

# THE SUSTAINABLE CITY SCOOP: A DETROIT AND DUTCH EDITION

DETROIT  
ISIT

DETROITISIT'S  
SUSTAINABLE URBAN DESIGN  
X PURPOSEFUL FORUM

WHITE PAPER  
MAY 2024



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## AFTER DECADES OF UPS AND DOWNS, DETROIT IS NOW IN THE SPOTLIGHT.

The city has undergone rapid changes and improvements, presenting opportunities and challenges. The central question becomes: **How can urban design promote social equity and inclusion while fostering sustainability?** While every city is unique, certain elements of Detroit's journey and city's in the Netherlands offer valuable lessons for all cities. Many sustainable solutions, as discussed in Detroit's inaugural Sustainable Urban Design Purposeful Forum, are universally applicable.

### SUSTAINABILITY

The term 'sustainability' encompasses far more than ecological concerns. A sustainability planner aims to gauge how durable a city is to ecological, social, and economic changes and then derive solutions that support the city's resilience in these key areas. Resilience is born from support and strengthens the sense of belonging. At the heart of sustainable urban design lies a guiding principle: **"Contribute to your community so that in return the community can contribute to your well-being."** To succeed, we must all strive to be shareholders in our communities.

### PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

Sustainable urban design is fundamentally about people and community. **Functional buildings, landscapes, and community spaces are meaningless without the individuals who weave our societies together.** Integrating collectives of locals into planning and decision-making processes through a human-oriented design approach is critical to fostering sustainable urban development without uprooting a community's character and identity. This approach ensures that development is inclusive and reflective of the needs and aspirations of the community.

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### ECONOMIC BENEFITS

When executed judiciously, the economic benefits of investing in sustainable urbanism outweigh the costs. However, mass acceptance and realization of this potential are proving to be better feasible if we adopt a localized and patient attitude toward civic engagement and investment.

- **A circular economy can address critical issues such as food insecurity, unemployment, and health outcomes.** Adopting a circular economy does not necessitate an entire upheaval of economic and political structures; rather, it requires a shift in mindset.
- **Private investors could consider sustainable development projects,** not for immediate short-term returns, but for their ability to generate promising long-term returns while nurturing a strong connection between the project and the community.

By embracing this holistic approach and embodying the principle of community contribution and well-being, we can create sustainable urban environments that thrive socially and economically.

# INDUSTRY CALL OUTS, QUOTES, AND **BREAKTHROUGH** CONVERSATION POINTS

## THRIVING NEIGHBORHOODS

Key Question:

*“How can we celebrate the current residents and also welcome the future residents?”*

– Dan Pitera, dean, University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture & Community Development

Build multiple and smaller collectives:

*“Collectives are close-knit, self-organized groups that help determine neighborhood vision and makeup.”*

– Marthijn Pool, founding partner, Space & Matter

## SIGNIFICANCE OF MEANWHILE SPACES

**Definition:** A vacant space used temporarily while its long-term use is to be decided. These spaces foster inclusion. In short, a downtown should belong to everyone.

*“The Meanwhile space creates a sense of belonging across the city. It becomes a beacon of what is coming.”*

– Roberto Otero, associate principal, SHoP Architects

*“We’re just here for the meanwhile. We contribute to the city, the city gives back to us, and eventually, we will hand it over to the next generations.”*

– Marthijn Pool

## ADDRESSING THE MEANWHILE SPACE

Focus on including spaces that are diverse, inclusive, and foster growth.

**Examples:** Residential, coffee shops, and small business spaces.

**Example:** Amsterdam Urban Planning gives neighbors the first right of refusal to open shops.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Broad Definition:

*“The durability of a city comes down to far more than withstanding ecological change. It’s also social and economic change.”*

– Conrad Kickert, associate professor, University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning

## ARCHITECTURE: FIRST FORTY FEET

**Importance:** Architecture, the way our buildings are constructed, is critical in sustainable and inclusive urban developments. It describes how the structure impresses upon and builds a relationship with the location and visitor. The first forty feet of a building relates to the threshold of initial experience by the user of the space.

*“Great attention is placed on the first forty feet in an urban experience. This area is what people engage with and is crucial for creating a sense of place.”*

– Roberto Otero



# PATIENT CAPITAL AND INNOVATION IN ENERGY MANAGEMENT

**Patient Capital:** Long-Term Investments for Sustainable Development.

Patient capital refers to investments prioritizing long-term gains and sustainable development over immediate short-term returns. This approach is particularly crucial for sustainable urban design, where the benefits of development projects often take time to materialize.

## Key points highlighting the importance of patient capital:

### Attracting Patient Investors

Sustainable development projects require a stable and long-term investment approach. By attracting patient investors, cities can ensure that projects are not rushed or compromised for short-term gains.

Patient capital is essential for fostering innovation and sustainability in urban development. It allows for thorough planning, community engagement, and the integration of sustainable practices without the pressure of immediate financial returns.

### Economic and Social Benefits

Patient capital enables the creation of resilient urban environments that can adapt to ecological, social, and economic changes. These developments contribute to long-term economic stability and social well-being.

