

Season3.2_Anika Goss

Mon, Mar 27, 2023 8:19PM 58:14

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

detroit, neighborhood, community, detroit future city, city, dfc, people, climate, black, organization, live, design, michigan, important, continue, lead, mayor, work, areas, economic

SPEAKERS

Anika Goss, Narrator, Eric Benson



Narrator 00:00

This podcast is a project of the climate designers network.



Eric Benson 00:03

Hey, this is Eric. Welcome to season three of Climify. This season, I'm talking to women across the globe, who are at the forefront of climate science and climate action. Each guest is a thought leader in one or more of the drawdown.org climate solutions sectors. What you may ask are the drawdown.org Solution sectors, well important topics like renewable electricity, soil and agriculture, architecture, oceans, health, education, so much more. The goal of this season is of course, to continue to help design educators incorporate a foundation of sustainability and regeneration into their courses, and, in turn, inspire more climate designers. Climate Solutions are already here, you can literally start being part of the solution today. Climify brings these solutions to you. So no matter what your skill or knowledge level, you can implement what you learn today in your personal life and classroom.



Eric Benson 01:17

Heard Anika Goss speak back in the fall of 2022, at the Cumulus Design Conference in Detroit, Michigan, She is the CEO of Detroit Future City. She was invited to the event to give an insightful keynote about climate adaption in the city of Detroit. I already had my notepad out from all the other speakers. And when she started talking, I continued to quickly write down some of the notes that inspired me from her talk, including a quote she made that became the title of this episode. Informed communities are powerful. I learned a lot from her work, and I hope you do as well, in this second episode of the season, in terms of drawdown solution sectors, the discussion today with Anika will focus on climate ideas for food, agriculture, and land use.



Anika Goss 02:01



ANIKA GOSS 02:21

Hi, I'm Anika Goss. I'm the president and CEO of Detroit Future City in Detroit, Michigan. You can find out more about me and what we do with Detroit Future City at www.Detroitfuturecity.com



Eric Benson 02:39

Well welcome Anika to the program. Season three of Climify. I'm happy to have you here. And thanks for spending the next 40 minutes with me.



Anika Goss 02:50

Thanks for having me, Eric.



Eric Benson 02:53

Yes, it's an honor to have you here. Our listeners don't know. But I met you in the audience as you were giving a talk in Detroit. And I was taking notes and one of my notes were wrote was okay, invite her on the show. I've reached out to you on LinkedIn. And I'm happy you accepted.



Anika Goss 03:16

Great. I'm glad to be here.



Eric Benson 03:18

Yeah. Well, I was looking into more of the work that you were doing after I heard you talk at the cumulus conference in Detroit of 2022. And you've had a really, really impressive career still going. And I'm wondering what led you to the work that you're doing there? In Detroit?



Anika Goss 03:39

Yeah, I an interesting question. Because this is sort of a veer from my path. But um, so I've been in community development and neighborhood work my entire career. I spent the majority of my career on at Local Initiative Support Corporation, which is a community development financial institution that invests and real estate and community development activity and low income communities, both urban and rural. And that's sort of where I grew up. I started working there in my 20s. I took a short break from there to work for city government. And so I did a two year stint in city government.



Eric Benson 04:34

What was your role there and city government? Yeah, so

A

Anika Goss 04:37

I was the director of philanthropic affairs, which was a new title. It was a cabinet level position, and I lead the mayor's next Detroit Neighborhood Initiative. Oh, cool. Yeah. Under the Kilpatrick administration, a while it's very controversial, but it was I feel like some of my best work to be quite honest. It's because I was he wanted this to be his legacy project and next Detroit Neighborhood Initiative. So I was completely isolated from all of the chaos.



Eric Benson 05:21

Yeah. Yeah, you're not him.

A

Anika Goss 05:25

Yeah, exactly. So I'm really proud of the work that we that we did there. So I went back to Liske. And went on to when he went to jail, I went back to Liske, and went on to become the vice president of their Sustainable Communities Initiative, which was more of like, not sustainable, environmental sustainable, sustainable in terms of economics to sustainability and comprehensive neighborhood development. And then I became a regional vice president, with seven cities in the Midwest and Pennsylvania. So yeah, so I've, I've spent a lot of time in cities all across the country, trying to understand how they work trying to come up with solutions for cities. And so about that same time, my children were in middle school and high school, and it was really clear that my son was not going to graduate from high school unless I was there to jump out of the bushes to tell him to go work. Yeah, after school. And so I made a promise to both my kids that in 2015, that I would be back in Detroit and working in Detroit. Even if I was the new manager at Kroger.



