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This report was prepared by undergraduate and graduate students in the Urban and Regional Planning Practicum Course at Michigan State University, Spring 2012.

The MSU Practicum Team wishes to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the members of the St. Martha's Planning Session in their effort to revitalize the City of Detroit. Their strong community leadership is an example for all.

ST. MARTHA'S COMMONS COMMUNITY VISION



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27 APRIL 2012

Michigan State University

# St. Martha's Commons Community Vision

MSU Practicum Team

SPRING 2012





# St. Martha's Commons Community Vision

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Spring Semester 2012  
MSU Practicum Team





*Presbyterian Villages of Michigan : Courtesy PVM*



Presbyterian Villages of Michigan  
Roger L. Myers, CEO  
26200 Lahser Road, Ste. 300  
Southfield, Michigan 48033

RE: St. Martha's Commons Vision Project  
City of Detroit  
Wayne County, Michigan

Dear Mr. Myers:

Pursuant to your request we have prepared a report that provides a vision for the property known as the St. Martha's Commons and the surrounding neighborhood. In addition to a vision for the site, you will find included: regional and neighborhood descriptions, pertinent area demographics, strategies for encouraging community involvement and obtaining financing, and other analyses. In addition to delivering the report in bound and digital format, we have provided you with digital copies of the report which we hope you and your colleagues will find beneficial. This assignment was completed by undergraduate and graduate students in Urban and Regional Planning at Michigan State University. We would like to thank you, your staff, and your partners on the St. Martha's Planning Session for the opportunity to prepare this report.

Respectfully,

The MSU Urban and Regional Planning Student Team

Lauren A. Chapman

Patrick D. Crawford

Michael R. French

Christopher T. Hughes

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*St. Martha's Episcopal Church Nave*



The MSU Practicum Team would like to thank the MSU Urban and Regional Planning Department and the St. Martha's Planning Team for making our participation in this project possible. We would particularly like to thank our Professors Rex LaMore and John Melcher for their guidance and inspiration, Richard Wooten of MSU Extension Services for providing us with background materials and information on the project, Roger L Myers of Presbyterian Villages and John Kerr of Canterbury on the Lake for keeping us updated and informed and guiding our tour of the buildings at St. Martha's, and Andrea Felice and Presbyterian Villages for graciously hosting Planning Team meetings and lunches. We would like to recognize the following individuals and organizations as contributors to and members of the St. Martha's Commons Planning Team.

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Village of St. Martha's

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Christ Child House

John Kerr  
Canterbury on the Lake

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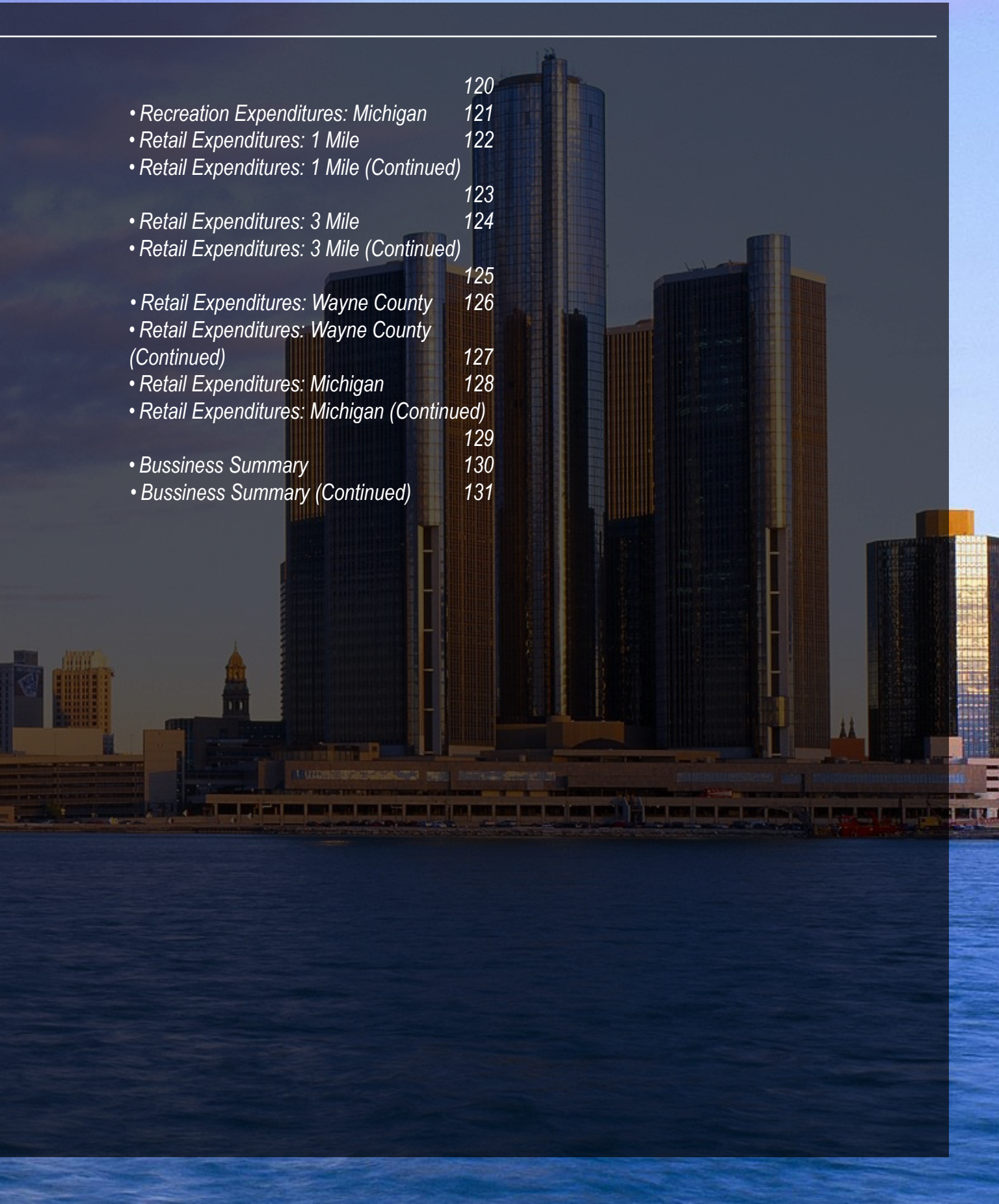
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*St. Martha's Church Interior Scene*