Investing in sustainable projects can reduce environmental impact, improve public health, and enhance residents' quality of life, which in turn can attract further investments and economic growth.

## Examples of Successful Patient Capital Investments

Many cities have benefited from patient capital investments in sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy projects, and community development initiatives. These projects often serve as models for other cities aiming to implement sustainable urban design.

### Encouraging Policy Support

While this paper does not provide policy recommendations, it is important to note that supportive policies can further enhance the effectiveness of patient capital. Policymakers can play a role in creating an environment that encourages long-term investments in sustainability.

By focusing on patient capital, developers and investors can contribute to the creation of sustainable, resilient urban environments that offer long-term benefits to both the community and the economy. This approach aligns with the principles of sustainable urban design, emphasizing the need for thoughtful, deliberate investments that prioritize the well-being of current and future generations.

***"Bedrock's goal as a long-term property owner is to invest in high-performing equipment and durable materials."***

***"Bedrock has partnered with Urban Tech Xchange and Detroit Smart Parking Lab to support early-stage companies focused on urban innovation and mobility."***

*– Chelsea Sanderson, director of architecture and design, Bedrock Detroit*



## SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Implementing sustainable urban design and fostering thriving neighborhoods comes with challenges that require strategic planning and collaboration. Key challenges include **securing patient capital** and effectively **leveraging public-private partnerships**.

### A) Securing Patient Capital

One significant challenge is building and gathering networks with patient capital in mind for local systems. This type of investment is crucial for long-term, sustainable urban development but can take time to attract and maintain.

Pool emphasizes the role of public housing entities and associations as "first-movers" in the market. He explains:

*"Public housing entities often lead by example, investing in more public housing, commercial spaces, and public services such as shops, supermarkets, and schools. This approach increases the number of services available and stimulates secondary and tertiary city regions, making them more attractive for future investments."*

Like in the Netherlands, pension funds can play a pivotal role in this regard. Pool states;

*"Pension funds are well-positioned to follow the patient investing model, serving as 'first-movers' and providing the necessary capital for sustainable development projects."*

### B) Leveraging Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships are essential for the sustainability of urban development, yet they pose challenges. Effective collaboration between the public and private sectors is necessary to achieve inclusive and durable city development.

Kickert points out that;

*"Public-private partnerships are the only way to get anything done."*

The challenge lies in strengthening the public sector to safeguard inclusivity goals crucial for a city's durability.

Pitera adds that it is vital for city leaders to foster these partnerships proactively. He advises;

*"As a city mayor, you should not only be thrilled that private partners are coming into the city but also emphasize how beneficial it is for private interests to invest in the city."*

This highlights the mutual benefits that both sectors bring to the table.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders involved. By focusing on patient capital and fostering strong public-private partnerships, cities can navigate the complexities of sustainable urban development and create resilient, inclusive communities.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SUSTAINABLE URBAN DESIGN FORUM

The Sustainable Urban Design Purposeful Forum conversation yielded several important insights and potential paths forward for the industry. The five main takeaways:

## 1) Patient Capital is Essential for Long-Term Success

A critical differentiator discussed during the forum was the importance of patient capital in fostering sustainable urban development. This investment style prioritizes long-term benefits over immediate returns, allowing for more thoughtful and inclusive planning. As highlighted by Pool, public housing entities, and pension funds can serve as “first-movers” in this space, setting a precedent for other investors.

## 2) Public-Private Partnerships Drive Sustainable Development

The forum underscored the indispensable role of public-private partnerships in achieving durable urban development. Both sectors bring unique strengths to the table, and their collaboration is vital for ensuring inclusivity and resilience in city planning. As Kickert noted, such partnerships are the only way to accomplish meaningful progress, and Pitera emphasized the need for city leaders to promote and support these collaborations actively.

## 3) Thriving Neighborhoods Require Community-Centric Planning

Building thriving neighborhoods is about celebrating existing residents while welcoming new ones.

This involves creating smaller, close-knit collectives that are self-organized and can help shape the vision and makeup of neighborhoods.

The forum stressed the importance of diverse, inclusive spaces that foster growth and community engagement, making areas outside the downtown core more attractive for future investments.

## 4) Meanwhile Spaces Foster Community and Inclusivity

The concept of meanwhile spaces—temporary uses for underutilized spaces—was highlighted as a powerful tool for fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion. These spaces can serve as beacons of future development. By utilizing vacant spaces creatively, cities can maintain vibrancy and community engagement even as long-term plans are being developed.

## 5) Innovation in Energy Management is Crucial

The forum also highlighted the critical role of innovation in energy demand management in sustainable urban development. Partnerships with organizations like the Detroit Smart Parking Lab exemplify how cities can support early-stage companies focused on urban innovation and mobility. These initiatives address current energy challenges and pave the way for future technological advancements in urban planning.



# LOOKING AHEAD

The insights gained from this forum point to a promising future for sustainable urban design. By embracing patient capital, fostering public-private partnerships, focusing on community-centric planning, utilizing meanwhile spaces, and driving innovation in energy management, cities can evolve to become more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. The conversations initiated here will undoubtedly influence the trajectory of urban development, encouraging a holistic approach that benefits current and future generations.