

# Democratic mayor rolls out Detroit downsizing plan

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Detroit's Democratic mayor, David Bing, revealed further details Wednesday of his plan to shrink the city by forcing residents out of neighborhoods deemed too poor or underpopulated. Under the "planned contraction" scheme, the city will reduce or eliminate trash pickup, street lighting, fire and police protection, public schools and other essential services to drive residents out.

The Motor City, which has been decimated by decades of factory closures and downsizing, is being used as a model by the Obama administration to drastically reduce spending to blighted urban areas. Far from reviving these cities—through government spending to create jobs and expand services—Detroit is one of several hard-hit industrial cities, including Youngstown, Ohio and Flint, Michigan, targeted for "right-sizing."

The scheme, which is being funded by a "public-private partnership" of the federal government and the multibillion-dollar Kresge and Skillman Foundations, will divide Detroit into three "market-type" categories, according to analysis of the plan by the *Detroit News*.

The first, deemed "steady" neighborhoods, would include those with a higher level of owner-occupied homes. These would see "more code enforcement, debris cleanups, streetlight repairs, business recruitment and commercial area improvements," the newspaper reported.

"Transitional" areas—with a relatively high presence of foreclosed and bank-owned properties—"would see more building demolitions, board-ups and road improvements," the *News* said.

Finally, "distressed" neighborhoods—with a "near absence of market activity," and high vacancy rates—would be issued a death sentence, seeing "a concentration of demolitions" and other measures to

"enhance vacant lots."

"We can't continue to do business the same way we have," Bing, a multimillionaire businessman who has overseen the closing of dozens of schools and other public facilities, declared. "We must be smarter about the way we align our resources."

Wednesday's announcement did not include the mayor's original proposals to provide financial incentives to encourage residents to move. Instead the removal of services will be used to force residents to relocate into more populated areas or simply out of the city.

The mayor made no secret of this last year when he spoke of residents who resisted, telling the press, "If they stay where they are, I absolutely cannot give them all the services they require."

John Mogk, a Wayne State University law professor in Detroit, told the *News*, "Providing reduced services to distressed areas sends a message that these areas will eventually be cleared and reused for other purposes. This kind of says to people you have some options and may want to move."

The mayor's plan is being coordinated with the governor-appointed Emergency Financial Manager of the Detroit Public Schools. The former General Motors executive and hedge money manager, Roy Roberts, is closing dozens of schools, which provide a critical lifeline of public education, health care and other services to the so-called distressed areas.

Detroit, once the nation's fourth largest city with around 2 million residents in 1950, has fewer than 714,000 people, according to the 2010 census. It has lost a quarter of its population in the last decade alone, a figure unparalleled except for wartime and disease.

The population loss is the result of an unrelenting war waged by the corporate and political establishment,

which never resolved itself to the gains wrenched away from it by auto workers through their mass struggles from the 1930s to the 1970s.

Since the first Chrysler bailout of 1979-80, the auto industry has eliminated more than one million jobs, including hundreds of thousands in the Detroit area. The city—which has an unofficial unemployment rate approaching 50 percent—is littered with closed factories, dilapidated houses and the largest number of vacant lots in the US, if not the world.

The United Auto Workers union—built by workers in the mass battles of the 1930s—has spent the last three decades collaborating with the auto bosses in the destruction of the jobs and living standards of auto workers.

Over the last decade, due to the destruction of decent-paying jobs, there has been a reverse migration of many African American workers—whose ancestors fled the poverty and racism of the Deep South in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to find higher paying factory jobs in the city. Both Michigan and Illinois showed an overall loss of blacks for the first time in the last census, while the percentage of African Americans living in the South was the highest since 1960.

The premise for Bing’s downsizing plan is that there is no money to maintain services, let alone improve them and provide decent-paying jobs to attract residents back to the city. As the *Detroit News* editorialized Wednesday, “Keeping healthier neighborhoods viable even if it means decline may accelerate in a few of the more marginal areas, is a necessary step for a city that lacks the resources to mount a citywide overhaul.”

In reality, the working class has produced trillions in profits for the auto companies and Wall Street over decades and decades producing untold riches for the corporate and financial lords. The workers of Detroit have been rewarded with poverty, and are now being driven from their homes.

Earlier this week, Ford announced \$2.4 billion in second-quarter profits. With first-half profit totaling \$4.95 billion, the carmaker is ahead of its pace in 2010. All Detroit’s Big Three auto companies have returned to profitability after the Obama administration’s restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler in 2009. Accomplished with the collaboration of the UAW, this resulted in the destruction of thousands of jobs and deep concessions from auto workers, including slashing

wages in half for new workers.

The downsizing plan is the latest “urban renewal” scheme by the Democratic Party, which has overseen the impoverishment of Detroit for decades. Like the city-funded casinos and sports stadiums, the slashing of the city workforce, and privatization of schools and other city assets, this latest plan to “improve the business climate” will only create greater inequality in the nation’s poorest big city.



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