# Executive Summary

"St. Martha's Commons Community Vision" was prepared on behalf of Canterbury on the Lake and Presbyterian Villages of Michigan (PVM) by Michigan State University students in the Urban and Regional Planning Program capstone practicum course. Canterbury, PVM and their partners on the St. Martha's Commons Planning Team have been working over the past year to develop a plan for reuse and redevelopment of St. Martha's Episcopal Church and surrounding sites. The property is located on the south side of Joy Road, west of Greenfield Road, in Detroit, Michigan. The MSU Practicum Team joined the project with the goal of creating a report that will aid the planning team in pursuing their revitalization objectives. Accordingly, the scope of this report encompasses: targeted

demographic data; a profile of community assets; an inventory and description of the parcels in the study area; a determination of strengths and weaknesses of the site and the surrounding neighborhood; conclusions about the needs and character of the neighborhood in the context of its past, present, and future; and a vision for the reuse and repurposing of the subject site with specific recommendations. The primary methodology used in achieving these objectives includes: gathering and compiling of demographic data; cataloguing of existing improvements and conditions; surveying community stakeholders; utilizing regional benchmarks for comparison to local data; and limiting recommendations and conclusions to elements that are supported by the data gathered.

The overall study area is an 85 acre site comprised of 36 contiguous tax parcels bounded by Joy Road to the north, Greenfield Road to the east, Metattal Road to the west, and the CSX Railroad to the south and west. Within this study area is an approximately 20 acre focus site comprised of four contiguous tax parcels, more or less rectangular in shape and fronting the south side of Joy Road approximately ½ mile west of the corner of Joy and Greenfield Roads. This smaller study area is the primary focus of this report, viewed within the context of the broader study area.

Properties in the overall study area are used for a myriad of uses including commercial, industrial, multi-family residential, group care homes, and institutional uses including churches, a mosque, a K-12 school, and a community college. Vacant properties include the community college, the K-12 school, some multi-family housing, and the churches. The 20 acre focus area includes institutional and group home uses on four parcels. First, the property includes the presently unused St. Martha's Episcopal Church. Second, the Village of St. Martha's independent senior living facility is located directly west of the church property. Third, a group of buildings that was previously the St. Peter's Home for Boys is located directly west of the Village. Last, located between Joy Road and St. Martha's Church a small family cemetery plot serves as the final resting place of industrial pioneer, Henry Ford, and members of his immediate family. The Ford family connection to the focus area is strong and has been incorporated in the vision for the revitalization of the study area.

In order to understand the site and surrounding community the MSU Team collected and compiled demographic data and analyzed the current conditions of the neighborhood, identifying gaps in needed functions and services.

An analysis of the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (challenges) was conducted to better gauge factors influencing the current conditions of the area. Additionally, a survey of community stakeholders, represented by the St. Martha's Planning Team, was conducted to aid this part of the report.

The final sections of the report deal with conclusions and recommendations. Specific suggestions and recommendations from the St. Martha's Planning Team have been incorporated where possible. First, in reference to the church property and the Ford family cemetery, it is recommended that the client make

the necessary repairs to permit fulltime occupancy of the property by a new tenant. This property is an excellent candidate for placement in State and National registries of historic places. A "Women of Ford" theme may be an excellent choice for the facility. Second, in reference to the Village of St. Martha's housing facility it is recommended that connecting pathways and walking trails be added in and around the site to promote physical activity for its residents and other seniors in the community. Third, the former St. Peter's Home for Boys site is well-suited as the location of a new community/care/healing garden with agricultural elements geared toward the Vet's-to-Ag program. Furthermore, the balance of the building could be utilized for built-out offices to house non-profit community organizations compatible with community needs and St. Martha's Commons objectives.

This report was prepared in keeping with the spirit of the St. Martha's Planning Session vision statement which reads:

"We believe that St. Martha's Project should be a community commons that brings together people from diverse generations, spiritual and personal backgrounds, races, and physical and mental capabilities to promote the well being of all and the environment in which they live."



