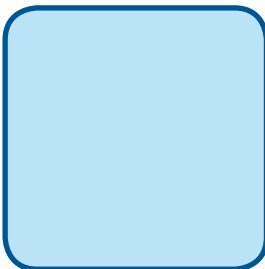


Detroit Ombudsman presents

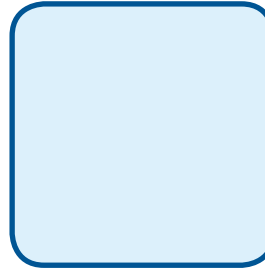
# 5-year impact statement 2005-2010



March 2011



PLEASE  
HELP SECURE  
OUR HOOD  
FOR THE  
SAFETY  
OF OUR  
CHILDREN



CITY OF DETROIT

**OMBUDSMAN**

DURENE L. BROWN  
*City Ombudsman*

*"Getting problems out of the way,  
so that progress can occur."*

## 5-year impact statement



Appointed in 2005, City Ombudsman Durene L. Brown has completed half of her 10-year term. Over the past five years, Brown re-energized the Office of the Ombudsman by increasing visibility through aggressive community outreach efforts and emphasizing customer service and accountability.

### Reporting

Reports have been prepared and presented to the Detroit City Council annually since 2006. Submitted as “Report on Complaints received from the Ombudsman’s Office,” all reports are available to the public and posted on the Ombudsman’s Web site.

Reports provide detailed information about complaints, and pie charts identify which city departments generate the most complaints. In 2006, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department was responsible for the majority of complaints; however, since that time, Buildings & Safety Engineering, \*Environmental Affairs/ Department of Public Works (DPW), and General Services have been vying for first place among all tax-payer-funded service delivery providers. (\*Activities conducted by Environmental Affairs transferred to DPW in 2009.)

In 2010, the Office of the Ombudsman added another way of analyzing complaints: Complaints by Zip Codes provides a snapshot of the city’s problems in specific areas around the city.

### Recommendations

Analyses of the data collected from constituents who contact the Office of the Ombudsman provide the foundation for the recommendations submitted to City Council each spring. Any and all recommendations from the Ombudsman stem from complaints received – an apolitical approach allowing every citizen, property owner, business owner, and visitor equal access to the Ombudsman’s investigative expertise.

## Policy Development & Advocacy from Your City Ombudsman

2005-2009

### 2005 **Designate Public Libraries as Drug Free Zones**

As a complaint-driven organization, the Ombudsman's response to a complaint from a Detroit Public Library Librarian about prostitutes and drug dealers led to an amendment to the state's Public Health code and new statewide legislation, Public Acts 552 and 553. Brown successfully lobbied the state legislature to extend traditional "drug free zones" around schools to public libraries, as well.

### 2006 **Oppose Solid Waste Fee**

Detroiters are severely impacted by the passage of P.A. 123 of 1999 which escalated the property foreclosure process from six years to three. The cumulative effect of the existing law, coupled with the Solid Waste Fee proposal, will have a devastating affect on residents who struggle to meet their everyday needs. For a financially distressed property owner trying to "catch up" on delinquent taxes, the burden increases exponentially, escalates the foreclosure process, and contributes to the steady population decline.

### **Develop a Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan**

Implementation of a comprehensive solid waste management plan is long-overdue and sorely needed to address collection, illegal dumping, and disposal in a cost-efficient manner.

- The difference between solid waste collection in the city compared to the suburbs is dramatic. Suburbanites pay much less and receive much more than Detroiters. Trash, recycling, yard waste, and bulk collection are standard features in the suburbs where the annual cost for all services is less than \$200. In contrast, property owners in Detroit are assessed a Solid Waste fee of \*\$240.00 for trash collection only. (\*\$300 was the initial assessment, but was reduced in 2009.)
- Ongoing public education campaigns are needed to complement efforts to establish and maintain tidy neighborhoods that increase property values and increase contributions to the General Fund.
- The elimination of monthly bulk pick-up has created another burden for neighborhood residents. Transportation is a major obstacle for residents who need to dispose of bulk. The city offers residents free disposal for bulk materials at any of its transfer stations, but transporting the materials is impractical for most residents who do not own or operate hauling equipment.
- For fair representation, City Council should research the feasibility of amending ordinances and operating agreements to obtain a voting seat on the board of directors for the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority (GDRRA).

