



Commentary by Rip Rapson:

Detroit Is on Track for a Positive Future

Originally published in The Detroit News on Nov. 12, 2014.

November 17, 2014

With U.S. Judge Steven Rhodes' acceptance of the stakeholder-approved plan of adjustment, the Detroit community will be the subject of every manner of intellectual, legal, political and social discussion over the coming weeks. And we should welcome that.

We have spent a year in profound struggle. About the legitimacy of nonelected decision-making. About the relative rights of creditors of every conceivable stripe. About the inviolability of obligations to former city employees, who dedicated their careers to public service. About the need to steward the community's cultural heritage. About the "feasibility" of Kevyn Orr's blueprint for improving public services, remediating blight and rebuilding the tax base.

It's time now to step back and take stock of the lessons learned. This is to our benefit and all those interested in the economic future of countless communities that find themselves in circumstances not so different from Detroit.

The bankruptcy has been, at root, about whether Detroit can and will put in place the building blocks necessary for its revitalization. It has been about whether the region can follow a trajectory that will once again propel Detroit to its rightful place as one of America's great cities.

This desire to move forward with the business of rebuilding a shared future was the essential reason those of us in the philanthropic community contributed, along with the state of Michigan, the pensioners and the Detroit Institute of Arts, to what's referred to as the "grand bargain."

We had to do everything in our power to make sure that the harm pensioners felt would be kept to an absolute minimum. We couldn't stand by while proposals ricocheted through the bankruptcy trial to strip the assets of one of the community's treasures.

With those objectives accomplished to the best of our abilities, we must now resume with redoubled passion and skill the efforts underway to realize a healthy, united future.

That is our foundation's focus. We will continue to seek out, support and work with partners locally and from across the country – nonprofit, public, private and philanthropic. We want to help foster long-term economic opportunity that advances social equity, promotes cultural expression and re-establishes Kresge's hometown as the center of a vibrant region.

We will offer our assistance to Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan's administration and the City Council as they seek ways to retool city services to improve safety, remediate blight, turn the lights on, pick up the trash, get the buses running on time and attend to countless other challenges of fixing basic municipal function.

We will continue our partnerships with the private sector to ensure M-1 Rail's success as the first leg of a regional transportation system. M-1's streetcars promise to draw markets back into the city center and into neighborhoods. All along the route, it will encourage the kind of small-business activities that will help diversify the economy and create new jobs.

We will work with neighborhood residents, community-based organizations and the Detroit Future City office to ensure that we are investing in neighborhoods, whether through the creative repurposing of blighted land, the strengthening of places that anchor a community's identity and build social cohesion, the incorporation of art into a neighborhood's daily life or the development of new preschool development opportunities.

There have been times over this last year when aspirations to get back to work seemed beyond reach. Yet the stakes were too high to fail. Instead, each person and institution rose to the challenge and stretched beyond what any of us thought possible.

It's time to do that once again.