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Wayne County promotes green demolition while retraining workforce

(WAYNE COUNTY) – Wayne County has partnered with Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit and Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit in a novel pilot project to take down blighted structures using green techniques while retraining workforce development clientele.

"I saw an opportunity to create a new local economy in Michigan, which encourages the deconstruction of abandoned homes versus demolition; recycling and reselling bricks, metals, wood versus paying landfills, and creating new jobs in communities versus paying one guy in a tractor to do demolitions," said Azzam Elder, deputy Wayne County executive. "We now have a new way of going green, and creating jobs at acceptable market prices. We developed the program with input from local business owners who promote sustainability."

Deconstruction is an alternative to demolition and land filling. The focus of deconstruction is to salvage materials for reuse and recycle.

Research at the Deconstruction Institute website www.deconstructioninstitute.com indicates that deconstruction provides nearly 20 more worker days at a living wage than would conventional knock-down-and-haul-away demolition.

"This is an exciting opportunity to promote green demolition while offering employment opportunities," said Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano. "The hopeful thing about the pilot is the workforce development piece, which gives individuals just released from correctional facilities some direction and focus for a better future."

The deconstruction of a typical 2,000 square foot wood frame home can yield 6,000 board feet of reusable lumber. Fairly obvious items are salvaged like sinks, fireplaces and windows. Other items include joists, shingles, wood planks and even drywall if it's asbestos-free.

Two homes, currently owned by the Wayne County Land Bank, were completely deconstructed in Detroit as part of the pilot project and parts were collected and tagged as reusable or recyclable. The pilot program involved training 13 workers who were part of Goodwill Industries reentry program, recently released from incarceration.

“Through the deconstruction of these homes, we’ve found yet another way to help unemployed metro Detroiters reconstruct their lives,” said Lorna G. Utley, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit. “Working with the Wayne County Land Bank and Architectural Salvage Warehouse teaches these men the skills they need to become trained, trusted and ready to work.”

Superior Demolition will demolish the remaining basements and remove materials for recycling.

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