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Let's Save Michigan 'It's About Place' Contest Inspires Creative Placemaking Plans For Detroit

The Huffington Post | By Kate Abbey-Lambertz Posted: 05/18/2012 4:45 pm Updated: 05/18/2012 4:45 pm

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The Canfield Social Yard is one of the projects in the Let's Save Michigan "It's About Place" contest, which will award \$2,000 to one of 46 projects to improve a public space in a Michigan city.

Could you transform your neighborhood with \$2,000?

The competitors in the "It's About Place" contest from [Let's Save Michigan](#) have come up with ideas to do exactly that, crafting plans to turn an underused space in their city into a public place for the community.

The [46 submitted projects](#) are a varied bunch, including a pocket park in an alley in downtown Saline and a wheat field in Hamtramck. In the first round, the public

can vote until June 1, once per person daily, on a favorite entry. The top 10 will go on to a final round in mid-June where judges will choose a winning project to receive \$2,000 and award prizes of \$500 and \$1,000 to several others.

The contest is sponsored by the Michigan Municipal League's Let's Save Michigan program, which focuses on supporting the state's cities through revitalization efforts and policy advocacy.

"Placemaking works at a variety of scales, and it's something that all of our cities

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need, and that includes the smaller towns and villages," said Sarah Szurpicki, project coordinator for Let's Save Michigan. "There are very few cities around Michigan that have been able to focus on making those place-based investments, and all of our downtowns have suffered from disinvestment in this arena."

Szurpicki sees the contest as a combination of a grant process and a public design competition. She says the goal is to show how small investments can make a large difference in any community.

While all of the 28 locations in the contest could benefit from more dynamic public spaces, Detroit's vacant land, diminishing city services and strong communities make it perfect for placemaking -- or at least the 14 hopeful candidates who submitted Detroit-based projects must think so.

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and I wanted to do something nice with it."

Linn also lives in Woodbridge and spoke to neighbors about what amenities they would want from a public space.

"A good portion of the people I spoke with in Woodbridge were movie buffs or creative residents, and they were really excited by the proposition of hosting screenings," Linn said. "It will be more for evening events, so I think it will be a natural complement to other open spaces in the area."

He's collaborating with another sibling duo, architects Maynard and Nora Leon, who will design the space and its features, which include a patio, seating, a food prep area and bike racks. The project will rely on local residents to help build out the space and then run its programming.

Many of the placemaking contest's projects rely on volunteers' work, but according to Szurpicki, that's a good thing. The panel of expert judges will be looking for project feasibility, uniqueness and stakeholder engagement.

"The most successful placemaking projects are those where the community who's going to be using the project is going to be involved," Szurpicki said.

(For more information about the projects and to vote for your favorite, see the [Let's Save Michigan website](#).)

Let's Save Michigan is not the only group committed to placemaking. Individuals and community groups do it all the time when they preserve public places in their neighborhoods.

On a larger scale, the foundation ArtPlace funds creative placemaking nationwide and awarded \$1.3 million in combined grants last year to the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Sugarhill District and TechTown's Fabrication Arts Business Lab. Six Detroit organizations are [finalists in the 2012 competition](#).

And last month, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority launched the [MIPlace Partnership](#), a website dedicated to placemaking education and resources for the state.

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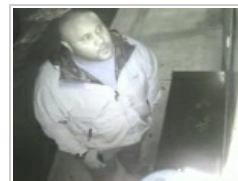
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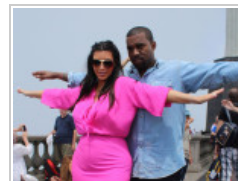
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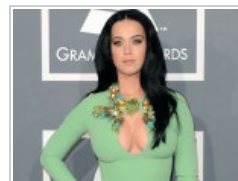
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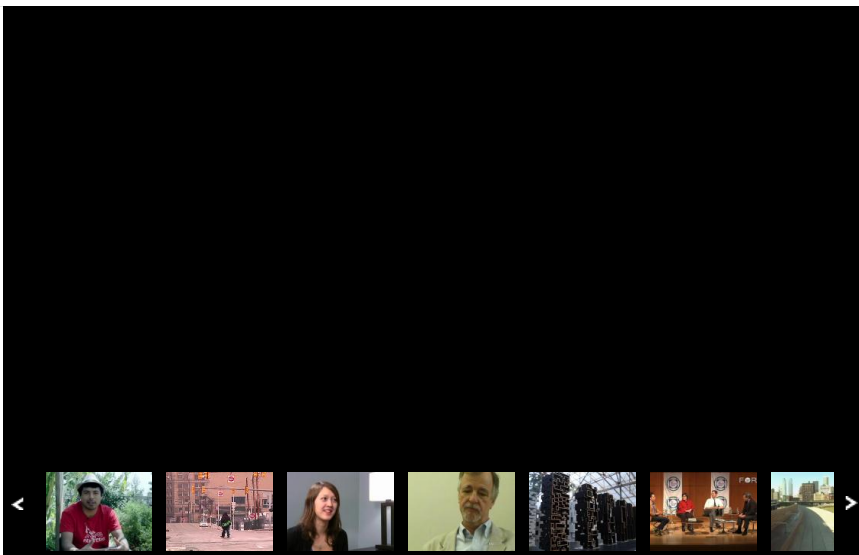
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Kate Abbey-Lambertz COMMUNITY CURATOR · 51 Fans

ARTICLE AUTHOR

In reply to: Toka313

Hi there -- just to clarify, the Canfield Social Yard project is intended to complement other community spaces in the neighborhood. They would use funding not for the programming itself, as far as I am aware, but to design and construct the architectural elements -- stage, seating, bike racks and storage according to their original plan.

<http://letssavemichigan.com/placemaking-contest/entry/canfield-social-yard-detroit/>

Did you have a favorite of the Detroit projects?

Reply Fave Share 24 May 2012 5:02 PM Flag

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