Eric Benson 07:02

Yeah, we're back for family then.

A

Anika Goss 07:04

Exactly. And, and I expected to only stay at Detroit future city, which at that time, was a very small, troubled organization. Coming off of this major planning process. I had only planned to stay until my kids graduated, which would have been like three years. And now I'm going into my seventh year. Wow. It's the and really enjoying the work. So



Eric Benson 07:32

well, what is it? So Detroit future cities where you are now? What what is the what do they do? What's their mission?



Anika Goss 07:40

Yeah, so essentially, Detroit Future City is a think tank. And there are a few of organizations like us across the country where we practice, both research and practice. And really what we do is focus on economic opportunity, reducing racial barriers to economic opportunity and environmental sustainability. And we do that through research. We do that through community engagement and community practice, and environmental practices, large and small, whether it's green stormwater, infrastructure, or helping communities design and plan gardens in their neighborhoods.



Eric Benson 08:38

So do you host events for the community? How does it all come together?



Anika Goss 08:41

Yeah, we well, when we were more together, we did a lot of events. And I was one of the things that I was really kind of proud of, was that I did not want a chicken dinner event. I felt like people deserved to if they were going to hear about research, and if they were really interested in the work we were doing, they should come to a wine and cheese gallery opening. So that's what we did for the community. And we had literally wine and cheese and appetizers like you would at any other gallery event, of course, where we had a talk and we had pictures and yeah, so it was a lot of fun when we were in person.



Eric Benson 09:27

That's how I survived in graduate school in Austin is I went to gallery openings for dinner Yeah, free samples that grocery stores. gallery openings was very common. So you're you did a lot of community organizing work prior but also during quit your current position and you have a master's in sociology and community organizing. From the University of Michigan, my alma mater. Yeah, nice to meet you. Go Blue. Yeah. How has how has that community organizing background, not just from your education, but from other places really helped with these?



Anika Goss 10:15

Yeah,



Eric Benson 10:16

neighborhood and community events for you?



Anika Goss 10:19

.....

Well, I feel like an I was a really young organizer coming out of graduate school that knew absolutely nothing about a lot of the neighborhood. I grew up in Oakland, California, and even though I'm a third generation Detroit, er, I, I really didn't know Detroit when I when I came out of school. And so I, it was really important to me that people understood what was happening to them and around them, and that the people who were living there had a voice in decision making. And that has been, that's something that I that I was not only taught in graduate school, but I was also I that I practice that I actually learned in the streets of Detroit, that people have all kinds of agency and information that they just because you're poor doesn't necessarily mean you are uninformed, or ignorant about the ways of the world, and you can see what's happening around you. And so it was always really important for me to, you know, honor that, that this is where someone, not someone else lives, but I don't live here. And so the decisions that they want, that they're making, and the decisions that are happening, and are affecting their neighborhoods, if me as someone who they might trust because I look like them. That's a privilege to have in that community. And I deeply, deeply respect that. And I've carried that, while I don't, you know, hit the streets as much any longer. That is something that's really sort of driven my own personal mission, my own, how I lead the organization, how I prioritize my staff to lead in the work that we do at DFC.



Eric Benson 12:41

I remember a statistic about Detroit where it's 90% bipoc. Is that, is that right? That's yeah, yeah. So I'm sure that with your organization, right, speaking to those different communities, it's it's, I guess, potentially, that they view you as part of the community there, even though maybe you came over from Oakland.



