

# Detroit needs a homestead act for homeowners



STEVEN SIVAK

Last week I spent time discussing Detroit and its relationship to other cities. I admit to being critical of the city. Many have thrived in its peculiar form of destruction but, for me, I can only imagine what the city was like during the Jazz Age of the Twenties and Thirties.

To imagine that the city was once one of the top five wealthiest cities in the country is almost unbelievable. Money just poured out along Woodward Avenue — the mansions, the performance halls, the fine neighborhoods of Boston Edison and the like.

I do not think that stadiums, casinos and automobile race tracks are a first step towards the rebirth of the motor city. They, I believe, are a separate

**I think that there is a lot to be said about these issues, perhaps these should be discussed live. Is there anybody out there who has read any or all of the past eight articles who would like to form some sort of discussion group? I am willing to give it a try! How about 7 p.m. Wednesday nights starting Jan. 8 at Brazil in downtown Royal Oak — maybe the Mayor will show up and answer some questions for us all. Give me a call to let me know if there is in fact interest.**

component of what makes a healthy prosperous city.

Not all — and maybe not most — of what a city does to make itself great will come from the private sector, e.g. casinos and stadiums. These are money makers for a group of businessmen — they may work into a city's plan or they may not. I think it foolish to believe that the private sector will supply Detroit with neighborhoods and middle-income job

opportunities. Detroit under its own will and ability to attract industrial manufacturers will need to do this for itself.

For me, one of the strongest marks against the city are the elements of destruction, decay and potential for crime. Why not bulldoze dysfunctional and poverty-stricken neighborhoods that have a population density below a certain percentage? Take the existing residents and re-

locate them to more comfortable and safe neighborhoods.

Schoolchildren would then plant oaks and maple saplings, creating parks and something to look at other than burned and destroyed buildings, which only lead people to have little respect for their surroundings. The city would appear to be cleaner and safer, and existing neighborhoods would be reinforced by increasing the population of such areas.

It is obvious that the population of Detroit will not be what it once was, and it is also probable that the tax revenues will never be as high as they once were. Natural areas can be left alone, as they are in the wild, but by ignoring a city and not maintaining it will only lead us to the situation we currently have in many parts of the city.

This bulldozing scheme takes care of much — not people who are here to gamble but those who want to paint their houses

and rake leaves in the fall and walk with baby carriages down the sidewalks of their neighborhoods.

What could possibly encourage young people to come back to this city? Money.

Although, the city is poor, it does have money in the form of abandoned houses. Why not have a policy similar to the one that was used to attract settlers to the western half of the country; a homestead program if you will.

The city of Detroit offers up houses whose title is held by both the city and the homeowner for seven years and, at the end of this time period, the city signs off and the property is fully owned by the resident.

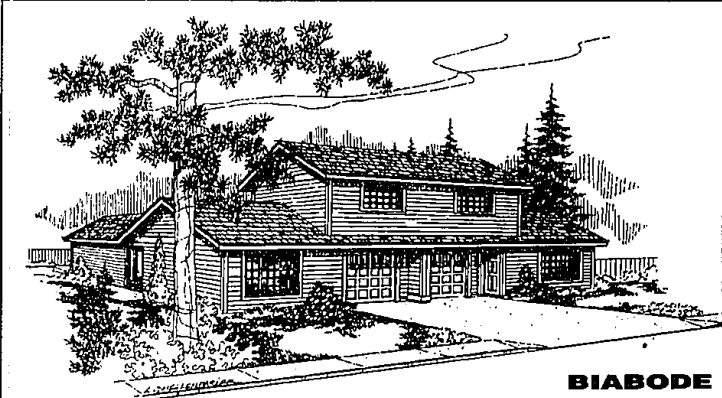
The catch is that the residents must renovate the houses and perhaps the city offers low cost loans for those willing to undertake the burden. Who would be entitled to take advantage of the program would depend on one's politics. I like the idea that this

house is both an enticement as well as an award for having completed something that the city so badly needs — so perhaps this is a reward for going to college?

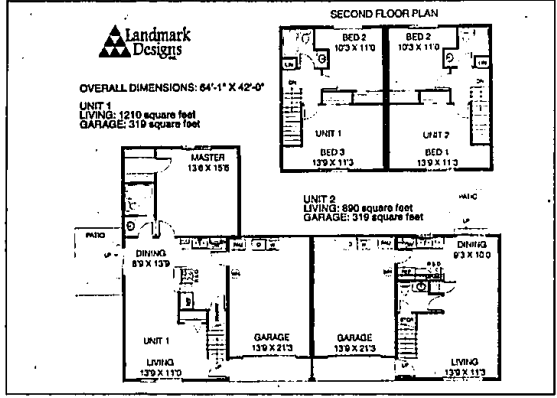
Allowing suburban flight to continue will only create more desire to create Renaissance Centers whereby fast, smooth running cars quickly move back and forth down the freeways bringing commuters and evening entertainment opportunities.

Neighborhoods and jobs must be the cornerstone of a happy and healthy city. Expect no quick solutions — this will be a slow road to recovery.

Steve Sivak is a licensed architect in private practice and an adjunct professor of architecture at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield. He specializes in well-crafted residential and commercial architecture and can be contacted at (313) 769-8502.



BIABODE



**Biabode:** This unusual duplex offers a place to live and a place to rent. Patios and garages for both units are among the amenities.

## Duplex design is money-maker

Ownership of a duplex can provide many benefits for those interested in acquiring an income property. Some may choose to reside in one unit, while renting the other. Another option is to rent both accommodations and manage the holding. One of the more modern and innovative duplex plans to hit the market in quite a while, is the

Biabode. This two story design has 1210 square feet of living area in unit one, with the master suite on the main level and two bedrooms on the second level. The other side is an 890 square foot unit with two bedrooms, one and a half baths.

Both units have an attached garage that conveniently opens directly into the kitchen. This allows one to unload groceries with a minimum of bother. There is space in each garage to put a washer and dryer.

The master suite, in unit one, is a rarity in duplex design. Extending out from the back of the building, the amenities here include a large sleeping area, walk-in closet and a semi-private bathroom.

Both units have a living room that flows unimpeded into the dining area. The kitchen dimensions vary somewhat, but both allow for easy serving and feature built-in appliances. Unit one's dining room has a sliding glass door leading to a side patio. Unit two's dining room has a sliding glass door to a back patio.

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