



PITTSBURGH VACANT LOT TOOLKIT



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Cover Images

top left: Ballfield Farms (Grow Pittsburgh)

top right: Ballfield Farms (Grow Pittsburgh)

middle: Unknown (Asakura Robinson)

bottom left: Beloved Community Garden of Hope (GTECH)

bottom right: Miss Mary's Garden (Hanna Mosca)

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 edible, flower, and rain gardens.

Residents of the City of Pittsburgh can read this toolkit when thinking about creating a vacant lot project on City-owned land, and will find it useful throughout the process. The manual 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 long lasting 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/vltk

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ONLINE SUPPLEMENTS:

www.pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/vltk

1. INTAKE FORM
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3. SOIL TESTING PROCEDURES/GUIDELINES
4. APPLICATION CHECKLIST + FORM
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6. ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION
7. PROJECT PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT + HOLD HARMLESS AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY FORM
7. CHANGE ORDER FORM
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10. SIDE YARD SALE PROGRAM GUIDELINES
11. PWSA WATER CONNECTION FORM
12. ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM ORDINANCE

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





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 current number of city-owned vacant lots.



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 the long haul.

← 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.

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** allow residents to have access to fresh food and in some cases fight “food deserts.”



- **Flower Gardens** allow residents to beautify key locations in their neighborhoods to create gateways and reduce blight.



- **Rain Gardens** allow the capture of stormwater that would otherwise put more strain on our already stressed combined sewer system.

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**.



OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST [OSS]

is 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

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 a vacant lots as well as the City services required to maintain lots 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
-  Water
-  Neighborhood Boundary

1 mile


Sources:
City of Pittsburgh DCP, PASDA

PROCESS

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

On the following pages you'll see "THE PROCESS OF VACANT LOT" 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?

See the process on pages 10-11 and 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.



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.

**SOCIAL
FINANCIAL
ECOLOGICAL**

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.



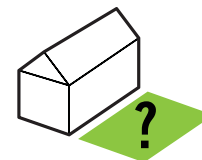
WHERE DO I FIND A VACANT LOT?

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.

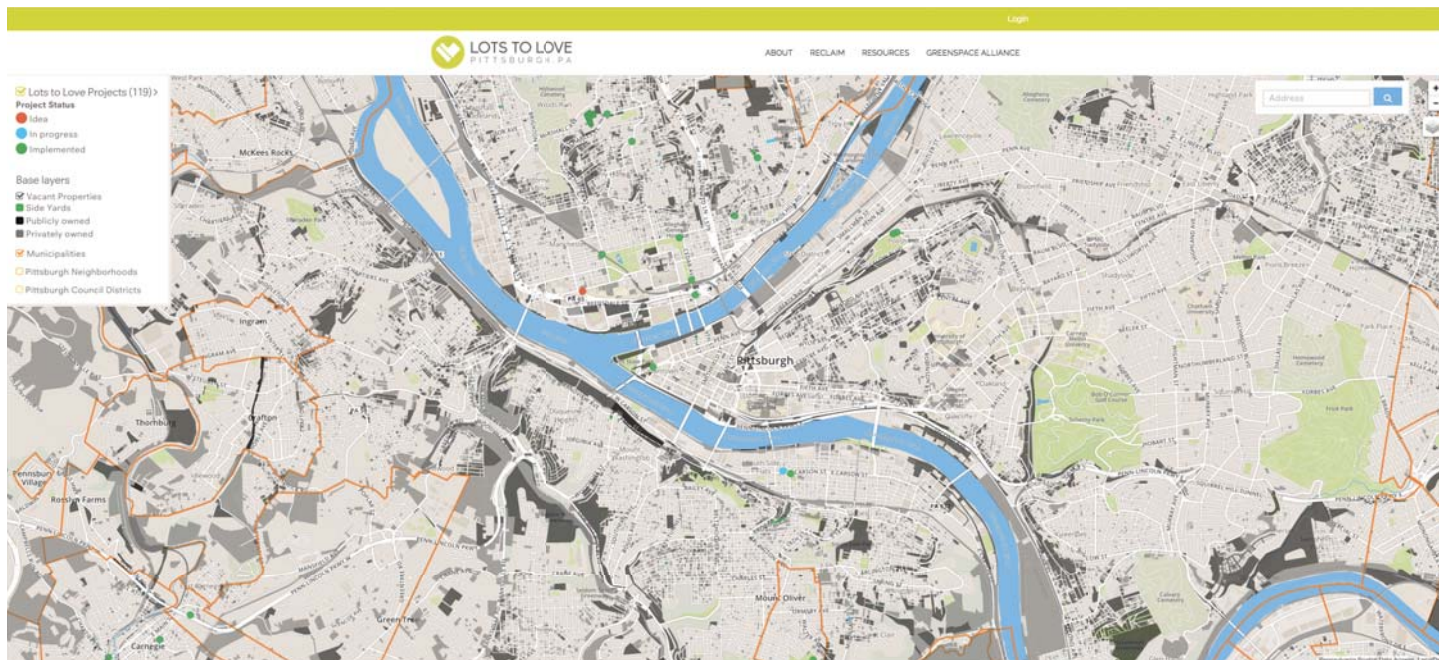


WHEN DO I START?

