

Detroit Renaissance

Overview

Detroit Renaissance was formed in 1970 by business leaders who wanted to improve the city’s deteriorating core. In 1991, the group’s Board reevaluated its mission and decided to focus on issues that are strategically important to the city. At the same time, the group decided it would no longer manage events such as the Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival and the Detroit Grand Prix that had become vital to the city’s image-building. That role was passed to other groups, and Detroit Renaissance’s emphasis shifted to economic and physical development of the downtown.

Detroit Renaissance is known for involving the region’s “first-string” CEOs. Its 48-member Board includes the chief executives of many of the major corporations in southeast Michigan, including the Big Three automobile manufacturers.

In addition to downtown development, Detroit Renaissance reviews public policy questions and develops a legislative agenda on selected issues. Its three priorities for the core city are downtown and riverfront development, educational reform and quality-of-life issues.

Detroit Renaissance’s regional priorities include boosting regional cooperation, improving public transportation and strengthening the Southeast Michigan Consortium for Water Quality.

Regional Priorities

Boosting regional collaboration is a priority for Detroit Renaissance. The Detroit region has traditionally had a clear division between the city and the suburbs. Although Detroit Renaissance has a number of CEOs who are focused on the city, the group must remain vigilant to make sure the suburban CEOs don’t lose interest in the city.

Renaissance meets regularly with county executives from around the region and Detroit’s Mayor to boost regional cooperation. The goal of the project, for which Renaissance is the “convener,” is to build trust and accountability among the officials. Some issues

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Exclusively business-led

Unit of Membership

Individual

Number of Members

2003: 48

1998: 50

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 5%

Mid-sized Companies: 5%

Large Companies: 90%

Dues Determined by

Company revenue

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$125,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$10,000

Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$2 million to less than \$5 million

1998: \$2 million to less than \$5 million

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 9

1998: 10

Board Members

2003: 48

Regional Priorities

Regional Cooperation, Public Transportation, Regional Water Consortium

to be considered are joint purchasing, data collection for law enforcement, and a regional convention center.

The difficulty in creating regional consensus was demonstrated by an unsuccessful effort to raise money for arts and culture. Renaissance led the campaign to raise money for the region's cultural institutions, but the effort, which would have required higher taxes, ultimately failed. The tax would have benefited cultural institutions that help the region's quality of life and economic competitiveness.

On the issue of transportation, Detroit Renaissance has worked with the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition and the Detroit Regional Chamber to push for a regional transit authority to oversee the region's transit activity. Renaissance says southeast Michigan is the country's only major metropolitan area without a coordinated mass transit system, and connecting people with jobs and services is crucial.

Detroit Renaissance has also supported the Southeast Michigan Consortium for Water Quality, which was formed in 2001 when a federal judge asked 40 civic and governmental leaders to address water quality problems in southeast Michigan.

Structure and Operations

Detroit Renaissance's membership is primarily made up of the Big Three automobile manufacturers and related supplier companies, utilities and financial institutions. In addition, the chairs of the Detroit Regional Chamber, Greater Downtown Partnership, Detroit Investment Fund, New Detroit and Detroit Economic Growth Corporation hold seats on Renaissance's 48-member Board.

Ninety percent of Renaissance's members represent large companies. The longevity of Board members has fallen considerably, which means they tend to be less rooted in the community, which can in turn lead to less civic participation. Renaissance's annual dues range from \$10,000 to \$125,000. The group has nine staff members and an annual operating budget of \$2 million to \$5 million. Detroit Renaissance President Paul Hillegonds says that if the regional economy improves, the budget may increase by 10 percent, but will otherwise stay about the same.