How can Detroit come back?

There is no one single answer, nor should there be. The Motor City has meant many things to the public eye, from Beaux Arts gem to Industrial Juggernaut to a symbol of despair. The recent past has dealt a discouraging hand to the city - crime, economic depression, depopulation, municipal bankruptcy, and perhaps worst of all, a lack of sympathy from the outside world. But while people across the country write off Detroit as dying or dead, the 680,000 people who still live there continue moving forward against all odds.

A movement is underway in Detroit. Fueled by grassroots organization and community camaraderie, residents are defining new ways of living in an urban environment. They are growing their own food, starting small businesses, and relying more on each other than on the car companies and the city government.

The Detroit Collaborative Design Center is a nonprofit design firm affiliated with the University of Detroit-Mercy. The people of the center conceive and build ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable projects for the Detroit area. Their projects range from the scale of a single building to a new strategic framework for the entire city of Detroit. The DCDC is currently located in the Architecture building at the University of Detroit-Mercy, separated from the distressed neighborhoods they are trying to assist.

The new DCDC location places the organization in a uniquely symbolic place. To the east and southeast lie Detroit's most stable neighborhoods, including Midtown, Downtown, and Corktown. To the west sits a vast area of sparsely populated neighborhoods. This is where Detroit's transformation will be most apparent in the coming decades, as the city's land-use trends and policies evolve.

The program of the new center does not create housing or propose new buildings, but it is a strategic platform for the city. The DCDC has a role and responsibility to help define and design this transformation. The DCDC is working on a new building in Detroit, but it is not the same as rebuilding the city. The transformation will be at a much larger scale, and the DCDC is a part of that transformation.

The DCDC gives the people of Detroit a vantage point to witness the evolution of their city. It also stands as a beacon, welcoming ingenuity while celebrating history. It is a meeting place and an icon. It invites visitors to explore context and scale, from the familiar man-made materials of which it is built, to the distant views seen from the observation tower, to the endless imagination those views inspire within the mind.