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: 0174E00140000000
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!

The Process of VACANT LOTS

A guide to reuse vacant lots in Pittsburgh

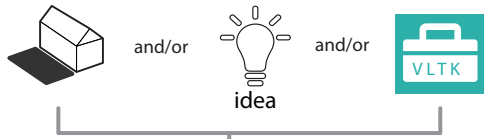
Legend

Decision (green = yes, red = no)

Action by OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST

Action by Participant/applicant

Approximate time for City reviews



Intake Form

1 WEEK

Intake Form Review/Processing + Send Right-of-Entry Application

lot unavailable choose new lot

CITY/URA

OTHER

PRIVATE

ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM

COMMERCIAL USE

Right-of-Entry Application

SIDE YARD SALE PROGRAM
Proceed through City - Real Estate Division / URA - Real Estate Department

1-2 WEEK

Right of Entry Processing



Notice to Proceed with Soil Test + Perform Soil Test + Submit Results to OSS

1-2 WEEK



Over 1,000 PPM for lead = choose new lot

Soil Test Processing + Program Type + Soil Use Type

Is the lot tax delinquent?



TAX → Treasurer's Sale

Permission from owner



Conservatorship or lot unavailable choose new lot

Agreement with owner



Schedule a meeting with the OSS

Zoning/PLI



PA One Call/ Soil Test



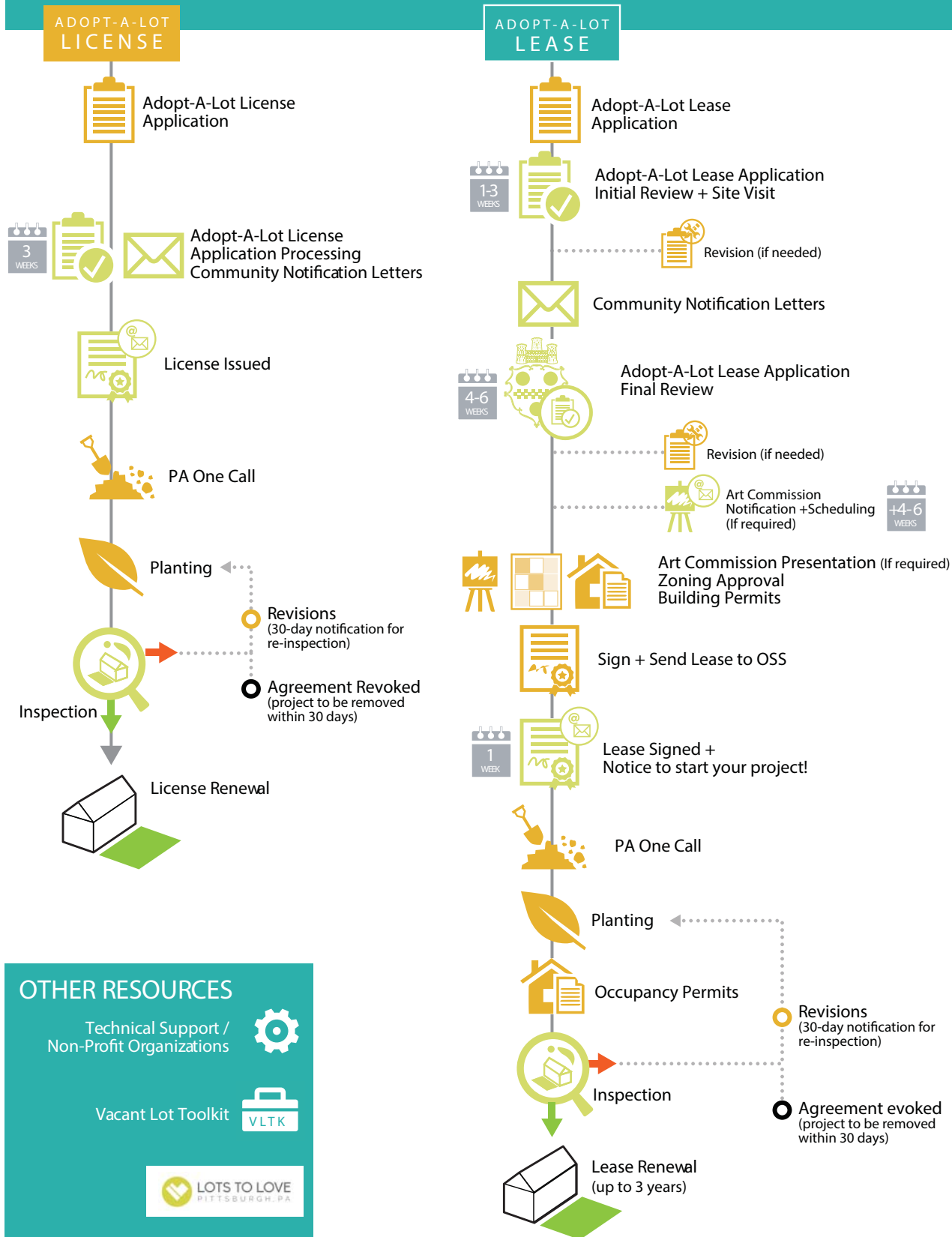
Planting



SKIP TO ADOPT-A-LOT PROGRAM TYPE

(Continued on next page)

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 to complete 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 to guide you and your project through the process.



URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

as part of the Vacant Lot Toolkit process and policy development, the URA has decided to adopt the city's process and programs. 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/VLTK 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 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 RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION**

If your proposed project is on an available City or URA lot, the OSS will send you a **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 \$1,000 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.



RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION

Submit an Adopt-A-Lot **RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATION** to gain legal access to a lot for one day to conduct a soil test. You'll receive this application from the OSS after an Intake Form review.



RIGHT-OF-ENTRY PROCESSING

