

ABSTRACT:

‘To shine one corner of the world—that is enough. Shine, and make it clear, right where you are.’

--Shunryu Suzuki-Roshi

BACKGROUND & NARRATIVE:

Nestled in the center of Detroit sits bustling Hamtramck – a tiny, 2 square mile enclaved city, with a rich history of immigration, Hamtramck housed early Polish, Eastern European & African-American factory workers during Detroit’s industrial automotive hey-day. But it is now surrounded by dramatic examples of impermanence, & the downside of industrialization.

A mile to the south of Hamtramck sit the bizarrely glorious ruins of the Packard Plant: 3.5 million square feet, across 40 acres, built by Albert Kahn, with steel so thick it’s nearly impossible to demolish. A mile to the north are the ruins of the original Model T Factory. A mile to the west, the abandoned site of Old Dodge Main, and a mile to the East, the vast industrial railroads, still used, that separate Hamtramck from its eastern neighbors.

In 1930, Hamtramck was home to 56,000. Thousands of workers lived in the factory row housing, a grid streetscape with mixed use dwellings, endless bars, restaurants & small businesses on the packed business district main streets, a trademark of the landscape that leaves it the only truly walkable City in metro-Detroit, to this day. But as the factories closed, so, too did the shops, stores, restaurants, and City budget.

A mass exodus of eastern European residents left room for a new wave of immigrants. Today, Hamtramck is again bustling, with 32 ethnic groups and low levels of abandonment. Yet it has the highest rates of poverty (47%), population density (28,000/2 miles), and foreign-born residents (38%) in Michigan (US Census 2020). It is a dense, vibrant borough, home to independent cafes, restaurants, grocery stores, studios & galleries, and is also filled with potholes, sirens, racing cars & noise pollution. Students, immigrants & artists cross paths on the streets. Serious issues do plague our neighborhood. Many residents do not speak English; most belong to communities of color, and we suffer rampant infrastructural, racial & economic barriers and wounds. Hamtramck longs for healing.

Two major and related crises are the lack of public greenspace, and the toxic, perpetual combined storm-sewage water backup into the basements & streets throughout Hamtramck, during heavy rain events. To solve this problem traditionally, City storm-sewer systems would need replacing, by tearing up roads & sidewalks – economically impossible for Hamtramck.

Regarding greenspace, Hamtramck has 320% more concrete surfaces, & 82% less public greenspace than the average City in Wayne County (SEMCOG). Public greenspace is virtually non-existent; children often play in alleys & parking lots.

On a neighborhood corner in Hamtramck sits the Detroit Zen Center, founded in 1990. It is a spiritual branch of Sudeoksa Temple, a 1,300 year old zen monastery in South Korea. Set across 3 buildings & 4 city lots, resident monks, students & members have worked daily for 33 years – in a slow yet steady transformation of abandoned buildings & vacant lots – from near total dilapidation, into a model of urban ecological renewal & stewardship.

The Zen Center offers a site-wide, urban ecological and living laboratory of Green Roofs, Bioretention Gardens & broad reclamation/re-use practices. In 2024 it will launch the “Shine One Corner” Project featuring tours, field trips ‘Urban Ecology Stays’, & workshops, & also improved neighborhood access to the Zen Center’s existing greenspaces – spaces of rustic beauty & healing – that also stand as a micro-model of how to solve Hamtramck’s storm-sewage backup & flood crisis.

The Shine One Corner Project is an evolution of an initiative that began 33 years ago, a slow-but-steady vision, of the Zen Center as a place to foster awakened relationship, in and among people and the environment.

Physically, the Zen Center stands as micro-model for sustainability at an urban ecological level. It features multi-dimensional Green Stormwater Infrastructure that serve a dual purpose as public Greenspace. Its reclaimed buildings

feature local wood, and a hand-cut & built post-and-beam entrance building with a green roof, that brought monks, Bosnian immigrants, and zen apprentices together to build the structure from the ground up.

With walkable green roofs, bioretention gardens, and reclamation practices site-wide, we need continued financial support to refine & improve the spaces. Next year, we hope to add phytoremediation mats to cover a former vacant lot, converted into a public garden, that sat for years as a de facto parking lot for junked cars. To combat the persistent soil toxins, we sought the help of Clayton Rugh, an expert in the field of rhizodegradation, who has offered to design & grow vegetative mats that once installed, will break down the particular soil toxins, featuring native plants.