# Location Description

Figure 1

## State of Michigan



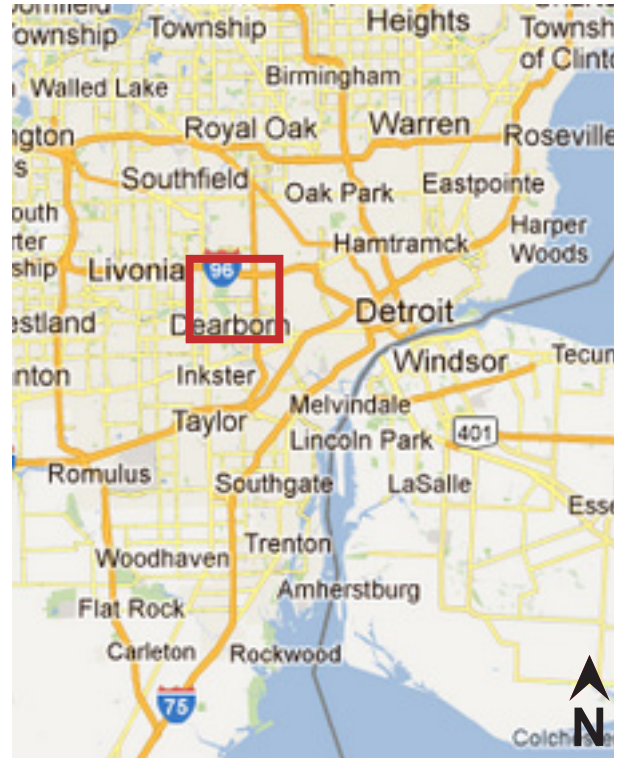
Source: Google Maps

The St. Martha's Site is located in Detroit in southeast Michigan

St. Martha's Commons is located in southwest Detroit just west of the center of Wayne County in southeastern Michigan (See figure 1).

Figure 2

## Southeast Michigan



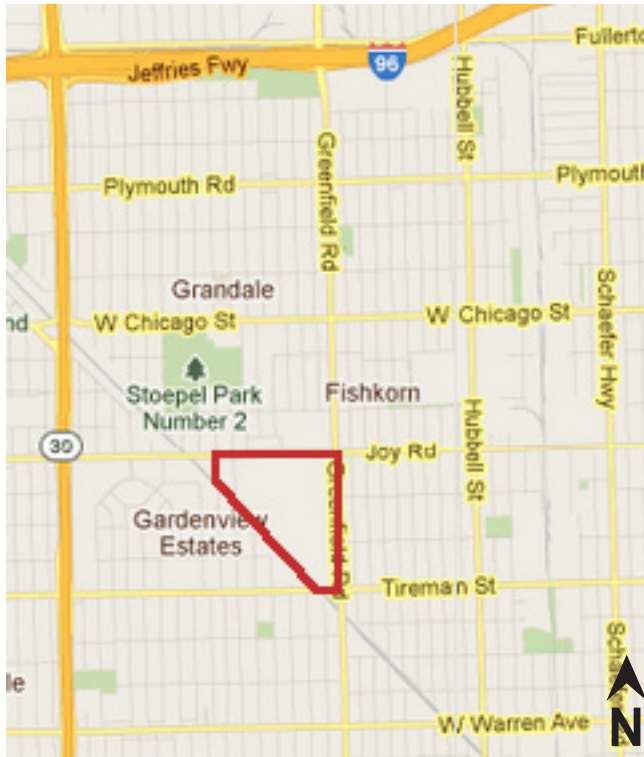
Source: Google Maps

The site is in southwest Detroit located close to the Dearborn border.

Wayne and its surrounding counties contain urban, suburban, and rural areas. They are home to many prominent national and international cultural, commercial, and philanthropic institutions. The area shares a border with Canada and is an international port of entry. Currently southeastern Michigan is undergoing economic restructuring to broaden its employment base beyond its primary cluster of auto manufacturing (See figure 2).

Figure 3

### Site Boundary



Source: Google Maps

The overall site is approximately 85 acres in size and is bounded by Joy Rd to the north, Greenfield to the east, Tireman to the south, the CNX railroad and Mettatal to the west.

The project site boundary is outlined by Joy Road to the north, Greenfield Rd to the west, Tireman to the south; to the east, Mettatal St and C&O Railroad (See Figure 3). This site is located two blocks east of Southfield Freeway and south of Stoepele Park Number 2.

Figure 4

### St. Martha's Focus Area



Source: Google Maps

The primary area of focus for the St. Martha's Commons is the highlighted 20 acre area which currently includes St. Martha's Church, St. Martha's Village and the former boys home.

The St. Martha's Church, which is the primary focus area of this study is located south of Joy Rd in the northern quadrant of the larger project study area (See Figure 4).



# Area History

## History of Detroit

The first Europeans to visit the Detroit area were French explorers, missionaries, and fur traders travelling west from Quebec in the early 17th century. The river was a broad, navigable strait bordered by flat and fertile land with abundant fruit, forests, and wild game. French travelers continued to traverse the region, and came to call it 'The Strait' or in French 'Le Detroit.' In 1701 Antoine Laumet de Lamothe Cadillac built Fort Ponchartrain (at present day Jefferson and Shelby) to establish a settlement and protect the region from British encroachment. The British did gain control of the region following the French and Indian War in 1760. They maintained their jurisdiction over Detroit until 1796, when they withdrew to Canada and ceded the settlement to the Americans.

The population of the area increased rapidly following the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, and in 1835 the 80,000 residents of Michigan approved a Constitution and petitioned Congress for recognition as a state. Detroit served as the State Capital until 1847. Lumber and the railroads were early engines of growth in the busy port town, and the population of Detroit nearly quadrupled between 1850 and 1890. New residents included German, Irish, and Polish immigrants, and following the Civil War, African Americans from the south. Diversion of raw materials during WWI led to a severe housing crisis, and to a building boom and rapid expansion of the city limits following Armistice.

Early industries in the city included the manufacture of steel, stoves, pharmaceuticals, railroad cars, carriages, marine engines, and ships. Innovators successfully modified small engines to power open wheeled carriages. Early Detroit automobile manufacturers included Henry Ford, Ransom E Olds, David Buick, Henry M Leland, and John and Horace Dodge. Henry Ford revolutionized American industry in 1908 when he created the Model-T, the world's first mass produced and affordable automobile. In 1913 he introduced the movable assembly line and in 1914 he offered workers an 8 hour work day and a \$5.00 daily wage. By 1930 his Ford River Rouge Plant employed 100,000 workers.

