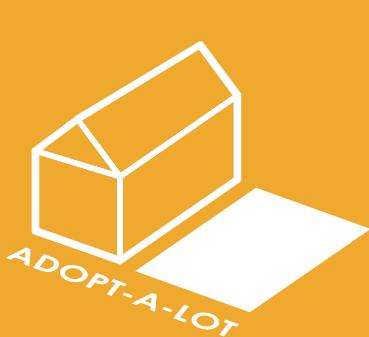




PITTSBURGH VACANT LOT TOOLKIT

R E S O U R C E
G U I D E



December 2015

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The Vacant Lot Toolkit is a comprehensive overview of the goals, policies, processes, procedures, and guidelines for transforming vacant, blighted lots into temporary edible, flower, and rain gardens.

Residents of the City of Pittsburgh can refer to this toolkit when thinking about creating a vacant lot project on City-owned land, and will find it useful throughout the process. The toolkit can also be a resource for projects on other public and privately owned land throughout the city.

The City of Pittsburgh thanks you for your time, creativity, and stewardship to creating transformative projects in your neighborhoods. We look forward collaborating with you and watching your projects grow.

For questions please refer to the Vacant Lot Toolkit Website:

www.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/adoptalot

***Please note that this toolkit is for new projects as well as existing projects that do not possess a current license, lease, right-of-entry, or waiver for City-owned property. Projects that exist without these will have to contact the Open Space Specialist and/or begin through the processes outlined here.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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www.BreanAssociates.com

Cover Images

top left: Ballfield Farms (Grow Pittsburgh)

top right: Ballfield Farms (Grow Pittsburgh)

middle: Eastfield Co-operative Garden (Asakura Robinson)

bottom right: Manchester Growing Together Garden (GTECH)

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FORMS+APPLICATIONS: pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/adoptalot/formsapplications

1. INTAKE FORM
2. SOIL TEST RIGHT OF ENTRY APPLICATION
3. ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE APPLICATION
4. ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION + MARKET STAND
5. REVISION FORM
6. PWSA WATER REQUEST FORM

SUPPLEMENTS: [www.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/adoptalot/supplements](http://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/adoptalot/supplements)

1. ADOPT-A-LOT ORDINANCE
3. SOIL TESTING GUIDELINES
4. APPLICATION CHECKLIST + FORM
5. DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE - REAL ESTATE: SIDE YARD SALE/ STANDARD SALE

LETTER FROM THE MAYOR

Pittsburgh is a city built with infrastructure for 600,000 people with a population just over half that. After an economic collapse and years of disinvestment many of our neighborhoods now face serious challenges with blighted and vacant lots and structures, many of which are owned by the city or its authorities. Estimates have shown that the city may have nearly 30,000 vacant and blighted lots and structures, representing a staggering percentage of the overall land area within our borders.

This problem is simply too large for the city to tackle on its own. However, we are extremely fortunate to have so many wonderful neighborhood groups, nonprofit organizations, and community development corporations that are dedicated to turning these lots and structures into community assets that will help rebuild neighborhoods and provide new opportunity to residents. For decades, these groups and their dedicated staff and volunteers have been on the front lines of combating blight and turning around neighborhoods, saving city taxpayers millions of dollars in the process. Solving this problem is a team effort that will require diligence and attention for years to come, and this toolkit is an important first step in redefining how we work together as a team and ensuring that our partnerships will only grow stronger and more fruitful in the future.

The primary purpose of this toolkit is to begin to build new and improved pathways to turn blight into opportunity and to streamline the processes by which we partner with non-governmental groups and individual residents to do so. Many of these processes are legacies of the past and are cumbersome both for the city staff that manage them and the non-governmental groups that make use of them in order to do their work on city-owned lots. With so many efforts underway, inside and outside of government, to eliminate blight and turn our neighborhoods around, the timing is just right to take a close look at these processes and make some common-sense improvements that will benefit everyone. The recommendations in this toolkit, once implemented, will serve as the catalyst we need to integrate activities like land banking, green infrastructure development, urban agriculture, and community greening into our broader neighborhood planning and development efforts.

The partnerships we form now and the work that results from them will change the face of our neighborhoods for decades to come and it is vitally important that all city departments, our authorities, and our non-governmental organizations come together in true partnership to embrace these recommendations and move forward together.

Mayor William Peduto





Larimer Avenue Rain Garden
image: Stormworks

OVERVIEW

Pittsburgh's Vacant Lot Toolkit is an implementation item of the City of Pittsburgh's **OPEN SPACE PLAN (2013)**, and is an overall strategy to temporarily and permanently reuse vacant lots to achieve financial, social, and ecological benefits for all. Vacant lot projects can provide more access to fresh food, manage stormwater, and beautify neighborhoods.

HISTORY OF VACANT LOTS

The City has a long history of vacant lot gardens, dating back to 1916, where residents planted food gardens throughout the City. From 1940 to 2010, Pittsburgh lost more than half of its population due to suburbanization, declining household sizes, outmigration, and industry loss. One of the most lasting effects of this population decline is the prevalence of vacant lots throughout the City. Today, there are over 27,000 vacant lots in the City of Pittsburgh.

THE CURRENT SCALE OF ISSUES CREATED BY VACANCY:

- COMPROMISING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS
- REDUCING PROPERTY VALUES
- WEAKENING THE CITY'S TAX BASE

Approximately 26% of the total number of vacant lots are City-owned. These 7,286 vacant lots make up 19% of the total area of vacant land within the City. Maintaining a single vacant lot can cost the City over \$595 per year (Open Space Plan, 2013), an estimated \$3-4 million based on the current number of city-owned vacant lots.

THE COLUMN TO THE LEFT CONTAINS INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROCESS YOU WILL BE A PART OF. THIS COLUMN CONTAINS INFORMATION REGARDING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF KEY PEOPLE OR DEPARTMENTS OR THE DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW.

DEFINITION: VACANT LOT

A parcel or multiple parcels of land that may have once been occupied by buildings or structures, wooded hillsides, un-built sideyards or informal parking lots. Parcels with documented uses, such as paved parking lots, recognized city parks, and greenways are not vacant lots.



VLTK THE TOOLKIT

The **VACANT LOT TOOLKIT** provides opportunities to transform lots in your neighborhood from vacant to vibrant. Through the toolkit, you'll learn more about how to gain legal access to vacant lots, how to include your neighbors and other community members, how to develop a plan, how to find resources available through your local area non-profits, and how to sustain your project for term of your license or lease.

Every effort has been made to create processes that will be easy for anyone to navigate. Of course, due to certain site conditions, ownership, liability concerns, and regulations, some projects will be more challenging to realize than others. Vacant lot projects on City-owned land can fall into three basic categories:

-  **Edible Gardens** a garden containing annual and/or perennial flowers, herbs, seeds, berries, vegetables, fruit, and other plants that you can eat.
-  **Flower Gardens** a garden containing displays of annual and/or perennial plants.
-  **Rain Gardens** a garden that takes advantage of rainfall and storm water runoff in its design and plant selection.



OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST [OSS]

A staff member of the Department of City Planning that is responsible for interacting with community groups and the public, maintaining a current database of opportunity properties, identifying suitable properties for proposed uses, and navigating projects through city department approvals. You can contact the Open Space Specialist at anytime in the process:

OSS@pittsburghpa.gov
412.255.2200

If your idea does not fit into one of these project types, the **OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST** will work with you to create a project that works! On private land, your possibilities open up even more if you can come to an agreement with the property owner.

When completed, your vacant lot project will be an asset for your neighborhood as well as the visitors that will stop by. For any questions along the way contact the City's - **OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST**.

GOALS

SOCIAL: FOSTER NEIGHBORHOOD INTERACTION

Vacant lot projects invite neighbors and communities to come together to steward a vacant lot through planning, design, funding, construction, and maintenance.

FINANCIAL: RE-IMAGINE THE POTENTIAL OF VACANT LOTS

Vacant lot projects will add value to a neighborhood through removing blight. Studies show that un-maintained lots decrease property values. In addition, the yearly cost of maintaining vacant lots with City services will be reduced.

ECOLOGICAL: ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Vacant lot projects will improve aesthetics while providing ecosystem services through the removal of invasive species, creating habitats for insects and wildlife, increasing groundwater recharge, reducing heat island effects, and remediating polluted soils.



VACANT LOTS

This map shows the location of approximately 27,000 vacant lots throughout the city.

For an interactive map, visit
PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/DCP/GIS-WEBCARTS-NEW
or WWW.LOTSTOLOVE.ORG



PROCESS

The City of Pittsburgh has been working closely with local nonprofits, community groups, and residents to refine, clarify, and improve the process that individuals and community groups will follow in order to access, create, and sustain vacant lot projects.

On the following pages you'll see "**THE PROCESS GUIDE TO VACANT LOTS IN PITTSBURGH**" that will help you move through the process. In the **PROCESS OVERVIEW** section, you'll find more detailed information about each process.

TO GET STARTED THINK ABOUT THESE KEY QUESTIONS:

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Consider the following: Do I have a lot in mind? Do I have an idea for a vacant lot? Or both? Or I'm just exploring the Toolkit to see where to start. **See the process on pages 10-11.**



SOCIAL FINANCIAL ECOLOGICAL

WHY CREATE A VACANT LOT PROJECT?

Every vacant lot project will have its own reasons for its creation, whether it's to foster neighborhood collaboration, promote environmental awareness, or re-imagine an underutilized property.



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WITH THE LOT?

With several possible vacant lot projects, each owner will have slightly different requirements for creating a vacant lot project. While the focus of this toolkit will be on reusing publicly owned lots, much of the information will be useful for private projects, too. **Find out more about project types on pages 30-35.**

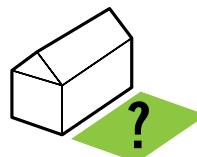
WHERE DO I FIND A VACANT LOT?

While some neighborhoods have a bounty of vacant lots, others can be a challenge to find a site to realize a project. Visit lotstolove.org for a complete listing of vacant lots.



WHO OWNS THE LAND?

One of the key issues that will guide the process of creating a vacant lot project is the ownership of the land. 27% of vacant lots are owned by the City or the URA. Approximately 70% are privately owned. **For more about finding ownership information go to page 9.**

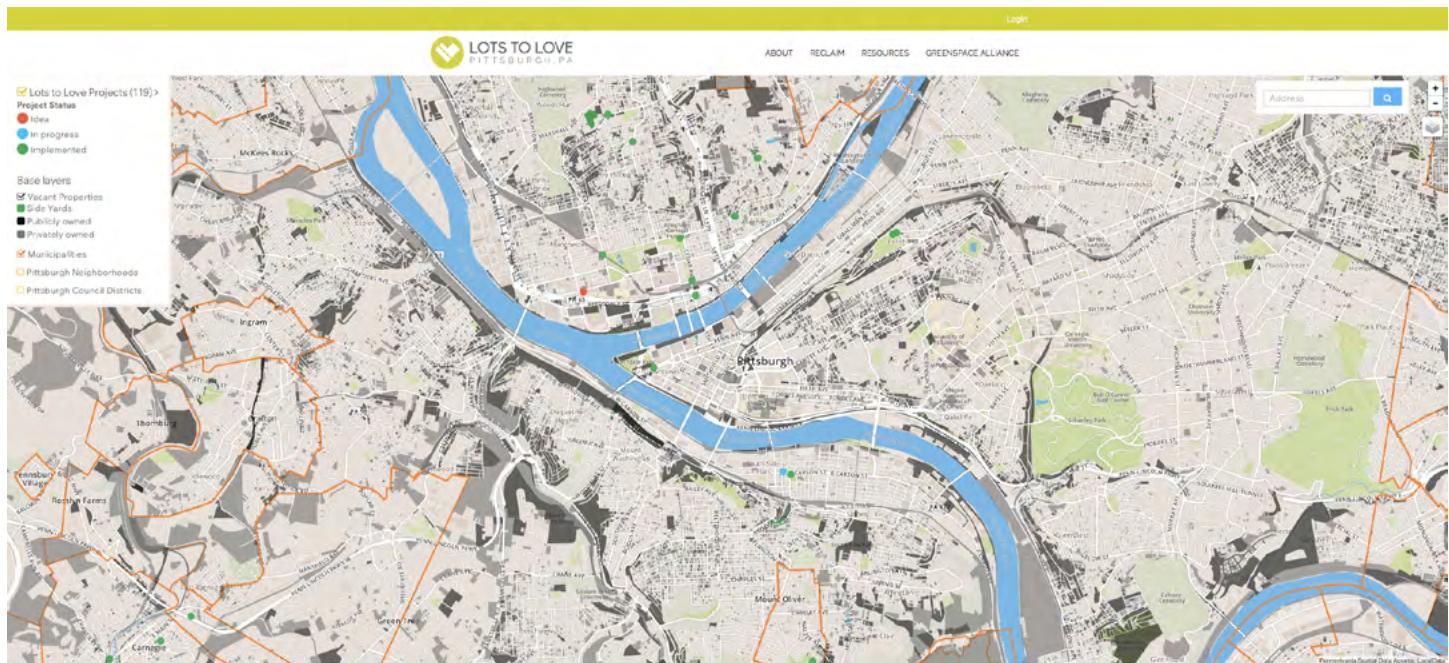


WHEN DO I START?

To get a project started in the spring you'll want to start in December for fall projects May would be a good starting point.

**DECEMBER (SPRING)
MAY (FALL)**

WWW.LOTSTOLOVE.ORG



There's LOTS TO LOVE in the Pittsburgh region.

In fact, there are over 45,000 vacant lots in Allegheny County alone, many of which have negative impacts on our communities.

Join us as we work to reclaim them, one lot at a time.



1011 N LANG AVE
Parcel ID 6174E034060300
Municipality PITTSBURGH - 13TH WARD
Use VACANT LAND
Property Owner CITY OF PITTSBURGH
Is the property delinquent? No

COPY "PARCEL ID"
AND PASTE INTO
YOUR INTAKE FORM

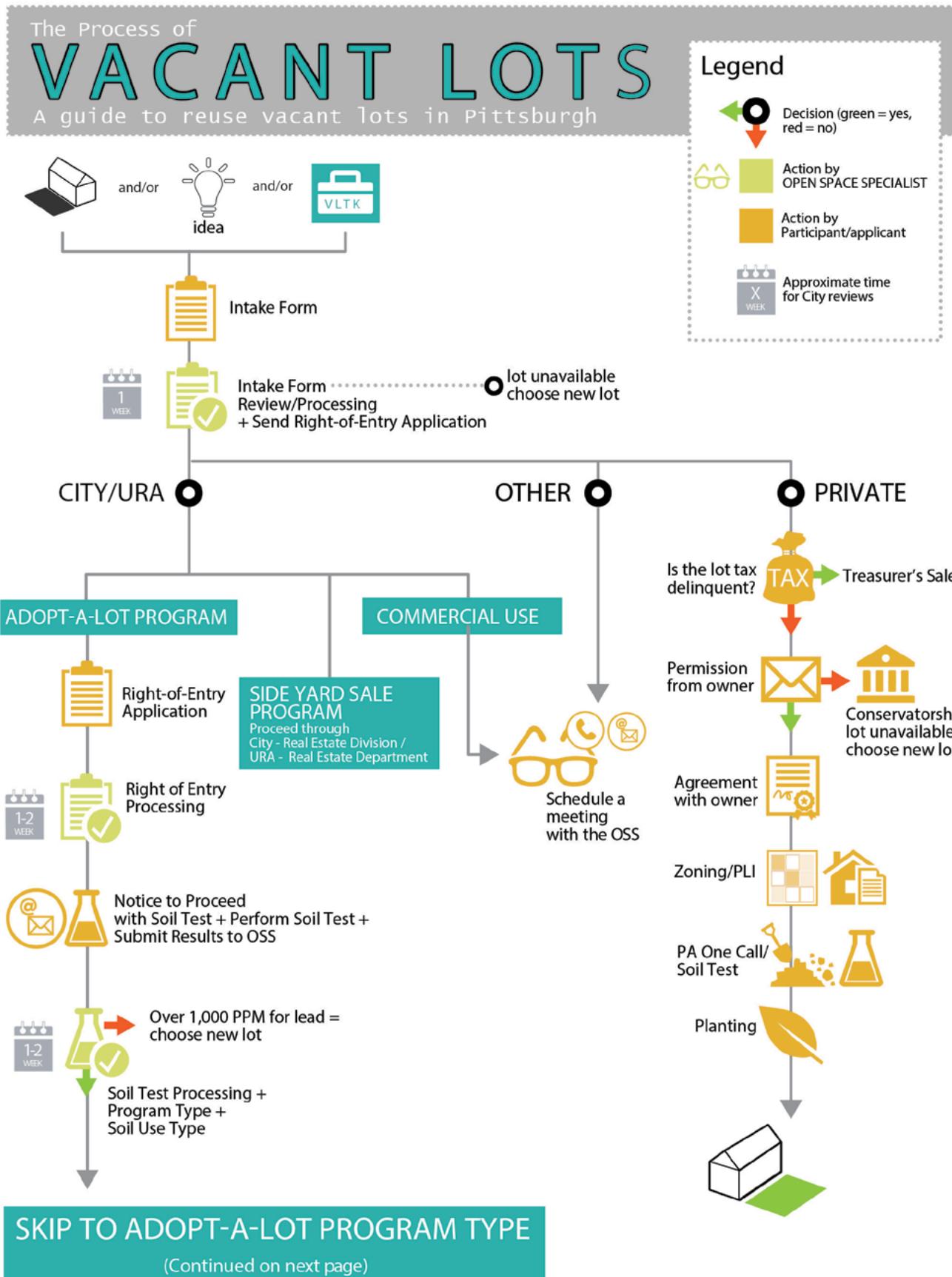
Interested in working on this lot? [Click here for more information.](#)

clicking on a lot on the map will
give you ownership and parcel
identification information.

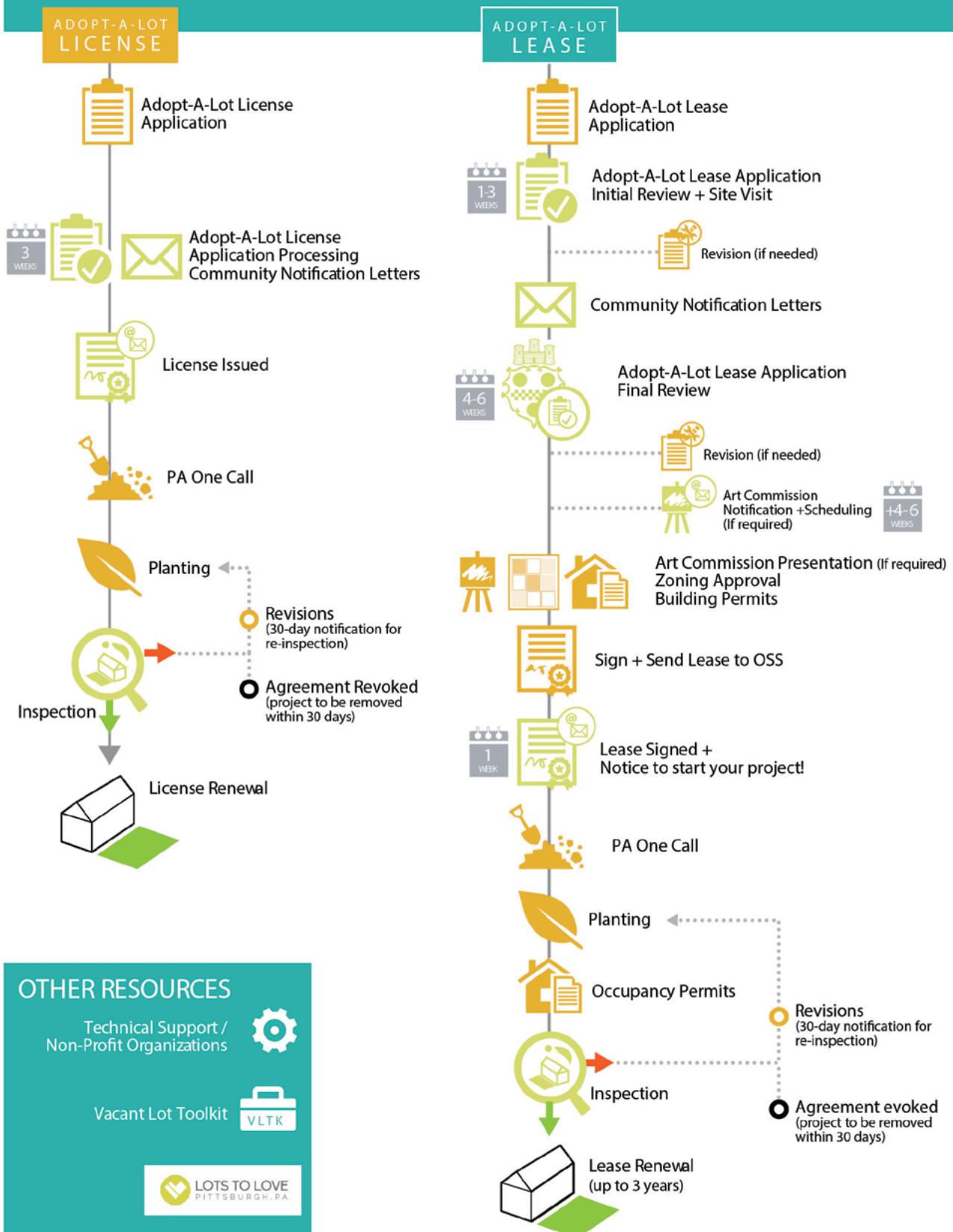
Lots to Love Pittsburgh is an online resource for community organizations and residents who have an interest in small, resident-driven greening projects on vacant lots. It brings together information related to the unique resources available in the Pittsburgh region and helps direct users to further information.

The base map featured on the website utilizes data from the Allegheny County Property Assessment, City of Pittsburgh Finance Department - Real Estate Division, and Department of City Planning. By clicking on a lot on the map, you will be able to learn its unique identification number, ownership and tax delinquency status. You can search by neighborhood, municipality or address to orient yourself.

You can use the website in coordination with this guide to gather information regarding the lot you hope to use, connect with a community of people developing vacant lot projects, and to learn more about projects that are already on the ground in order to learn more and generate ideas for your own project!



ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAMS



PROCESS OVERVIEW:

The following pages walk you through the process and explain your role in your project as well as the city's processes.



YOU

are responsible for completing the following steps in orange as well as communicate with the **OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST** if you have any questions throughout the process.



OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST

is responsible for guiding you and your project through the process.



URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

has decided to adopt the city's process and programs. as part of the Vacant Lot Toolkit process and policy development. The OSS will be your liaison with URA Real Estate staff.



INTAKE FORM

Submit a Vacant Lot **INTAKE FORM** at your convenience on our website PITTSBURGPA.GOV/DCP/ADOPTALOT or on LOTSTOLOVE.ORG



INTAKE FORM REVIEW/PROCESSING + SEND RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION (FOR CITY/URA PROPERTIES)

The OSS will accept **INTAKE FORMS** on a rolling basis. During the approximately **ONE-TWO WEEK** time-frame, the OSS will establish lot ownership and check the status of the lot with the City's Real Estate Division. Some city lots will be unavailable due to pending sale, use by the city, and/or reserved for future planning/development projects. Upon completion of the review the OSS will direct you to the next step or work with you to find a suitable lot.



→ SKIP TO SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION

If your proposed project is on an available City or URA lot, the OSS will send you a **SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION**.



→ SKIP TO SIDE YARD SALE PROGRAM

If your proposed project is on an available City-owned lot next to your residence and you would like to purchase the lot, skip to **SIDE YARD SALE PROGRAM**. To begin call 412.255.2300, Department of Finance - Real Estate Division, to start the process or see requirements in **SUPPLEMENTS**. If eligible the process can take approximately **18-24 MONTHS** but a month-to-month lease is available once your are approved for purchase.

