

Michigan Municipal League

Dequindre Cut



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.



PROJECT DETAILS:

NAME:

Dequindre Cut

DATE:

2009–Present

LOCATION:

Detroit, Michigan

CATEGORIES:

Live, Work, Play
Built Environment

THE GIST:

The Dequindre Cut Greenway is a 1.35-mile intown recreational path developed through a public, nonprofit, and private partnership that offers a pedestrian link between the Detroit Riverfront, Eastern Market, and many residential neighborhoods. Originally, the abandoned rail corridor had become an underground hotspot for illegal activity including graffiti art. Eventually, this project was able to turn that art into a public asset.



Dequindre Cut

PROJECT SCOPE:

The Challenge:

How can we make an abandoned rail corridor a lively greenway?

Overview:

Formerly a Grand Trunk Western Railroad line, the Dequindre Cut is a below-streetlevel path that runs parallel to St. Aubin Street just north of the Detroit Riverfront. The first completed section of the Dequindre Cut is between Woodbridge Street and Gratiot Avenue. The greenway features a 20-foot-wide paved pathway, which includes separate lanes for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and proposed light rail. The path became a huge success story for the city. Naysayers claimed it wouldn't be safe and no one would use it, but people started using it before it was even finished. Today, the urban corridor is actively used by residents and visitors alike.

Accomplishments:

- Encouraged thousands of residents and visitors to get outside and exercise. A recent study, Cost-Benefit Analysis of Physical Activity Using Bike/Pedestrian Trails, concludes that for every \$1 spent on trails, nearly \$3 of public health costs are avoided.
- Linked the popular Detroit Riverfront and Eastern Market, and has been a catalyst for over \$18 million of investments in properties along the greenway.



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- Awarded a \$10 million TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) Grant to expand the greenway, connecting it to the Midtown Loop, Amtrak, and the Detroit Institute of Arts by 2014.
- Exhibited 35+ high-quality graffiti murals painted by internationally known street artists, attracting visitors from around the world.

Organization:

Working with the city, Rails to Trails, and the GreenWays Initiative, the Downtown Detroit Partnership and JJR helped transform the corridor into a public greenway. The multi-year design and construction process required commitment and a clear vision. The design team actively sought community input through surveys and workshops. The Dequindre Cut is currently managed by the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving and maintaining the riverwalk. A small maintenance staff and security patrol the greenway daily.

Budget:

The GreenWays Initiative granted the Downtown Detroit Partnership \$98,750 to put plans in motion to remake the Dequindre Cut as a greenway. The project was later funded by another \$3.4 million in grants from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and the Economic Development Corporation.

Funding:

Ongoing funding for the Dequindre Cut is provided through an endowment. The city recently received a \$10 million TIGER Grant to expand the Cut seven miles by 2014. This addition will connect the greenway to the Midtown Loop, Detroit Institute of Arts, Amtrak, and additional amenities.

Participants:

In addition to the major players in making the path a reality, from the city and state to organizations like the Downtown Detroit Partnership and Rails to Trails, the key participants are the people of Detroit. Although the initial rundown, graffitied appearance of the corridor warranted significant concern from the public, the design team quickly realized that the art was an asset and that providing a canvas for the artists would enhance the space. Today the Cut hosts graffiti weekends where internationally known street artists create stunning murals on bridges and infrastructure. Local residents, avid runners, business owners, school groups, and visitors use the path daily and enjoy the edgy art.

Inspiration:

Greenways are linear open spaces, including habitat and trails, that link parks, nature reserves, cultural features or historic sites with each other, for recreation and conservation purposes. The Dequindre Cut provides an unique opportunity to strengthen social bonds, connect nearby communities, inspire people through art, and promote healthy lifestyles in downtown Detroit.



Actions Taken:

1) RETHINK OPPORTUNITY.

An abandoned rail corridor might not be your first choice for the next great public space in your city; however, several new greenways including the Dequindre Cut, New York City's High Line, and Atlanta's BeltLine, are making a strong case for it. A former rail line can actually provide the perfect footprint for pedestrian traffic and light rail. Working at this scale has both opportunities and challenges. Consider what immediate issues would need to be addressed, and envision what a greenway would look like.

2) CONVERGE IDEAS OVER COFFEE.

The Dequindre Cut was first a lofty dream shared between a few key individuals including a planner, Detroit enthusiast, funder, and environmental leader. They often met over several cups of coffee at a local coffee shop to brainstorm the greenway. These informal sessions quickly grew, and as the idea became more popular, the team gathered more formal meetings attracting additional partners and support from the city.

3) CONTACT THE PROPERTY OWNER.

Find out who owns the space. Many "abandoned" rail lines are still active or privately owned. In the case of Dequindre Cut, the city actually owned the first property, which made the process a bit easier; however, with the expansion of the greenway, a partnership agreement has been forged with additional property owners.