In June of 2024, the Zen Center plans to formally capture the benefit of its grounds through a schedule of Saturday tours, field trips & workshops, and thoughtful, clear public access, featuring interpretive signage for its many non-English speaking neighbors.

We need your support, and hope you will consider helping us continue to shine this corner of the world, and find inspiration to shine your own corner, too.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND:

Launched into a mission to install GSI (Green Stormwater Infrastructure) to deal with its own storm-sewage backup crisis, the Zen Center is now home to 2 green roofs, public bioretention & rain gardens, extensive reclamation practices, a lovely meditation hall & residency, and a vegan urban-farm-to-table café. Located on a busy pedestrian street one block from the high school, neighbors & the City have been very supportive, and derived great benefit from the Center. Resident monks & members are part of the fabric of Hamtramck community life.

The Center was founded by a Buddhist monk – our Abbot, Sunim – who, after 18 years training in Zen monasteries, was directed to leave the mountain temple serenity of Korea by his spiritual teacher, to teach meditation in America. Born in Detroit in 1941, he is a former Detroit public school teacher and sociology professor. He left Detroit in 1967 toward a spiritual calling, in the aftermath of, & serving as a peacekeeper in the Detroit uprising (“riots”). Decades he returned to serve as a monk, and in 1989 arrived back to Detroit with \$50 and a backpack.

A Detroit hospital nurse and a few early students began meditating with him, and together they founded the Zen Center inside a home in southwest Detroit. In 1990, the City of Hamtramck supported their move into an abandoned, historic site (a former Speak Easy, WWII Dance & Wedding Hall & Arts & Crafts residency) that was scrapped, dilapidated, & vacant for decades due to storm sewage backup. Sunim and early students & volunteers spent the next number of years cleaning, repairing the caved in roof, and digging & jackhammering up the entire perimeter of the site by hand, to lay new drain tile, install new storm/sewer lines & backup pumps & valves. They worked at odd jobs in the neighborhood to raise money for the renovations. That early blue collar zen mentality has stuck, and to this day the Center does a lot on a shoe-string budget, with volunteer monks & members doing the vast majority of building, site & admin work.

During an epic storm in 2012 the Center lost power. The sumps failed, then the backup system & valves failed, and 3 feet of storm sewage flooded into the buildings, destroying floors, walls & contents. We nearly lost the Center. But being stubborn folks, rather than giving up and moving to a more affluent neighborhood, resident monks launched into a campaign and mission for alternative solutions, and came across Green Roofs, Rain Gardens, and more. They made friends with Clayton Rugh of Xero Flor, the installer of the wonderful Ford Rouge Green Roof, who offered to grow & teach them how to install green roofs at the Center, when the time came.

Ten years later, the Detroit Zen Center is now home to extensive public greenspace & Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) in the form of Green Roofs, converted vacant land into Bioretention Gardens, Phytoremediation Mats, extensive reclamation & re-use practices. Monks operate an Urban-Farm-to-table Café (paused since Covid), food distribution business and a Tea House, and the Center offers public meditation, retreats & residential apprenticeship in a rustic yet beautiful facility. Our Abbot is now 83, and a Buddhist nun, Myungju, is the Zen Center Director. She is supported by a diverse & dedicated group of students & members.

Yet every time it rains heavily, we watch our neighbors and their children clean up toxic, contaminated storm-sewage waste, as we once did. And we are called to share what we know.

We have slowly & steadily funded site improvements, one at a time, primarily supported by the volunteer labor of monks running a small café & teaching retreats & classes, and memberships. We endeavor and work to heal our neighborhood – we live here, too. With no paid staff, we work collectively, daily, as a spiritual labor of love. This live-work model is unique and financially efficient. This model has also attracted the trust and support of the City, neighbors, and the extended community. Hundreds of volunteers have offered time, professional services & other in-kind donations. We have received a few small grants over the years. Yet as are many non-profits, we are underfunded, and mostly use our own hands.

But times are changing. In the aftermath of Covid, and a world on fire, most of our members and guests report of their increasing struggles, & ever more complicated lives. They and their children suffer from more mental & emotional hardship. It is hard to just live simply & happily in this world. And the ever-increasing climate crisis, the severity and frequency of local storm sewage floods & backups, beckons. Historically when plagued by crisis Buddhist monks have run for the mountains! We choose to stay.