→ SKIP TO COMMERCIAL USES

If your proposed project will employ people or will produce a revenue of more than \$10,000 per year, schedule a meeting with the OSS.

→ OTHER - PUBLIC PROPERTY (NOT CITY/URA)

If your proposed lot is owned by other federal, state, and / or local public entities, the OSS will assist in getting you in contact with those owners or assist in a new lot selection.

→ SKIP TO PRIVATE

If your proposed lot is not owned by the City, URA or other public entity, you can jump to gaining site access by reaching out to the private property owner for permission to use the lot. You can get mailing address information from the **LOTSTOLOVE.ORG** website or through the Allegheny County Tax Assessment site: **WWW2.COUNTY.ALLEGHENY.PA.US** by using the lot's address or lot & block numbers. Some owners may want an agreement as well as insurance. See the **SUPPLEMENTS** for samples. If the property is **TAX DELINQUENT** or if you are unable to communicate directly with the owners, you could consider exploring **CONSERVATORSHIP** or **TREASURER'S SALE**.

TAX DELINQUENT

Failure to pay taxes in full by December 31st of each calendar year result in the property being designated as tax delinquent, and a tax lien is automatically filed against the property. This status provides for additional collections or possible special actions being taken by the municipal body to recover their taxes owed.

PRIVATE PROPERTY OPTIONS



CONSERVATORSHIP A court-enabled process for blighted property reclamation. The Court of Common Pleas may grant the rights and responsibilities to care for a specific property, with a remediation plan. Upon completion of the plan, the property may be sold by the court or remain in conservatorship until it may be conveyed with free and clear title at market value via court sale.



TREASURER'S SALE The Department of Finance holds a 'sale' of tax delinquent properties. A minimum price is set based on debt, liens, etc. An individual may identify tax-delinquent property and request the City include it and/or bid on properties at the Sale. If there are multiple interested purchasers, an auction is held at the sale.



SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION

Submit an Adopt-A-Lot **SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION** to gain legal access to a lot for one day to conduct a soil test.



SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY PROCESSING

The OSS will accept **SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATIONS** on a rolling basis. During the approximately **ONE WEEK** time-frame, the OSS send you a **SIGNED SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY** via email.



RECEIVE SIGNED SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY & PERFORM + SUBMIT SOIL TEST

Once you receive a **SIGNED SOIL TEST RIGHT-OF-ENTRY** via email, you can conduct your soil test. See **SUPPLEMENTS** for guidelines. Test results should take less than three weeks. Submit results from the lab of your choice via email to **OSS@PITTSBURGHPA.GOV** within 30 days.



POTENTIAL SALE!

If a sale is started on the vacant lot your licensing and/or leasing, you'll be notified and able to competitively bid on the property, except in the case of a Side Yard Sale or URA transfer.



SOIL TEST PROCESSING + PROGRAM TYPE + SOIL TYPE USE

The OSS will accept Soil Test Results on a rolling basis, and review will take approximately **TWO WEEKS**. Passing soil test will then put you into an **ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM**, where the choices are a **LICENSE** or a **LEASE**. Remediation options will be available for lots having under 1,000 ppm lead. Over that threshold, failing soil tests will require the selection of a new lot.



1-2
WEEKS

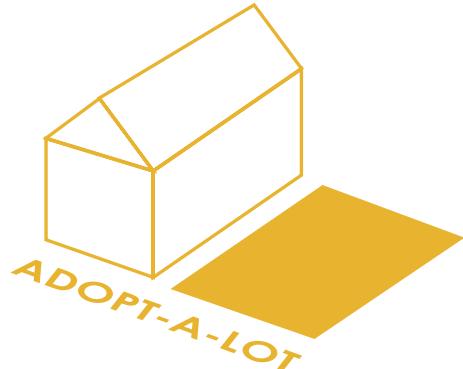
SKIP TO ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM TYPE

Upon receiving your Soil Test Review the OSS will direct you to the program that fits your project.

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE

- **1 SEASON, 1 LOT, NO STRUCTURES***
- **YEARLY LICENSE RENEWAL REQUIRED**
- **ONLY FLOWER AND EDIBLE GARDEN USES**
- **NO SALES OR DONATIONS ON THE LOT**

*TEMPORARY FENCING AND RAISED BEDS ARE ALLOWED SEE ELEMENTS SECTION



ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

- **ONE YEAR LEASE WITH A THREE YEAR RENEWAL**
- **EDIBLE, FLOWER, OR RAIN GARDEN USES**
- **INSURANCE REQUIRED**
- **NO SALES OR DONATION ON THE LOT (W/O MARKET STAND LEASE)**



MARKET STAND

TO SELL/DONATE WHAT YOU GROW ON-SITE

- **\$25 APPLICATION FEE**
- **LESS THAN \$10,000 IN SALES (NOT REVENUE)**
- **NO EMPLOYEES**

LICENSE

an annual, nonexclusive garden license granted by the City to use a vacant City lot for a temporary Flower or Edible Garden by an individual. Current licensees will have the option to renew the license.

LEASE

a lease granted by the City to use a vacant City lot for a Vacant Lot Project for a one year term. Following the successful completion of the one-year term, then-current lessees will have the option to renew the lease for up to an additional three years.

MARKET STAND LEASE

a subsidiary category of an Adopt-A-Lot Lease, to allow outdoor retail sales and services.

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE APPLICATION



- 1 SEASON, 1 LOT, NO STRUCTURES*
- YEARLY LICENSE RENEWAL REQUIRED
- ONLY FLOWER AND EDIBLE GARDEN USES
- NO SALES OR DONATIONS FROM LOT

*TEMPORARY FENCING AND RAISED BEDS ARE ALLOWED SEE ELEMENTS SECTION

Submit an **ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE APPLICATION** at your convenience on our website PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/DCP/ADOPTALOT



ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE PROCESSING + COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION LETTERS + FINAL LICENSE

The OSS will process your **ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE APPLICATION** in approximately **THREE WEEKS**. During this time, notification letters will be sent to adjacent property owners. See **COMMUNITY PROCESS**.



PA ONE CALL

Contact the Pennsylvania One Call System at least three business days but not more than ten business days prior to actual excavation. **CALL 811 OR VISIT PA1CALL.ORG**



PLANT YOUR VACANT LOT

Install your garden to the specifications of the site plan you submitted in your application.



INSPECTION

The OSS will inspect your project periodically throughout the season as well as to ensure de-installation if you do not renew your license.



REMOVE OR RENEW YOUR GARDEN

Remove all your plant debris, raised beds and/or temporary fencing from your vacant lot by end of license. Or renew your license 30 days before the end of current license.

ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION

ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASEMARKET
STAND

- ONE YEAR LEASE, WITH A THREE YEAR RENEWAL
- EDIBLE, FLOWER, OR RAIN GARDEN USES
- INSURANCE REQUIRED
- NO SALES OR DONATION ON THE LOT
(W/O MARKET STAND LEASE)



Submit an **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION** on our website PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/DCP/ADOPTALOT, the OSS will provide a password to access this application once your Intake Form and Soil Test are processed.



EXISTING PHOTOS



NARRATIVE



SITE PLAN



BUDGET



MAINTENANCE



INSURANCE

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

For a complete “how-to” on each component of an **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICANT** see the **PLANNING +DESIGN** section.



ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION INITIAL REVIEW + SITE VISIT

The OSS will review your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION** in approximately **THREE WEEKS** for completeness. Questions and comments may be issued to applicant. A revised and resubmitted application may be required.



EDITS (IF NEEDED)

Submit a revised version of your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION** to the OSS.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

is responsible for ensuring that vacant lot projects do not create a public safety or maintenance issue, as well as provide a letter of support to the Art Commission (if Art Commission is required). DPW will also provide non-city standard materials on a case by case basis.



ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION FINAL REVIEW

The OSS will review your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION** in approximately **FOUR TO SIX WEEKS** with applicable city personnel (Department of Public Works, Zoning, Permits, Licenses, and Inspections). Questions and comments may be issued to applicant. A revised and resubmitted application may be required.



EDITS (IF NEEDED)

Submit a revised version of your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION** at your convenience to the OSS.

ART COMMISSION

is mandated to review the urban design and architectural and landscape features of structures which are erected on or above land owned by the City; which are within the public realm under its control, including vacant lots; and in which City funds are invested. The Art Commission administers the review process, which includes preliminary and final approvals. For Vacant lots, Art Commission will only review projects with elements not listed in the element section or sites over 1/4 acre and/or with structures over 120 sqft



ART COMMISSION NOTIFICATION (IF NEEDED)

Upon final review of your application, the OSS may contact you to schedule an **ART COMMISSION** presentation date.



ART COMMISSION PRESENTATION (IF NEEDED)

Present to Art Commission with OSS your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION**, and components that require approval. Design revisions may need to occur and/or components removed based on commission's decision. You will have one month's notice prior to your appearance. Presentations to the Art Commission require you to be present during business hours.



ZONING APPROVAL/BUILDING PERMITS (IF NEEDED)



The OSS will work with you to obtain any **ZONING APPROVALS** or **BUILDING PERMITS** if needed based on your site plan and site components. Fee(s) waived for City-owned lots, but you'll have to come during business hours 8-3PM to get approvals/permits.



SIGN LEASE

After all reviews are complete, the OSS will send you a Lease agreement to be signed and returned to the City to be executed.



FINAL ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE + NOTICE TO START YOUR PROJECT!

The OSS will email you your complete lease agreement and you can begin your project!



PA ONE CALL

Contact the Pennsylvania One Call System at least three business days but not more than ten business days prior to actual excavation. **CALL 811 OR VISIT PA1CALL.ORG**



PLANT YOUR VACANT LOT

Install your garden to the specifications of the site plan you submitted in your application. If changes occur during installation submit **CHANGE ORDER FORM** (see **SUPPLEMENTS**) to OSS.

ZONING

The Zoning and Development Review Division of the Department of City Planning administers the City of Pittsburgh Zoning Code. The intent of zoning regulations is to allow property owners the reasonable use of their property insofar as the use is not detrimental to abutting properties or to the neighborhood. Every property in the City has a zoning classification and subsequent occupancy permit that determines how the property can be used.

The Zoning Division is the first stop to getting a building permit. The approval processes involved vary by project type and zoning district. Once zoning approval is granted, the project will be reviewed by the Department of Permits, License, and Inspections

GIS

To find your Zoning District visit
[HTTP://GIS.PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/ZONETEST/](http://GIS.PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/ZONETEST/)



DEPARTMENT OF PERMITS, LICENSES, & INSPECTIONS

is responsible for ensuring life safety and quality of living to the residents developing vacant lot projects that require a building or occupancy permit as well as inspecting and issuing citations if your project requires any permits.



OCCUPANCY PERMITS (IF NEEDED)

The OSS will work with you to obtain any **OCCUPANCY PERMIT** if needed based on your site plan and site components. Fee(s) waived for City-owned lots.



INSPECTION

Call the OSS, within five days of project installation, at **(412) 255-2200** or email at **OSS@PITTSBURGHPA.GOV** to schedule site inspections. Failure to schedule inspections may lead to license/lease revocation. See **MAINTENANCE + INSPECTION**. The OSS will inspect your project and send you results. If you pass your inspection, continue to keep up the great work growing and maintaining your project. If you fail the OSS will send a list of action items to be addressed within 30-days as well as conduct a follow-up inspection.



OWNERSHIP CHANGE + REMOVAL

If you no longer want to maintain your vacant lot project you can transfer it to another individual or group, or remove your project. Contact the OSS to transfer your lease and/or your plans to remove your project.



RENEW YOUR ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

The OSS will email you 30 days before your lease expiration to extend the option to continue your lease.

MAINTAIN AND GROW YOUR GARDEN

See **RESOURCES** for partners and organizations, fundraising, and volunteers + training or **MAINTENANCE** for activities, equipment, and volunteers required.

PLANNING + DESIGN

The planning + design of your vacant lot project can be a daunting task at first. Though creative ideas, the shapes and sizes, and your budgets may have endless variation, most vacant lot projects in the City, especially those on City-owned property, will fall into three main project types: edible, flower and rain gardens. In some cases, projects may be all three! While you aren't limited to these three types of projects, most will fit within these categories.

Completing your application is one of the biggest milestones in creating your vacant lot project. Each application will be submitted, with the assistance of the **OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST**, to a number of city departments, divisions and commissions, to grant you a license or lease to access and construct your vacant lot project. In this chapter you will find the tools to develop an **ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM APPLICATION**: site selection + existing conditions, narrative + programming, site plan, elements, budget, maintenance plan, and insurance.





Miss Mary's Garden
image: Hanna Mosca



FINDING A SITE + EXISTING CONDITIONS

Selecting the right lot is one of the most important steps you'll take in your vacant lot project. With over 27,000 vacant lots in the city, you have many choices! Many people are most interested in lots that are close to their own homes. An unkempt vacant lot on your own block can diminish property values and neighborhood pride. In other cases lots are selected for their historical value, highly visible locations or potential impact on the larger community.

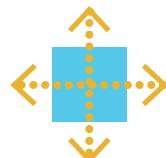
Importantly, lots should also be selected based on your proposed uses or the plants you'd like to use. For example, you shouldn't choose a lot that doesn't get direct sunshine if your goal is to grow edible plants!

Of course, if you're having problems selecting a location, you can always discuss your ideas with the **OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST**, your local community group, the non-profits who provide support to vacant lot projects, or visit LOTSTOLOVE.ORG. On the following pages, you'll learn about some of the key questions to ask when selecting a site as well as how to document existing site conditions, through photos, for your application.

KEYS TO SITE SELECTION

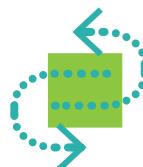
ADJACENT PROPERTIES

Accounting for adjacent uses and coordinating with neighbors can make or break a vacant lot project. Some uses, like an **EDIBLE GARDEN**, benefit from high visibility. In a residential neighborhood, a good relationship with neighbors will help provide a sense of security. In a more commercial neighborhood, nearby shops and destinations can bring desirable traffic and attention.

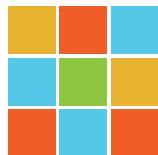


CIRCULATION

It can be important to ensure that access is available by transit, bicycle, or walking. Internally, your site design can be maximized for its type. In an **EDIBLE GARDEN**, are all of your planters accessible, even to someone whose mobility is impaired? Is there enough space



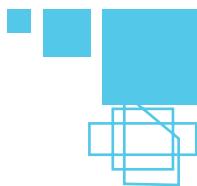
for the necessary tools? In a **RAIN GARDEN**, it is necessary to ensure that items such as bioswales or rain gardens do not pose a safety hazard. **FLOWER GARDENS** may range from sites in which no one is expected to set foot on, to those that have a path as their major feature. Examining “cow paths” or areas where people have cut paths through use, can be a useful way of evaluating where paths may be desired.



ZONING

All vacant lot projects, except for those under the **ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE**, are subject to the City's zoning codes. The OSS can help you check that the type of project you want to do is allowed by zoning. An interactive zoning map can be found at: GIS.PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/ZONING/.

Of particular interest to edible gardeners is Pittsburgh's Urban Agriculture ordinance, which was updated in 2015. The ordinance allows for agricultural activities, (including some animals, such as chickens, goats and bees), in many, but not all, zoning districts (classifications), as an accessory use with a permit. The OSS will be able to provide additional information to relevant projects.



SIZE AND SHAPE

Vacant lots in the City of Pittsburgh range in size from 26 square feet to several acres. The size of the lot will determine what type of project you can implement. **EDIBLE GARDENS** are possible at many scales; considering how much space you want per person involved in your project and how much space your specific plants will require may rule out certain sites. Whereas in a **FLOWER GARDEN** any size and shape would work, with greater consideration for lots with high visibility on corners or near neighborhood gateways and business districts. Consider a high visibility lot for a **RAIN GARDEN**, if your goal is a demonstration project, but any size and shape will work for general **RAIN GARDEN** purposes.



SLOPE AND DRAINAGE

Particularly in Pittsburgh, it is important to consider the slope of a lot when you begin to work on a design. Flat parcels of land and hillside parcels each have specific advantages and disadvantages, especially pertaining to stabilization and drainage. Parcels with greater than 25% slope or on landslide prone lots cannot be used. See GIS.PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/ZONING/ for steep slope and landslide overlays.

Lots with relatively steep slopes (under 25%) may not be suitable for **EDIBLE GARDENS**, however; they may be especially useful as **RAIN GARDENS** (location is important). Likewise, it may be possible to take advantage of steep slopes in a **FLOWER GARDEN** as well.

WATER

Access to water is critical for gardening projects, depending on the plants desired. During the dry months of July and August, irrigation may be required to keep many **EDIBLE GARDENS** and **FLOWER GARDENS** alive. An agreement with the owner of an adjacent building to allow access to an outdoor spigot or install a rain barrel is one potential strategy. Another avenue is to request a water meter pit from the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA). See **SUPPLEMENTS** for more information. Planting drought tolerant plants can save on water, especially in **FLOWER GARDENS**. Since native plants comprise **RAIN GARDENS**, a dedicated water source should not be needed once plant establishment occurs in 1-2 seasons.



SUN EXPOSURE

Sun exposure is likely to be variable throughout your lot. As different plants prefer different levels of sun exposure, plan your plantings to take advantage of all of the areas of your site. Full shade sites may not make good **EDIBLE GARDENS**, but may be appropriate for **RAIN GARDENS**.



-  **FULL SHADE:** No direct sunlight on the ground. Located on the north side of buildings, under dense trees, or in woodlands.
-  **PARTIAL SHADE:** May only receive sunlight during part of the day for a few hours.
-  **LIGHT SHADE:** May receive sunlight during part of the day for several hours. May be under sparse foliage.
-  **PARTIAL SUN:** May receive sunlight during parts of the day, but not full sun.
-  **FULL SUN:** Receives consistent sunlight throughout the day.

DEBRIS

Unfortunately, illegal dumping remains an issue throughout Pittsburgh. For the most creative users, site debris may even provide useful materials for a future project, though safety and health should always be taken into consideration.



SOIL

Soil provides nutrients for plants and affects water quality in a critical way. One of the easiest ways to begin exploring the quality of your lot's soil is by visually inspecting the current plant life. In general if plants are not thriving, that could be an indication of poor soil quality and/or compaction. For **RAIN GARDEN** use, soil compaction increases rainwater runoff, and would not allow the infiltration of water. Consider conducting an infiltration test prior to installing a **RAIN GARDEN**.





SOIL TESTING

The City of Pittsburgh requires a test for lead levels on all parcels used by residents. Although there may be additional cost, it is recommended that you test for nutrients and other heavy metals as well.

SOIL STANDARDS – Lead testing results

The City of Pittsburgh follows these guidelines when allowing use of City land:

- **0 - 150 ppm** – May be used without restrictions.
- **151 – 400 ppm** - Enforce “Clean Hands” policy – washing hands immediately after gardening. Paths must be covered with grass or mulched to a depth of 3 – 4 inches.
- **401 – 1,000 ppm** - Modified use* or find another lot.
- **Over 1,000 ppm** - No use allowed; find another lot.

*Modified use requirements; for vegetables 8 – 10 inches raised beds lined with geotextile barriers, or other solid containers with clean soil for planting. All areas not covered with raised beds must be grass covered or covered with geo-textile barrier and topped with 3 – 4 inches of mulch. No digging is permitted anywhere on the lot.

See **SUPPLEMENTS** for more information.



UNDERGROUND UTILITIES

If your project involves digging or moving earth with power equipment, state law requires that you notify underground utility companies three to ten business days before you plan to dig.

If you plan to do excavation/digging with power equipment you must contact the Pennsylvania One Call System notice at least three business days before your excavation. Once you place a call, the utility companies will visit your site to mark location of underground lines. This is free of charge, but if you do not call and damage any utility lines, you will be responsible for all repair costs. **CALL 811** or visit **PA1CALL.ORG**

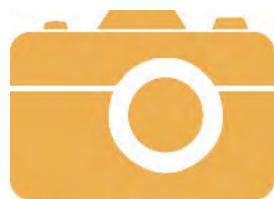


BUILDING/OCCUPANCY PERMITS

All fences, sheds, pavilions, decks, retaining walls and similar structures, regardless of size, require an occupancy permit. All fences over 6 feet; all sheds, pavilions, or similar structures over 120 square feet; all decks more than 30 inches above grade; and all retaining walls over 4 feet require building permits as well. You can obtain an occupancy or building permit by visiting Division of Zoning and Development Review and the Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections on the Fourth Floor of 200 Ross Street. See **ELEMENTS** or **PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/PLI/** for more information.

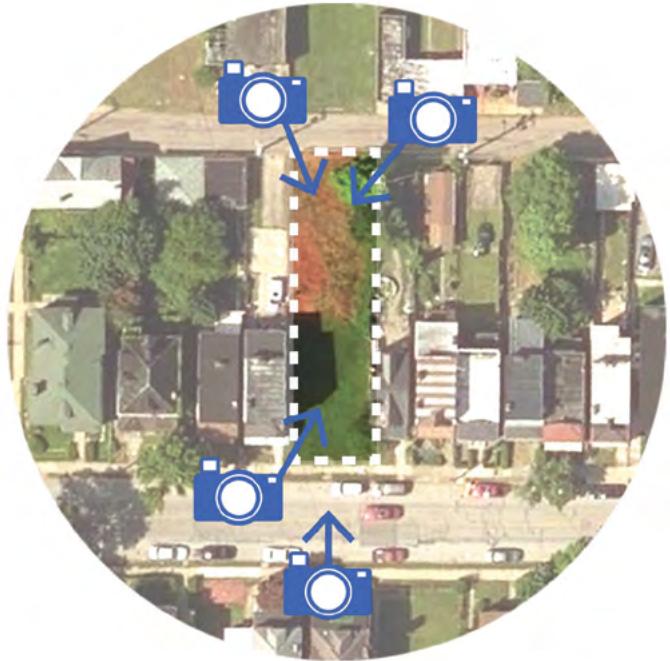
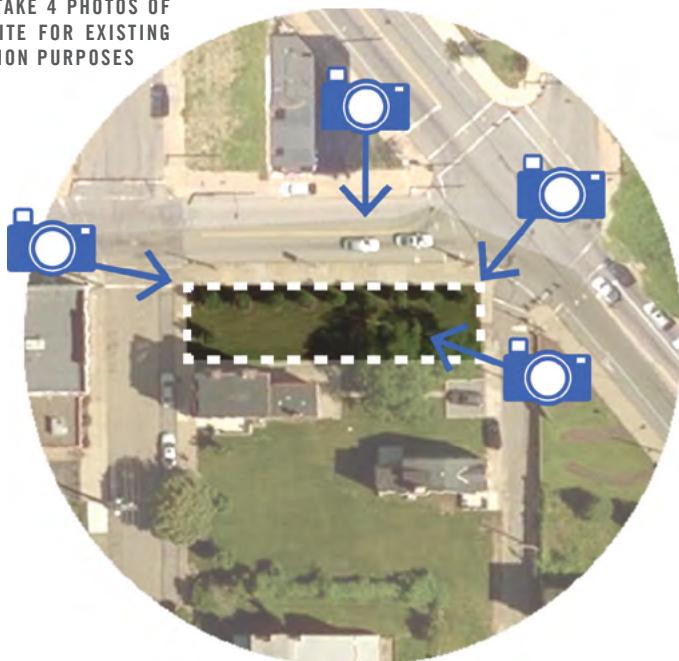
EXISTING CONDITIONS - SITE PHOTOS

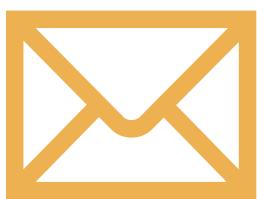
Your application should include photos taken from specific angles around the proposed vacant lot. Include additional photos of all utilities, sidewalks/steps, debris/trash, plants, or other noticeable elements if they exist on site. A minimum of four photos is required, (one from each side of your site) as well as photos of the sidewalk or steps if present. Add a caption to each photo to describe where the photo was taken (ie. Garden Street, North side of lot, etc.).



ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

EXAMPLES OF WHERE YOU MIGHT TAKE 4 PHOTOS OF YOUR SITE FOR EXISTING CONDITION PURPOSES





**ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE**

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

COMMUNITY PROCESS

POSSIBLE PUBLIC MEETING

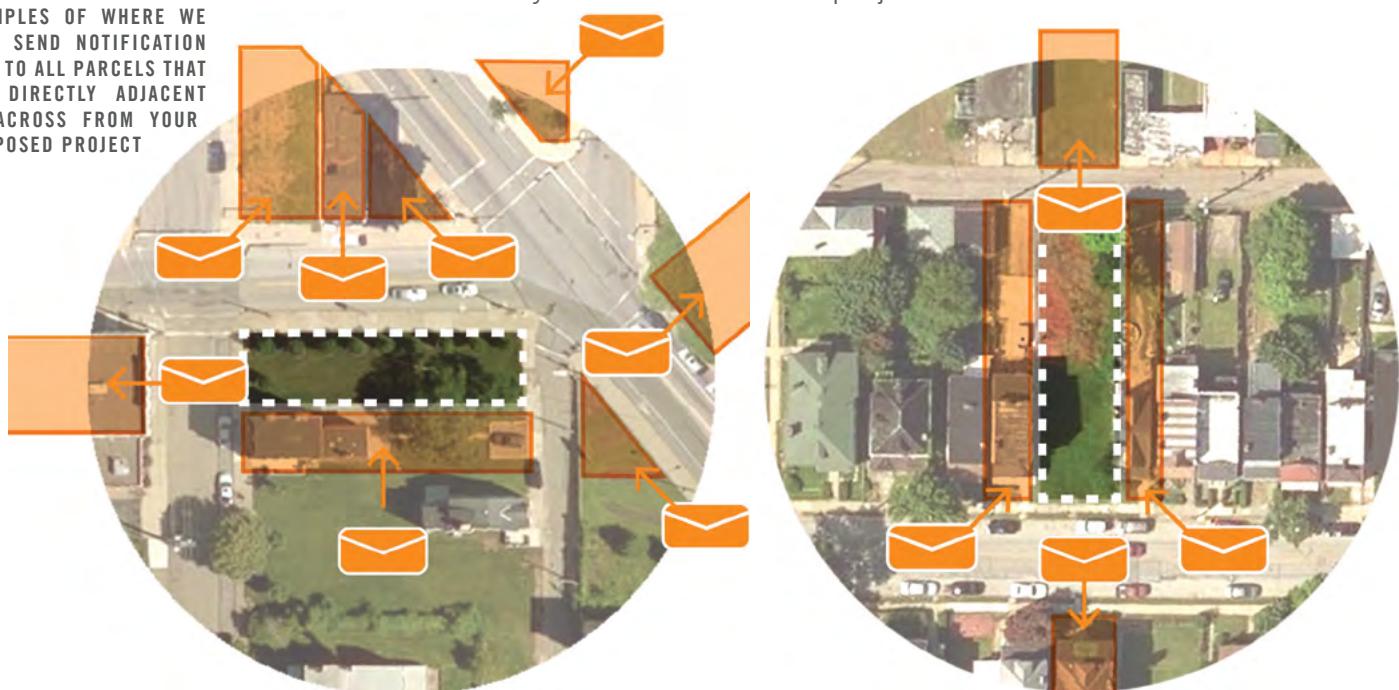
If the City receives objections to your project during the notification period, the OSS will require you hold a public meeting to present the project. After the meeting, the OSS will work with the applicant to refine the project or assist in finding a new site.

A meeting can add up to a month to the project application process. It is advisable that you reach out to the larger neighborhood prior to submitting an application, to minimize the chance of objections.

The City encourages and promotes the re-imagining of vacant lots, while respecting the adjacent community through a notification process. On City-owned lots, the OSS will send notification letters to adjacent property owners for the **ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM**. For the **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE**, neighborhood/community organizations and the City Council member will be additionally notified to solicit questions or comments about the impending project. See the graphics below for details on who exactly we will notify and the **SUPPLEMENTS** for the sample letter. Adjacent property owners include properties next to your lot as well as across streets or ways as well as lots with or without structures (letters sent to the tax address listed on the Allegheny County Real Estate Portal website).

You are also encouraged to engage with the neighbors, community, and neighborhood as a part of the process of developing a vacant lot project. This process can vary depending on the scope of the project you want to do. Engaging with your community is a great opportunity to find out more about local resources, gain support from your neighbors, and even recruit volunteers! It will also give you an opportunity to learn from the community members who've already created successful projects.

**EXAMPLES OF WHERE WE
WILL SEND NOTIFICATION
LETS TO ALL PARCELS THAT
ARE DIRECTLY ADJACENT
OR ACROSS FROM YOUR
PROPOSED PROJECT**



NARRATIVE + PROGRAMMING



ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

The project narrative is a short project description (less than 500 words) explaining your vision for your vacant lot. Applicants should emphasize:

- How your project achieves the Vacant Lot Toolkit goals (see **OVERVIEW**).
- How the community can participate in the creation and/or stewardship of the lot as well as any project partner roles
- Ideas of programming, project type (**EDIBLE, FLOWER, RAIN**), and key site components (such as planters, plants, etc.) See **ELEMENTS**.

The following is an example of a short narrative of the style that is required:

*The Windymill Community Garden is an **EDIBLE GARDEN** that aims to create a garden space for community members to grow food. This garden will achieve the goals of the VLTK by providing easy access to the community (SOCIAL), capture rainwater in a rainbarrel to water plants (ECOLOGICAL), and beautify a blighted lot in our community (FINANCIAL). We will clean the site of all brush and debris. The site will be mainly composed of raised planters made from reclaimed, non-treated timbers. Mulch paths will surround these planters as well as a central space for cut tree stools and a timber table. Plantings will consist mainly of annual edibles (tomatoes, corn, beans, etc), while the edges of the garden will be perennial flowers for summer color interest. The neighborhood will help in stewarding this garden through regularly scheduled maintenance events as well as a community share in the produce that is grown in this garden.*



**ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE**

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

SITE PLAN

All applications will require a site plan of your design that indicates what elements you will be using and where they will be positioned on the lot. This will be one of the things that the OSS will be reviewing after you have completed your project. This plan does not need to be completed by a professional.

HOW TO DESIGN A SITE PLAN

DO IT YOURSELF!

Using cut and paste, you can create a design using Google Earth, Microsoft Powerpoint, Adobe Illustrator or any number of other programs. You can also hand draw your design. Several local nonprofits can also provide design assistance. Remember to use a scale!

CONSIDER A DESIGNER!

If your project is large-scale, if funding allows, or if in-kind services can be provided, consider finding and hiring a professional designer or landscape architect to help assemble a design and site plan using your vision.

OPTIONAL

Renderings and perspectives can be developed to illustrate greater design detail as well as be useful in your fundraising efforts. Many people find these types of drawings easier to understand, compared to a plan drawing. While these usually take a lot more time to develop, free programs like Google Sketchup can get you started.

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE SITE PLAN ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE

Use the base plan provided in your application to sketch in planting areas and/or raised bed locations. Any project including a fence will require a scaled site plan as outlined below.

ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE SITE PLAN ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

Due to higher use and increase in public access to your lot, the City requires a more in depth site plan. Below are the requirements. For projects that have elements that require building permits, a detailed site plan stamped by a surveyor or architect may be required.

1. Determine the dimensions (measurements) of the property lines.

The following sources provide fairly accurate information regarding the length of property lines. Note that they do NOT provide an accurate representation of where the property lines are actually located.

- Pittsburgh GIS Vacant Lot Parcel Map. Zoom in to your lot(s) to get basic shape and dimension information (+/- 5'). GIS.PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/ZONETEST/

- Allegheny County Real Estate Portal map.
Search for your lot(s) and click on the map tab to see the dimensions for your lot(s).
WWW2.COUNTY.ALLEGHENY.PA.US/REALSTATE/SEARCH.ASPX

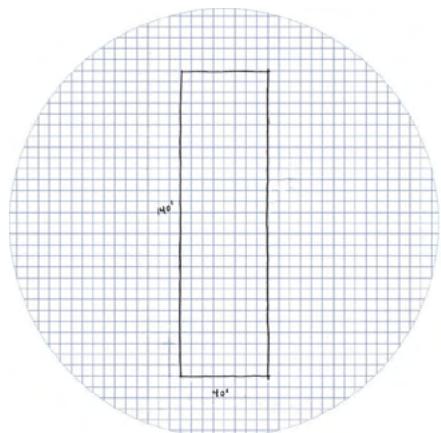
2. DETERMINE WHERE THE PROPERTY LINES ARE.

To draw a scaled site plan, you must know where the property lines are located. Note: Fences and the public sidewalk are not necessarily installed on the property line and therefore cannot be used to determine where your line is. If you do not know where your property line is, then you will have to hire a surveyor.

Tip: Talk to your next door neighbors. If they've had their property surveyed, you can usually use that information to determine where some of your property lines are. You can usually use your property's dimensions as noted on the Allegheny County Real Estate website to determine where the remaining lines are.

Note: Allegheny County Real Estate website maps, Google satellite maps, and similar maps are not accurate enough to meet the scaled site plan requirement.

Lot boundaries/property lines



3. MEASURE THE LOCATION OF ALL STRUCTURES, TREES, AND MAJOR PLANTING ON THE LOT.

Use a tape measure to measure the distance from the property lines to where the existing or future structures, trees and major plantings are located on the lot. In order to get an accurate drawing, it is important to measure the distance from at least two of the property lines to the location of the structure, tree or major planting. For instance, if it is a rectangular lot, measure the distance of the structure from either the front or back property line and one of the side property lines. Irregularly shaped lots may need additional measurements in order to accurately place these items on the scaled site plan.

4. DRAW THE SITE PLAN

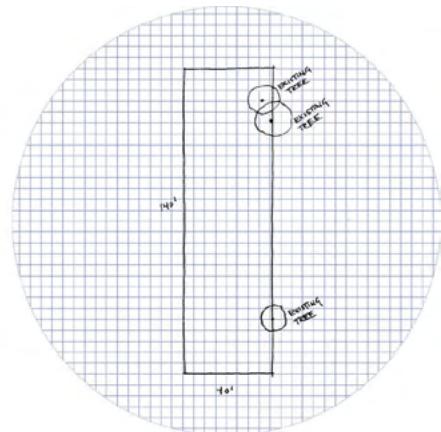
Materials

-Paper (Most properties in residential areas will fit on an 8 1/2" x 11" piece of paper. Plans on paper larger than 11" x 17" will not be accepted.)

- Ruler or scale ruler
- Pencil and pen
- Eraser/white out

First, you will need to determine what scale you are going to use to draw the plan. It must be a standard architect's or engineer's scale. Anyone with a regular ruler can use the scale 1 inch equals 16 feet (1"=16'). This means that

Existing elements/planting



every inch as measured on your plan is the equivalent to 16 feet on your property.

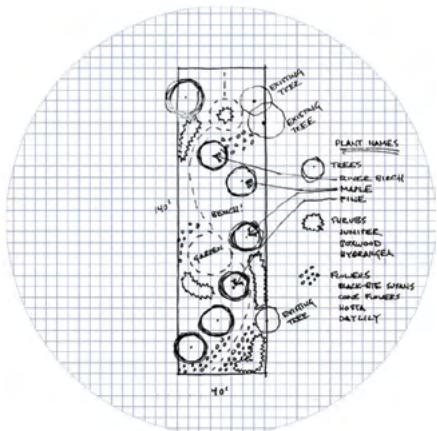
How this works: Each inch on the ruler is divided into 16 lines, so each line represents 1 foot. If your lot is 100 feet long, count 100 lines on your ruler and draw a line that long on your paper. Continue to draw the remaining property lines using the same process—if your lot is 20 feet wide, count 20 lines on your ruler. Yes, lots and structures may appear small at this scale...that is OK!

Once you have the property line drawn, add all the structures, trees and major plantings using the measurements you gathered earlier and the same process as above, counting one line on the ruler for every foot you measured. Don't forget to include the canopies of the trees and plantings.

Recommended: draw the plan first in pencil in case of errors. Once the plan is completed, go back over it in pen. If you draw in pen and make an error, white out is acceptable.

5. ADD THE DETAILS TO YOUR PLAN

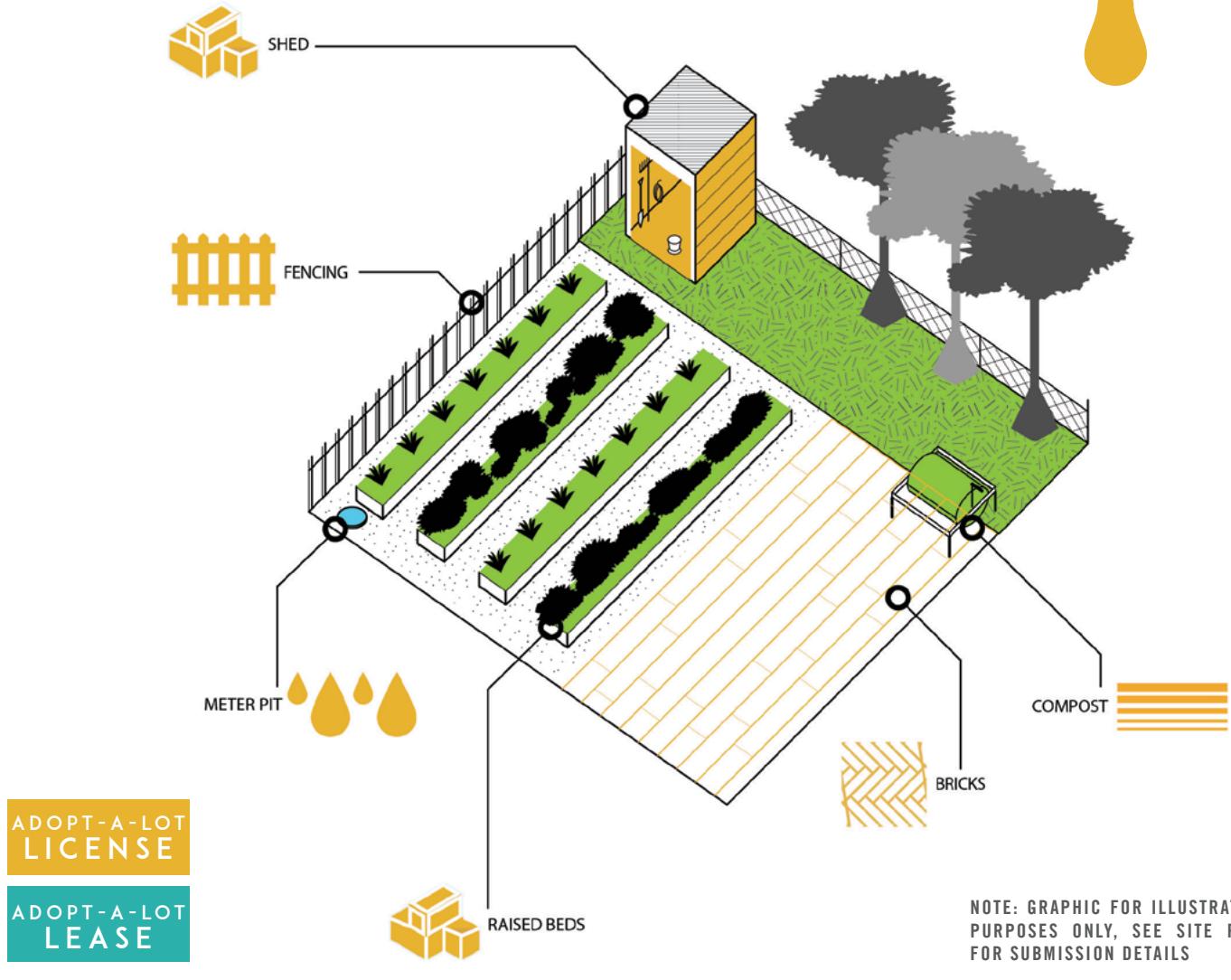
Proposed elements/planting



Once you have drawn the property line and proposed structures, trees and major plantings to scale, you will need to add the following items to your plan to make it complete:

1. Scale. This must indicate the scale that you used to draw the plan and can be in the format: Scale 1"=16' (the numbers will be different if you used a scale other than 1 inch equals 16 feet)
2. North Arrow. Indicate which way is north on the plan.
3. Label adjacent streets, ways or alleys.
4. Existing elements/plantings. Make a note of what you plan to remove and what will remain as part of your project. For elements, please include any existing walls, steps, fences, sidewalks, etc.
5. Proposed elements/plants. Draw all elements and/or plants that you propose to use on the site plan.
6. Label Measurements. Label the sizes of all structures, the lengths of the property lines, and the distances of the major structures from the property lines.
7. Other Labels. Label the items on your plan. Don't forget to draw or label where your paths, furniture, rain barrels or other decorative items will be placed. Labels can include images of elements or plantings.

PROJECT TYPES: EDIBLE GARDENS



EDIBLE GARDENS remain one of the most common and important vacant lot project types in the City of Pittsburgh. These projects have the opportunity to bring healthy, fresh food to many neighborhoods which are currently lacking these options. Under the **ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM**, program participants may harvest edibles from **EDIBLE GARDENS** for personal use.

To donate or sell uncut, unprocessed produce on site a program participant would pursue a **MARKET STAND LEASE**. This would be within your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE** for an **EDIBLE GARDEN**. For more information about zoning requirements see MUNICODE.COM/LIBRARY/PA/PITTSBURGH/CODES/CODE_OF_ORDINANCES?NODEID=PIZOCO_TITNINEZOCO_ARTVUSRE_CH912ACUSST_912.060URESASEACUS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

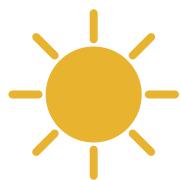
- Grow Pittsburgh
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

CONSIDERATIONS SAMPLE SITE PLAN

Water



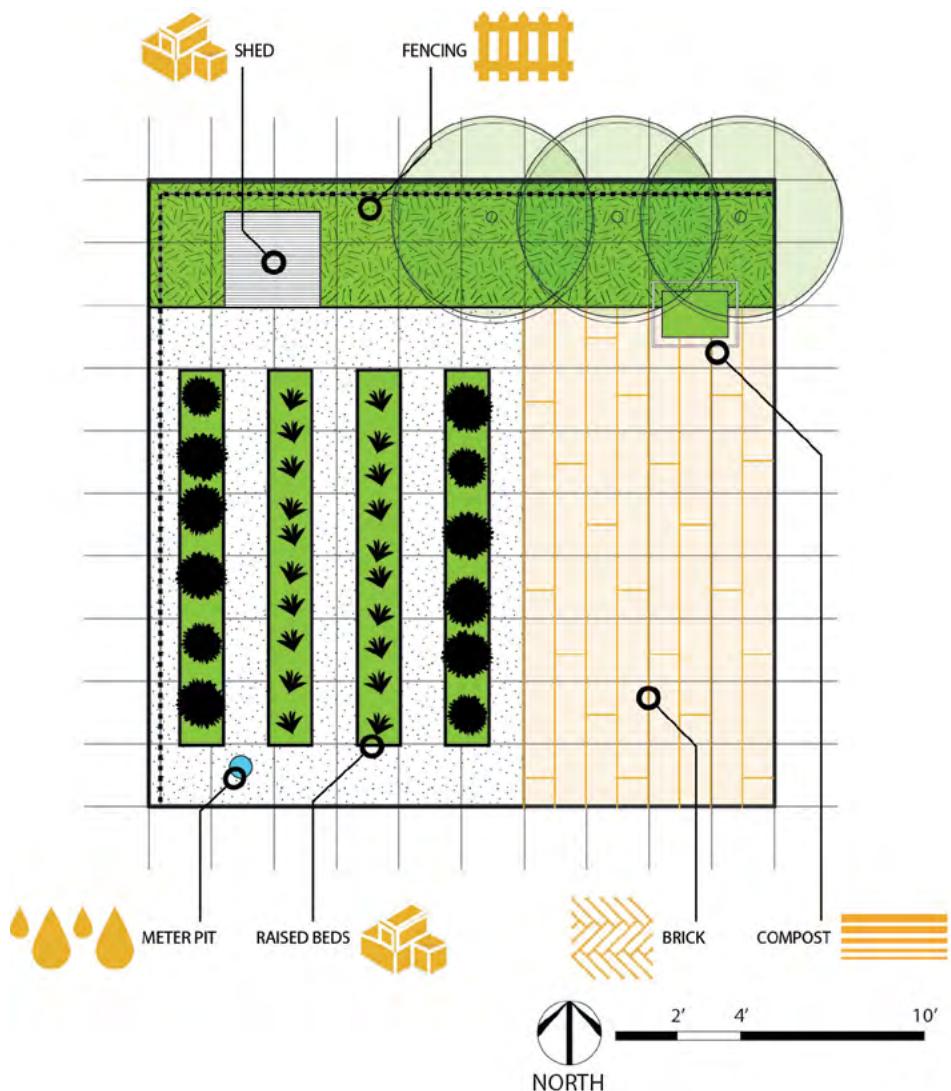
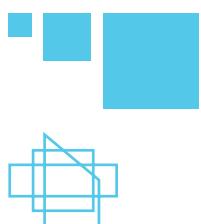
Sun Exposure



Soil



Size/Shape



LOCAL EXAMPLES

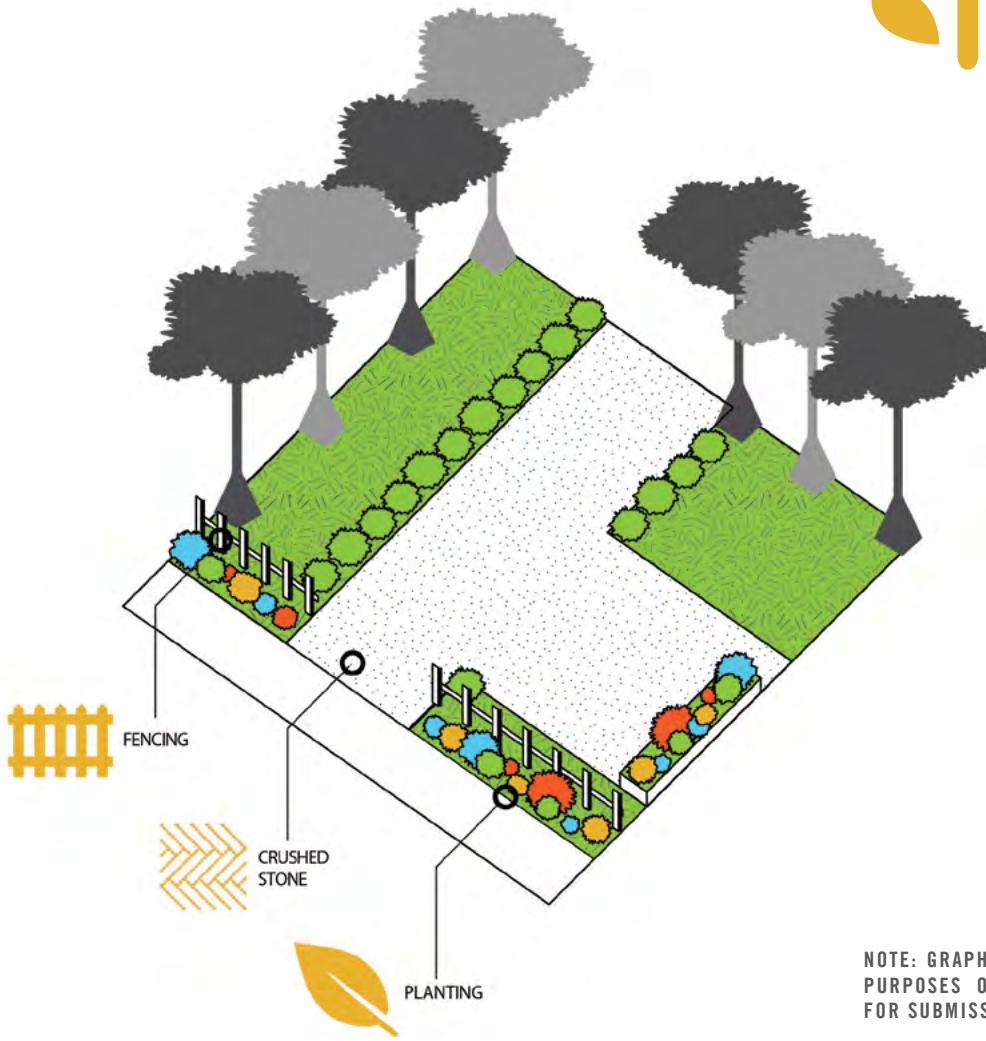


Eastfield Community Garden



Miss Mary's Garden

PROJECT TYPES: FLOWER GARDEN



FLOWER GARDEN projects are common on prominent or oddly-shaped vacant lots; often, but not always, on main streets or intersections. These projects serve to smooth the transitions between the public and private realm and in many cases are on lots that are unlikely to redevelop due to their size or shape. The projects often consist of decorative plantings, trees, paths and seating areas. Under the **ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM**, program participants may harvest flowers from **FLOWER GARDENS** for personal use.