**4) DETERMINE FEASIBILITY.**

The Rails to Trails organization led a feasibility study for the Cut. It was incredibly important to have a thorough inventory and analysis of the current conditions in the project area. They also reviewed and coordinated other projects and recent studies of relevance during this planning effort.

5) MAKE A FORMAL PLAN.

Gather partners at a table and begin to articulate an implementation strategy. Consider identifying all of the possible new greenways in the district, create concepts that show potential designs, estimate project costs, list top 10 priorities, and determine management. This phase will take a significant amount of time. Working with a skilled design team who shares your vision is imperative. Understand that you want to bake the cookies right the first time, so get all of your ingredients in order and measure carefully.

6) TALK TO NEIGHBORS.

You might not hear the feedback that you want to initially. The public was shocked over plans for the Dequindre Cut. They raised concerns over outrageous expenses, infrastructure challenges, and safety. The 25-foot-below-grade greenway seemed to be foreboding. Consider outreach to alleviate concerns and gain important feedback. A community task force can help articulate the shared vision and gain support from the public. Door-to-door surveys and interactive workshops helped engage neighbors, designers, and general city enthusiasts in the project.

7) CONSIDER SUSTAINABILITY.

Detroit did not have a structure for managing public spaces, and someone had to be responsible for daily maintenance and security at the greenway. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy currently maintains the space, and maintenance funding is provided by a project endowment.

8) DIG IN AND WATCH IT GROW.

After you finalize master plans, enjoy groundbreaking; it is an exciting time. Don't be surprised if people follow the paving trucks and make visiting the construction zone an event. Document the process and continue to share your story onsite and through social media.

9) ANIMATE THE SPACE.

The Dequindre Cut is an unusual space, but people have embraced it. The greenway often hosts graffiti weekends, art festivals, dog walk groups, and family picnics. If you give artists a canvas, most likely you will get cool and colorful work to enhance the space. Get creative and invite diverse users to come up with exciting programming.

10) BEGIN NEXT PHASE.

You aren't done yet. If you have taken the time to plan for an expansion, consider next steps and gain additional partnerships. You will face similar challenges, but it will be much easier to move forward based on your experience. The Dequindre Cut's expansion will include urban farming, gardens, a picnic market, and more. Leverage your previous success to build something that has multiple uses and attracts even more users

Lessons Learned:

- Think Outside the Box.
"Unexpected, unappealing spaces can be transformed into vibrant new parks for people to gather."
- Embrace the Existing Culture of the Space.
"Where some people might have seen the graffiti as an eyesore, these partners quickly realized that it could be admired as artistic expression and a cultural outlet for the community."
- Build a Collective Vision.
"Outreach to get neighbors on board. Projects like these are often daunting and expensive. Use passion and communication to foster support."

Experts:

Tom Woiwode, Director of GreenWays Initiative, twoiwode@cfsem.org

Similar Projects:

Atlanta BeltLine
High Line

Documents:

Map
Grant Overview



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DEQUINDRE CUT GREENWAY

DEQUINDRE CUT GREENWAY

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DetroitRiverFront.org
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DEQUINDRE CUT GREENWAY

Legend:

- Existing Greenway (Yellow dashed line)
- Future Greenway Extension (Orange hatched area)
- Entry Points (Blue starburst icons)
- Detroit RiverWalk (Blue line)
- Temporary RiverWalk (Blue dashed line)

Key locations and landmarks shown on the map include:

- DeQuindre Cut Greenway (highlighted in orange)
- St. Aubin Street Waterfront Playfield
- Friends School in Detroit
- Chrysler Elementary School
- Lafayette Plaisance Park
- Cherryboneau Place
- Orleans Street
- Antietam Avenue
- Hyde Park Road
- Thornhill Place
- Pembroke Place
- Chateaufort Place
- Nicolet Place
- Joliet Place
- E. Lafayette Boulevard
- Navarre Place
- Lafayette Central Park
- Woodbridge Street
- Franklin Street
- Rivard Street
- Cafe
- Atwater Street
- William G. Milliken State Park & Harbor
- Chene Park & Amphitheater
- Atwater Street
- Chene Street
- Dubois Street
- Orleans Street
- St. Aubin Street
- E. Jefferson Avenue
- E. Larned Street
- St. Antoine
- Chrysler Drive
- Gratiot Avenue
- FISHER FWY
- Wilkins Street
- Alfred Street
- Adelaide Street
- Rionelle Street
- Winder Street
- Orleans Street
- Division Street
- Mack Avenue
- Erskine Street
- Russell Street
- Rivard Street
- Chrysler Drive
- Atwater Street
- DUPLESSIS PLAYGROUND
- DETROIT RIVER

Inset photos show people at the Eastern Market, a person riding a bike on the greenway, a person playing guitar under a bridge, and two people walking along the riverfront.

The Center for 21st Century Communities

Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at mml.org.

Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan's future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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