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Why Detroit Matters, Part III: The Stars are Lining Up

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Detroit has many fine things going on, and many fine actors that are working hard for the future of the city. What is even more remarkable is that some of their efforts center on ideas and principles that are “out of the box.” Their efforts are also consistent with many of the directions that experts nationwide seem to agree are the pathways to the New Economy. There also seems to be emerging consensus in the foundation community about these pathways, and opportunities are increasingly crystallizing to support these efforts. For example, the [New Economy Initiative for Southeast Michigan](#)--funded by a consortium of foundations to allow the [Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan](#) to lead and invest in catalytic projects to better ground Detroit and the region in the New Economy--is probably one of the most significant testaments to the new emerging view on the future and prospects of the Greater Detroit Region.

Last year witnessed the election of [Mayor Dave Bing](#), who came into office with the mandate to stage, perhaps, the biggest turn-around in the plight of a major city ever. His administration has taken some very bold steps in articulating ways forward. For example, with the help of the foundation community, his administration has commissioned a group to help drive Detroit's future land use plans. The city has also engaged [McKinsey & Company](#) to help with the vision piece. All of the above is good news, considering that, until recently, the level of optimism about Detroit was rather low. Getting on the same sheet of music has always been a challenge. When great minds from the public and private sector, and the foundation community, start to believe that it can happen in Detroit, there is a very good chance that it will.

All of these recent developments in the Detroit area are consistent with the direction of State policy, which is increasingly comfortable with the notion of publicly supporting the resurgence of cities. The State of Michigan is rapidly warming up to the idea that the success of Detroit is critical to the success of the Detroit Metro Region, and that the success of the region is a prerequisite for Michigan's return to prosperity. Governor Jennifer M. Granholm's [Cool Cities initiative](#) and the [Cities of Promise program](#) are examples of early creative thought about the importance of cities. While important, in light of Michigan's legacy, those ideas were slow at resonating statewide. Today, there seems to be more universal acceptance of the idea that cities are important, and that positioning Detroit well for the future is also important. But, these opportunities to position Detroit come at a time when the city and the state are both economically challenged. So, while it appears that the policy community is finally getting it, we have limited State and local resources to make things happen.

In moving Detroit forward, we must look to the feds for any assistance we can get. For one, emerging initiatives in the city seem heavily consistent with the direction of federal policy and the funding opportunities arising, due to the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\)](#). Huge federal funds are now available for initiatives with such titles as “Neighborhood Stabilization Program,” “Choice Communities,” “Sustainable Communities,” “Advanced Transportation,” “Renewable Energy” and “Workforce Development.” Outside of the ARRA budget, a large amount of federal funding is available for such things as education, transportation, roads, parks, trails and energy. So, if Detroit is simply visionary and is competitive in attracting federal dollars, it can lay a strong foundation for the future, while leveraging federal resources. The stars are lining up and this is the time to act.

Paying attention to where the city, its administration, the people of Detroit, the foundation community, the State and Washington, D.C. are going, would lead one to conclude that there are promising possibilities. But, it makes sense for Detroit to be true to itself and build a future based on its inherent critical assets. These assets will be the subject of the next article in the series.