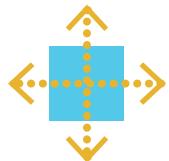
To donate or sell flowers on site a program participant would pursue a **MARKET STAND LEASE**. This would be within your **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE** for a **FLOWER GARDEN**. For more information about zoning requirements see MUNICODE.COM/LIBRARY/PA/PITTSBURGH/CODES/CODE_OF_ORDINANCES?NODEID=PIZOCO_TITNINEZOCO_ARTVUSRE_CH912ACUSST_912.060URESAEACUS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Tree Pittsburgh
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- GTECH

CONSIDERATIONS SAMPLE SITE PLAN

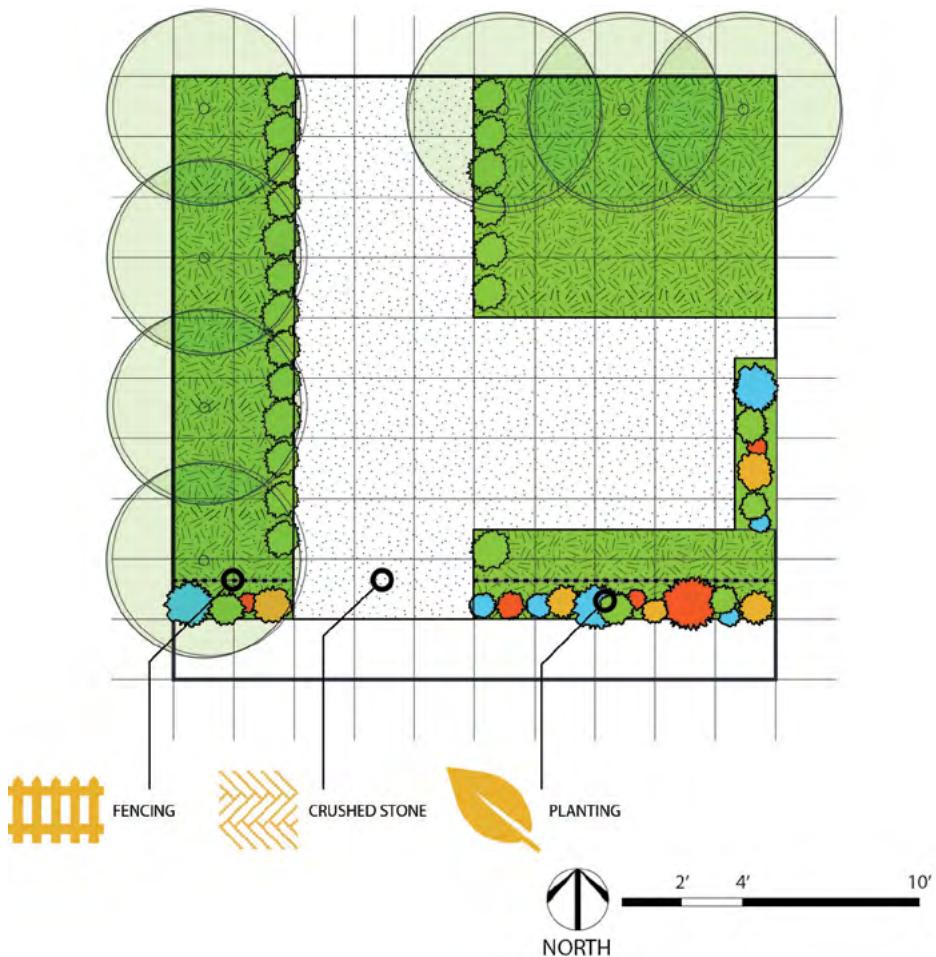
Adjacent Properties



Water



Size/Shape



LOCAL EXAMPLES

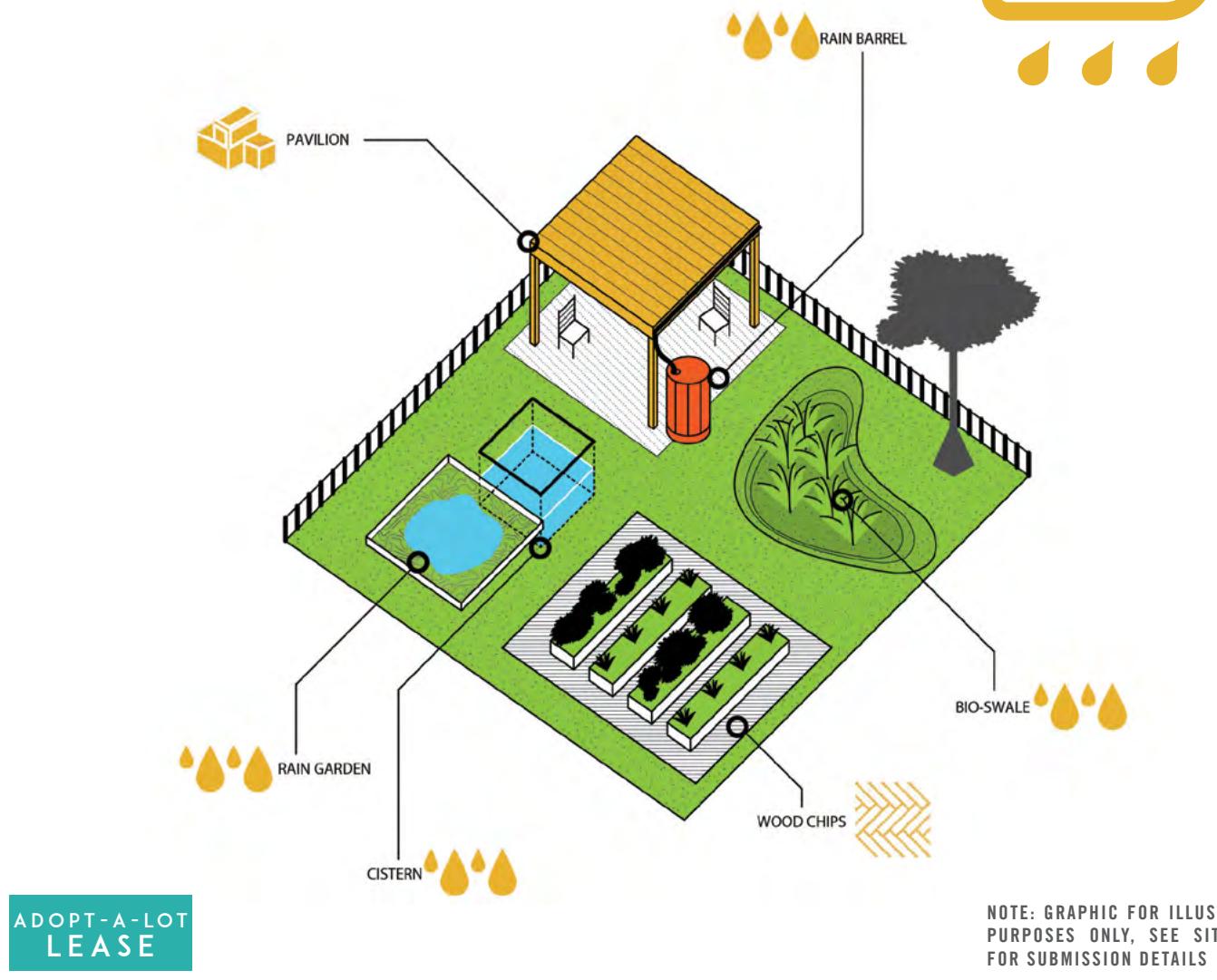


Boulevard of the Allies & Parkview:
Western PA Conservancy



Brighton Road & North Ave: Western PA Conservancy

PROJECT TYPES: RAIN GARDEN



The management of rain water runoff has become an important issue for the city, and vacant lots can provide an essential part of the solution. There are a number of simple **RAIN GARDENS** in the form of swales, cisterns and other water management tools that can be incorporated into vacant lot projects. These are also key opportunities for education. Under the **ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM: ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE**, program participants may install a **RAIN GARDEN** project.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Penn State Center
- Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority
- Stormworks
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

CONSIDERATIONS

SAMPLE SITE PLAN

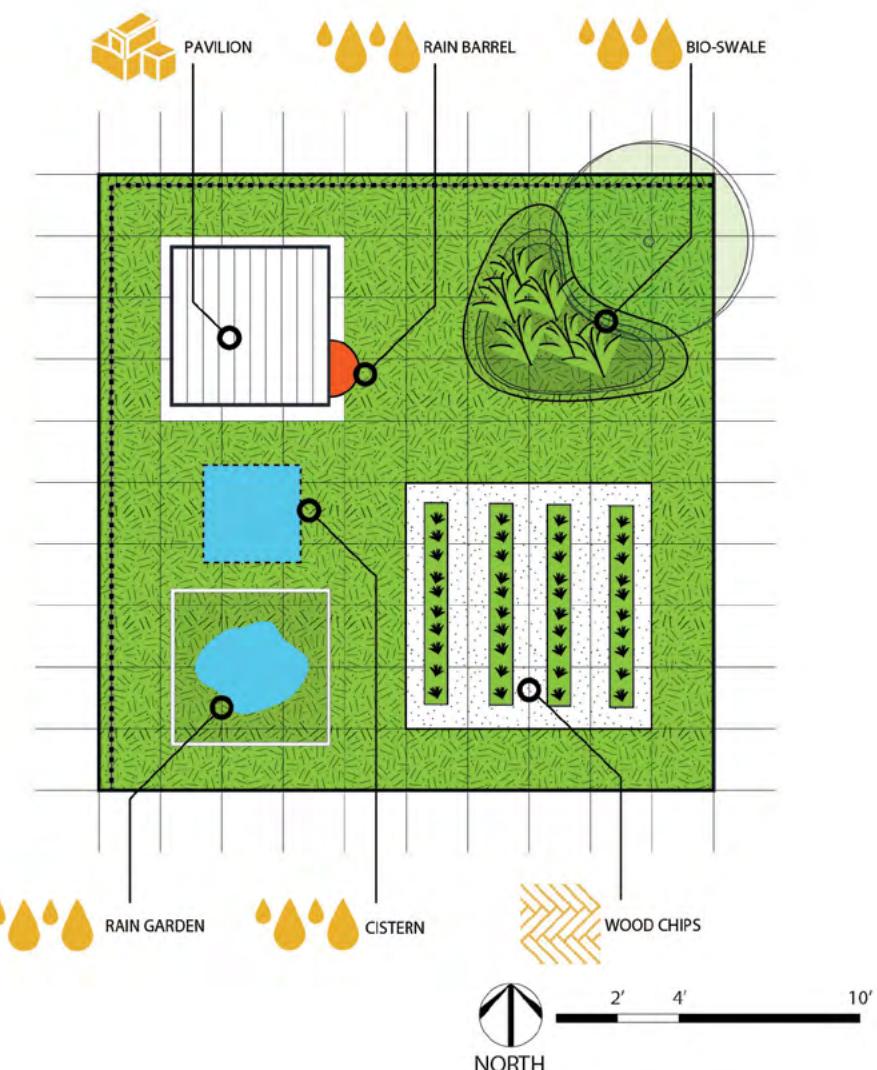
Slope



Adjacent Properties



Soil



LOCAL EXAMPLES



Ballfield Farm - Rain Garden



PWSA - Rain Garden



Bandi Schaum Garden

ELEMENTS

Now that you have a sense of the type of project as well as programming you can start to explore the palette of elements that exist to build out the vacant lot of your dreams. This section will illustrate groups of elements that may be used on your city-owned vacant lot projects. Though not limited to these elements, note that any elements that vary from these may require additional reviews from the City's Art Commission, Department of Public Works, Zoning, and/or Permits, Licenses and Inspections.

USEFUL DESIGN ELEMENTS

While not exhaustive, the following list will provide you with information on the most common design elements at use in vacant lot projects. Following each type, information will be given on initial costs and level of maintenance required. Please make sure each of these elements is labeled on your plan.

STRUCTURES

RAISED BEDS

Planting areas that are raised up from ground level to provide easier access as well as separation from contaminated soils when a geotextile fabric is used between the existing grade and soil mix inside the planter.

OPTIONS:

- Wood (non-treated)



- Composite Lumber
- Plastic
- Stone/block/bricks
- Metal



SPECIFICATIONS:

- 3 feet height maximum
- 3 feet set back from property lines
- 2 feet minimum between beds



INDEX	
	Relative cost
	Relative maintenance
	Zoning requirements
	Building permit and/or Occupancy permit
	Art Commission (only if element is not shown here or lot is over 43,560 square feet and/or sheds/pavilions over 120 square feet/10' tall)
	As noted
	All





DO IT YOURSELF!

For many of the elements suggested here, you will have an option of purchasing materials from your local garden or home repair store or of construction your own. There are many good places to get ideas for DIY projects, including YouTube and the Tactical Urbanism guide available from the StreetPlans Collaborative: http://issuu.com/streetplanscollaborative/docs/tactical_urbanism_vol_2_final?e=4528751/2585800

SHEDS

Storage facility for tools can vary widely from self constructed to prefabricated. Your storage shed must comply with your lot's zoning and setback requirements like any other structure.

OPTIONS:

- Plastic/composite
- Salvaged materials
- Pre-fab
- Wood

CONSIDER:

- Incorporating rain water harvesting



SPECIFICATIONS:

- Set backs see zoning code
- Cannot be constructed on or across property line if working on multiple lots
- Cannot exceed one story in height (10 feet maximum)
- Only occupancy permit required if less than 120 square feet
- Requires specification drawing (if pre-fab) or stamped architect/engineer drawing (if custom) when over 120 square feet



THINGS TO CONSIDER

Pest control for wood structures

Wood is susceptible to termites and carpenter ants. Use organic pesticides when treating any wooden structures around food producing plants. On structures not adjacent to food wood can be treated with low VOC sealers.

PAVILION/SHADE STRUCTURE

Structure to provide protection from the elements for storage and/or gathering space.

OPTIONS:

- Metal
- Pre-fab
- Wood

CONSIDER:

- Incorporating rain water harvesting



SPECIFICATIONS:

- Set backs see zoning code
- Cannot be constructed on or across property line if working on multiple lots
- Cannot exceed one story in height (10 feet maximum)
- Only occupancy permit required if less than 120 square feet
- Requires specification drawing (if pre-fab) or stamped architect/engineer drawing (if custom) when over 120 square feet



OTHER COMMON STRUCTURES

- Arbor
- Pergola
- Trellis
- Cold Frames

SPECIFICATIONS:

- See zoning code section 925.06A for setback requirements
- Cannot exceed 8' in height
- Occupancy permit required

FENCING

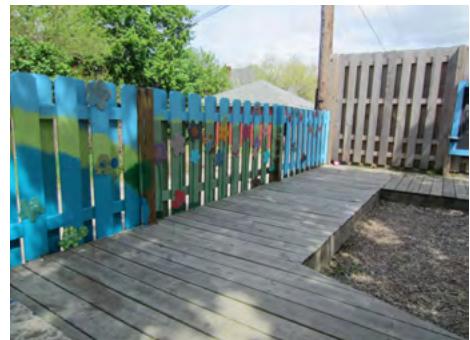
Simple fencing is also an important component of most vacant lot projects. Common types include a split rail or chain link. Choose a fencing that meshes well with your project type. It is desirable to have fencing that creates a proper delineation between spaces without creating an appearance of being unfriendly to your neighbors.

PICKET FENCE

4 feet height this fence would be used along the street side to define the property while allowing views onto the lot.

SPECIFICATIONS:

- See zoning code section 925.06A for setback requirements
- Cannot exceed 4' in height
- Occupancy permit required



DEER FENCE

7-8 feet in height these fences would be used for edible/food gardens to protect plants from deer grazing.

SPECIFICATIONS:

- See zoning code section 925.06A for setback requirements
- Any fences over 6.5' must meet setback requirements of zoning district
- Zoning board hearing
- Occupancy + building permit required





SPLIT RAIL

Decorative barrier to define the edges of a lot either around the perimeter, at entrances, or to define a corner.

SPECIFICATIONS:

- See zoning code section 925.06A for setback requirements
- Cannot exceed 6' in height
- Occupancy permit required



TEMPORARY

Typically wire mesh fence material with metal or wood stakes that can easily be driven into the ground with a hammer that can keep little critters (rabbits, squirrels, groundhogs, etc) out of your garden (plastic construction fencing is prohibited).

SPECIFICATIONS:

- Cannot exceed 42 inches in height
- Must be removed for winter



WOOD CHIPS

Similar to mulch, this material will be a bit longer lasting and easy to maintain and source.



CRUSHED STONE

Crushed stones are an ideal path material. They are porous, and can be packed, depending on stone size, to create a semi-solid surface. Best used when an edging is used to control migration of the crushed material. Crushed limestone and pea gravel are common.

BRICK

A commonly salvaged material in Pittsburgh can be used as low cost paths, with a variety of patterns. Remember to use sand as a setting bed to level the bricks.

PAVERS

A variety of pavers are available, from larger square or circle cast concrete pavers to smaller scale cast pavers. Remember to use sand as a setting bed to level the pavers.

EDGING

To minimize maintenance of planting beds, consider an edging material to define planting beds from other materials (usually lawns). Costs and maintenance will vary widely with materials.

Material Options

- Brick
- Belgium Block
- Steel
- Plastic/composite
- Wood
- Spade edge
- Boulders



WATER MANAGEMENT

RAINBARREL

A rainbarrel collects and stores rainwater from an adjacent property's roof, a garden shed and/or shade structure. Connect the rain barrel to a downspout, and remember to always keep your barrel covered to deter mosquito growth. Every year rain barrels must be drained to winterize.

HOSE BIB

Installed by PWSA, a meter pit that taps into the water main allows for consistent water access for garden requiring high levels of water. Remember to keep your pit secure and covered when not in use. See **SUPPLEMENTS** for more information.



OTHER OPTIONS

- Underground cistern
- Treegators- Slow release watering bags for trees
- Drip irrigation

PLANTS

Numerous local gardening shops, landscapers and non-profits can give you advice in plant selection. At the very least, use the following terms when labeling your planting plan. Please note that existing trees will need to be protected.



TREES – a perennial woody plant that may grow more than 20 feet tall. Characteristically, it has one main stem, although many species may grow multi-stemmed forms (See [Pittsburgh Urban Forest Master Plan 2012](#)).

OPTIONS:

- Shade Trees
- Ornamental Trees
- Fruit/Nut Trees

SPECIFICATIONS:

- Cannot exceed 2.5 inches in diameter (time of planting)
- Use Shade Tree Commission Species List [PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/TREES/](#)

SHRUBS – are medium sized plants that grow no taller than 20 feet at maturity. They can create hedges to define the boundaries or act as focal points on a lot.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Native
- Flowering
- Sun/Shade conditions
- Evergreen or deciduous

SPECIFICATIONS:

- Cannot obstruct traffic sight lines
- Cannot exceed 3 feet in mature height adjacent to sidewalks

PERENNIAL PLANTS – are plants that return each year and are best planted in spring or early fall. Should require little water after two years of planting.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Native
- Drought tolerant
- Flowering
- Sun/Shade conditions

ANNUAL PLANTS – are plants that only last one season, and most of the time require daily or weekly watering depending on rain conditions. Also require some maintenance as far as “dead heading” (removing dead flowers so more will grow) throughout the growing season.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Sun/Shade conditions
- Water needed
- Costs of annual installation

VINES – are plants that climb vertical surfaces. They are useful when hiding chain link fences.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Sun/Shade conditions

SOIL & AMENDMENTS

Soil is an environmental building block that supports plant life, influences the water cycle, and provides habitat. Soil is made up of organic matter, minerals and living organisms. The quality of the soil on your lot will determine how well your plants will grow. A soil test for nutrients will tell you what amendments to apply, and compost will help with building your soil over time. You can also add soil to your vacant lot project.

- Top Soil
- Compost
- Mushroom Manure
- Composted Animal Manure
- Peat Moss
- Green Sand
- Worm Castings

SPECIFICATIONS:

- Clean fill only



WEED PREVENTION

MULCH

Mulching is a helpful technique that can reduce the amount of work in your garden with respect to weeding and watering. Mulch is often defined as any material applied to the soil surface as cover (3-4 inches).

- Leaf Mulch
- Shredded Hardwood
- Wood Chips
- Grass Clippings
- Landscape fabric/ Geo-textile barrier
- Newspaper
- Organic leaf material





OTHER ALLOWED ELEMENTS:

- **Furniture:** Non-City standard benches are allowed
- **Bees/insect/butterfly attraction boxes** (for aided pollination purposes)
- **Bird Houses**
- **Decorative/Flower Pots**
- **Little Free Libraries**
- **Pallets**
- **Plant labels/identification** (plant names only)
- **Tires:** Use of recycled tires can be permitted, but must allow no standing water to occur.

PROHIBITED ELEMENTS:

- **Art** (anything designed by an artist - volunteer “decoration” does not count)
- **Fire Pits/Barbecue Grills/Pizza Ovens**
- **Memorials** of any kind (to persons, and/or ideals)
- **Play equipment** of any kind - any structure or recreational equipment such as the seesaw, merry-go-round, swingset, slide, jungle gym, chin-up bars, sandbox, spring rider, monkey bars, overhead ladder, trapeze rings, playhouses, and mazes
- **Poured-in-place Concrete slabs** exceeding 1 square feet
- **Signs** (unless to City's Open Space Signage Standards 2015)
- **Stages/Performance Platforms**

BUDGET



You have designed the vacant lot of your dreams with the **ELEMENTS** that will create your garden space. But in order to make your project a reality, it is important to consider the cost of the elements, materials and equipment needed as well as money to feed your volunteers. Below is a sample budget template to follow when developing a budget that corresponds to your vacant lot project. You may realize that your project needs to be phased over a few seasons in order to raise the funds needed to attain your dreams. For purposes of your application show phase one costs.

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

INCOME	
Personal Contributions	
Start-up Grants/Loans	
Total	
EXPENSES	
Preparation	
Soil Test	
Soil Remediation (lime, cover crops, etc.)	
Basic Items	
Water Bill	
Water System	
Tools	
Tool Storage	
Woodchips/Groundcover	
Raised Beds	
Compost/Topsoil	
Plants (seeds or seedlings)	
Fencing	
Paving	
Total Expenses	
TOTAL BUDGET	
Total Income - Expenses	



INSURANCE

ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

Liability insurance is required for all **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASES**, due to the higher level of use, and the City being “self-insured.” This will ensure that you or any volunteers that help create and maintain your vacant lot project are covered for any accidents.