A Anika Goss 13:05

Yeah, well, I mean, some of it like Detroit, DFC is not 100%. Black, we're not, you know, we're more like, I don't know, 65% or something like that. However, I do take a lot of pride in that Detroiters feel ownership because of the original framework, good or bad, whether they liked the whether they had a good experience and their process of the the original strategic framework or not. I take a lot of pride in that. They feel like they can trust us enough to be honest about whether or not what we what we're doing is right or wrong. Right. Yeah. And and that when I came to DFC, like a lot of organizations and a lot of really well meaning white people, the staff at the time had been accused of being racist and insensitive and and I, and so they were there was a lot of anxiety around going back into the community going to community meetings, showing up and I was it was just really a priority. That as an organization, no matter how you felt about us, we are a part of Detroit. We this is Detroit's we this the organization that we're building belongs to Detroit first, and we you can't be you can't let this accusation you can't own that. Right. And so whether you're white, black, Indian, otherwise, and those are all of the people Latina. All of those people work at Detroit future city. Everybody has to Be okay with talking about black people and Hispanic people and foreign born people, you have to be okay with it, you have to be able to ask questions and understand and have this really healthy respect for who is living and working in Detroit.




Eric Benson 15:17

How old is Detroit future city as a as an organization?

 Anika Goss 15:21

As an organization? It's I was the first employee. So corporated Yeah. So it's seven years old, seven

 Narrator 15:29

years old. So they the communities know about it. So that's, I think that helps, right? It's not like, oh, brand new startup coming from.

 Anika Goss 15:39

So the framework process that I referenced, the Detroit strategic framework is the largest community planning process in the United States. And that framework process really laid out the 50 Year Framework for Detroit. So what Detroit could and should look like, in 20 years, 30 years and 50 year. Okay, so that was before you. That was before me, that was before Detroit future city became an organization, I think, okay, and so it was a part of city government at that time. And under the being administration, when it was the so like, you probably heard about, like, the theories about closing off and decommissioning parts of Detroit as a sign. Yeah,

 Eric Benson 16:30

yeah. I grew up in Michigan. And it's always Yeah, it was on the news and all that.

 Anika Goss 16:35

Yeah. And so that, that started that process started in 2010. And the framework was completed in 2012. And so between 2012 and 2015 16, DFC was, and and a program of the Detroit economic growth Association Corporation. And they were really responsible for carrying out the initiatives that came out of the framework.

 Eric Benson 17:12

I see. Okay. And you mentioned something actually really important that I also learned an experience trying to work in communities. This, this specifically didn't happen to me, but a friend of mine, outsider coming into a community predominantly black, and I'm going to help, right, he's also white, and yeah, yeah. And I remember the first person he talked to, like, rolled his eyes and said, Okay, well, we don't want our property taxes to go up with some of your plans. So he backed off and said, Okay, I get it. I'm trying to approach Yeah, let's, so you co design with the communities. And I think that's really important, because you're viewed as part of Detroit. And you're helping them, but they're helping themselves. Can you talk a little bit about how that all works? And why that strategy works. So well.

A

Anika Goss 18:10

Yeah. That code design? Well, so one, we, almost everybody at Detroit future city has some technical expertise. We are an organization of architects and urban planners. We even had an engineer on staff at one time. And so having that kind of technical expertise is valuable in the community. So the way we approach the work is, we can help you do this. Because we're architects, we're landscape architects, and urban planners, so we can help you do this. But you have to really guide this, right? Like, you're What do you want to see in this neighborhood? Yeah, their neighborhood. It's your neighborhood. So we can tell you whether or not someone would be willing to pay for it. We can tell you whether or not it would actually work physically, because maybe you don't know that, right? Yeah. And we can even tell you like, wow, if you plant these kinds of flowers, only, they're all going to die and not come back. You know, like we might have that kind of information. But this is really their vision. And one of the best example like a teeny tiny example of that was we ran this program called the Field Guide to working with lots and we gave out many grants to block clubs, churches, it was really it was my favorite one of my favorite programs because we would literally get hand written for proposals from block club presidents. So Mrs. Jenkins and her friends that live in her neighborhood want to do something with the with the vacant lot on their block. And they're writing their proposal in script. Right



Eric Benson 20:17

cursive cursive handwriting.

