

Reimagining the Region: Building a New Detroit Metropolis

October 3rd, 2011 by Robert West



“This was about keeping hope alive – the past is not who we are.” . . . “This event allowed us to see successful strategies (from other cities) that can translate to our own community.” . . . “I feel confident our community can change and make strength in diversity a reality.”

These were just a few out of 180 positive comments from over 200+ audience members at the **Reimagining the Region: Building a New Detroit Metropolis** forum, centered around Andrea Torrice’s documentary series ***The New Metropolis***, hosted at the Emagine Royal Oak Theater on September 15.

“Detroit has been deteriorating for over 40 years because of disinvestment,” said **Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director of Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)**, one of the sponsors of the event. “The suburbs had been secure, but over the last 15 years they’ve been experiencing the same decline as the urban core. There’s also been a lot of competition between municipalities. I hope this event starts to break down the barriers so that all communities, suburban and urban, can cooperate rather than compete. **But the question is: how do we cooperate?** This event gives community leaders the opportunity to come together and discuss how to do this.”



Award-winning filmmaker Andrea Torrice launched the evening dialogue with some clips from her recent documentary, *The New Metropolis*, which highlights issues facing America's first suburbs to examine U.S. land use and transportation policy. "The film series is called *The New Metropolis* because old policies which separated cities and suburbs are no longer in our economic self-interest," said Torrice. **"We need a new vision for our regions in the future."**



Stephen Henderson, an editor for the **Detroit Free Press** and host of Detroit Public Television's **American Black Journal** moderated a panel discussion and dialogue with the audience, which was filmed and streamed live by **Detroit Public TV**. (Watch the event via streaming video on The New Metropolis website [here](#).) "Detroit is the home of the original idea of the suburbs. The highway system here, which is **more complex and over-developed than any place in the country**, made it possible since the 1950s for people to leave the city. So, we have more decaying infrastructure, especially in the inner-ring suburbs because they're older," said Henderson.

Conan Smith, Executive Director of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, which also co-sponsored the event, said, "Suburban communities were created to drive segregation in the '40s, '50s, and '60s. These films (*The New Metropolis*) speak about strategies to overcome important stuff for us. **Overcoming segregation to realize its promise, as seen in *The New Metropolis* framework – that is the hope of this experience."**

The forum was co-sponsored by [Detroit Public Television](#), [Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength](#) (MOSES), [Michigan Suburbs Alliance](#), [Michigan Department of Civil Rights](#), [Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion](#), [Model D Media](#), [Working Films](#), and [Torrice Productions](#).

108 evaluations were collected from the audience, when asked if they believed the Forum highlighted critical issues facing Detroit and the surrounding region, 99 said they agreed or strongly agreed. 101 said they thought the films highlighted stories that will be use in developing strategies in Detroit. 83 audience members said they are feeling more positive about finding new strategies to work together.

The sponsors and organizers are now putting into action many of the suggestions for follow up by the audience, including opportunities for future screenings hosted by partnerships of local organizations as well as a listserv that will allow us to stay connected to the attendees – 160+ of whom shared their contact information. **Nineteen different organizations immediately committed to hosting additional screenings, from churches and synagogues to inner city youth groups to district libraries to Eastern Michigan University.**

This event was part of *The New Metropolis* civic engagement dialogue series taking place across the country on revitalizing America's older communities and is made possible through the support of the Ford and Surdna Foundations. Working Films co-organized two strategy summits for this Detroit event, bringing together local community stakeholders to secure their input and commitment. **Robert West, Working Films' co-founder and Executive Director, said, "This forum was a model of how to use a documentary series as a catalyst for authentic change.** Community stakeholders were involved with our planning process six months prior to this event, and stayed focused on local challenges and concrete outcomes.

One comment from an audience member seemed to sum up the extraordinarily positive energy at the conclusion of the event: this event was about **"collaboration, unity, community."**



You are invited to attend
a film screening and community dialogue

Reimagining the Region: Building a New Detroit Metropolis

How can the city of Detroit and its suburban communities work together to create a vibrant and equitable region for the future? Join public officials, policymakers, business, faith and community leaders, and filmmaker Andrea Torrice for a film screening of *The New Metropolis* followed by community dialogue.

Thursday, September 15, 6 – 9 p.m.
at the Emagine Royal Oak Theatre, Royal Oak, Michigan

This event will be **streamed live** on the **The New Metropolis** website. [Click here to watch or learn more.](#)