You can either obtain a stand alone policy, add the lot(s) to your existing homeowners insurance, or you can explore having the lot(s) added to a policy held by your local CDC or community group.

ACORD CERTIFICATE OF LIABILITY INSURANCE						DATE (MM/DD/YYYY) XX/XX/XXXX																																																																																															
<small>THIS CERTIFICATE IS ISSUED AS A MATTER OF INFORMATION ONLY AND CONFERNS NO RIGHTS UPON THE CERTIFICATE HOLDER. THIS CERTIFICATE DOES NOT AFFIRMATIVELY OR NEGATIVELY AMEND, EXTEND OR ALTER THE COVERAGE AFFORDED BY THE POLICIES BELOW. THIS CERTIFICATE OF INSURANCE DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A CONTRACT BETWEEN THE ISSUING INSURER(S), AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OR PRODUCER, AND THE CERTIFICATE HOLDER.</small>																																																																																																					
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THINGS TO CONSIDER

Add to your Homeowners Insurance

Explore adding your vacant lot project to your existing homeowners policy.

Insured Community Group

If an insured community group exists in your neighborhood, ask them to sponsor your project. Not only will you get insurance you may increase your volunteer pool to complete and maintain your project.

Private Policy

Call a private insurance company to get a quote on a policy for your vacant lot project.

MAINTENANCE + INSPECTION

Your vacant lot project is becoming a reality! You'll need to be prepared over time to keep your project just as well-maintained and loved by community members as it was on the very first day it was installed. This chapter focuses on how to get your vacant lot project to remain as an asset to your neighborhood for many years to come by creating a robust maintenance plan and how your project will be monitored by inspections.

MAINTENANCE PLAN

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LEASE

Having a maintenance plan is critical for the success of your project. You'll need to have the proper equipment, a dedicated group of people ready to keep your plants and site features in good shape, and a plan for raising the funding and resources necessary to keep the project going.

Equipment needed – Gardening gloves, a trowel, and a rake are essential tools for maintaining your green space and keeping it clean (spade, hoe, garden shears, twine, etc.). If you have an edible garden, you'll also need things like stakes and garden shears to keep your plants pruned and growing correctly.

Personnel required – The number of people you need maintaining your vacant lot depends on the type of use. If you're trying to conduct a larger garden project, you'll want a group of dedicated people (2-4) to weed the lot, remove invasive species, and ensure that responsibilities are passed on as people leave the group or move away. For a major undertaking like a community garden, Grow Pittsburgh recommends waiting to start a community garden until six or more community residents are personally committed to helping start and maintain the garden. It's also important to note that not everyone will have the same physical abilities. Having more partners in your project will help make your project sustainable.

Types of Activities

- Compost** – Keep your compost in a covered bin that does not attract insects and animals. Use yard materials (25% green material such as cut grass, 75% dried brown or woody material) and turn weekly or every other week to aerate. Avoid using large quantities of food materials as these may cause more odors and insect/animal issues.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

Pest control

Use organic pesticides, such as soapy water, tabasco sauce, garlic and salt or Integrated Pest Management (IPM) - the use of plants and insects to control pests. Some plants can attract beneficial insects like lady bugs and praying mantis to eat bad pests, while plants like marigolds, basil, nasturtiums, petunias, and chrysanthemums can repel common garden pests.

Pruning

All perennial plants and shrubs as well as trees will require a level of pruning maintenance to remove dead plant material, crowding, disease, as well as promote desired plant form. Remember to wear gloves and glasses. Pruning of trees on City property may only be done after a permit is issued from the City Forester or during Tree Pittsburgh Pruning workshops that are supervised by ISA Certified Arborists and permitted by the City Forestry Division.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Regular removal of invasive species –

- plants that are not from the Pittsburgh area but tend to take over our green spaces if given the chance
- is important for the health of our native ecosystem.

See "Invasive Plants of Pittsburgh" for more information
PITTSBURGHPARKS.ORG/USERDOCS/INVASIVEPLANTSOFPITTSBURGH.PDF

- **Mulch** - Make sure your trees and plants stay mulched to protect their root systems while they grow and keep weeds down. You'll want to replenish your mulch. Woven landscape fabric/geo-textile barrier (available at any major hardware or gardening store) or newspapers can help keep weeds down when you use it in your flower or plant beds under your mulch – but the fabric also can keep many nutrients from entering the soil, so you should put down a good layer of compost below the fabric that will provide nutrients for some time to come.
- **Large animal control** – The City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Animal Care & Control provides assistance in dealing with wildlife. More information is available at: PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/ANIMALCONTROL
- **Leaf/debris cleanup** – Rake leaves and debris regularly; do not allow debris to build up at your vacant lot.
- **Trash pick-up** - City refuse collectors will not pick-up trash at your vacant lot. Consider off-site disposal options.
- **Vegetation** - remember to water weekly until plants are established (for perennials usually 2 years). In the fall and spring, be sure to remove any dead materials.
- **Watering** – Depending on plant selection watering can be a daily or weekly task, or only during long periods of drought.

INSPECTION

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE**

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

**SCHEDULE AN
INSPECTION**

Call the **OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST** at (412) 255-2200 or email at OSS@PITTSBURGHPA.GOV to schedule site inspections. Failure to schedule Inspections may lead to license/lease revocation.

If your project is on a City-owned lot, the OSS will visit to make sure that the project is safe, maintained, and used for the same purpose as in the original agreement with the City. You are required to notify the OSS within five days of completion of the installation of your vacant lot project to schedule an inspection. This inspection will verify:

The project meets the Application submission:

- Narrative
- Site Plan
- Elements
- Maintenance Plan

When making your maintenance plan, it's a good idea to consider these inspections ahead of time and avoid making changes to your project that could cause a violation of one of these inspection criteria.

REVISION PLAN



You have designed and received your **LICENSE** or **LEASE** to construct your vacant lot project. But when you went to the store some items were not available and you needed to make substitutions. Or you got onto the lot and found some changes needed to be made to your original plan. On the other hand your garden may be thriving and you would like to make additions. We understand these changes occur and we will work with you to submit a revision plan. This will ensure that the terms of your lease still apply, and when it comes to inspection time you'll be up to date with your plan. See **SUPPLEMENTS** for **REVISION PLAN FORM**.

ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE



ALLOWED CHANGES (NOT REQUIRING REVISION PLAN):

- Color:** only if the element remains the same
- Material:** only if element is the same, alternate material is an option (See **ELEMENTS**) and Art Commission is not required

CHANGES (REQUIRING REVISION PLAN):

- Placement:** any elements or plantings that are being relocated (excluding annual flowers and annual edibles)
- Elements:** any additional elements you add (excluding annual flowers and annual edibles)
- Plants:** any plant changes or substitutions (perennials, trees, shrubs, evergreens, etc.), excluding annuals and annual edibles
- Quantity:** any additional numbers of items added

NOTE: DEPENDING ON CHANGES, ADDITIONAL APPROVALS MAY BE REQUIRED (ART COMMISSION, ZONING, PERMITS, LICENSES, AND INSPECTIONS).

SCHEDULE A REVIEW

Call the OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST at (412) 255-2287 or email at OSS@PITTSBURGHPA.GOV to schedule revision plan review. Failure to schedule revision plan may lead to license/lease revocation. Up to one week review period upon receipt of plan.

RESOURCES

Finding and connecting with local resources is an important facet to projects becoming a reality. In this chapter you will find the partners and organizations that you can engage to develop a project, creative ways to fund raise, as well as volunteer and training programs that can maintain and sustain your project over time.





Community Greenspace Program: North Avenue and Brighton Road

image: Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



PARTNERS + ORGANIZATIONS



Creating a vacant lot project on your own can be an intimidating prospect. Luckily, there are many great non-profit partners in the City of Pittsburgh who offer assistance and resources to people like you. This chapter details some of the key organizations and programs that may be able help you on your way. In addition to this guide, the Open Space Specialist will also be able to help you decide which organizations and opportunities may be right for you and your project.

RESOURCES BY ORGANIZATION

GROW PITTSBURGH

www.growpittsburgh.com

Grow Pittsburgh is an urban agriculture nonprofit serving the Pittsburgh region. Their mission is to teach people how to grow food and promote the benefits gardens bring to neighborhoods. They believe access to locally-grown, chemical-free fruits and vegetables is a right, not a privilege. Grow Pittsburgh's programs include:



- **Community Garden Programs** - offers technical, educational, and material assistance to community gardens across Allegheny County and works with communities in the City of Pittsburgh to start new gardens through the City Growers program.
- **Garden Resource Center** - is a tool lending library and materials depot that is open to any individual or group within Allegheny County. Located at 147 Putnam St. Pittsburgh, PA 15206. www.growpittsburgh.org/garden-resource-center/.
- **Urban Farm Apprenticeship** - Through this program Grow Pittsburgh hires and trains apprentices annually and prepare them for future work in food and farming through hands-on work and regular workshops.
- **Urban Farmers In Training** - Grow Pittsburgh employs high school youth in specific neighborhoods to work on our production sites and community sites throughout the summer.
- **Community Garden Sustainability Fund** - This fund provides



GTECH

www.gtechstrategies.org

GTECH helps distribute knowledge, technical skills, information, and funding to motivated community members to transition vacant land from a problem to a community asset. Passionate about the intersection of a green economy and community development, GTECH sees urban vacant land as a critical issue to a city's long-term vitality and believes that the process of improving places can be an economic driver.

- **Lots to Love** - A resource guide for community organizations and residents who have an interest in small, resident-driven greening projects on vacant lots. It brings together information related to the unique resources available in the Pittsburgh region and helps direct users to further information.
- **ReClaim PGH** – Collect data and information on where to reclaim vacant land, learn how to plan, design, implement, finance and maintain your projects. Then GTECH will help you put your ideas into action and help weave a greener landscape throughout the city.



PENN STATE CENTER - PITTSBURGH

pittsburgh.center.psu.edu

The Penn State Center Pittsburgh provides an urban platform to the University in meeting its land grant obligation in the transfer of research based practice into community problem solving. This is accomplished via resident knowledge of a staff of over 25 Extension Educators, Outreach Program Managers, Management and Support Staff in three business lines of community development, environment and horticulture and quality of life via youth development, healthfulness and the arts; or, by accessing faculty and students from the University through engaged scholarship opportunities. Pittsburgh offers the following programs and assistance for vacant lot projects:

- Feasibility analysis for urban agriculture;
- Soil testing;
- Water analysis and quality impact;
- Invasive species management;
- Design assistance;

- Green infrastructure design, installation and maintenance;
- Urban forestry including tree assessment and management;
- Gardening and maintenance (Master Gardener program); and
- Horticulture analysis and plant specifications

TREE PITTSBURGH

www.treepittsburgh.org

Tree Pittsburgh was organized in 2006 to carry out fund-raising, education, and stewardship activities aimed at restoring and protecting Pittsburgh's urban forest. The organization's vision is to be a leader in creating a healthy and robust urban forest by engaging citizens to maintain, plant, and protect trees. Tree Pittsburgh's programs include:

- **Tree Tenders®** - Tree Tenders is a certification training program that empowers and prepares citizen volunteers to plant and care for trees in their community. Training covers tree biology, identification, planting, maintenance, community engagement, the Pittsburgh urban forest, pests and disease, and the many health and environmental services provided by trees. Tree Tenders work alongside local tree agencies, leveraging resources and extending the impact of municipal tree stewardship.
- **Tree Nursery** - Tree Pittsburgh's Tree Nursery currently has over 10,000 trees in production. These restoration trees are grown to 3-4 ft tall before being planted along rivers, in parks and vacant lots. We offer tree sales to the public multiple times a year and are always seeking volunteers that get hands on training on how to propagate and grow a wide variety of native trees. Staff can offer technical assistance in placement, sourcing and logistics of planting new trees.
- **Tree Care** - Tree Pittsburgh's Tree Care program continues to grow each year. From weeding and mulching events in different neighborhoods and parks to pruning workshops. We teach trained Tree Tenders how to prune young trees to encourage proper structural growth.



WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONSERVANCY

<http://waterlandlife.org>

Western PA Conservancy (WPC) is the oldest conservation organization in PA, founded in 1932. The mission of the Conservancy is to protect and restore exceptional places to provide our region with clean water and healthy forest, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations.

- **Greenspace Program** - works to improve the living landscapes of Western PA cities and towns by implementing high-impact greening projects to promote attractive and healthy environments and livable



places, thereby helping to revitalize communities and reduce impact on undeveloped lands and natural resources. WPC does this in a variety of approaches, including sustaining 130 community flower gardens in 20 counties. In addition the program provides technical assistance to communities including green scans analyses that identify ways to use green infrastructure to reduce problems such as flooding and to support community revitalization.

- **TreeVitalize** - is a public-private partnership managed through the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy with a goal to restore tree canopy cover. TreeVitalize supports community level street and park tree plantings by supplying trees and services for locations throughout the greater Pittsburgh region.

FUNDRAISING

Creating your vacant lot project is dependent on creating a realistic budget and the various fundraising techniques to meet your project goals. Fortunately there are some easy ways to raise the funds needed to create the project of your dreams. This chapter contains ways that can help you find funding for your project. There are many additional opportunities for fundraising besides those listed here. For example, grant writing assistance is available at The Bayer Center and Forbes Fund, and there are numerous geographically specific Foundations.

COMMUNITY - INDIVIDUALS/ORGANIZATIONS/ BUSINESSES

Some funding opportunities may be closer than you think. Look within your community/neighborhood for materials, donations, services, etc that can push your project across the finish-line. Community organizations such as Chambers of Commerce, Business Associations, Development Corporations to name a few are great points of contact to create connections. Some local businesses are often willing to contribute small amounts of money, goods, or services to community-oriented projects.

Accordingly, fundraising events in coordination with local organizations can serve a dual purpose: to raise start-up cash and to generate publicity for your project (that may also lead to future support). Over the past few years, quite a few local bars, restaurants, and other community-minded organizations have created sponsorship opportunities. Community projects may apply to have benefit nights or happy hours during which a percentage of the proceeds go directly to the project organizers. Neighborhood garden tours, plant sales, and community days are just a few examples.

EXISTING FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES - GRANTS

Funding for the programs below may change from year to year, so be sure to check before you take the time and effort to apply.

- **Awesome Grants** - provided by Awesome Pittsburgh is a chapter of the Awesome Foundation, a global network of people devoted to forwarding the interest of awesomeness in the universe. The

Awesome Foundation gives \$1000 grants to people or groups with brilliant ideas. Grant cycles occur monthly.

www.awesomepgh.com

- **Grow Pittsburgh / Western Pennsylvania Conservancy Community Garden Sustainability Fund** - This fund provides the opportunity for existing community food gardens in Allegheny County to complete projects that contribute to the sustainability of their gardens. Groups can apply for materials such as fencing, raised beds, compost and topsoil, signage, rain barrels, and/or technical assistance services like tilling or soil testing.

www.growpittsburgh.org/community-garden-sustainability-fund/

- **Love Your Block** - Love Your Block is a program run through the Mayor's Office by servePGH with the goal to revitalize the City block by block. Nonprofit organizations (or groups sponsored by a registered nonprofit) may propose projects to transform their blocks with up to \$1,000 in funds and donated supplies and the support of key City Departments. Each season, the most impressive block transformation project will be awarded an extra \$2,000 for future site improvements.

www.pittsburghpa.gov/servepgh/loveyourblock



Love Your Block

image: City of Pittsburgh

- **Three Rivers Community Foundation** - offers annual grants that usually range from \$500 to \$4,000. Instructions are released in December, letters of inquiry are due the following January, a full proposal is due in late March, and grants are released in late June. TRCF funds projects that fall within a wide range of issue areas, including environmental justice. Among other things, youth-led projects and those promoting grassroots leadership are especially encouraged.

www.trcfwpa.org/grants/

- **Sprout Fund** - Supports innovative ideas that are catalyzing change in Pittsburgh—making our community a better place to live, work, play, and raise a family. In 2015, in partnership with the Buhl Foundation, Sprout will make available Neighbor-to-Neighbor Grants of up to \$1,000 to

provide immediate support for small-scale community projects with broad citizen support as demonstrated by neighborhood petitions, letters of support from community groups, and small financial pledges.



image: Sprout Fund

www.sproutfund.org/apply/catalytic-funding/apply-for-one-northside-grants/

CROWDFUNDING

More and more, community project organizers choose to raise funds through online crowd-funding. There are quite a few options - Kickstarter, IndieGogo, loby, etc - that all have different requirements and charge different fees. Do a little bit of research to decide which platform fits best with your project. Among other qualities, successful crowd-funding campaigns have a well-crafted story and a powerful outreach strategy.

If you plan to launch a commercial enterprise, you may decide to borrow your start-up funds. Kiva Zip offers 0%-interest loans to financially excluded and socially impactful entrepreneurs. Loans are made through contributions by individuals, so outreach is key for this strategy as well. In addition to the myriad crowd-funding platforms, GTECH's Lots to Love website will feature a local crowd-funding platform in the future.

VOLUNTEERS + TRAINING

Many vacant lot projects in Pittsburgh are collaborative efforts. Even those that are maintained by a single person often include groups in the initial planting, design or lot cleanup process. This chapter focuses on where you can find the help and training you need to implement your project and keep it growing. You'll see information about volunteer groups who can help with your project for a day or for a season, and details on gardening and landscaping classes that will help you keep your vacant lot attractive and growing for many years to come.

FINDING VOLUNTEERS FOR EXTRA HELP



image: Grow Pittsburgh

The best place to find volunteers is in your own neighborhood! Every dollar donated or hour spent means a greater amount of ownership and investment in these important neighborhood amenities. In addition to your neighbors and community members, the groups below are great local sources of volunteers to help get your green space or garden project going on a vacant lot. Some of these volunteers are year-round, while others are usually available on a particular day or days.

- **Clean Pittsburgh Commission** – organizes and supports volunteers and community organizations to educate, beautify, and execute community clean-ups on vacant land.
www.cleanpittsburgh.org/.
- **Cleanups** - Allegheny CleanWays works with local residents, organizations, businesses, and governments to remove debris dumped within Allegheny County.
www.alleghenycleanways.org.
- **Days of Caring** – provided by United Way, members of the Pitt community serve on critically needed projects.
www.pittsburghcares.org/
- **Pittsburgh Cares** – is a local, non-profit affiliate of the HandsOn Network, a national volunteer organizing network. All 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations are eligible to partner with Pittsburgh Cares and receive the opportunity to connect with

individual volunteers or organizations by posting volunteer opportunities on the Pittsburgh Cares website as well as borrow tools from the Pittsburgh Cares tool shed

www.pittsburghcares.org

- **Pittserves** – is an initiative of the University of Pittsburgh that connects Pitt students with community organizations who need volunteers for particular projects. Volunteers are available year round, but organizations may want to consider scheduling their events to coincide with Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (celebrated on the third Monday of January) or **Pitt Make A Difference Day** (the fourth Saturday in October).

[www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/pittserves.](http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/pittserves)



image: Pitt Serves

- **Student Conservation Association** – provides weekend volunteer opportunities to high school students throughout the year. Paid service programs for high school students are also available during summertime, and on evenings and weekends during the school year.

Email: SCAPittsburgh@theSCA.org

- **Tree Care** - Tree Pittsburgh works with neighborhoods to plan tree care events for newly planted street trees. (weeding/mulching/pruning).

www.treepittsburgh.org

TRAINING TO KEEP YOUR LOT GROWING STRONG

The below training programs provide expertise on gardening, landscape design, botany, invasive species, and many more issues that will help you keep your green space or garden growing far into the future.

- **Bidwell Training Center** - offers a degree program in horticulture.
www.bidwell-training.org/majors/horticulture-technology
- **Community College of Allegheny County** – provides affordable classes in gardening and other landscape-related issues, such as “Design Your Own Garden,” “Hillside Gardening,” and “Vegetable Gardening.”
www.shopcommunityed.ccac.edu/Courses/Garden.aspx
- **Community Technical Assistance Center** - offers a Volunteer Package, which is a resource for non-profit and community organizations, provides a handy Volunteer Event Toolkit that

describes the key steps for planning, hosting, and sustaining the results of a successful volunteer event.

www.ctacpittsburgh.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Volunteer-Event-Toolkit.pdf.

- **Grow Pittsburgh** – offers courses to the general public in January to April of each year. Courses may include “A Garden Primer,” “Starting Your Own Seedlings at Home,” “How To Start A Community Garden,” and “Build It: Long Lasting Raised Beds.”

www.growpittsburgh.org/.

- **Penn State** – from the Penn State Cooperative Extension, the Master Gardener program offers intensive training on gardening and horticulture that provides participants with the ability to educate others in their community about growing practices. In addition there are staff who can assist you in rain garden details.

www.extension.psu.edu/plants/master-gardener/join

- **Tree Pittsburgh** – offers a Tree Tender course, which gives participants information and materials about “urban forestry practices, tree biology and health, proper planting, pruning, and maintenance.

www.treepittsburgh.org/become-tree-tender

- **Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens** – offers classes that provide training for community members in gardening, planting, and crafting as well as more intensive certificate courses in botany, plant identification, and more.

www.phipps.conservatory.org/classes-and-programs/adult-programs/

- **Student Conservation Association** – The Student Conservation Association (SCA) provide both volunteer opportunities and paid service opportunities to high-school aged young adults.

www.thesca.org/serve/program/pittsburgh-pa.

- **Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy** - Urban EcoStewards program allows “EcoSteward” to adopt a specific section of park land to maintain. They receive training from Parks Conservancy staff and other program partners to remove invasive species, plant native flora, slow erosion, and clean up trash.

www.pittsburghparks.org/ues

ICON & ABBREVIATION GLOSSARY



This glossary is not comprehensive.

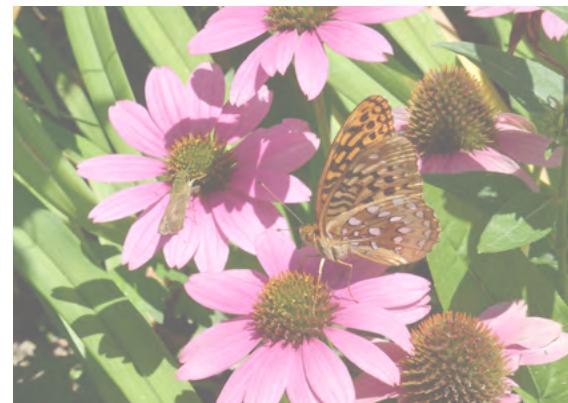
Back Cover Images

*top left: Miss Mary's Garden (Shelly Danko+Day)
top right: Lawrenceville Tree Park (Shelly Danko+Day)
middle left: Shiloh Peace Garden (Shelly Danko+Day)
middle right: Lawrenceville Tree Park (Shelly Danko+Day)
bottom left: Allegheny Mountain Lot (Shelly Danko+Day)
bottom right: Garfield Farms (Shelly Danko+Day)*



PITTSBURGH VACANT LOT TOOLKIT

RESOURCE GUIDE





PITTSBURGH VACANT LOT TOOLKIT

P O L I C Y G U I D E

December 2015



pittsburgh
city planning

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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www.AsakuraRobinson.com

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www.breanassociates.com

ACRONYMS

MVA = Market Value Analysis

OSS = Open Space Specialist

TRF = The Reinvestment Fund

URA = Urban Redevelopment Authority

Cover Image

Eastfield Co-operative Garden

Asakura Robinson

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INTRODUCTION



EastField Little Free Library and EastField Co-operative Garden, East Liberty

image: Asakura Robinson

Through the last half of the 20th Century, Pittsburgh's population declined by more than half through suburbanization, declining household sizes, outmigration and numerous other reasons (figure 1). One of the lasting effects of this population reduction is the prevalence of vacant lots throughout the City.