The OSS will accept **RIGHT-OF-ENTRY APPLICATIONS** on a rolling basis. During the approximately **ONE WEEK** time-frame, the OSS will sign off on the application and give you a **NOTICE TO PROCEED** with your soil test via email.



RECEIVE NOTICE TO PROCEED & PERFORM + SUBMIT SOIL TEST

Once you receive a **NOTICE TO PROCEED** 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.



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. Over that threshold, failing soil tests will require the selection of a new lot.



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**



MARKET STAND

TO SELL WHAT YOU GROW ON-SITE

- **\$25 APPLICATION FEE**
- **LESS THAN \$1,000 IN SALES (NOT REVENUE)**
- **NO EMPLOYEES**

LICENSE

means 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

means 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

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

POTENTIAL SALE!

If a sale is started on the vacant lot your license 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.

ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSEADOPT-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 PITTSBURGH.PA.GOV/DCP/VLTK

**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
LEASE

- ONE YEAR LEASE, WITH A THREE YEAR RENEWAL
- EDIBLE, FLOWER, OR RAIN GARDEN USES
- INSURANCE REQUIRED
- NO SALES OR DONATION ON THE LOT



Submit an **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE APPLICATION** at your convenience on our website PITTSBURGH.PA.GOV/DCP/VLTK

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

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



EXISTING PHOTOS



NARRATIVE



SITE PLAN



BUDGET



MAINTENANCE



INSURANCE



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** at your convenience 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.



COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION LETTERS MAILED

The OSS will send notification letters to adjacent property owners, community organizations, and your city council member. See **COMMUNITY PROCESS**.



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 step 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 PERMITS** 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@PITTSBURGH.PA.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.

MAINTAIN AND GROW YOUR GARDEN

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



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.



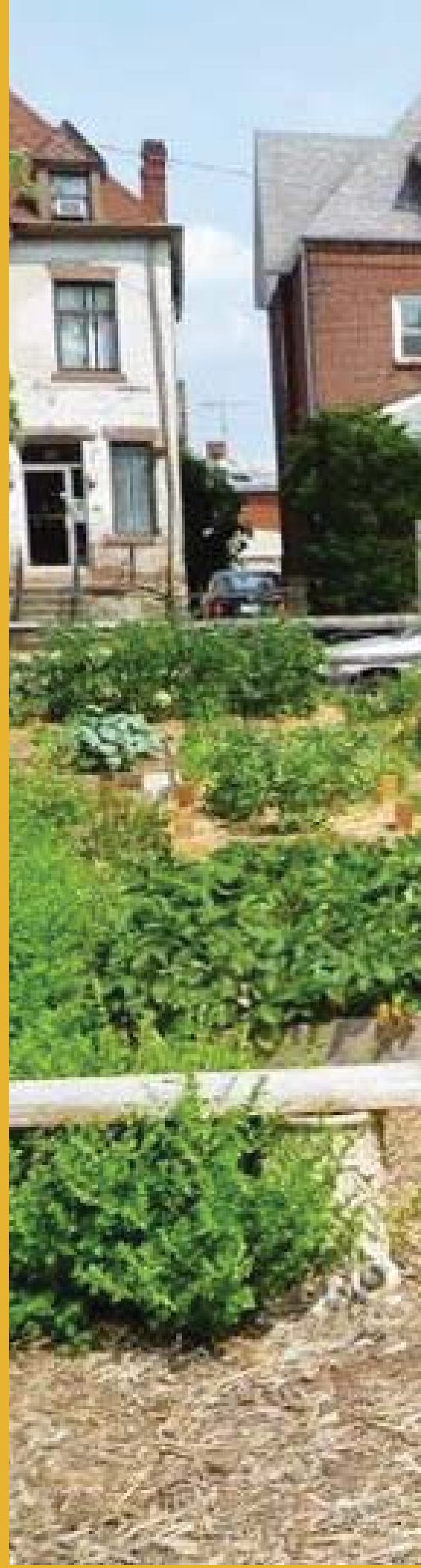
RENEW YOUR ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