Detroit is known as 'The Motor City,' and for ninety years the city has been shaped by the automobile. The rapid growth of the auto industry drew millions to jobs as laborers, tool makers, and engineers. Rapid influxes

of workers created housing shortages and exacerbated problems of ethnic and racial intolerance. But through high wages and profitable innovations the city evolved into a prosperous center of arts, entertainment, and shopping.

Appropriately Detroit is not just home to the automobile, it is also the home of the first modern paved road. As roads were improved and extended the automobile gave Detroiters access to inexpensive new housing in clean, quiet suburbs. The populations of the southeastern Michigan region and suburban counties of Oakland and Macomb have continued to increase, but since the building of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950's and 60's, the population of Detroit has declined. Even as the region has continued to grow the city has experienced an exodus of population and business. In 1900 the 285,704 residents of Detroit accounted for 53% of the metropolitan population, and 43% of the region's population. 1,849,568 Detroiters in 1950 accounted for 57% of the metropolitan and 50% of the region's population. By 2010 the remaining 713,777 Detroit residents were only 16.6% of the metropolitan and 13.7% of the region's residents. (Figures 5 & 6)

## Population Trends in South East Michigan

Figure 5

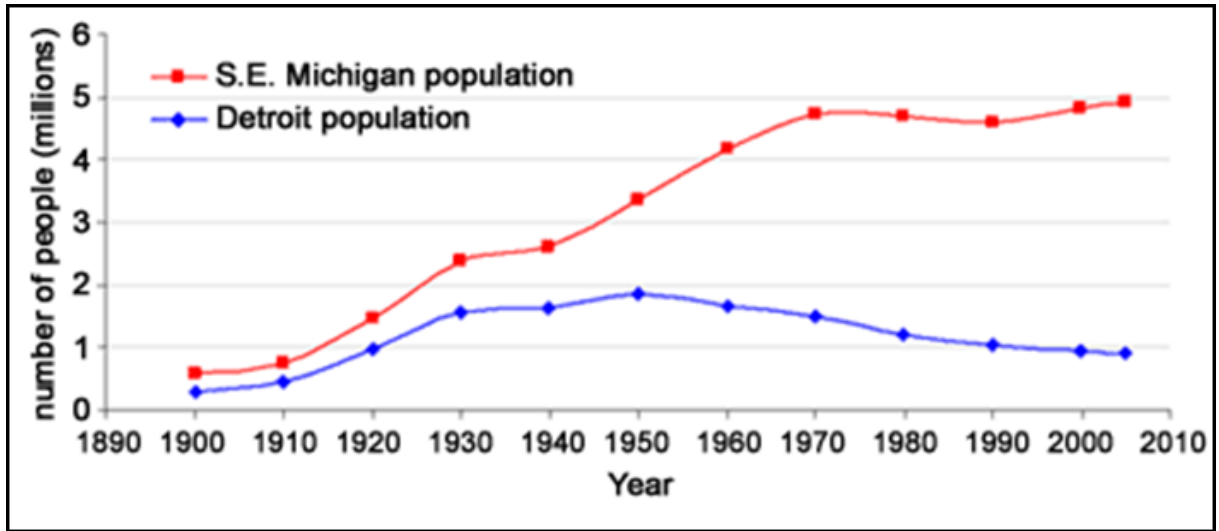
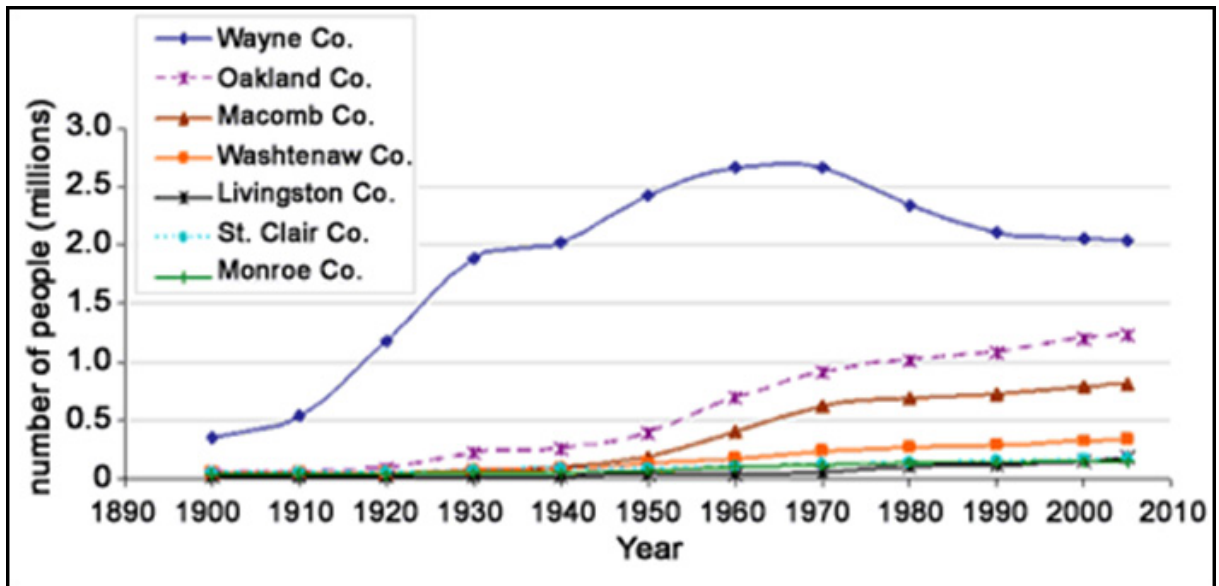