Today, there are over 28,000 vacant lots in the City of Pittsburgh (figure 2, pg 6). These lots, **which include parcels where structures may have once stood, wooded hillsides, unimproved sidelots, and informal parking lots**, can compromise quality of life for residents, reduce property values and weaken the City's tax base (parcels with an established use such as park, greenway, parking lot, and cemeteries as well as public right-of-ways are not included). The City of Pittsburgh directly owns approximately 7,286 vacant lots – 13.3% of the total number of vacant lots and 19% of vacant lots by area (figure 3, pg 8). The second largest owner of vacant lots is the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). In addition to these existing lots, there is an additional number of abandoned and/or tax delinquent structures that are likely to come under public ownership in the coming years. While the majority of vacant lots in the City remain in private ownership, they still present a significant maintenance challenge for the City of Pittsburgh.

The Open Space Plan, adopted in 2013 as the open space, parks, and recreation component of the City's Comprehensive Plan, concluded that the approximate cost of maintaining a single vacant lot is \$595 per year. Although the City has developed several programs dealing with vacant lots, including the Side Yard Sale Program, allowing residents to purchase adjoining vacant lots; and the Garden License/Waiver program, which allows community members to access vacant lots for seasonal gardening; among other programs. However, the responses to vacant lots within the city have been on a small scale and generally uncoordinated.

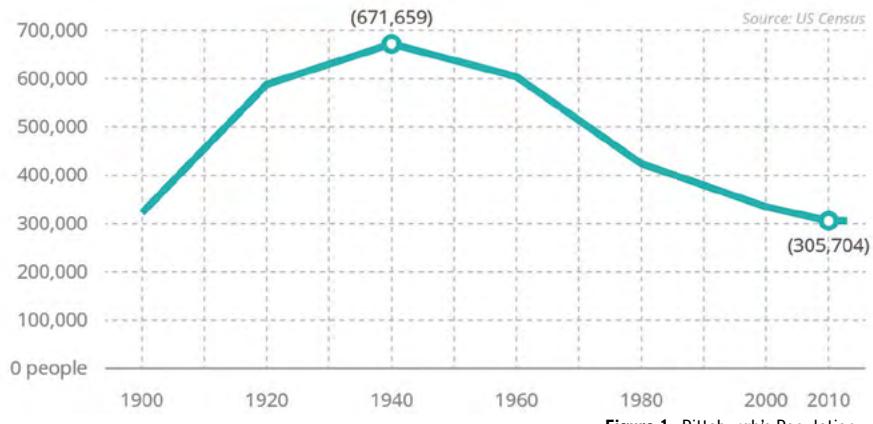


Figure 1. Pittsburgh's Population

While the City population has begun to increase again after this long decline, significant numbers of vacant lots are likely to remain an issue for the foreseeable future.

Many City- and privately-owned vacant lots are located in areas of very low market demand. A Market Value Analysis (MVA), a real estate investment tool developed by the The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), has been conducted for the City of Pittsburgh. The MVA "uses spatial and statistical cluster analysis to identify local conditions that support healthy growth and underscore fundamental problems such as community disinvestment" (source: TRFund.com). Using this tool, some important conclusions can be drawn about the state of vacant lots within Pittsburgh (figure 4, pg 10). Some neighborhoods with significant concentrations of vacant lots, such as Larimer and Homewood, are identified in the most recent MVA as having had less than five sales in the previous year, with over 30% of the remaining homes being owner-occupied. Other neighborhoods, such as Beltzhoover and Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar, are in the lowest-demand cluster in the MVA. The City has taken steps such as the Choice Neighborhoods-funded redevelopment in Larimer to strategically address some of these vacant lots through redevelopment. While this model holds promise for stimulating growth in Larimer, many of these vacant lots in low-demand neighborhoods are likely to remain vacant for 10 years or more and cause a drain on residents and the City if interim uses are not supported.

While much of the existing vacancy is concentrated in low-demand areas, dealing with vacancy in transitioning and high-demand areas poses its own set of challenges. In areas of rising market demand, which appear in the MVA as areas of middle demand, such as Garfield, the question is how to concentrate and focus development through strategic redevelopment as well as vacant lot reuses; while in areas that have rapidly increased in value, such as Lawrenceville, open space preservation may be a concern. In general, there is a high correlation between the market value of properties and the percentage of vacant lots within a neighborhood (figure 5, pg 12), however, due to Pittsburgh's extreme topography and industrial heritage, there are occasionally additional factors in the availability and position of vacant lots. The City has begun to identify and place additional lots in property reserve that are unsuitable for future redevelopment due to hillsides or steep slopes or that are adjacent to existing greenways.

The Open Space Plan, contained several key recommendations for addressing the challenge of vacant lots. One of these recommendations was to launch a Pittsburgh Vacant Lot Toolkit (VLTK) project with two key objectives:

- 1. Policy Guide** - Clarify and refine City processes and policies for interim reuse of city-owned vacant lots throughout the City.
- 2. Resource Guide** - Create a toolkit for Pittsburgh residents and community groups that documents these clarified City processes and otherwise facilitates vacant lot reuse.

The policy recommendations in this document address the first objective of the Vacant Lot Toolkit – to clarify and refine the City's processes and policies for vacant lot reuse. During public meetings for Open Space Plan, many organizations and individuals came forward to voice that the City's processes for facilitating interim reuse of vacant lots were unclear and inconsistent, with multiple City Departments making discretionary

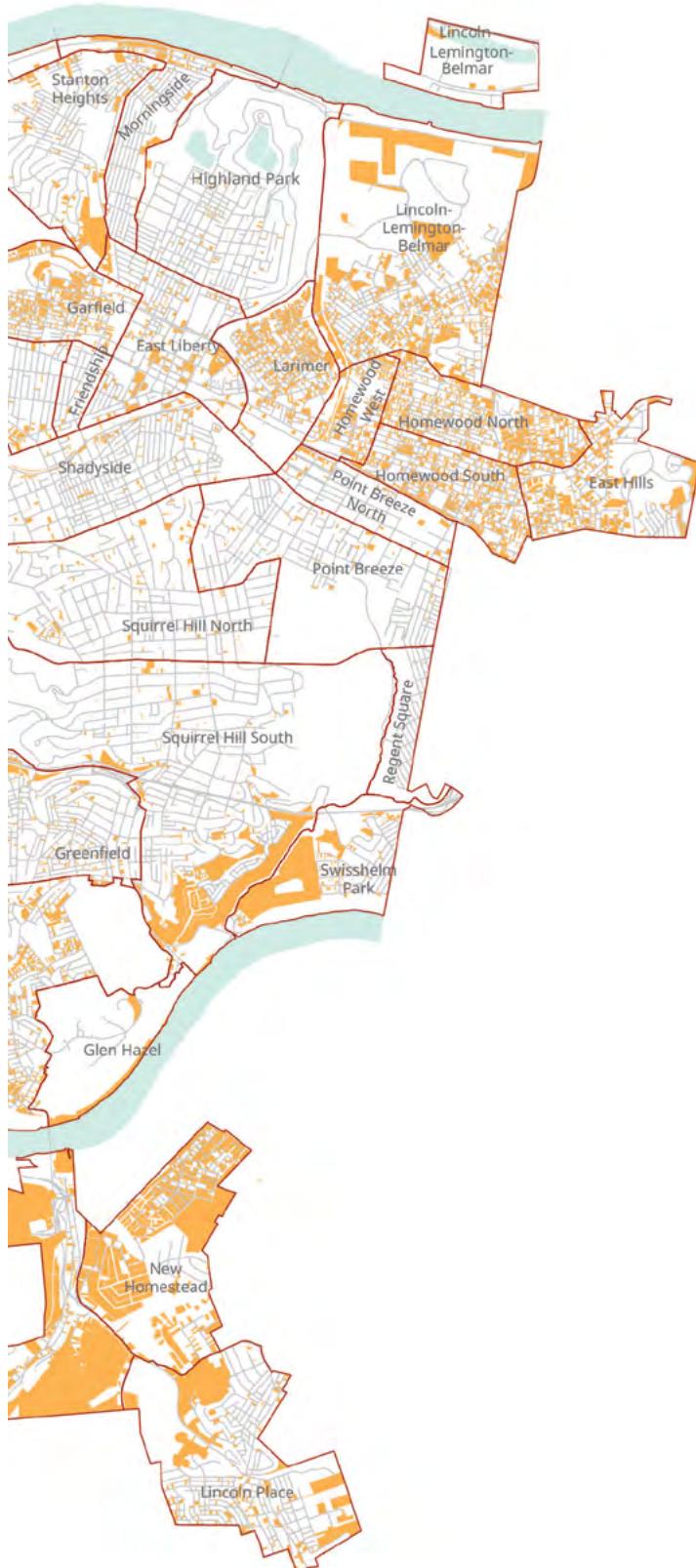
approvals that absorbed too much time from both City Departments and applicants for vacant lot projects alike. The City has already responded to one key Open Space Plan recommendation by appointing a single point of contact, the Open Space Specialist within the Department of City Planning. This dedicated staff member will interact with applicants and help shepherd projects through the required approvals. The recommendations below are designed to produce a streamlined process that offers clear, transparent guidance to community groups and residents on how to design a vacant lot project that meets City requirements.

The Department of City Planning initiated the Vacant Lot Toolkit project by creating an Advisory Committee composed of both City departments and authorities (City Planning, Public Works, Finance, Law, Urban Redevelopment Authority, Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority) and non-profit partners who provide technical assistance and/or resources to vacant lot projects (GTECH, Grow Pittsburgh, Penn State Center/Extension, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Tree Pittsburgh, and the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group). This Advisory Committee and the Department of City Planning then contracted with the consultant team of Asakura Robinson and Brean Associates, who then assisted the Advisory Committee in developing these policy and process recommendations based on individual interviews and meetings with non-profits, community groups, and community development corporations who work in vacant lot reuse; interviews with City officials from the City Planning, Law, Finance, and Public Works Departments as well as the Mayor's Office and City Council; and focus groups with residents and community organizations focused on green infrastructure, urban agriculture, and play.

The recommendations are broken into two categories: short-term and long-term recommendations. Each of the short-term recommendations has been crafted in coordination with the Department of City Planning and other City

INTRODUCTION





Departments, are meant to be further developed, and, if possible, implemented within several months of the release of this report. Numerous recommendations have already been achieved. Long-term recommendations are those that will require further interdepartmental coordination, coordination with outside organizations or that will require legislative action from City Council or another body, which will occur over the next few years.

Through these recommendations, the City will be better equipped to utilize the social capital of communities and the value of volunteers who desire better futures for their neighborhoods, while also supporting and becoming a resource for City regulatory, funding and programmatic systems.

**TOTAL PRIVATE VACANT LOTS:
18,810**

**TOTAL PUBLIC VACANT LOTS:
9,415**

- █ Vacant Lots
- █ Water
- Neighborhood Boundary

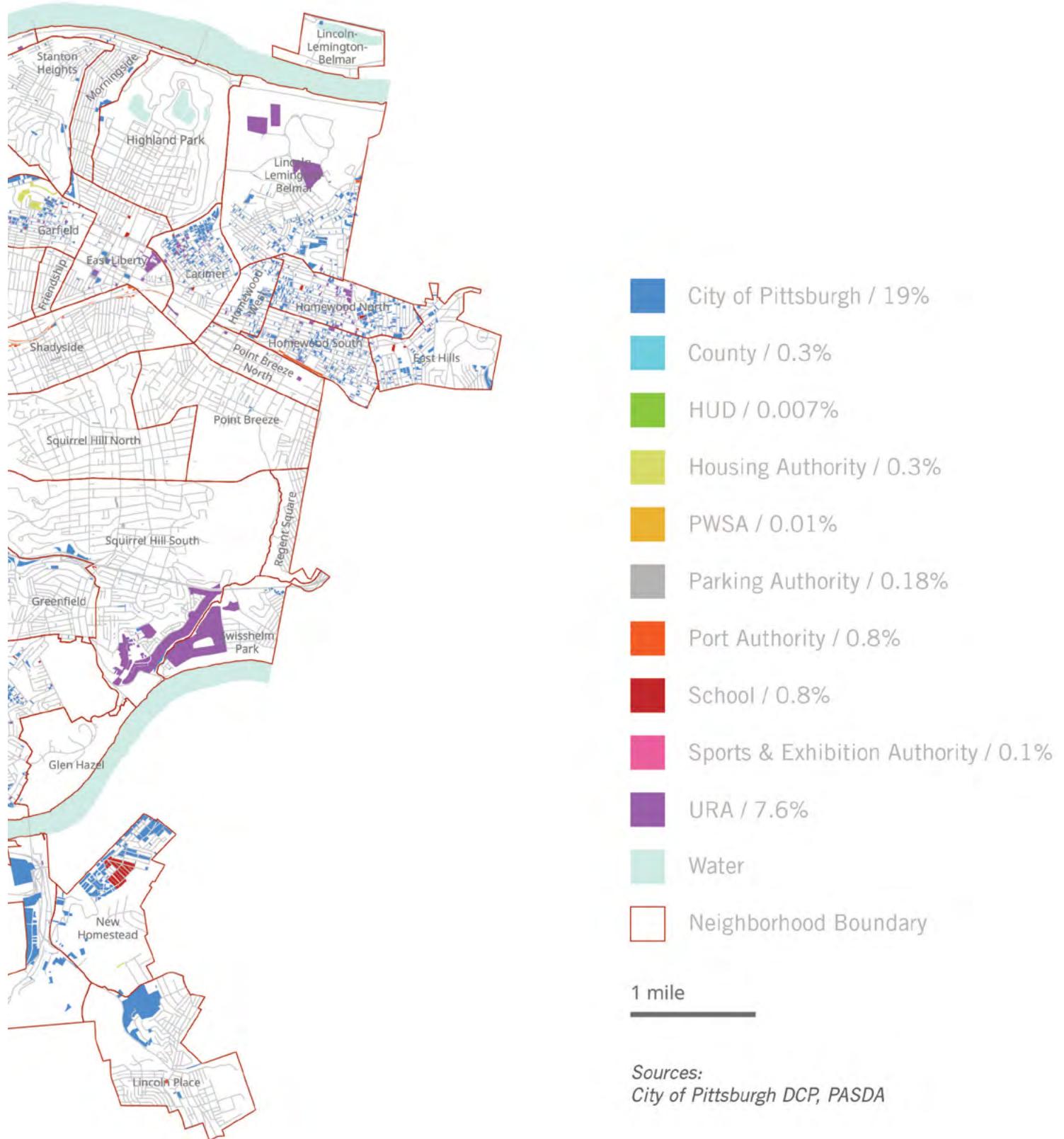
1 mile

Sources:
City of Pittsburgh DCP, PASDA

INTRODUCTION



Figure 3. Ownership (% by area)



INTRODUCTION





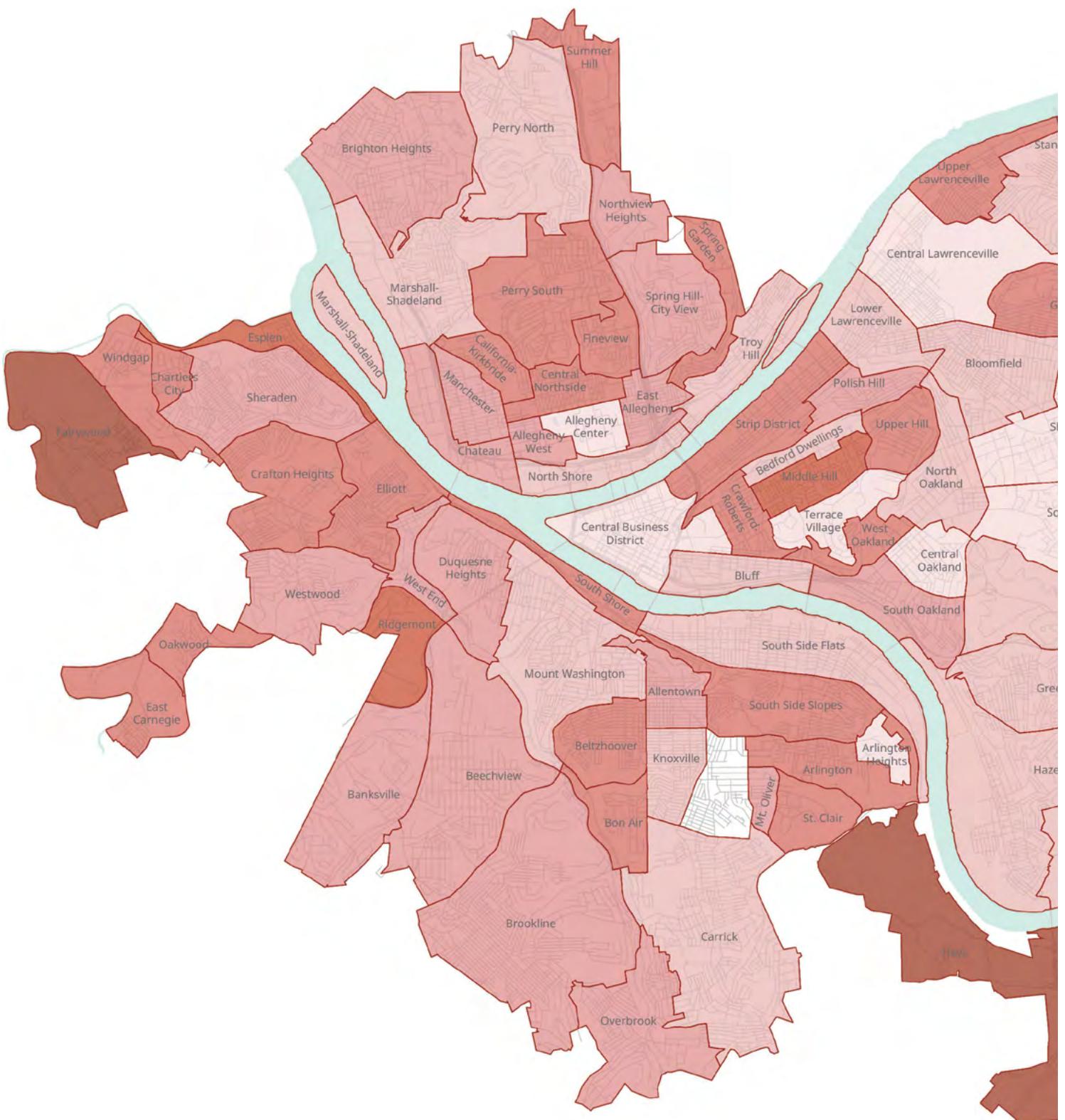
MVA - Vacant Parcels Percentage by Area

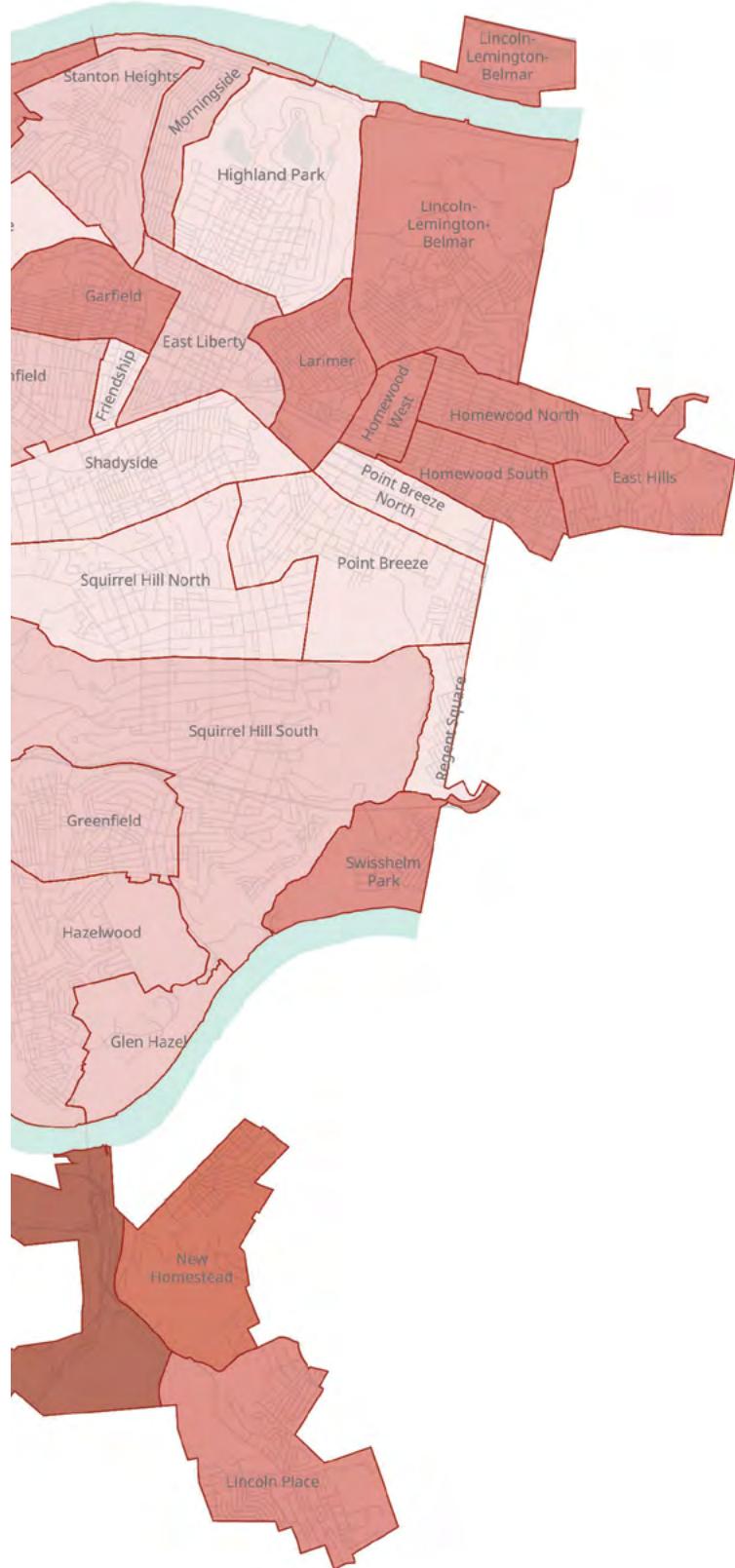
- A - 0.2%
- G - 17%
- B - 0.3%
- C - 4%
- D - 13%
- E - 16%
- F - 18%
- <5 sales & >30% Owner Occ. - 28.5%
- Water
- Neighborhood Boundary

1 mile

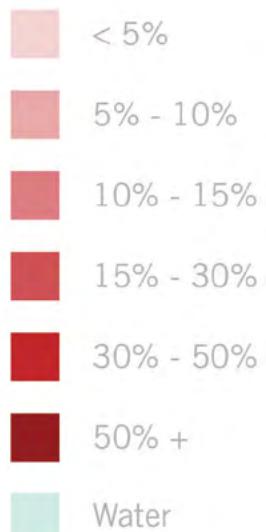
Sources:
City of Pittsburgh DCP, PASDA

INTRODUCTION





Percent Vacant Lots per Neighborhood



1 mile

Sources:
City of Pittsburgh DCP, PASDA



SHORT- TERM

African Liberation Garden, Homewood
image: Asakura Robinson

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: SET A VISION

RATIONALE

Through review of existing programs and discussion with City departments, community members and organizations, it is clear that the City's policies and programs relating to vacant lots within the City have not been strongly coordinated internally and that City departments do not view vacant lots, temporary and long-term projects for their reuse or desired community uses in the same light. As such, it is important that the Mayor's Office set a common vision for the use and value of vacant lot projects for the City of Pittsburgh and encourage all City Departments to align their policy and practices to those visions.

