

# A Basic Community Profile: Southwest Detroit (Vernor & Chadsey-Condon Communities)

Southwest Detroit's 14.7 square mile land area is made up of different neighborhoods, each with its own distinct flavor. There are small wooden cottages and large brick estates, rehabilitated apartment buildings and bungalows ranging in provenance from the 1920s to 1950s. Housing prices range average from about \$70,000 to \$100,000. A drive through the communities reveals a wide variety of housing. Brand-new, market-rate Ste.



Anne condos, designed to look like peaked-roof row houses, are the latest addition to Bagley Housing Association's revitalization plan. Over on 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> — more of the many residential blocks pioneered by the BHA — new A-frame houses with manicured lawns and a spruced-up collection of older ones are quietly creating a quaint neighborhood, lit up by the night-time glow of the Ambassador Bridge. Neighborhood price points — \$80,000 for an old home that needs work and new market-rate condos for \$160,000 — can be made more attractive by tax abatements and subsidies.



The communities can be characterized as working-class with a mix of seniors and families. The ethnic breakdown of Mexicantown's population is, in fact, incredibly diverse. According to the Mexicantown CDC, the numbers go something like this: 50 percent Hispanic, 33 percent black, and 37 percent white. Neighborhoods in SW Detroit, regularly comes in second as neighborhoods in the city with the least crime. The Joshua Project shows crime in Southwest Detroit has gone down 35 percent between 1996-2005.

**Some basic population statistics.** The most recent (2000) census indicates that just under 88,000 residents live in the area. There are just over 28,000 households, slightly over 19,000 families, and about 35,000 children and youth between 0-18 years of age. The community is relatively stable, with about 53% of community members residing in the same house for more than five years, and about 48% residing in the same house for less than five years. Of the 19,000 families, a little over half of them are headed by married couples, with about 33% head by single women. Children and youth make up a little more than 40% of the community population.

**Employment, income and crime.** Nearly 85% of community residents report some type of employment; male unemployment rates run about 14% while female unemployment is just under 13%. The average median income for community residents is just under \$25,000. About 3400 households (12% of the total in the community) receive some type of public assistance, and just under 40% of children age 5 or less live in a family below the poverty line.

Statistics on crime are somewhat difficult to obtain, however the 8800 reported crimes in 2004 in the community (including homicides, rapes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, larcenies, and auto thefts) place this community among the safest communities in Detroit. It is estimated that about 15% of these crimes are committed by youths 18 years of age or less.

**Education.** In this community, there are 15 public elementary schools, six middle schools, and three high schools. There are also 11 private elementary schools and 1 private middle school. A little over half of the community residents (51.4%) report less than a high school diploma in the 2000 census. About 30% are high school graduates, about 11% report some college, about 5% report an associates or bachelors' degree, and almost 2% report a post graduate degree.

Schools do what they can, however, the community's high school graduation rate of 51% in 2004 is less than both the city's rate of graduation (61%) and the state's rate of high school graduation (71%) in 2004. Elementary and middle school students' performance on standardized MEAP tests can vary widely – from a low of 30% to a high about 70% of students who meet or exceed standardized test levels.

**Community Assets.** There are 11 parks in the community. One of these neighborhood asset is the 85-acre Patton Park, which stretches north of Vernor at Woodmere. The sprawling greenspace is home to some of the oldest trees in the city as well as baseball diamonds, playscapes, and soccer fields. In fact, the Mexican Soccer League — with over 1,000 players participating annually — makes Patton Park its home. The Recreation Center, which contains a pool and gymnasium, recently underwent a \$10 million renovation and is slated to reopen in the spring 2006. Southwest Detroit Business Association is planning for construction to begin this spring on phase one of the Southwest Detroit and Dearborn Greenway, which will run through the park; a future phase will complete a greenway trail around the periphery of the park.

Romanowski Park on Lonyo south of Michigan is being transformed by the Detroit Recreation Department and the Greening of Detroit to include not only a playground and sports field, but also a working community farm including a fruit orchard and syrup-producing sugar maples. One of the several schools that will benefit from Romanowski's rebirth is Our Lady of Guadalupe Middle School for Girls, located on Central south of Michigan. This private school provides a holistic community for its 45 sixth through eighth grade students; it includes volunteer service, summer camp and a mandatory extended-day program that includes directed study, athletics and clubs — one of which is indeed gardening.

There are seven recreation centers in the community, but budget cuts mean that three of them are closed or will be closing, and two will have reduced hours of service.

After nearly a decade with only one branch library in the neighborhood, Detroit Public Library partnered with Southwest Nonprofit Housing Corp. in the beautiful renovation of a vacant storefront on Vernor at Lawndale to reopen the Campbell Branch. In an era of budget and service cutbacks, this investment is a striking statement to the value of this community.



The area has plenty of amenities: fine dining thanks to Vince's Ristorante Italiano, Las Brisas, Nuestra Familia Taqueria and Doña Lola's; a Rite Aid and a CVS; a Neighborhood City Hall; a Secretary of State branch office; numerous hardware stores, bakeries, banks and dry cleaners; and quality senior housing at the Pablo Davis Elder Living Center. Dix Street just west of Patton Park features a row of Arabic shops including butchers and markets.