Figure 6



Source: [http://www.epa.gov/med/grosseile\\_site/indicators/populationhtml#status](http://www.epa.gov/med/grosseile_site/indicators/populationhtml#status)

## History of Dearborn

Tireman Street, the southern border of the site, is also the border between Detroit to the north and Dearborn to the south. Dense forests between Dearborn and the Detroit River inhibited early settlement. Farms were developed in long ribbons, extending into the forest from the Rouge River tributary. Early Dearborn industry relied on local resources: the forests provided cord wood for wood-burning railroad locomotives, and clay soils were quarried for brick making. Henry Ford's father William, who first lived on his uncle's farm on Joy Road, bought property in present day Dearborn. The east side of Dearborn developed rapidly following construction of Ford's Rouge River plant in the 1920's.

Henry Ford's success brought him much notoriety and little privacy. He and Clara purchased 1,300 secluded acres along the Rouge River in a rural section of Dearborn and built their home, Fairlane Estate. The grounds were landscaped in a natural style due to the

couple's love of nature and bird watching, but also contained extensive rose and peony gardens and a working farm scaled to the size of their grandchildren. Following the Ford's deaths the estate was purchased by the Ford Motor Company, and is currently operated as a National Historic Landmark by the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House Foundation.

The population of Dearborn peaked in 1960, declined until 1990, and then began a period of modest 1% annual growth. In 2010 40% of the city's population was Arab American; many are descendants of Lebanese Christians who immigrated in the early 20th century to work in the auto industry. More recent Assyrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi immigrants have formed a large Arab Muslim community. Notable Dearborn Arab American institutions are the Islamic Center of America, the Dearborn Mosque, and the Arab American Museum.

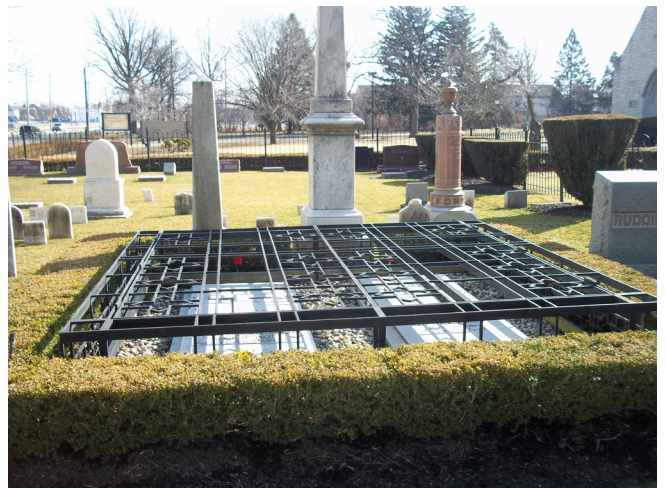
## History of the Project Site

The site of St. Martha's Commons was originally purchased and cleared by Samuel and George Ford following their immigration from Ireland in 1832. Samuel died and was buried on the property in 1842. Five years later Samuel's mother Rebecca Ford, with her eldest son John and his seven children joined George in Michigan. John is the grandfather of Henry Ford. Henry purchased the original farmstead in 1920 and assumed care of the cemetery. He himself was buried there in 1947. After Henry's death concerns for the future safety of the family cemetery prompted Clara Ford to commission the construction of an Episcopal Church, Sexton, and Rectory on the site. Mrs. Ford arranged for the design, construction, landscaping, and maintenance of the church, cemetery, and grounds. She requested that the church be named in honor of her mother, Martha Bench Bryant. Mrs. Ford passed away and was buried next to her husband in 1950. Ford family members and descendants have continued to be buried in the family plot, as recently as 1998.

Subsequent development of the farm site has centered on faith, education, and community service. Institutions which occupy or have occupied neighboring parcels include The Village of St. Martha's, the Detroit Urban

Lutheran School, Christian Victory Church, Wayne County Community College West Campus, The Detroit Islamic Cultural Center, Christ Child Society, and St. Peter's Home for Boys.

*Figure 7*



*Henry Ford Burial Plot*

## Church History

Figure 8



St. Martha's Episcopal Church - Feb. 2011

St. Martha's Chapel is a beautiful historic stone chapel whose construction was commissioned by Clara Ford in honor of her mother Martha Bryant. The church buildings were designed by Arthur K Hyde of Giffels, Vallet, and Rosetti. Construction began in 1952 and was completed in 1954, although interior embellishments continued to

be added until 1968. Notable among these is the pipe organ built by Casavant Freres Ltd. of Quebec, Canada, an ornately carved pulpit, and arched stained glass windows.

In 1948 the Episcopal Church created a new congregation in growing northwest Detroit. Before construction of St. Martha's the congregation was forced to meet in two separate facilities. Once constructed the church was home to a congregation of 500 families. Some of the original parishioners continued to attend the church, but over a period of 65 years the congregation dwindled. With fewer than 20 persons in regular attendance, the Episcopal Diocese suspended Sunday services in April of 2007. St. Luke Tabernacle Community Church of Detroit was holding services in the sanctuary until water infiltration adversely affected air quality. The building is currently not in use. In 2011 the property was leased to St. Martha's Commons Project, LLC. The group continues to develop plans for repair and reuse of the building.