Our Zen Center sits in one small corner of the world, but has a powerhouse of models to offer regarding green solutions to storm sewage backup. A hard-earned sanctuary in the middle of urban blight, it seeks to share this place of refuge - beautiful green spaces - with the neighborhood. Sometimes during the worst of moments, all folks need is a quiet, beautiful place, to sit and relax, to free ourselves from worry, and maybe find a kindred spirit in a rock, tree or butterfly, or a new human friend. The Center also seeks to provide refuge for our non-human friends: the birds, insects, plants & our beloved Detroit & Rouge River watershed, that do sustain us.

We look forward to working with the City of Hamtramck to model & help solve Hamtramck's stormwater crisis. Our objective over the next 10 years is to help Hamtramck become the Green Roof & Rain Garden (GSI) capital of Michigan. When we first met with the DDA in 2017 to discuss a city-wide campaign, a Department Head Official was not impressed, and asked 'how we would get lawnmowers onto the roof top'. He also wondered about the significance of native gardens, as 'bug attracting weeds'. We then realized that modeling & exposure is the first step. We persuaded him to the great benefits of green roofs & rain gardens, and in 2019 that same official helped us install our green roof, along with the City of Hamtramck Fire Department. With patience, wonderful outcomes are possible!

EXISTING PUBLIC GREENSPACE FOR TOURS, FIELD TRIPS & WORKSHOPS & IMPROVEMENTS: METRICS

-Space Description, Year installed, square footage & features-

- 1. Upper Green Roof (2019):** 2500 sf; Staircase, walking paths, panoramic views of Hamtramck-Detroit; on top Meditation Hall. Installed by monks, donated by Xero Flor of the Ford Rouge Green Roof, and Michigan State University Green Roof Studies Department.
- 2. Peace Garden* (2013):** 2,700 sf. Bio-retention Gravel & Native Garden, open to the public sunrise-sunset daily. Located across the street from main DZC campus, built by volunteers featuring reclaimed roofing tile, & 10,000+ original Detroit street paving bricks (carted over a 10 year period from a disposal yard). Used daily by the many in the neighborhood/high school.
- 3. Lower Green Roof (2013):** 400 sf; High intensity, engineered phyto-remediation vegetative/moss mats atop post-and-beam corridor built with local wood, built by monastics & volunteers. Green Roof mats engineered & grown by Xero Flor (installers of the Ford Rouge Green Roof).

4. **Reflection Garden (2015):** 820 sf; Public walled garden, with gravel & native landscaping, featuring French drains & extensive reclaimed materials (old roofing tiles, original Detroit curbs & Detroit street pavers), publicly accessible sunrise – sunset daily, located at corner of pedestrian area.
5. **Atrium (2019):** 330 sf; enclosed on 4 sides, open air gathering space & location of green roof stair. Located below & between Meditation Hall & Lower Green Roof Corridor.
6. **Urban Farm-to-Table Café (2008):** Popup meals & dinners; locally grown tea & foods.
7. **Sidewalk Planters (2019):** 120 l.f. hand-built planters at sidewalks/curbs, from reclaimed tile & brick.
8. **Extensive Recycling & Composting On-Site (2008):** Staged in the alley behind the main building, a dozen 55 gallon drums. Recycling taken to Recycle Here; compost driven to local urban farms.

- **Currently, Zen Center green roofs & bioretention gardens/reclamation practices capture approx. 385,000 gallons of stormwater annually, & up to 36,000 gallons of water during a single rain event (metrics provided by Xero Flor). Project improvements will add an additional 173,000 gallons of stormwater captured.**

CURRENT PROJECT SCOPE: In 2024, our aim is to:

- A. Improvements & Better Access to existing Greenspace & Green Stormwater Infrastructure**
 - Featuring interpretive signage, with translations
 - Multiple accessibility improvements site-wide
- B. Empowerment & Acceleration of neighbor/visitor understanding of “how” & “why” around Greenspace, GSI, and broad urban ecological protection**
 - Featuring field trips, workshops, tours & an audio-visual presentation
 - Partner with the City of Hamtramck, High School LEAP students & the Fire Department
 - Partner with leaders in GSI & Greenspace regionally & beyond
 - Host a Town Hall Meeting along with City of Hamtramck & LEAP