A

Anika Goss 20:19

Yes. And I loved that. I love that. Right. But you know, we're also a bunch of architects and landscape architects and designers. And so they want petunias and, you know, all kinds of pretty flat rows of plant flowers, even though the design calls for all kinds of, you know, environmentally sustainable plants that aren't as you know, some of them might be pretty, like the sunflowers, but most of them, you know, look more like meadows and rain gardens and that kind of stuff, which isn't always pretty and looks terrible in the offseason, right? Yeah. That's not what they want it. And so there was debate in that, you know, they were the staff, at the time, was really like, well, they can't do that's gonna look terrible, everything is gonna be dead by November. And then they'll just have to keep replanting it in the spring. And I was like, so what? This is their neighbor.



Eric Benson 21:27

They're planting annuals.

A

Anika Goss 21:28

Right, right. So this is their neighborhood, they want to plant a bunch of annuals and petunias and all of that kind of stuff. That's fine. They like,



Eric Benson 21:41

well, one thing maybe it's important here, I grew up in Michigan, you're in Detroit. I don't know, all my listeners know, what's going on in Detroit. What's, like the basic history of Detroit over the past decades. Maybe we can start there. Because I think that's going to be important when we talk about the success stories that you've had. What's been going on in Detroit? Where does it stand now?



Anika Goss 22:06

Where do you where do we, how far back? Do we go? Oh, my gosh,



Eric Benson 22:10

I feel like we have to start 1950s, right. Like, that's okay. That's a pivotal part of Detroit. You know,



Anika Goss 22:20

well, and I would go so if you're going to start in the 50s, I would start in the 30s. Okay, because in the 30s, the Hulk maps were drawn. And the Federal House, the the FHA Federal Housing Act, or the home mortgage Act, was really what led to redlining where they had areas, or shades of areas in Detroit that were listed as high risk and areas listed as low risk. And they were high risk for mortgages, and low risk for mortgages. And those high risk for mortgages, mortgage areas were neighborhoods, where during the 30s, African Americans and most Jewish households were not allowed to live in those communities. There were more neighborhoods for Jewish communities, but not many, and Jewish and immigrants. For black people, you could only live in what was then called the Black Bottom, which is the lower east side. And in the north end, in the 30s. And which is just west of but just east of Henry Ford Hospital. And just west of what we now know is I 75. Okay. And and then later, they allowed for black families to live in southwest Detroit, and I think mostly southwest Detroit, or, and it's not south southwest, what we think of today like Mexican town. It's more like just the northern edge of Southwest Detroit. And I think it was because it would have been adjacent to where Henry Ford had recruited Mexicans to work in the Ford Rouge plant and the plants that were in that part of the city. So that was really a lot of how Detroit was built. And then what ended up happening in the so that was the 1930s. It right after World War Two was the GI Bill. And the GI Bill allowed you to gave you basically a housing voucher. And that housing voucher allowed for you to live anywhere. And you could live, you were often encouraged to live outside of the city and newer housing or in areas that were even further out. And that then expanded the area that was considered high risk for African Americans. Oh, and, and others. So there were very few places where black families could live in Detroit. And that ended up perpetuating well past the Fair Housing Act, right in the 60s. And so it went from Okay, so we can't intentionally be discriminatory, but we can still call it high risk. And,



Eric Benson 22:20



Eric Benson 25:54

and what did they even mean by that? What do they even mean by



Anika Goss 25:57

finance, that it was high risk for bankers, to give mortgages, okay, those areas. So it was law in the between the 30s and the 50s. And in the 50s, it was no longer law. It was more like, you know, did your law were you? It was the realtors, the mortgage companies were just not financing black families in those places. So it really limited no matter what you, you could be a doctor, a judge, and there were many black doctors and judges and nurses, my great aunt, my grandmother and great aunts, and all of them came up from Lafayette, Alabama, to Detroit in 1936. They were all college educated teachers. One was a psychiatric nurse, one had general secretarial skills. They were all forced to live in the same



Eric Benson 26:59

name. Yeah, it didn't matter then.



Anika Goss 27:01

Right. And so, in the 50s, after the GI Bill, and Detroit's population began to decline, people started moving, and that was where, you know, Detroit, went from its height began to really, really decline. And so then by the time we got to the 60s, there were African Americans were living in a lot much further, they were much more expansive areas of the city, but the concentration would have been that west side. So in the area, and 19, the the community where the great rebellion was in 1967. July,



Eric Benson 27:56

that's a big one. Right?