## Policy Development & Advocacy from Your City Ombudsman

### 2005-2009 (continued)

2007

#### **Restore \$1.5 Million to Demolition Program**

It is imperative that the City Council focus on neighborhood deterioration and commit to addressing the environment that will continue to threaten present-day and future viability. The Mayor's budget proposal allocated \$5,743,775 for demolition, representing a \$1.5 million reduction from the previous year. Loss of funding left 187.5 vacant and dangerous buildings standing.

#### **Research Benefits of The National Vacant Properties Campaign**

Innovative revitalization efforts are supported by this Washington, D.C.-based organization with a mission to "create opportunity from abandonment."

2008

#### **Enforce Detroit Property Maintenance Ordinance**

The City is non-compliant with its own ordinance, No. 18-03 Chapter 9 Article I By Adding Article I, Titled "Detroit Property Maintenance," Etc. Sec. 9-1-49. This ordinance authorizes the directors of Buildings & Safety Engineering and Health Departments to cut overgrown weeds and grass, secure open structures, remove trash, and demolish structures and bill the property owners.

#### **Increase Demolition Funding**

A 57 percent decrease in demolitions occurred over a three-year period, coupled with an 8.5 percent decrease in demolition funding.

#### **Require Property Owners to Use Select Materials to Secure Vacant Properties**

Demolition requests fall on deaf ears in Detroit. A steady decrease in the funding for demolitions leaves the city with dangerous buildings and the threat of exposure to litigation. Securing the properties is not an option, according to the Buildings & Engineering Department, due to the cost of materials and manpower.

In response to a similar situation, the City of Chicago adopted an ordinance requiring owners to use specialized and authorized materials to secure vacant properties. While waiting to be secured in Detroit, the structures deteriorate and are vandalized making them eligible for razing, as opposed to attracting new residents.

#### **Research Benefits of the Second Chance Act**

In Michigan, 48 percent of ex-felons become felons again and return to prison within two years of their initial release.

In response to this alarming incarceration and recidivism trend, new Federal legislation authorized \$330 million to be spent over two years for re-entry programs.





2009

### **Allocate Funding from Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and Economic Stimulus Weatherization Funds to Create Jobs and Relocate Residents**

The budget does not support certain neighborhoods. Equipment needs, operational costs, and reduced staffing make a strong case for implementing a strategy to prevent further deterioration. In late 2007, Detroit was allocated \$47 million in NSP funding, and another \$33 million was received months later. These monies were not represented in the Fiscal Year 2009-10 Budget and have not been spent on neighborhood improvements.

- Save neighborhoods that can be rescued.
- Put people to work--Train and employ a skilled workforce to rehab houses in areas where 40 percent of neighborhoods are still viable.
- Relocate residents to newly rehabbed homes.
- Add restored properties to tax rolls.

### **Increase Demolition Budget**

Vacant properties cannot endure another cold and rainy season. City Council has expressed interest in preserving properties, as opposed to demolition; however, Buildings & Safety Engineering Department can't keep up with the momentum, demand, and costs of securing the properties before they're vandalized or destroyed by the elements, rendering the structures worthless and uninhabitable.

### **Direct Auditor General to Conduct an Audit of the Demolition Division of Buildings & Safety Engineering Department**

The last internal control review of the Demolition Division was conducted in 1994. According to Article 4, Sec. 4-205 of the City Charter, the auditor general shall conduct audits of financial transactions for all city agencies at least every two years or as otherwise directed by the city council. Failure to do so is a violation of the Detroit City Charter..

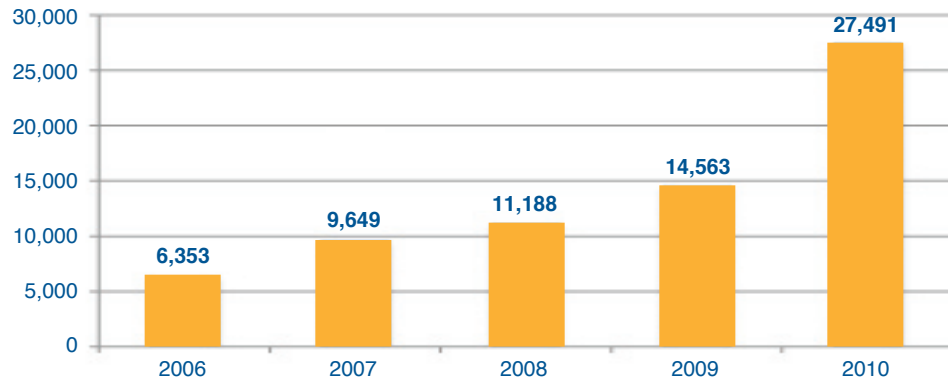
### **Save Tax-Payer Dollars by eliminating The Department of Administrative Hearings and 3-1-1**

Uncollected millions of dollars support this recommendation to eliminate funding for the Department of Administrative Hearings. Designated as a "blight court," and revenue generating department, the enabling state legislation failed to include a mechanism for collecting fines, thus, violators do not pay or comply with the city's Property Maintenance Ordinance.