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

A. Improvements & Access

1. Install interpretive signage site-wide
 - i. Translate into Arabic/Bengali/Polish (3 main languages in our neighborhood)
 - ii. At entrances to Green Roof, Peace Garden, & Reflection Garden
 - iii. Partner for translation services with Hamtramck High School LEAP (Leaders in Environmental Awareness & Protection) students
2. Purchase & Install bicycle racks at Peace Garden & Main Building
3. Build & Install additional benches in Peace Garden
4. Install improved handrail on Green Roof Staircase
5. Purchase & Install perimeter planters & screens around Upper Green Roof
6. Improve walking paths on Upper Green Roof
7. Make fence repairs & install rain barrels/hosing in Peace Garden.
8. Build & install planters in alley behind Main Hall & route downspouts to them.
9. Expand the Peace Garden site & install phytoremediation mats across site for rhizodegradation of existing soil contaminants, partnering with Clayton Rugh of Xero Flor, to engineer the mats
10. Convert existing sump systems into greywater systems, connected to existing planters & gardens

B. Empowerment & Acceleration

1. Organize & schedule of Tours, Field Trips, Urban Ecology Stays, & Workshops
 - i. Tours offered June – October, beginning 2024, on Saturday afternoons & evenings
 - ii. Field Trips & additional tours held by appointment
 - iii. 2 total Workshops held in November & May
 - i. 11/2024: Clayton Rugh of Xero Flor: How & Why to install a Green Roof or Rain Garden
 - ii. TBD
 - iv. Educational emphasis on “how-to”, and “why-to”.
 - v. Train volunteers & hosts
 - vi. Advertise regionally, especially with local school districts
 - vii. Track visitors & develop a survey to track demographics, feedback & other data
 - viii. Design & distribute fliers; advertise in the local Hamtramck Citizen paper
2. Create a 10 minute audio visual presentation, with subtitles in Arabic/Bengali/Polish
 - i. A narrated presentation of the Shine One Corner project, & the neighborhood & broad context for GSI & complementary protective practices
 - ii. Designed by LEAP students & Zen Center monks -- as well as Zen Center team members with audio/visual impairments – for equitable access
 - iii. Presented prior to tours & field trips
 - iv. Shown in the Main Hall and/or the Café
3. Launch ‘Shine One Corner’ Website dedicated to this Initiative
4. Host a Town Hall Meeting on stormwater/GSI, with the City & Hamtramck High School LEAP
 - i. Hamtramck High School LEAP students to co-host & offer translation
5. Explore partnership with ‘Friends of the Rouge’ for resources for neighborhood rain garden installations.
6. Schedule caretaking/volunteer days 2x per month, April – October, where volunteers can learn about and help maintain greenspace & GSI.

If you'd like to help the Detroit Zen Center in this important work, we hope you will.

Donations for the project can be made on the website, www.detroitzencenter.org, or by check. Please remember that many employers will match employee donations, as we are a 501c3 nonprofit organization. All donations are tax deductible.

We also hope you will sign up for a tour, workshop, immersive stay, or let your local schools, churches or groups know about our field trips. And we welcome you to sign up for one of our volunteer days, held in the spring, summer & fall.

- Which neighborhoods or communities within the cities of Detroit, Highland Park or Hamtramck are you serving with this proposal?*

We are primarily serving Hamtramck, but expect the impact to reach into Detroit, Highland Park and the greater region.

- What physical space are you proposing to activate or enhance?*

We are proposing to both activate & enhance existing the Detroit Zen Center's public green space & Green Stormwater Infrastructure (Green Roofs, Bioretention & Rain Gardens)

- Are you planning on purchasing property or a building? Are you currently in possession of the space? If not, please describe the status of your purchase.*

We currently own and occupy the buildings, gardens & site in full.

- What activities or programs will take place in the designated HUB?*

PROJECT SCOPE:

- C. Improvements & Better Access to existing Greenspace & Green Stormwater Infrastructure**
 - Featuring interpretive signage, with translations

- Multiple accessibility improvements site-wide

D. Empowerment & Acceleration of neighbor/visitor understanding of “how” & “why” around Greenspace, GSI, and broad urban ecological protection

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 - v. Train volunteers & hosts
 - vi. Advertise regionally, especially with local school districts
 - vii. Donation-based
 - viii. Track visitors & develop a survey to track demographics, feedback & other data
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- G. Explore partnership with ‘Friends of the Rouge’ for resources for neighborhood rain garden installations.