Anika Goss 27:59

There was, but you see, because there had been all of this leading up to it. It was concentrated in this area that was a black community. And it was a thriving black community. It was a community my mother lived in. And she was my mother was in college, when in 1960, that summer of 1967. She was at home from University of Michigan, and was trying to get home when the rebellion broke out. And there were tanks in the streets and shooting and it was a really scary time. Yeah. And so then after that, after 67, I mean, you just there was already this movement outside of the city. And then you began to see it really accelerate. And so from there, it just continue to decline. And so then, when you began to see the auto decline in the late 70s, and early 80s, more and more of the city began to become much more divisive, and much and much poor. So then people began to move, because then you could move you could live where pretty much wherever you wanted to live. And then by the 90s, I think the real coffin, you know, nail in the coffin, one of them there have been many of them openly. Because

in the 90s, when the it was the law changed where your city employees, government employees did not have to live inside of the city. So the the majority at that time, like let's I can't remember what year that was actually passed, I'm gonna say, I think it was closer to actually 2000 But I think it was somewhere between 97 and 2000. When that law passed, and you did not have to live in the city, but at that time, the majority of African Americans that were residents of Detroit, were also employed by city government and the public schools and the hospitals. So they



Eric Benson 30:17

could just leave. They didn't have to be in Detroit.



Anika Goss 30:19

And they did. And they did. And so you continue to see this decline. So then by the time we get to the housing crisis of 2008, where Detroit was, so now we've gone from 2 million now we've lost a million people, by 2000. Right? After two years. Yeah. And we're living outside of the city. And so but we're still at a million, which made us like the 11th largest city in the United States. And so from there, the housing crisis in 2008, between 2000 by 2010, which would have been that next census, there were whole blocks that were left empty, we some of that we just did to ourselves at that point. Sure. We're whole blocks. We there was accelerated foreclosure process, at that time, for tax foreclosure. So we really began to see this enormous evacuation. That was not of choice. And then some of it you saw people sort of doubling up households, if they were families in crisis, and then other families were just packed up. I mean, Michigan was also losing population. Yeah. on its own. And so when you're losing population like that, because it was that time, where we really dropped to, you know, that below 700. Number, and we have continued to lose populations. And



Eric Benson 32:12

so some 100,000 people now you're like, 640,000 or so? Yeah, exactly. Wow. So like in in that timeframe, people left those buildings where they used to live. And these are in the neighborhoods or I know, some of them being torn down. And so how would you describe then some of the neighborhoods in Detroit? And then we'll, we'll go into I think the flooding and climate? Yeah, component here, because I think that is where I see a lot of joy and hope in Detroit.



Anika Goss 32:50

So it's, you know, it's really interesting. And cuz I really do have to, you know, there's a mayor for every moment in time. That's I'm a big believer of them. And it's not all the time. But Dugan is the mayor, for right now. Right. And I think what we needed especially after receivership, coming out of receivership was this really intense? Economic Development push? So if you go back to there's a great film, called gradually, then suddenly, and I would encourage your listeners out there to watch it, too. Yeah, it's really it's a documentary about the bankruptcy process, like leading up to it



Eric Benson 33:51

was what happened when when was that again? The bankruptcy was like, 2010.



Anika Goss 33:56

No, it was 2013 2013. Okay. Yeah. Which was after the Detroit future city planning process, which was really interesting. So then that really impacted people very, very differently. So the bankruptcy Mayor Duggan was the mayor during the bankruptcy. And he listen, Detroiters were adamantly against it. And what but at the time, if you look at that movie when you when you watch it for Detroiters now, very difficult to watch, because that was the 2013 when that film was made. It was a very different Detroit. It was mostly vacant, obsolete, empty, and all of the neighborhoods and it was really difficult. painful to see that B roll footage Ah, and now and you forget, you see how easy it is to forget. There's still neighborhoods, obviously that look like that. But it's not the vast majority of the city the way it was. Now, there, is it all suburban and clean and shiny. No, no. But it certainly looks more intact, it looks. There might be large swaths of land that's vacant wood that appears to be vacant, but it might also be open space. And so you're seeing much more intentionality now than I then I've seen that I can remember in Detroit, and I feel like that is that there's so much optimism in that. Right. Yeah. So I mean, so a mayor for every time he another may or may not have done that, you know, may not have focused on like really sort of narrowly focusing on demolition on redevelopment the way this mayor has, so that's made a big difference.



