



November 11, 2013

Mr. Tyson Gersh  
Michigan Urban Farming Initiative  
7432 Brush Street  
Detroit, MI 48202

Dear Mr. Gersh,

As the lead organization in The North End for nearly twenty years, Vanguard Community Development Corporation is responsible for convening a broad base of stakeholders to assist in the creation and implementation of projects and initiatives that support residents' vision for our neighborhood. This responsibility is met with a tireless and sincere commitment to be inclusive and to ensure all parties are working collectively to advance the interest of the neighborhood.

Per our previous conversations, you are aware that the Michigan Urban Farming Initiatives plans are in conflict with the land use plan Vanguard Community Development Corporation completed in 2012 with input from residents and stakeholders. Moreover, a number of residents and community stakeholders expressed severe reservations regarding MUFI's presence and work in the neighborhood during the community meeting held at Vanguard in February 2013. Participants expressed their concerns regarding the lack of community engagement from your organization, the location and proposed magnitude of your project, and your organization's capacity to implement projects that require a long-term commitment.

While MUFI has *listened* to the comments and acknowledged its missteps along the way, I have not witnessed a commitment to changing the course and aligning the organization's goals with those of the neighborhood. Additionally, the organization's quest to acquire vacant land, single family homes, and multi-unit buildings seems contrary to promoting "education, community, and sustainability and reducing socioeconomic disparity." The organization's current holdings, which have been estimated by your Board Members as approaching 40, are significant and several, including the vacant building on Brush, have not been redeveloped. More troubling is the assistance MUFI has given to out-of-town speculators during the last tax auction.

Disinvestment in The North End has been quicken by absentee property owners as approximately 70% of the properties identified by Vanguard for demolition are owned by private entities located outside of Detroit. Not only are these activities inconsistent with the stated mission of your organization, it appears that urban farming is being used as a guise for speculative interests of your Board Members and others. This is troubling as efforts to legitimize urban farming as a viable strategy for community development in The North End and other Detroit neighborhoods are at risk of being undermined.

Personally, I have a long supporter and proponent of urban agriculture and since coming to Vanguard I have made myself available to MUFI on numerous occasions in hopes the organization could reassess its trajectory. Despite your organization's assurance that its acquisition of property would be curtailed and more time would be given to the development of a sustainable organization structure, it appears the opposite has happened. Therefore, Vanguard Community Development Corporation is no longer in a supportive of Michigan Urban Farming Initiative and its presence in The North End given its current activities.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to give me a call at 313-556-2017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Khalilah Burt Gaston', written in a cursive style.

Khalilah Burt Gaston  
Executive Director