Figure 9



Clara Ford and baby Edsel (1894)



# The Neighborhood

The following profile of the St. Martha’s neighborhood identifies assets important to the St. Martha’s Community. A community asset is any type of establishment or organization that provides some sort of overall benefit to the community. Although several more community assets exist, such as a local

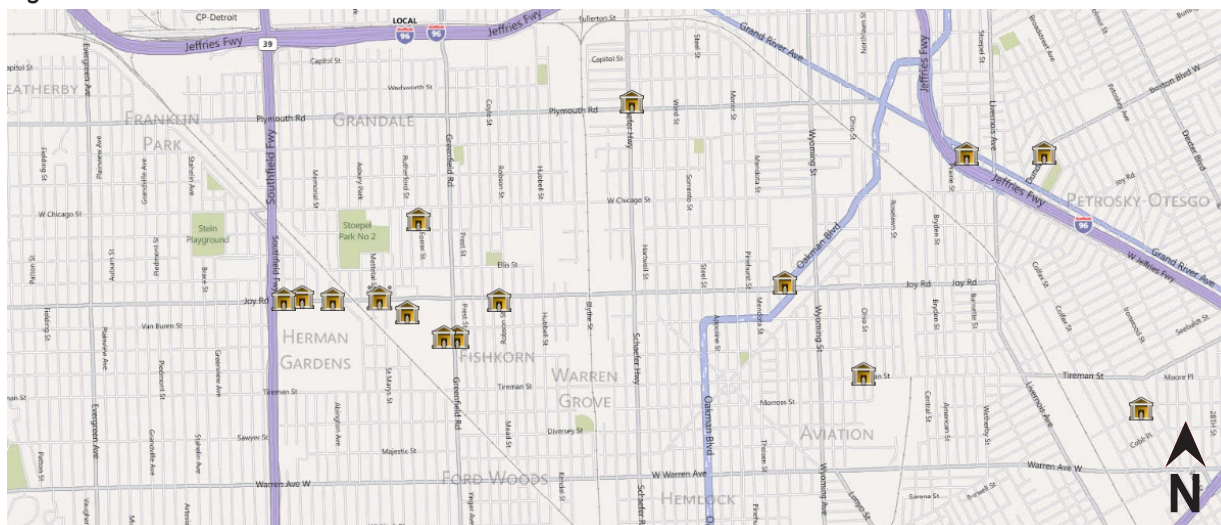
business or organization, most are not included in this neighborhood description. The following community assets which are listed are included in this neighborhood description because they share a direct link with the MSU Planning Team’s proposed recommendations for the St. Martha’s Community Site.

## Religious Institutions

With St. Martha’s Episcopal Church being a religious institution, it is beneficial to identify other religious institutions in the area of which there are many. A total of 16 other religious institutions reside within a 5

mile radius of St. Martha’s Church, half of which are located within the 1 mile radius from the site. Figure 10 identifies the religious institutions in the area and includes St. Martha’s Episcopal Church.

Figure 10



Source: Google Maps

## Health Care

Health care services are lower in the 1 mile radius compared to the 3 mile radius, the county and state levels. These services make up 1.5% of the total businesses in the one mile radius and 4.4% in the 3 mile radius. In Wayne County these services make up for 5.1% and 5.1% in the State of Michigan (see Appendix B).

radius, \$2,653 for the 3 mile radius, \$3,342 for Wayne County and \$3,732 for the State of Michigan. Even though consumer spending on health care is lower, there is still a need for these services. Over 70% of the 1 and 3 mile population visit the doctor at least once a year and 37% visit 1-3 times per year, which is on par with the county and state levels (see figure 13).

Average consumer spending on health care for the 1 and 3 mile radius is 20%-30% lower than the county and state averages (see figure 12). The average amount spent on health care in 2010 was \$2,369 for the 1 mile

In an area where the population spends 20%-30% less than the county and state, access to low cost health care is important. Of the 6.2% of health care and social assistance businesses in the 1 mile radius, there are

Figure 11  
Low Cost Health Care Facilities in 3 Mile Radius



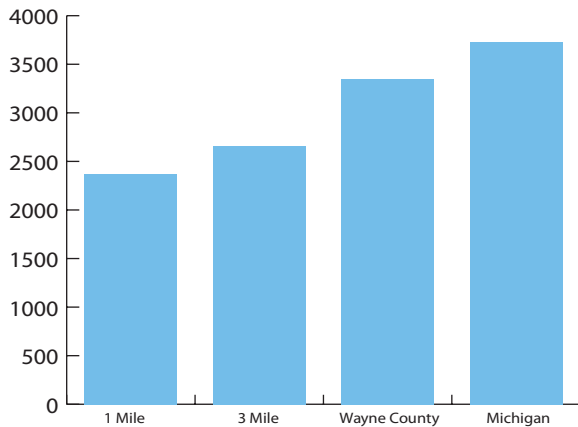
no hospitals or low cost health clinics. Within the 3 mile radius there are also zero hospitals and only two low cost health clinics (see figure 11).

health care but many of the residents who require low cost health care lack a means of transportation to easily access low cost clinics.

It is clear that the 1 and 3 mile neighborhoods are underserved when it comes to health care. Medical attention can be hard to come by for some of the population in the 1 and 3 mile radius neighborhoods. Residents within the area may have to travel 3+ miles to find affordable

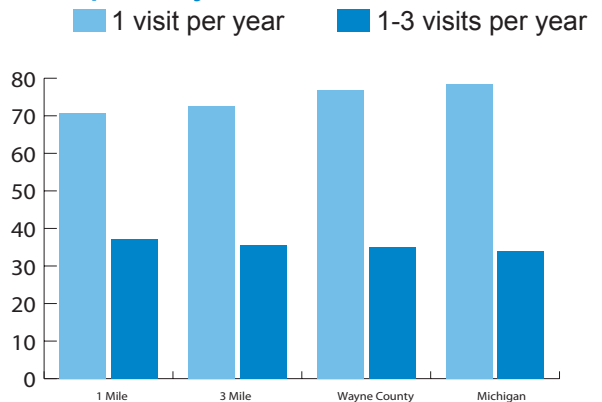
Figure 13 displays the frequency of doctor visits by region. Residents living within the 1-mile radius are most likely to make multiple doctor visits per year. But these same residents spend the least of any region on their doctor visits.