Similarly, 3-1-1 is a waste of tax-payer dollars. (Funding for the department was eliminated in 2010.) Millions of dollars used to support these departments could be used more effectively to offset the budget deficit or shift resources to provide desperately needed services.

## Complaints, Inquiries, and Referrals

Constituents contact the Office of the Ombudsman seeking relief and resources. Budget cuts in the area of essential services are directly related to the increase of complaints received.



## Prevention vs. Liability

Data used to support this report summarizes five years of recommendations submitted for the purpose of encouraging preventative policies to limit exposure to liabilities. A city-wide emphasis on safety would save taxpayer dollars and deaths, in some cases. Restoration of livable neighborhoods in Detroit is achievable when prevention is observed.

### Prevention

Demolition  
 Demolition of Commercial Properties  
 Forestry  
 Solid Waste Management Plan  
 Working Street Lights  
 Pavement Maintenance Program  
 Compliance with & Enforcement of Property Maintenance Ordinance  
 Ongoing Public Education  
 Emergency Response  
 Prompt Payment to Vendors

### Liability

Fires, Fatalities, Assaults, Drug & Gang Activity, Dog-Fighting  
 Air Quality, Asbestos Emissions, Personal Injury, Rodents, Fatalities  
 Personal Injury, Fatalities, Property Damage  
 Rodents, Disease, Loss in Property Tax Collection  
 Personal Injury, Property Theft & Destruction, Criminal Activity  
 Personal Injury, Property Damage  
 Loss of Property Tax Value, Health & Safety Risks, Criminal Activity  
 Illegal dumping, Ordinance Violations, Uninformed Residents & Property Owners  
 Personal Injury, Fatalities, Potential Litigation  
 Limited Pool of Contractors resulting in Higher Pricing for Services, Interest Payments, Potential Litigation



## Ombudsman's Goals for 2010-2015

Over the next five years, the Office of the Ombudsman will advocate for the following changes to policy and spending:



### Objective Investigations

- Provide equal access
- Maintain confidentiality
- Tirelessly seek relief

### Accurate Representation of Complaints Received

- Collect and analyze data
- Efficient use of technology
- Report preparation and distribution

### Influence Budget-Making Decisions

- Heighten the awareness of constituents' needs
- Match needs with resources
- Adequately fund basic services

### Clean & Safe Neighborhoods

- Implement comprehensive solid waste management
- Code enforcement
- Increase property tax contributions to the General Fund



## Ombudsman's Awards & Recognition



**2006**

Muscular Dystrophy Association Detroit Lock-Up for Summer Camp

**2008**

Charles H. Wright Legacy Award  
Testimonial Resolution from Detroit City Council

**2009**

Outstanding Public Service Award, MI NW Harvest Jurisdiction COGIC

**2010**

Most Influential African American Women in Metropolitan Detroit, Women's Informational Network  
U.S. Census 2010 New Portrait of America



**Durene L. Brown**  
City Ombudsman

2 Woodward Avenue, Room 114  
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
Detroit, MI 48226-3413

(313) 224-6000  
(313) 224-1911 fax  
Ombudsman@ombud.ci.detroit.mi.us

### **Mission Statement**

The Office of the Ombudsman for the City of Detroit will abide by and uphold Article 4, Chapter 3 of the Charter of the City of Detroit. We commit to the assessment of inquiries and complaints in a timely manner; collaboration with internal service providers and their representatives; reaching out to faith-based groups, community-based organizations, and civic organizations; and establishing a performance record by employing all resources to prioritize, investigate, mediate, and resolve problems and complaints expressed by citizens, property owners, employees, businesses, and visitors.

### ***om-buds-man (Sw., deputy, representative)***

a public official appointed to investigate citizens' complaints against local or national government agencies that may be infringing on the rights of individuals.

- Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language  
Second College Edition