Eric Benson 36:19

Yeah, sounds like it and your organization is a part of that sort of renewal. I think in Detroit, pretty obviously. And climate is impacting all of us. Yeah. And it's impacting Detroit through flooding, and and what else is going on in Detroit from climate change? And can you talk about some of the success stories that you've had? A teacher city? Yeah. Building climate resilient.



Anika Goss 36:48

Right. So um, one of the things that I think I'm most proud of, is I would definitely, you know, and I think you probably know, this, the climate space, but the environmental sustainability and climate change space is largely very highly educated, fairly elitist, and mostly white. Yeah. And there is an assumption that black and brown people don't care about climate change. Yes, I've heard that. Yes. And I think what I one of the things that I'm most proud of that DFC has been a part of, is changing that narrative here in Detroit, and changing it in a way because I don't want to take credit, because the justice, the environmental justice folks have been consistent over time. And they are representative of black and brown communities in Detroit and Flint, and in our most vulnerable places all over Michigan. However, the table, the Justice table, and the environmental sustainability table, are two very different tables. And all of the resources are at that environmental sustainability table, whether it's education and technical expertise, or just plain old cash that's on the environmental side. And the justice side has to be the ones that struggle, right. And so what I'm really proud of is that we tried to create a table for both. And if you want it to be at this table, you can be an environmental engineer, you can be from the

University of Michigan for Michigan State, Wayne State, private organization, but you're sitting at the table with the Sierra Club, and we the people, and Moses, and s, Southwest Detroit, environmental vision, all of these people that spend all of their time and energy fighting for climate for climate change. And the reason that that table comes together is because from our perspective at DFC climate, the impact of climate change is an economic problems for Detroit. Yeah, climate change ends up trapping poor African American and Latino households in their neighborhoods, it devalues their homes and the land that they live on. And it keeps their children and their children's children from benefiting from ownership, in addition to the toxins, that that come from living in a climate vulnerable community In the soil, water and air. And so that for us the economic position of why climate matters in an urban neighborhood in a poor urban neighborhood, is it just goes so far beyond race, right? You bought this house on the east side of Detroit. And it floods like you were at a New Orleans by you



Eric Benson 40:31

were surrounded by water. Right?



Anika Goss 40:33

Yeah. Exactly. And there's there's some accountability that has to take place, you know, and the formula for fixing it is either there must be an economic development that's attached to it. Or it must be so broken that your house is almost floating.



Eric Benson 40:57

You don't want to get to that point. Right.



Anika Goss 40:59

Right. Yeah. But that's the only way that we ended up fixing, fixing it. So it DFC we really want to get into these conversations. And people are opening them open to them. They understand it, they get it, they want a rain garden in their neighborhood, they want a rain barrel in there, on the side of their yard, they're happy to take down their downspouts. Their children have asthma just like everyone else, and they want it to stop. They know that their neighborhood smells. And they want that to stop too. So I really feel like this is this. What I hope in the future is that this conversation will continue. Yeah, so that we are working with one table.



Eric Benson 41:51

Yeah, one of the My Favorite Things you've said not today, but in the past, when I've heard you speak before, is informed communities are powerful. Yeah. Can you tell me what that that saying means to you?



Anika Goss 42:03



Anika Goss 42:05

Yeah, that I mean, I think it goes to what we were just saying that people understand that their neighborhood is flooding. Because in part, the state has not done its due diligence and managing the sump pumps and the seawall, and that this is preventative, and that their taxpayer dollars go towards this. That neighborhood is very powerful. They have a whole lot to say about what happens in their neighborhood. Yeah. You know, so an informed neighborhood is a very powerful community. And so we're we're just happy to be an agent for that. When the ARPA money came down, we didn't try to host our own meetings, the city was hosting their meetings. However, we did explain to them and we created a document a short document that said, if you're going to these meetings, here are the things you should ask about. Because this is what you said you care about in your neighborhoods, climate, jobs, what water and infrastructure. Go ask about that. And they would go to the meetings with this two pager that we created.



Eric Benson 43:28

Is that two pager? Would that define what DFC says, As a climate resilient neighborhood? How would you define that?



