dwindled, Civic Park was faced with massive disinvestment and decline. Located in the heart of Civic Park, Urban Renaissance Center (URC) launched in 2014 as a response to the neighborhood’s plight and spent years working hand-in-hand with residents of the neighborhood and Flint leaders to develop solutions that align with the needs expressed by the community. Over this time we launched a variety of demonstration and pilot programs to explore solutions to various community needs. Now, we are organizing all our community development programs under one overarching concept—the Ubuntu Village.

What is Ubuntu?

From a Zulu term meaning “humanity towards others,” Ubuntu is a philosophy of human development that recognizes the innate humanity of all members of a community. Ubuntu is grounded in the understanding that all people are connected in a common network or mutuality and that the thriving of one member of that community depends on the thriving of all other members.

What is Ubuntu Village?

Ubuntu Village is a community transformation project of Urban Renaissance Center (URC). Building upon the African philosophy of Ubuntu, URC is building a community that recognizes the intrinsic value of interconnectedness and that believes in the universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. The project operates at the intersection of people and place to create equitable and holistic strategies for community revitalization using a two-pronged approach:

1. Provide critical supports to help community meet basic needs
2. Foster neighborhood conditions that encourage residents to realize their individual and collective potential and create new economic opportunities for themselves and their community.
Decades of disinvestment and systemic marginalization have taught the urban population we serve in Civic Park to underappreciate their individual talents and the value they can provide to their family, neighbors, and community through their unique skills and gifts, regardless of employment status. URC seeks to reverse this trend by bringing the full breadth of its social enterprise, workforce development, and community revitalization resources to bear on a 15-block area in Flint’s Civic Park neighborhood. Through Ubuntu Village, URC seeks to create a thriving and sustainable community that supports the common welfare of all residents.

– A New Paradigm in Community Development –

For far too long and for many of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our community, planning and community development has been a colonial process, with standards of community welfare and urban renewal being imposed upon the community. In the past, institutional and government interests have been the primary agents of community transformation and have been allowed to dictate the terms upon which communities flourish and grow. For communities of color, such as Civic Park, these dictates have too often meant wholesale disinvestment, crime, gentrification and displacement, property abandonment, and chronic unemployment.

Ubuntu Village represents a new vision for equitable and inclusive community development. Through the project, residents reclaim ownership of their community by becoming active agents of community change. Through events, festivals, workshops, resource fairs, cleanups, and other projects, URC has engaged hundreds of community members in the ongoing work of revitalization. Through the unified and strategic deployment of social services in conjunction with physical transformation, Ubuntu Village sets a new standard in community development; mobilizing grassroots resources along with institutional expertise to foster a healthy, safe, and economically viable neighborhood that retains and celebrates its uniquely rich cultural character.

In 2019, Civic Park celebrates its centennial. With Ubuntu Village, we inaugurate the next 100 years with a renewed community spirit and integrity, as we work collectively to build a neighborhood in which social wellbeing, spiritual harmony, and physical environment work collectively to allow all members of the community to flourish and thrive.
Civic Park Ubuntu Village Projects

Urban Renaissance Center Community Hub
Conference and training facility that serves as a hub for activities within the Ubuntu Village. The space includes a computer lab, conference space, offices, game room, recording studio, commercial kitchen, and auditorium.

Health and Wellness House
Referrals to primary care, vision and dental services, transportation to health providers, support groups, violence prevention, trauma and grief counseling, and various wellness programs to encourage healthier lifestyles.

Civic Park Centennial Pavilion
Outdoor concerts, plays, worship services, weddings, events, family activities.

Rebounding Force Transition House
Temporary housing for graduates of URC’s Rebounding Readiness workplace readiness program, providing young men with a safe, supportive environment while they begin their career journey.

Heritage House
Restoration of a historic house in the Civic Park neighborhood to display and store artifacts, archive stories as a National Site of Consciousness, and encourage engagement between UM-Flint and the community.

Agricultural Land & Facility
Partnership with local and international experts on urban agriculture to renovate a formerly vacant home into a facility for teaching community gardening and basic agricultural concepts to urban populations.

Children’s Learn & Play House
A place where children can enjoy fun activities while participating in learning activities, coaching, mentorship, and tutoring services. Home of the Claressa Shields Community Project Summer Youth Camp.

Services Currently Offered in the Village
- Health Screening and Referrals
- Counseling and Mental Health Screenings
- Workforce Readiness Training
- Employment Services
- Youth Summer Camp
- Mindfulness Education
- Veteran Support
- Weekly Walking Clubs
- Food and Water Distribution
- Transitional Housing
- Lead Abatement
- Neighborhood Beautification
- Gardening Education
- Computer Lab & Technology Education

Planned Village Services
- Affordable Housing
- Healthy Food Education and Preparation
- Demonstration Kitchen
- Women’s Services
- Historical Archiving and Preservation
About Civic Park

One of America's first planned subdivisions

Over 1,000 homes with many homeowners and long-term residents who pride themselves as Civic Park residents

"We've just seen a community that had been written off come back," McCathern said Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2015, after the Genesee County Land Bank announced that $2.6 million in federal funds would pay to demolish 225 blighted houses in Civic Park

Civic Park Historic District was designated in 1979 as a National Register of Historic Places - Historic District

UM-Flint Outreach and Social Work Departments have agreed to walk alongside the residents of Civic Park in re-imaging the neighborhood in line with Flint Master Plan designation as a Green Neighborhood

St. Luke N.E.W. Life Center, Haskell Community Center and the Urban Renaissance Center are anchors

Several major parks surround Civic Park, making it ideal for outdoor recreation and family activities

Ubuntu Village is made possible with the support of