RECOMMENDATION

In November of 2014, the Mayor's Office released this memo to all Department Directors:

"As you may know, the Greenspace Alliance, a consortium of environmental, parks, and neighborhood greening groups, has been working with our administration since December 2013 to find ways to improve our internal processes to streamline approvals for the work they do. These groups do incredibly important work for our city and provide services and programs that reduce the burden on city government and help us manage our parks, vacant lots, and green spaces at low or no cost to the taxpayers. I made a commitment to these groups that we would work with them to put in place systems and processes that would enhance their ability to assist the city with these activities and I want to make it clear to you and your staff in the departments who work on these approvals that this is indeed a priority of my administration and a goal that I would like us to achieve by the end of the first quarter of 2015.

I understand that there are often tough choices that have to be made regarding medium-term and long-term use of city-owned lots by these groups and about potential liability for the work that they do. While it is important to protect the city and the taxpayers from unnecessary risk, I believe that in most cases the benefits of this work far outweigh the risks and I would ask that you consider this when crafting agreements and deliberating on approvals and err on the side of finding a way to 'yes'.

I know that many of the policy issues related to this work will be addressed by the Vacant Lot Toolkit that the Department of City Planning is currently working on but I don't want to wait until next year when the report is complete to begin making changes to how we interact with these groups. My goal is to get to a point, sooner rather than later, where we have one point of entry and clear timelines for requests for approval of this work, we have user-friendly streamlined forms that are readily accessible online, and we have an expedited process for crafting and approving agreements. Some of that work has already begun and I want to thank you for the time you have already put into it, but we need to do more. I have asked my Sustainability Manager, Grant Ervin, and my Policy Manager, Alex Pazuchanics, to serve as the liaisons to the Greenspace Alliance so please feel free to contact them if you have questions about your work with these groups and our goals for improving our processes.

Thank you for your hard work for the people of Pittsburgh."

As can be clearly seen, the Mayor's Office has put its strong support behind vacant lot projects.

In addition to this internal memorandum, it is further recommended that the Mayor's Office

release an executive order and pursue legislative action in order to continue the work that the City and the Greenspace Alliance have achieved to date.

NEXT STEPS

- The Department of City Planning and Mayor's Office should continue their commitment to working with the Greenspace Alliance and interdepartmentally to further develop opportunities for the reuse of vacant lots in the City.
- The Department of City Planning should continue to work with the Mayor's Office and other City departments to ensure that the concerns of the Mayor's Office are addressed. This includes user-friendly, accessible and transparent processes and materials for community members and organizations working on short-, medium-, and long-term vacant lot projects.
- The Mayor's Office should consider crafting an executive order or legislative action that may be necessary in order to promote the City's vision regarding vacant lots, including the necessary legislative action to create an Adopt-A-Lot Program and fulfill the other recommendations of this report.
- The Department of City Planning should explore the potential for developing key metrics to track the City's successes in achieving its vision. For example, these metrics could include the amount of money saved on maintenance.
- The Department of City Planning, the Mayor's Office, Neighborhood Liaisons, and the Greenspace Alliance should work to promote the availability of new processes for the reuse of vacant lots through the release of the Vacant Lot Toolkit and appropriate media attention.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: CLARIFY + DEVELOP THE PROCESS

RATIONALE

Perhaps the clearest desire expressed by community members and groups and City Departments alike is the clarification of the process or processes available to use vacant lots for short-, medium-, or long-term reuse projects. Descriptions of past processes revealed a lack of clarity for everything from the department to approach with a proposed project to the length of time required to apply to the costs and fees associated with a project. In order to improve clarity, transparency and to increase the number of vacant lot projects throughout the city, it is necessary to standardize and publicize new processes for the reuse of vacant lots.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of City Planning and the consultant team collaborated with City Departments to develop a process flowchart for the Vacant Lot Toolkit (figure 6, pg 20). It is desired that this chart become the standard for all community members and groups seeking to use vacant lots throughout the City on City-owned or non-City-owned vacant lots. The processes have a number of key components for City-owned lots discussed below.

1. Single Point of Contact

In order to consolidate contacts and clarify processes, it is also necessary to provide a single point of contact for applicants who seek to do vacant lot projects.

The designated point of contact will be the Open Space Specialist (OSS) in the Department of City Planning. It will be necessary to promote the role of the OSS to the other City Departments in order to assure that all project requests are directed to the correct department.

The OSS will have the task of identifying the proper program for each proposed project and shepherding each project through the relevant departmental approvals.

The OSS will also create programs to monitor and track projects throughout the City. This information can be fed into metrics as developed by the Department of City Planning in collaboration with the Mayor's Office.

2. New and Redesigned Processes and Programs

There will be three basic processes in the Adopt-A-Lot Program: the Adopt-A-Lot License, the Adopt-A-Lot Lease and Commercial Use.

The **Adopt-A-Lot License** will replace the existing Garden License/Garden Waiver program. It is intended for simple, short-term/temporary projects with the following parameters:

- Allows one or more individuals to get a license for one lot to do edible or flower gardening.
- Allows raised beds (not exceeding 3' in height)
- Allows temporary fencing (fencing that does not require foundations and does not exceed 42" in height)
- Yearly renewal required
- Does not allow group volunteer days
- No trees or large shrubs (shrubs with mature size exceeding 6' in height and/or width)

The **Adopt-A-Lot Lease** will be the most prevalent process. Participants will receive a one year lease, and, following the successful completion and maintenance of the project in the first year (i.e. project is in line with submitted materials and the licensee has maintained the project), will be eligible for a three year lease.

Finally, acknowledging the greater challenges faced and capacity necessary to use a lot for

a **Commercial Use**, such as a commercial farm, tree farm or other proposed uses, this process will be reviewed in greater detail in recommendation 1.5.

3. Standardized Forms

All forms for vacant lot projects will be standardized to the extent possible in order to formalize and create consistency with vacant lot project requests and reviews. Over time, it is desired that each form also be available online.

For all projects the following forms are required:

- The **Intake Form** will contain information that will assist the OSS in understanding the project type and available processes and will be required for all projects.
- The **Right-of-Entry Application**, will allow the applicant permission to conduct a soil test on their desired lot(s) and will be required for all projects. This application will be made available once the OSS confirms that the lot(s) from the intake form are available for use. This form is required for all projects.

For projects pursuing an Adopt-A-Lot License, the **Adopt-A-Lot License Application** is the required document. This application contains applicant information as well as a simple garden plan to illustrate how you plan to use the lot.

The third set of documents that will be required of applicants is the full **Adopt-A-Lot Lease Application**. The Adopt-A-Lot Lease Application will be required for the Adopt-A-Lot Lease and will contain all documentation necessary for the Department of City Planning to shepherd the project through each City Department and commission that must approve the project. It is desired that this application contain all the information necessary for the approval of the

project. The applicants will be responsible for the completeness of the application, which can be submitted online. The application will contain the following information:

- **General Information**
- **Existing Site Photos**
- **Project Narrative**
- **Site Plan**
- **Materials**
- **Budget**
- **Maintenance Plan**
- **Insurance**
- **Volunteer Waiver**

The **Vacant Lot Project Participant Agreement and Hold Harmless and Release of Liability Form** is the final new form. By signing the form participants agree to follow the City's safety guidelines and releases the City from liability for any actions/activities occurring on the vacant lot. This form is required for all projects. This form is required for all projects.

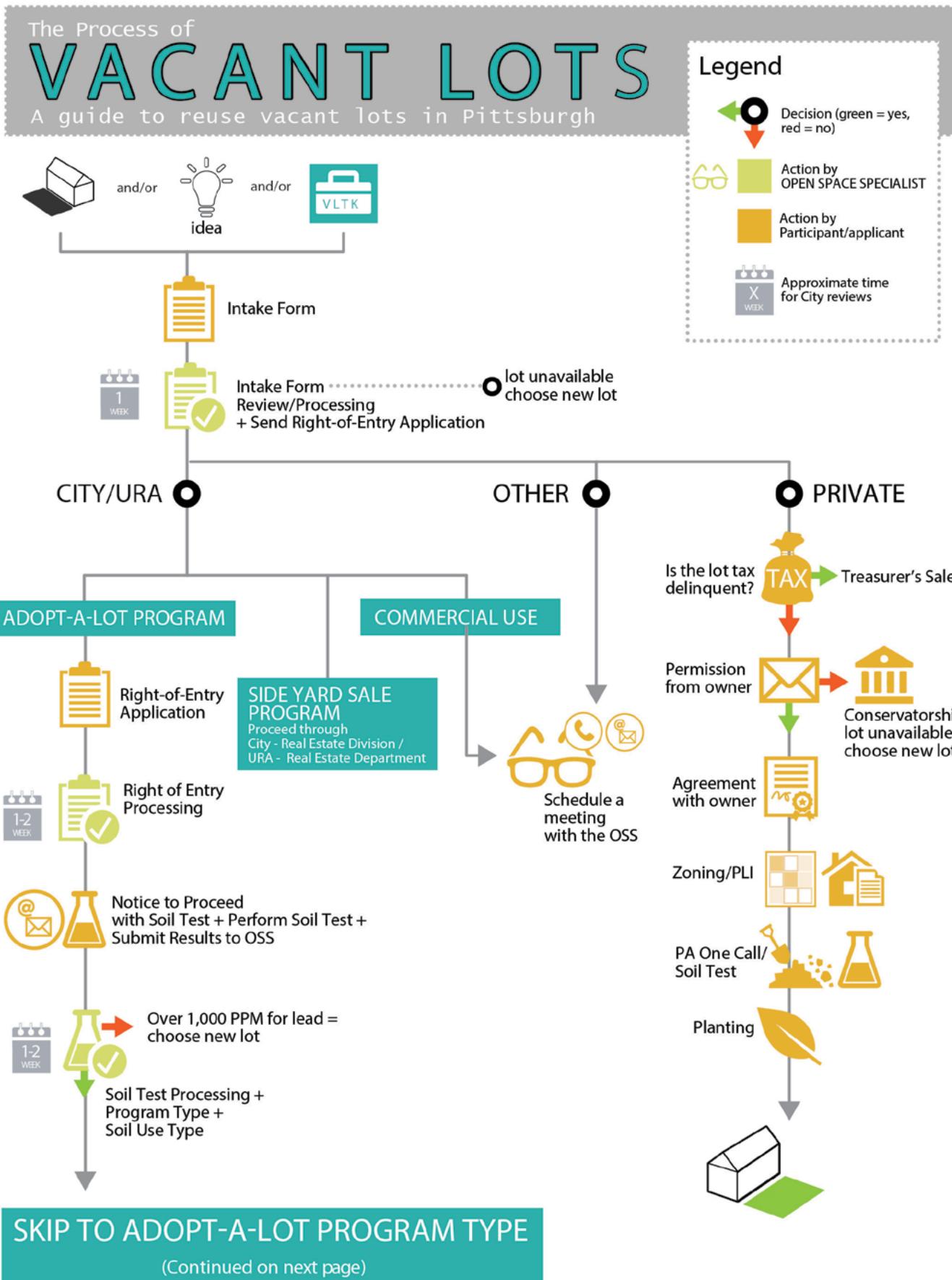
These documents form the main information that applicants will be required to provide.

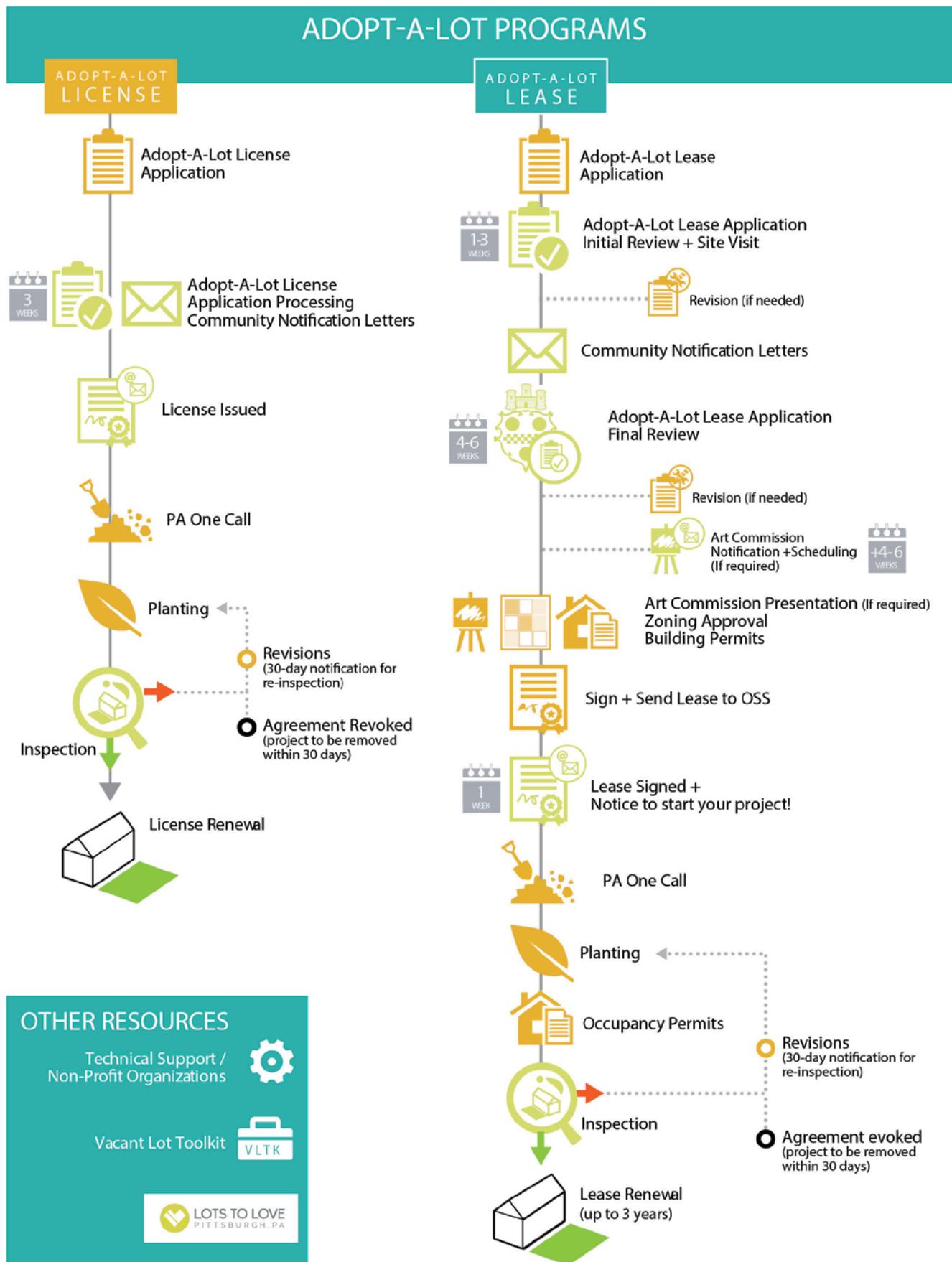
4. Policy on Soil

One major public health improvement that becomes possible through improved project tracking and the OSS is improved policy for, and tracking of, soil testing. The City of Pittsburgh will require a test for lead levels on all lots used by residents and will also recommend a test for nutrients and other heavy metals. In terms of stormwater management projects it is recommended that the City collaborate with Pennsylvania Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) to establish infiltration policy. For lots that are deemed unusable due to high lead levels it is recommended that the City develop a program for remediation.

5. Notification Letters

For all Adopt-A-Lot Program projects the





OSS will notify adjacent property owners of the proposed project, and will ask for any questions and/or comments to be submitted by a specified date. For Adopt-A-Lot projects letters will be sent to the City Councilperson as well as Community Development Corporation (CDC) and/or Community Based Organizations to notify them of the project and offer a community meeting. All project applicants can solicit letters of support as well as conduct community meetings as necessary for their projects, but will not be required to do so.

6. Lot Possession

In some cases more than one person may be interested in a particular vacant lot. In cases of multiple parties interested in a lot, the order in which an Intake Form is received will denote lot possession (timestamped and/or date received by OSS). The first applicant will have 30 days to submit a completed soil test and project application; failure to meet that deadline would open the lot to the next individual in line. Other considerations will be taken such as hierarchy of possession type. Still honoring the order of which Intake Forms are received, the OSS will grant possession based on the type of possession ranging from the lowest (Adopt-A-Lot License), middle (Adopt-A-Lot Lease), and highest (vacant lot sale). In this case, the first applicant will have the option to use the lot at a higher use, and in case of sale be able to bid on the property.

On the other hand, some projects may require a change of “possession” for a number of reasons. In the case of a project remaining “as is” or items being removed, the new “lessee” will have to update/amend the previous application with contact information, insurance information and/or amended site plan to receive a new lease (expedited process 2-3 weeks). If the new “lessee” adds to the project, a new application will be required to

reflect new project scope to receive a lease (full process of 6-12 weeks).

7. Existing Projects

Vacant lot projects currently occurring on City lots are responsible for obtaining a license or lease as outlined in the Adopt-A-Lot Program.

Once the Vacant Lot Toolkit is launched to the public the OSS will work with existing programs (Love Your Block, Green-up, Edible Garden Program, etc) to locate project applicants to formalize agreements. The OSS will also work in coordination with the Vacant Lot Toolkit Advisory Committee to outreach to projects that may have occurred with the assistance or support of those partner organizations. The City will work closely with these existing project individuals and groups to make the transition to a formalized agreement as easy as possible.

8. Maintenance and Inspections

Vacant lot projects occurring on City-owned vacant lots are subject to inspections to ensure public safety, consistency with building inspection, approval by Art Commission, and conformity to the final application and agreement.

Once substantial construction of a vacant lot project is complete, the OSS and/or Building Inspector from the Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections (PLI) will visit each site and perform a general site inspection to assure that:

- Project constructed to application; and
- Components that require building permits, are compliance (inspected by PLI).

Post inspection, the OSS will notify a vacant lot applicant if the project does not meet the application submission or PLI's inspection. Upon notice, the vacant lot license or lease holder will have 30 days to work with the OSS

to resolve any discrepancies to the application. If items are not resolved within this time frame the Adopt-A-Lot License or Adopt-A-Lot Lease will be revoked, and all items must be removed from the site within 30 days of notification. Items not removed will be removed by the Department of Public Works after the 30 day period.

Routine vacant lot maintenance shall coincide with proposed maintenance plan. The OSS will conduct periodic site visits throughout the season to ensure public safety. If maintenance violations are apparent, the OSS will notify the license or lease holder of maintenance problems. If maintenance issues persist, the vacant lot applicant may not be eligible for lease renewal and/or have to remove their vacant lot project.

9. Insurance

All vacant lot projects except for Adopt-A-Lot License holders are required to have standard commercial general liability policies with \$1 million aggregate and \$500,000 per occurrence limits, with the City listed as an additional insured.

Adopt-A-Lot License holders are not required to have insurance because of their low-intensity uses on City-owned lots that do not attract people to a site, i.e.:

- Passive space that includes beautification elements such as in-ground plantings and planters, but without benches, tables, trails, pathways, shelters, storage elements, playspace equipment, commercial enterprises, farmstands, or other physical elements that might attract regular public use of the site, and therefore impacting the intensity of use.
- No food can be grown on these sites, and no capital improvements can be created that would be returned to the City if the

license is terminated.

All project participants must sign the Vacant Lot Project Participant Agreement and Hold Harmless and Release of Liability Form, regardless of insurance.

10. Water Access

Vacant lot projects occurring on City-owned vacant lots are able to pursue tap water by contacting the Pennsylvania Water & Sewer Authority (PWSA). To begin the process, the vacant lot applicant would express a need for a water tap to the OSS. Once a need is established, the applicant would follow the PWSA's Water Metering Policy for Adopt-A-Lot Program Projects.

11. Waste Pick-Up

Vacant lot projects occurring on City-owned vacant lots can access waste collection by submitting a form to the Department of Public Works. This includes the initial cleanup of dumped materials that may be necessary in order to prepare the site for reuse. Other vacant lots will have to hire third party waste collection to dispose of materials from their site.

NEXT STEPS

- The Department of City Planning should identify redundancy and/or shared responsibilities with other City Departments and organizations to strategically and effectively utilize the OSS's capacity.
- The Department of City Planning should take the necessary steps to put these new processes into effect, including the development of the necessary materials and forms and coordination with all other necessary departments and commissions. The OSS should also develop methods of tracking vacant lot projects, including an attempt to catalog existing projects and encourage them to reapply or legalize their status using the

new processes.

- The Department of City Planning should collaborate with PWSA in the development of a policy with relation to soil infiltration for rates and contamination as well as green infrastructure maintenance standards.
- The Department of City Planning should work to develop online forms for submission whenever possible in order to reduce the amount of paper and cost to applicants.
- The Department of City Planning should develop a policy for “change orders” relating to project inspection in order to allow some flexibility for DIY (“Do-it-yourself”) projects while still ensuring that the City’s interests are maintained.
- The Department of City Planning should work with all existing projects in the city to ensure that they are legal and have the ability to access long-term leases for their sites.
- The Department of City Planning should collaborate with the Mayor’s Office and Grants Office to explore funding opportunities for vacant lot projects.
- Ensure that regular inspections are conducted and that water access and waste pick-up processes and expectations remain transparent and achievable for vacant lot projects.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3: CONDUCT LEGAL REVIEWS OF REUSE TYPES

RATIONALE

Through a legal analysis, it became clear that there were a number of activities that are desirable from the perspective of community groups and individuals that traditionally the City has been uncomfortable in their ability to legally allow. As such, it is necessary to assess the legality of several activities.

1. Public Trust Doctrine

RATIONALE

Many community groups wish to create long-term, privately-maintained open space projects on City-owned vacant lots. Research shows that access to open spaces can improve public health, improve quality of life, and increase property values in the surrounding neighborhoods. These projects also benefit the City by maintaining publicly-owned vacant properties at no cost to the taxpayer. However, the Department of Law has expressed concern related to allowing these open space uses on publicly owned vacant lots due to their possible implications under the “public trust doctrine” which stems from Pennsylvania’s State Constitution. This recommendation enumerates mechanisms suggested by the Department of Law to mitigate this risk in order to allow privately-maintained open space projects on vacant lots.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Law’s concern is that the public trust doctrine could theoretically force the City to maintain each open space in perpetuity should a private individual or group abandon its license or lease. While case law has generally limited the scope of the public trust doctrine to lands that local jurisdictions have acquired specifically for park or open space uses, some risk still exists that the doctrine

could be applied to vacant lot projects as well.

The City’s goal, as expressed by the Mayor’s Office and the Department of City Planning, is to allow as many of these community-oriented vacant lot projects as possible within clear guidelines that minimize the risk to the City under the public trust doctrine. In addition, to minimize time required from applicants and the Department of Law, these guidelines should avoid requiring discretionary Department of Law approvals to the extent possible. Based on an interview with the Department of Law, the following potential guidelines are recommended to govern these privately-maintained open space uses:

- All license agreements with groups creating long-term open space uses should state that nothing within the license and/or lease agreement is intended to designate the piece of property in question as a public park or a publicly-owned permanent open space. This stipulation should be mentioned during each community process for a proposed open space use on City property.
- No vacant lot project conducted on City-owned vacant lots should include the word “park” in its name.
- Signage (standards for which are currently being developed through a separate effort by the Department of City Planning) should indicate that these vacant lot projects are not City projects.
- No vacant lot project conducted on City-owned vacant lots should have play equipment or memorials
- City funding, such as Neighborhood Needs funds, should not be allocated to fund vacant lot projects with primarily recreational purposes, including trails, pathways, and natural playspace elements. The Department of Public Works may not donate “City Standard” materials for these projects (“non-natural” materials such as: benches, lighting, trash cans).

These proposed guidelines are subject to final Department of Law review and recommendations. City Planning and the Department of Law should work together to implement these recommendations.

2. Market Gardens with Farmstands:

RATIONALE

Community organizations operating small-scale community gardens or urban farms have expressed a desire to sell unprocessed produce from their growing sites located on vacant lots in a farmstand-style manner. This “market garden” model assists with the financial sustainability of these urban agriculture projects and brings fresh produce to neighborhoods that often have limited access to fresh food stores; many of these organizations accept SNAP funds from those receiving food assistance. The “market garden” model is common across the United States. In Pittsburgh, the barrier to establishing these uses on vacant lots has been a prohibition on selling items produced on City-owned vacant lots due to concerns about lease fees, liability, and questions around where the boundary would be drawn between these uses and truly “commercial” uses that should pay higher fees.