Anika Goss 43:38

That two pager at the time was really reflective of our economic equity indicators of what we've been measuring? And part of that was a sustainable neighborhood. So what we believe is a neighborhood that's resilient and sustainable, is also a neighborhood that has high quality infrastructure, whether it's water lighting, sidewalks, there are a lot of neighborhoods that we really care about that don't have those things working.



Eric Benson 44:12

Can you talk about then because this is really interesting for me is a neighborhood that you know, over you worked with, that you would consider promising or on the right path towards that.



Anika Goss 44:30

You know, my favorite neighborhood. I'm really glad you asked me because my favorite neighborhood right now is the Forsyth east. Okay. Yeah. Okay. And they were already doing this work. When we started working with them. They are informed. They were already you know, yes. They were already informed they already it was already a neighborhood of low density neighborhood with To a lot of community gardens that were already in existence. So the planning process that we did with them was called a green loop. So how do we actually help them? Design a neighborhood with a green lens. And that green lands includes Mattos. It includes forests, and we're partnering with them on actually building an urban forests in the middle of the snake. Amazing. Yeah. Yeah. And Jenna, it was, it's great. And it's funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Fund. And General Motors contributed so that we can create walking

paths and accessibility to the forest. And it's just beautiful. But it also has meditation gardens, and other personal gardens and hoop houses, all in this one neighborhood and mended immunity



Eric Benson 45:58

built that, or did you help community,



Anika Goss 46:01

the community built it for the most part, we help them with the design, like, this is what it's going to look like, so that they're for every vacant lot, there is a use? And they did that. We just help them with that. With the design. It's a beautiful place. It really is. Especially, yeah, okay, especially in the spring and in the fall when everything is blooming and all of that. And, yeah. And, and they're, they're very, we're still working with them. They need a land trust for that neighborhood so that they can or at least an overlay so that they are not vulnerable to because the more we talk about it, the more developers have already.



Eric Benson 46:54

Yeah, they want to go in there, right?



Anika Goss 46:56

Exactly. As we so developers and realtors reach out to us at DFC asking for that green loop plan asking for more information so that they can mark it that neighborhood. And so it's hard to keep them safe.



Eric Benson 47:14

Yeah, well, you made it too good. And now people want to be there. Yeah. Can you talk more about the Chandler Park project on Detroit? That's another one I'm interested in.



Anika Goss 47:27

Yeah, so we were not a part of that. But Chandler Park is a it was it's a city park. And it's a city park in the middle of what was once a really strong middle class neighborhood. That's now more of a lower income. neighborhood that even has some old public housing that's adjacent to it. But over time, the residents the the the Community Development Corporation, Eastside Community Network, where and pre previously it was named Warren Connor development coalition really organized their neighborhood, and starting with residents that wanted to that live near the park that wanted to be able to maximize the beauty and use of the park so that it was safe. And that was really all they initially cared about was safety. Got it. And then it became, we can go beyond safety. We can actually use green open space as a part of the value

of our own community. And now they've been able to attract so many resources a it's it has its own Conservation Board, the Chandler Park Conservancy. And it's a it's a beautiful, beautiful space. Yeah, there's a there's a water space there. And so there's a small pond. There's now all kinds of wildlife that's returned to this area. It's an active beautiful park, that the city actually lifts up is one of his Premier Parks in Detroit. And so this place where that was like open drug trafficking and really unsafe is now this sanctuary. And the residents that live around it are not wealthy or white. There might be some white people that live over there, but they're poor too. It's a really low income neighborhood. Yeah, and it's a it's a really beautiful space. And I think it's a testament to residents that are are informed about what their community could be, if with the right resources and what they want us See in their own neighborhoods?



Eric Benson 50:01

Yeah, that makes me smile. Because the success of that and that I live kind of in an older part of my community, and there's a lot of places when I walk or drive by I just kind of imagined them as what you just described, like, what if this wasn't this parking lot where no one's even parking in? What if this was a park? What if there were wildlife here? And I don't know, maybe I'm crazy. But I do this a lot. Or I just go for walks. And I say, how would I change this space to be? Better to be more green? Yeah, exactly. I need to get a job there, then. Well, that leads me leads me to talk more about as we start to come to the end here about Detroit future city, as an organization, and Detroit, you know, what, what do you think is is next for Detroit? How is Detroit future city going to be a part of that next? What is what is success for you?