Figure 12  
Average Health Care Consumer Spending



Source: ESRI Community Analyst

Figure 13  
Frequency of Doctor Visits



Source: ESRI Community Analyst



## Healthy Food Access

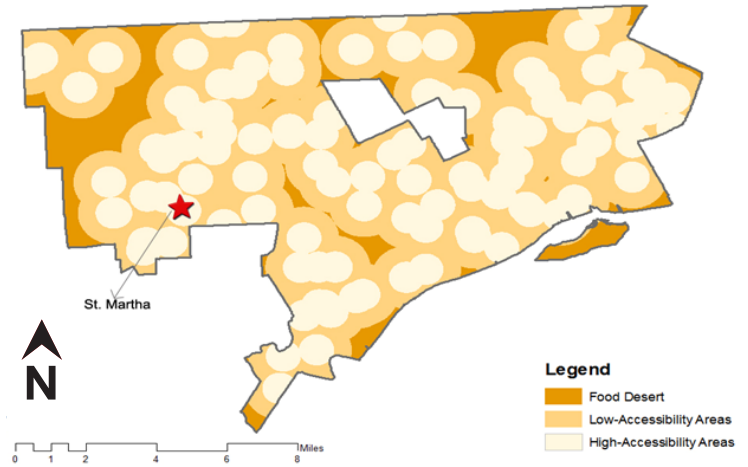
With growing obesity and diabetes rates in the United States it is beneficial to identify local farmers' markets, grocery stores, and other businesses that sell fresh produce and other healthy options. Given the United States Department of Agriculture definition of a "food desert" – areas in which the nearest full-service grocery store is more than one mile away – the project site is not considered a food desert (see figure 14). Even though the project area is not classified as a food desert, there is a large leakage of grocery store consumers to the outside areas (refer to Appendix B). This data would suggest that there is not a problem with food access, but more with quality and costs.

Within the one mile radius there is only one grocery store, US Quality Foods, which located

across the northern site boundary (Joy Rd). Within the three mile radius there are 2 farmers' markets, Sowing Seed Farmers' Market and the Northwest Detroit Farmers' Market. These are the only two farmers' markets within a five mile radius of the site.

Larger chain stores such as Meijer, Wal-Mart, Gordon Food Services and Kroger are located within the three-five mile radius. These stores may contribute to the

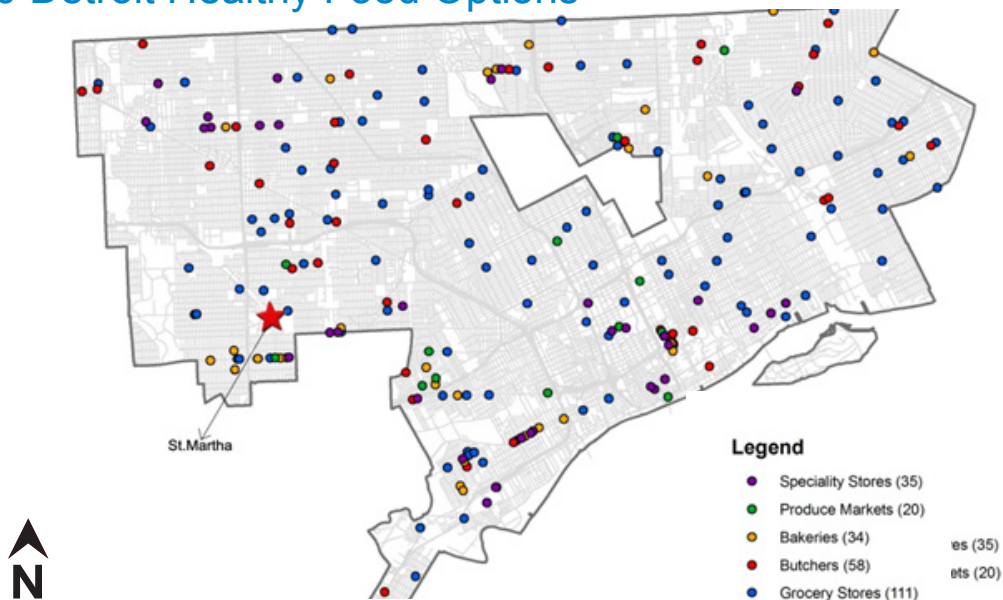
Figure 14  
2010 Detroit Food Accessibility



Source: <http://www.mapdetroit.blogspot.com/>

grocery store consumer leakage within the project area. Also within the three-five mile radius is the community garden D-Town Farm. This community garden is operated by the Black Community Food Security Network which promotes food security by promoting urban agriculture, educating the public and influencing public policy (see figure 15).