- What barriers or community needs will this NeighborHUB address?

This project will address several barriers and community needs:

- A. Language Barriers: 38% of our neighbors do not speak English. Interpretive signage with translations into the 3 major languages spoken, and an audio-visual presentation with subtitles, as well as partnering with Hamtramck High School LEAP students (who are bi-lingual), will address this need.
- B. Lack of Greenspace & Beauty: This project will provide greenspace as a place of refuge & rustic beauty for historically marginalized groups – our neighbors – that lack gathering spaces, and access to greenspace. (Hamtramck has 82% less public greenspace as the average City in Wayne County (SEMCOG). Public greenspace is virtually non-existent; children often play in alleys & parking lots.)
- C. Storm-sewage Backups: This project will absorb up to 365,000 gallons of stormwater annually, easing the burden on a struggling storm-sewer system, and a community-wide micro-model of how neighbors & businesses, and the region, can solve the crisis of storm sewage backup, through GSI (Green Stormwater Infrastructure).
- D. Persons with Auditory/Visual Impairments: With some of our team members belonging to this community, we are sensitive to the need to include this marginalized population. This project proposes an Audio-Visual presentation, narrated & subtitled, to serve this community, with design support from those team members affected.

Examples can include transportation, educational and employment opportunities, community gathering space, or groceries.

- How will you measure outcomes from this project? What numbers or metrics can you attach to this project to measure success?*

To measure outcomes & regarding metrics, we will:

- A. Create & distribute a survey for all visitors/guests of the tours, field trips & workshops
 - a. To track numbers of visitors, demographics, and feedback
 - B. Host a Town Hall Meeting, partnering with the City of Hamtramck & LEAP High School students, to establish needs & barriers for neighbors and bridge the language barrier to understanding, & installation of GSI in their own homes, businesses & gardens.
 - a. Part of the Town Hall Meeting will be filling out a survey, a feedback box, and high school student translators on site to facilitate neighborhood engagement
 - C. Establish quarterly meetings with project partners & invite neighborhood participation, to discuss project needs, improvements & encouragement.
 - D. Continue working with our established partner, Xero Flor, to monitor metrics around annual rainfall capture of the existing and/or expanding GSI (green roofs, bio retention gardens, planters, etc.).
 - E. We are currently using SEMCOG and US CENSUS 2020 data for metrics for this project
 - a. Impervious (Concrete) surfaces, Hamtramck: 52%
 - b. Poverty Rate, Hamtramck: 47%
 - c. Population Density, Hamtramck: 24,000 people/2 square miles
 - d. Population Foreign Born, Hamtramck: 38%
 - e. Population under the age of 18: 34%
- Please provide the project's 12-month grant period timeline.*

JANUARY/FEBRUARY, 2024:

1. Team/partner meeting. Outline tasks, set up expectations & begin on the ground preparation.
2. Design survey(s) for tours/workshops & town hall meeting.
3. Design tours & field trips & workshops.
4. Create audio-visual presentation.
5. Reach out to Friends of the Rouge to discuss partnership & Hamtramck-wide support

MARCH, APRIL & MAY, 2024:

6. Launch website, advertise & accept bookings for tours/field trips/workshops.
7. Set date for Town Hall Meeting (November 2024) & begin discussions with City.
8. Site meetings with LEAP students to discuss interpretive signage content/design
9. Purchase & Install bicycle racks at Peace Garden & Main Building
10. Build & Install additional benches in Peace Garden
11. Install improved handrail on Green Roof Staircase
12. Purchase & Install perimeter planters & screens around Upper Green Roof
13. Improve walking paths on Upper Green Roof
14. Train & organize hosts/guides

JUNE - OCTOBER, 2024:

15. Begin schedule of Tours & Field Trips on Saturday
16. Install interpretive signage site-wide
17. Make minor fence repairs & install rain barrels/hosing in Peace Garden

NOVEMBER, 2024:

18. Host Town Hall Meeting, in conjunction with City of Hamtramck & LEAP students