Anika Goss 51:07

Wow,



Eric Benson 51:08

yeah.



Anika Goss 51:09

Um, I think, you know, one of the major issues from so first of all, I feel like, as the presidency of Detroit, future city, I am a steward of the framework and the organization. I'm going to be one of the hopefully I'm one of many presidents. Yes. And I really feel like the future My job was to build an institution that reflects the vision of Detroit, and Detroit, others. I think the future of what's next is to really focus on the racial equity barriers that exist for that continue to exist for Detroiters. And the reason that is so important to me, not only as a black Detroit or myself. But it's painfully obvious that without an extreme level of intentionality, we can continue to develop around these communities that we care that we say that we care about, we can just build around them, right? Who cares if they continue to live in neighborhoods, they should move? Well, the reality is they can't No, can't move.



Eric Benson 52:44



ERIC BENSON 52:11

They're stuck.



Anika Goss 52:48

And so if I'm if you know, the future of what we're doing is to not only increase the number of middle class African American and Latino households that live in Detroit, that's one thing I want to do. The second thing is increase the number of sustainable, resilient middle class neighborhoods in Detroit, so that the neighborhoods themselves are places that everyone would want to live. And once you get that really great job, you want to stay. And there are a lot of most of the nonprofits are focused on poverty. And I get that and they should be and they're doing an amazing job. And we need them to do that. I really want to focus on the majority of Detroiters, and the majority of Detroiters are very close to living in in poverty. And as soon as they and they move, because it's easier to live someplace else. They can create stability, if they live in the suburb where your taxes are lower, your housing costs are lower, and you have all the infrastructure that you want. It's great. Everything is you know, that's part of it. I want that for Detroit.



Eric Benson 54:17

Yeah. Well, coming to my last question here, and I'm curious, really curious about how you would do this and that, if you were to switch shoes with me as a design educator, how would you go about teaching a class or to a bunch of design students knowing what you know, doing what you do?



Anika Goss 54:42

You know, it's so funny because I work with so many designers.



Eric Benson 54:46

Yes. And I'm happy to hear that. We want to be part of the solution.



Anika Goss 54:51

right, right. Um, but I think one of the things that's really important important for designers especially just designers that are working in communities of color, as there's an assumption that we are designing for communities that look like suburban communities, or high wealth, urban communities, and at the end of the day, that is a very Eurocentric standard for what success looks like, when in fact, communities of color live very differently in other places, right? Where, where they have choice. So, in southern black communities, everyone is living in the same neighborhood, my grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, you're all growing up in one neighborhood. And that entire neighborhood continues to perpetuate. How do you N and Latino neighborhoods are all living in one house, everyone is living in the house. And there's a community of houses that are living like that. We associate that with poverty, those two things,

we associate that with poverty. When we do act, we should be designing for community. And that community doesn't have to be a two and a half family, two and a half, you know, two parents and two kids and a dog with a garage out front. We don't have to live like that. You know, we can live within a static. If you are in a black and Latino community, you design for black and Latino people.



Eric Benson 56:52

Yeah, that's a great assignment. Because most of the time that's not that's not what happened. Right? You so yeah. Well, thank you for being on the program and Nika, it was an honor to talk with you. I am a huge fan of the city of Detroit growing up in Michigan. I did not get there as often as I wanted to. But going back there recently made all those good feelings come back about about the city. So I'm glad that you're there and doing the work that you're doing.



Anika Goss 57:23

Thank you so much for having the Eric was my pleasure.



Eric Benson 57:27

Climify is produced, edited and engineered by me. A huge Special thanks to Ellen Keith Shaw, and Christine Piolet for their gorgeous work on the new branding tool rich chic, and Mark O'Brien for their design help. And Brandee Nichols for her strategic guidance on improving the offerings of this podcast. If you enjoy the work we all do here, and you have a spare minute or two. We truly appreciate if you left a rating and review over at Apple podcasts. The more folks that review our program, the higher the algorithm pushes up Climify in the search results. And in turn, the more likely we all can learn how to become climate designers.