Figure 15  
2010 Detroit Healthy Food Options



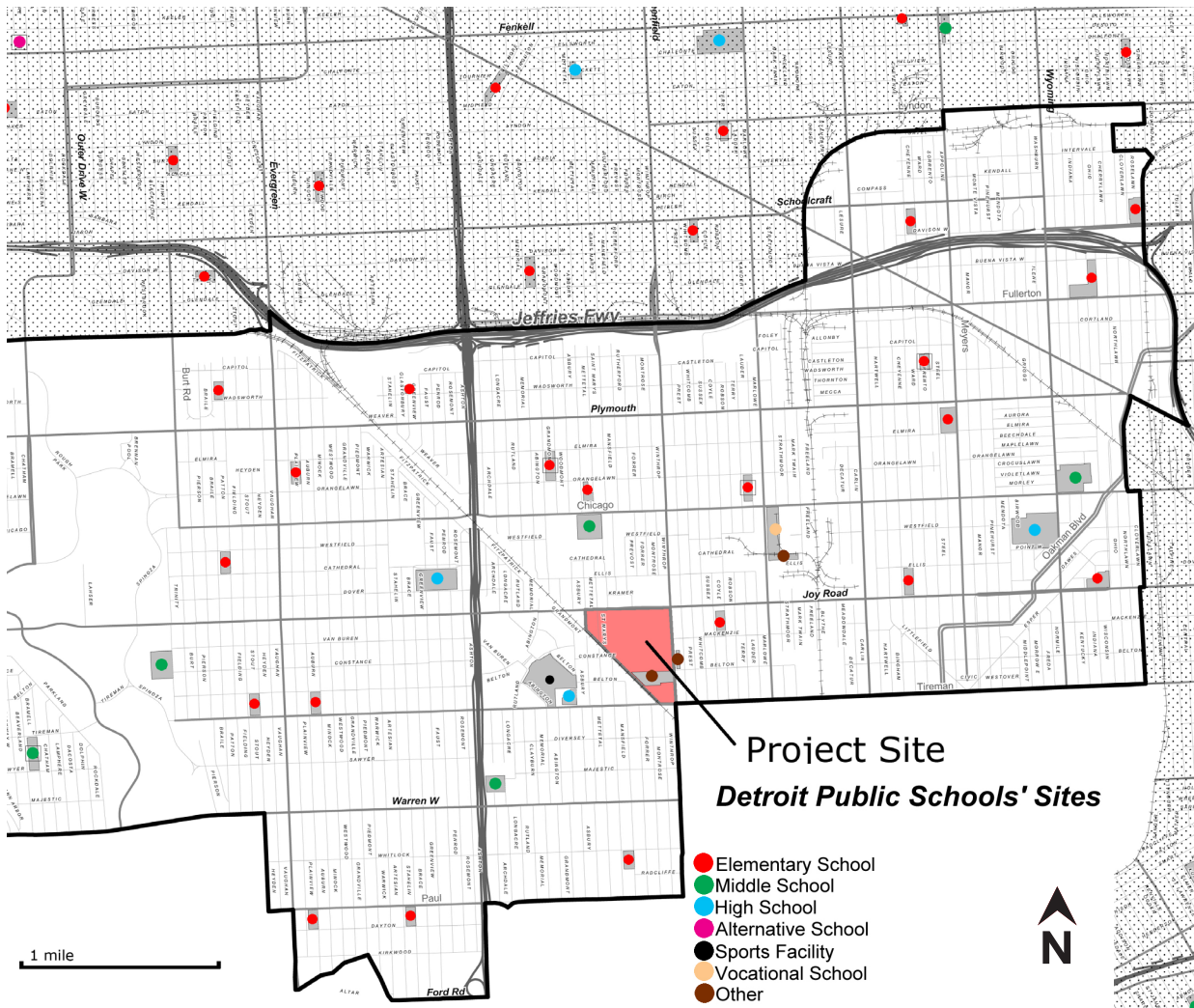
Source: <http://www.mapdetroit.blogspot.com/>

# Educational Facilities

There are 47 educational institutions within a distance of three miles: 31 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 5 high schools, 1 alternative school, 1 vocational school, and three schools classified as other. Within a radius of

10 miles from the St. Martha's site there are 7 colleges and universities. Figure 16 displays the locations of these educational facilities.

Figure 16  
Detroit Public Schools and other Educational Facilities



Source: City of Detroit





Figure 17: River Rouge Park Facility

Photo Credit: Amy Elliott Bragg - <http://nightraintraintodetroit.com>

## Recreation

Recreational facilities are an important community asset that may assist in attracting outsiders to the area. Within a one mile radius from the St. Martha’s site there are 6 parks. These parks contain children play sets, walking paths and athletic fields and courts, but are very poorly maintained. Table 1 displays information on the 6 parks within the one mile radius.

14 baseball fields, 12 playgrounds, 11 tennis courts, hiking and biking trails, picnic space, camping space, and 3 swimming pools. Lack of funds for maintenance has forced the city of Detroit to close some areas of the park, while other areas are being maintained by volunteers and community groups to allow for the park to stay open.

Within a 3 mile radius from the St. Martha’s site, is the River Rouge Park. This Park is approximately 1200 acres in size and contains an 18-hole golf course,

Table 1

### Municipal Parks Within 1-mile Radius

Within 1 Mile	Walk Time	Drive Time	Size	Short Description
Stoepel Park	10 Min	1 Min	40 Acres	Small Playground, Tennis Courts (Needs Maintenance)
Belton-Mark Twain	21 Min	3 Min	7 Acres	Empty Field
Simanek Playfield	26 Min	4 Min	4 Acres	Walking Path, Basketball Courts, Baseball Field (Needs Maintenance), Swing Sets
Mansfield-Diversey	24 Min	4 Min	4 Acres	Small Playground, Basketball Court
Green Playground	10 Min	1 Min	3 Acres	Swing Set
Doan Playground	24 Min	3 Min	2 Acres	Children Play Sets

Source: City of Detroit