RECOMMENDATION

The Mayor’s Office has stated that they do not wish to collect additional lease fees, beyond what is required by existing taxes and zoning ordinances, from small-scale urban agriculture uses that sell products grown on City-owned vacant lots. (*Note: the small-scale uses under discussion in this section do not include “commercial uses” which are for-profit and have employees; guidelines and underwriting processes for commercial uses are discussed in Recommendation 1.5.*)

The Department of Law has requested the ability to review fee structures for these

types of “market gardens” from other cities and determine whether the existing fees are appropriate, in light of the fact that Pittsburgh currently does not assess any dedicated lease or license fees for vacant lot projects. A comparison of fee structures in Baltimore, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Seattle revealed that fees generally fall into one of three categories: application or Certificate of Occupancy fees, zoning variance fees if needed, and yearly lease or license fees (usually zero or \$1 per year).

The following proposed guidelines are recommended for market gardens with farmstands located on City lots:

- Farmstands should conform with existing zoning regulations, and obtain the appropriate permits
- Yearly license fees should remain the same as license fees assessed by the City for other vacant lot projects on public lots.
- All produce sold from these farmstands will be required to be unprocessed and meet county and State Health Department regulations. No processed or cut produce can be sold from these farmstands.
- These gardens and small-scale farms would be required to have standard City-required general liability insurance policies, and add the City as an additional insured on the policy. The current City requirements for liability insurance are consistent with insurance requirements for market garden uses nationally.

These proposed guidelines are subject to final Department of Law review and recommendations.

NEXT STEPS

The Department of City Planning will continue their reviews of each specific issue and coordinate the decisions with the Department of Law in order to put each policy into action.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: PUBLIC ART

1. Public Art:

RATIONALE

Organizations and individuals have expressed interest in activating City-owned vacant sites throughout the City with public art displays. Art displays assist communities with place-making efforts and enliven vacant lots; the Public Art Manager for the City of Pittsburgh notes that neighborhoods south of the Monongahela and Ohio Rivers with high percentages of vacancy also have particularly limited access to public art. However, it is clear that unattended displays pose legal issues for the City if allowed indiscriminately on public lots; allowing one display can open the doors for other groups with any kind of free speech display (art or otherwise) to demand the right to display their own messages on City-owned vacant lots as well.

RECOMMENDATION

A structured, City-owned or sponsored program for temporary art similar to the City's Market Square Public Art program should be established in order to mitigate this challenge. Two options for establishing this type of program or project include:

- Option 1 - City Sponsored Program: The City could establish a vacant lot public art program, with an open competition to activate selected City-owned vacant lots, with a jury selected by City staff/ Public Art Division and Planning. In the case of the Market Square Art program, an open call for applicants is distributed locally and abroad, and a jury is comprised of two art experts, two city employees or commissioners, and two community members (residents or workers who inhabit the program locale). The jury selects artists and/or the artworks for display, with final approval by the City/Public

Art Division. All pieces on display within the program are loaned to the City while they are being displayed, and a lease or other right of entry agreement is executed with the artist and its contractors. This program could be in place for one site, with a "revolving" series of displays, or for multiple lots with either short-term, or longer term durations. Temporary art models can be flexible in this way.

- Option 2 - Art Displayed Under Leased Lots (to Non-Profits): When there are cases where a vacant lot project would merit or require a long-term lease, the lessee (or tenant) may administer its own display of art, and also administer its own selection and approval process for the art on display. All applicable legal, licensing, building, zoning, and Art Commission approvals would still apply. While there is currently no codified structure of artist selection for this model, a best practice and suggested method is that which is identified in Option 1 above – an open call for artists/art, a jury comprised of stakeholders, art experts, and city staff, with final approval reserved for pertinent City staff/Commissions would be most appropriate.

Since art can take many forms and site conditions can vary greatly, any final program design for a public art program utilizing City-owned vacant lots will be subject to Department of Law review.

2. Art Commission Policy:

RATIONALE

The Vacant Lot Toolkit will include a set of site design standards for common vacant lot reuses such as edible, rain, and/or flower gardens. The Art Commission is currently working to increase the number of applications for vacant lot projects that can be approved at a staff review level rather than

needing full Art Commission review. Members of the Art Commission and the Department of Law are exploring the option of the Art Commission providing a blanket authorization for projects that meet the Vacant Lot Toolkit design standards to be approved at the staff review level in order to speed the process for groups wishing to pass Art Commission review and reduce documentation requirements for those groups that comply with City-approved design standards.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on Department of Law recommendations, the Art Commission's code or bylaws should be amended to reflect the ability to grant a blanket authorization for staff review for projects that meet City-approved design standards.

NEXT STEPS

- The City should continue its legal review of the issue of having staff approve a greater number of vacant lot projects and pursue a legislative solution to this issue if necessary.
- Art Commission should be informed of the new processes for vacant lot projects and familiarized with the new city materials, including the Vacant Lot Toolkit.
- The Art Commission should “adopt” the Toolkit or pre-approve design materials for vacant lot projects.

RECOMMENDATION 1.5: CREATE PROCESS FOR COMMERCIAL REUSES

RATIONALE

Commercial uses such as urban farms, commercial farmers markets, larger scale agricultural and nursery enterprises, to name just a few, are among the most intensive uses for vacant lots we have looked at supporting. They are unique in that they generally require a high level of investment into the enterprise from multiple sources to get off the ground and sustain themselves in the long-term. They are also sources of employment for people. As a business effort, commercial uses require a higher level of review that tests the assumptions in the business model to assure as best we can that the operation is viable over the long haul. While most of the other projects contemplated on vacant lots might be regarded as “interim” uses, these commercial uses generally warrant much longer term leases and in the right circumstances, a sale of property. Longer-term projects are also subject to increase in scale over time, which can mean greater impacts on the land and the communities they are in, especially if the projects fail to deliver on their initial promise. This recommendation seeks to realize a need for a method to review these projects that takes into account all the aspects of viability.

RECOMMENDATION

Commercial uses should be subject to a review of the business fundamentals of the project proposed. This would involve the submission of a business plan as well as a comprehensive review of project financing and costs. Looking into the initial capital outlay, who would fund it, the nature of their commitments to do so, and the experience of the business owner all factor into project viability. As it is anticipated that a relatively small number of commercial operations would be proposed in any given year, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, which already does commercial underwriting for business projects in their Economic Development

department, could contribute their expertise and work with the proposing business operator to review project fundamentals, financing commitments and budgets. This review would be undertaken only in instances where a clear long-term large scale commercial use is proposed, i.e. when someone wants to start a business on City-owned vacant lots. In these cases, the applicant will still begin the process with a “pre-application” meeting with the OSS.

NEXT STEPS

- Review the URA process for underwriting of business loans and the sale of real estate for its appropriation into the commercial use review. This includes the submission of a business plan, the review of a site plan with bid level costs, and a budget including “sources” of capital as well as matching “uses”. There would also be the submission of a five year operating budget.
- Determine if new criteria should be added to this review specific to open space and agricultural uses; for instance, should an expert in farm operation or market operations be on tap to advise the URA underwriters on the aspects of these business that are unique to these type of operations’ long-term success.
- Develop a policy for the disposition process. Should the business be in operation under a lease for a number of years before land is sold? What is the policy around construction on these sites? How are hazardous materials to be addressed?
- Develop criteria for previous experience relative to the type and physical scale of the operation proposed. Consider past experience in regards to “scale to experience.”
- Develop cost structure for commercial (revenue-generating) projects.
- Develop enforcement methodologies for commercial projects.



A photograph of a row of houses in Lawrenceville, Pennsylvania. The houses are built on a slight incline. In the foreground, there is a yellow rectangular overlay containing the word "LONG-TERM". The overlay has a black border and is positioned above a garden scene.

LONG-TERM



A photograph of a landscaped garden in Lawrenceville Tree Park. The garden features a variety of plants, including large clusters of red sedum flowers in the foreground. A stone path leads through the garden, and the background shows more greenery and a building.

Lawrenceville Tree Park, Upper Lawrenceville
image: Asakura Robinson

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: CREATE SUITABILITY ANALYSIS

RATIONALE

The City and the Mayor's Office recognize that non-profits and community organizations invest significant resources and time to improve City-owned vacant lots and transform them into community assets. The City and Mayor's Office also understands that the short-term nature of the licenses allowing these groups to use City-owned lots represents a challenge when these groups are deciding whether to invest in improvements.

However, it is also clear that simply allowing long-term, small-scale vacant lot projects indiscriminately on any City-owned property could create future conflicts with other City interests, such as revitalizing commercial corridors, establishing large-scale green infrastructure and greenway systems, and promoting housing redevelopment.

The Department of City Planning therefore identified a need to focus the "suitability analysis" methodology originally developed for the Open Space Plan on selecting appropriate properties for long-term, small-scale vacant lot reuses.

RECOMMENDATION

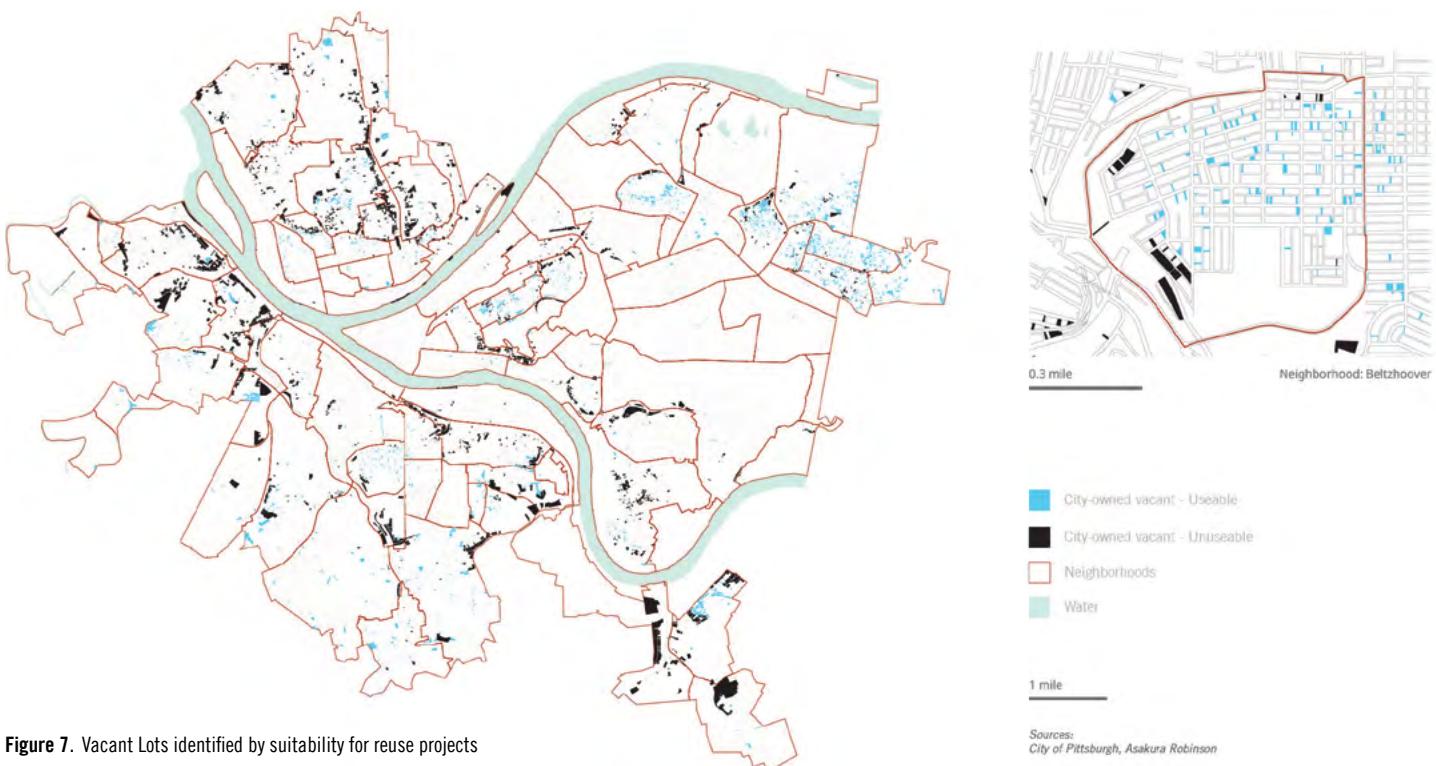
Due to the number of vacant lots available throughout the City of Pittsburgh, it is the opinion of the consultant team that it is unnecessary to "tag" each vacant lot with a "highest and best" use. Rather, vacant lot projects should take advantage of individual initiatives and use existing zoning to identify unsuitable uses, at least in the short-term. In the longer term, using available GIS data and based on a high-level of community interest in doing vacant lot projects, the City may generate a "list" of City-owned vacant lots that are unlikely to have significant environmental problems or pose significant danger to users, and that are less suited for large-scale green infrastructure uses or redevelopment opportunities.

At the same time, lots that may have a great potential value to city wide goals should be subtracted from the overall available inventory of City-owned lots eligible for small-scale vacant lot reuses, such as:

- **Inappropriate use areas:** Lots where the zoning code does not allow agricultural uses.
- **Potential green infrastructure development areas:** Lots located in floodplains or wetlands; waterway-adjacent properties
- **Dangerous areas:** Lots located in undermined areas, and areas with high landslide risk or steep slopes.
- **Redevelopment priority areas:** Lots located along retail corridors and lots located in core development areas.

Figure 7 (opposite) shows the rough proportion of land that would become unavailable using these criteria, however, further study should be applied, especially relating to upcoming zoning changes, considering the types of projects which may be practical even in undermined or steep sloped areas, and with updated information on redevelopment areas from the URA, and regarding green-infrastructure priority zones being developed by the PWSA. The goal of the Department of City Planning should be to keep as many vacant lots available as is safe and practical. The abbreviated list of City-owned vacant lots generated by removing the above types of properties from the list of eligible lots should be provided to the OSS in the Department of City Planning, who can use this "list" of eligible lots to perform an initial suitability check on each application. If the applicants' proposed lot is found suitable based on the above criteria, the OSS will then need to perform any additional checks with the Department of Finance - Real Estate Division to ensure that the lot has not been otherwise tagged or reserved for an alternative use. These checks include, but are not limited to:

- Has the lot been tagged as part of a greenway



- project? If so, the applicant should be redirected to an alternate site.
- Has the lot been tagged for the Land Reserve Process? If so, the applicant should be redirected to an alternate site.
 - Has the lot been tagged for the URA? If so, the applicant should be redirected to speak with the URA.

If the lot remains eligible after this list of criteria has been checked, the OSS should also refer to the City's Comprehensive Plan, and community or neighborhood planning documents in order to see whether a vacant lot project is consistent with the recommendations of the neighborhood plan related to siting vacant lot uses. In addition, the proposed uses should be checked against PWSA's priority stormwater management areas, which is also currently under development. Community groups may consider the following criteria when determining where to allow long-term vacant lot reuses in their neighborhood:

- **Compatibility with community vision**
 - Is the use and location of the lot consistent with identified community goals and strategies?
 - Action: Address the unevenness of community planning in Pittsburgh's neighborhoods; provide the resources to communities that have not articulated vision and strategies.
 - Is long-term open space in concert with density goals?
 - Does the community envision a variety of lot uses or concentration/network of one type of use (public art, garden, play space, etc.)?
- **Needs of surrounding communities**
- **Food Deserts**
 - Would the use of the lot increase access to fresh food, particularly in communities where such access is lacking?
- **Impact of site on adjacent and neighboring sites and uses**
 - Would the use of the lot be an asset to

or in conflict with neighboring houses or businesses?

- **Proximity to other neighborhood resources**
 - Which neighborhood resources (churches, community centers) would support lot reuse projects with volunteers or visibility?
- **Accessibility of site for use and maintenance**
 - Which lots would be easier or more difficult for a range of residents to access?
- **Safety and neighborhood surveillance**
 - Would some proposed uses enhance the safety of certain areas of the community? In which areas might residents be more supportive of vacant lot projects?
- **Visibility of site and preservation of view corridor in the public domain**
 - Which lots have valuable views? How can these views be preserved for public access?
- **Relationship to existing greenways**
 - What kinds of vacant projects would enrich the greenway, either in the greenway or near it? What kinds of uses should be discouraged near greenways?

NEXT STEPS

- Further refine and develop conditions under which lots will become unavailable, using best practices.
- Develop a “shortlist” of potentially suitable lots for vacant lot project based on City GIS data and provide this list to the OSS.
- Arrange for quarterly updates to this shortlist to reflect the City’s changing inventory of land.
- Assist communities in applying siting criteria for vacant lot projects in community or neighborhood plans as they are developed; these criteria may prove particularly useful as the Land Bank becomes functional.
- Develop standards for planning processes and community plan contents in order to allow DCP to have a formal “acceptance” process for community plans.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: CREATE STANDARDS + PROCESS FOR LONGER TERM USES + PURCHASE

RATIONALE

During conversations with individuals and organizations who have conducted long successful vacant lot projects, there was a great deal of interest in both the possibility of longer term projects and in the opportunity to purchase lots in order to maintain open space and community based projects in perpetuity. These desires become especially important in neighborhoods that are experiencing a strong or transitional market, where providing open space may become more difficult in the near future.

Additionally, although the new processes for using vacant lots introduced in recommendation 1.2 have significantly standardized the opportunities to do vacant lot projects, there is also a desire to streamline or fast-track some projects once the process has proved itself successful. The following recommendations are based on the assumption that the “bugs” have been worked out of the new vacant lot programs and there is an agreement among City Departments that more can be done to improve the process for some or all projects.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Establish Standards for the Types of Projects that can Access Longer Lease Periods

As was stated in recommendation 1.2, vacant lot projects under the new Adopt-A-Lot Lease and Commercial Processes will have access to longer lease periods than were previously allowed. This includes a 1 year standard lease with a 3 year renewal for the Adopt-A-Lot Lease and 3 year standard lease with 5 year renewals for Commercial projects. It is further recommended that the City develop criteria for other types of projects which may be able to access longer leases. These may include projects conforming to a community or neighborhood plan or longer lease periods for

projects that have proven their sustainability through multiple lease renewals.

2. Create Standards for Eligible Community Plans

The Department of City Planning should create a process for vetting and acknowledging community plans, and encouraging communities to include vacant lot planning in their planning processes, using the criteria suggested in recommendation 2.1.

In order to encourage and support community groups in their planning efforts, the City may consider releasing standard criteria for community plans, including template RFP's or other materials that may assist communities in crafting a plan that is likely to be accepted by the City. It is suggested that the Department set expectations regarding content and public processes that communities should go through, for example the City may recommend that certain topics must be covered in the community plan, for example, it could suggest that all neighborhood plans must address land use, connectivity and circulation, housing, open space, economic development, place-making, sustainability, and stormwater management in order to be considered complete. Categories such as these would make sure that important subjects were covered, but would also give a little flexibility for the communities to address key issues within their area. These sections could also be set to match the chapters of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Once accepted by the Department of City Planning, community plans could be used to identify desired vacant lot uses within their study areas and used to fast track projects that meet community desires. Furthermore, lots with projects meeting community plans should be considered for sale or transfer out of the City's ownership and into the hands of a community group or non-profit with the capacity to ensure the long-term viability of the project.

3. Create Blanket Stewardship Agreements with High Capacity Organizations or Individuals

The City of Pittsburgh is remarkable in the number of high quality, high capacity organizations working in the area of vacant lot projects. It is recommended that the City explore a process to pre-approve or create blanket project agreements with organizations who have proven themselves to be good stewards of the City's land. These organizations may be given an ability to fast track projects through the approval process, or, simply be given an ability to lease a certain number of projects per year without having to go through most of the application process.

These organizations would simultaneously need to submit to a standard inspection process and ensure that their projects continue to meet high quality standards in order to maintain their agreement with the City.

4. Create or Define Purchase Options for Vacant Lot Projects

Building upon the success of vacant lot projects and of the newly established processes, the City should develop policies and standards for those who have an interest in purchasing the lots being used for vacant lot projects. Currently, opportunities for ownership are either through the City's Side Yard Sale Program, which only applies to certain lots which are directly adjacent to other property owned by an applicant; standard vacant lot sale, through the Real Estate's Division vacant lot sale list; and the Treasurer's Sale process, which may not be appropriate for long-term vacant lot projects, as prices may be inflated, or may not reflect the true value of the parcel, especially in neighborhoods experiencing higher market demand.

NEXT STEPS

- The Department of City Planning should establish a point person to further develop each of these recommendations in coordination with the necessary contact people in each of the other relevant city departments. Once available to the public, each item should be promoted to relevant community groups and in the second update of the Vacant Lot Toolkit.
- The Department of City Planning should work to define criteria by which community groups will be assessed for their capacity in order to be allowed to purchase vacant lots for long-term projects.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: DEFINE + CLARIFY COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

RATIONALE

Community based organizations and city-wide non-profits identified the importance of community engagement for development and maintenance of garden projects on vacant lots. The development of a community corps for garden maintenance is aimed at finding low-cost solutions to garden maintenance when City resources are already stretched. In addition, the utilization of community efforts provides a focus for collaboration and long-term involvement in the health of the community.

On the one hand, the Department of Public Works does not have the capacity to keep up with the work to maintain the City's vacant lots. However, community organizations cannot work on City lots, since a public employer may not transfer any bargaining unit work to nonmembers without bargaining over the issue first with the labor union in question or at the very least asking their permission first.

For the legal precedent on this issue, see *Borough of Geistown v. PA Labor Relations Board*, 679 A.2d 1330, Cmwlth. 1996, appeal denied 692 A.2d 568, 547 Pa. 759 (Pa 1997) applying the PA Labor Relations Act at 43 P.S. Section 211.6; see also *Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties v. PA Labor Relations Board*, 661 A.2d 898, Cmwlth. 1995, appeal denied 666 A.2d 1058, 542 Pa. 649 (Pa 1995) applying the PA Employee Relations Act at 43 P.S. Section 1101.1201.

If bargaining unit work is wrongfully transferred, then Arbitrators, Courts and the State Labor Relations Board provide the unions with full payment for the foregone opportunity. Although community organizations have no desire to undermine these jobs, efforts must be made to

work in concert with the Department of Public Works and the Unions to improve and maintain vacant lots throughout the City.

Currently, communities are able to apply for a volunteer waiver, usually for a short-term volunteer clean-up activity. The waivers are too short-term and too specific to meet the needs of on-going community activities. In addition to the issue of non-City workers maintaining City-owned lots, all-volunteer community organizations have identified the liability insurance requirements as a significant roadblock.

Finally, non-profit organizations with staff and expertise to develop and maintain gardens have expressed the need for funding to support their work.

RECOMMENDATION

Identify categories of work on vacant lots that would be pre-approved for individuals in all community organizations. These work categories might be defined by requiring limited skills and/or having limited liability.

Clarify the necessity of volunteer forms once a lease has been issued for a garden.

Explore comprehensive approvals for non-profit organizations and community development organizations with professional staff. These organizations have the resources for staff training and on-going liability insurance.

NEXT STEPS

- Convene a meeting with the City Solicitor and Union representatives to identify appropriate volunteer lot projects, maintenance activities, and protocols with unions.
- Include the PWSA in the further development of these recommendations.
- Identify funding streams to support the work

of non-profit organizations in developing and maintaining City lots.

- OSS should work with the Department of Public Works Anti-Litter Coordinator to streamline the union approval process through standardized communication and established time lines.
- Continue to work with the Department of Law and Department of Public Works to improve the Union communication and approval process, while exploring seasonal and/or yearly maintenance activity approvals for vacant lot projects.