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

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.





Enright Gardens, East Liberty
image: Grow Pittsburgh

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.

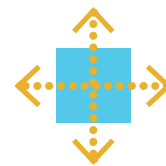
Importantly, lots should also be selected based on your proposed uses or the plants you'd like to use. For example, you shouldn't choose a lot that doesn't get direct sunshine if your goal is to grow edible plants!

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

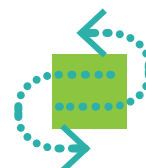
ADJACENT PROPERTIES

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



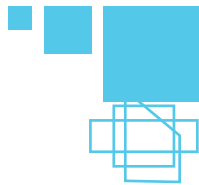
for the necessary tools? In a **RAIN GARDEN**, it is necessary to ensure that items such as bioswales or rain gardens do not pose a safety hazard. **FLOWER GARDENS** may range from sites in which no one is expected to set foot on, to those that have a path as their major feature. Examining “cow paths” 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 classifications, as an accessory use with a permit. In many, but not all zoning districts, the ordinance allows for agricultural activities with a permit. Under certain conditions, raising bees, chickens or goats may be permitted. 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 634 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.

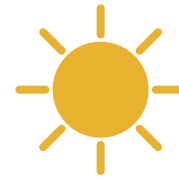
WATER






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.

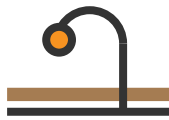
SOIL STANDARDS – Lead testing results

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 leaving the parcel. 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**

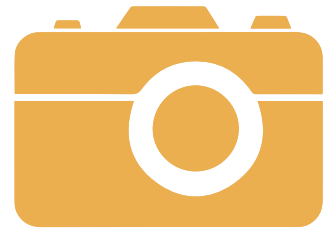


BUILDING/OCCUPANCY PERMITS

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. An occupancy permit may also be required for the use of a property. Approval is required from both the Division of Zoning and Development Review and the Department of Permits, Licenses and Inspections for any occupancy or building permit. See **ELEMENTS** or **PITTSBURGHPA.GOV/PLI/** for more information.

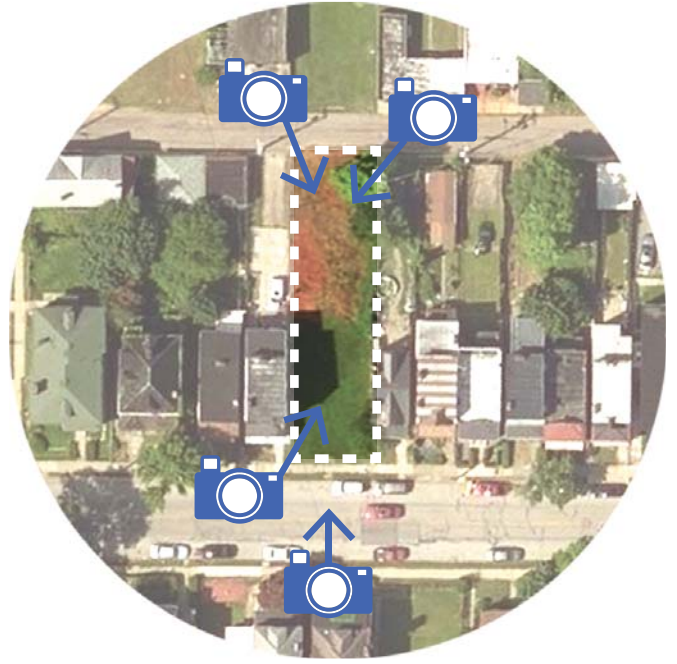
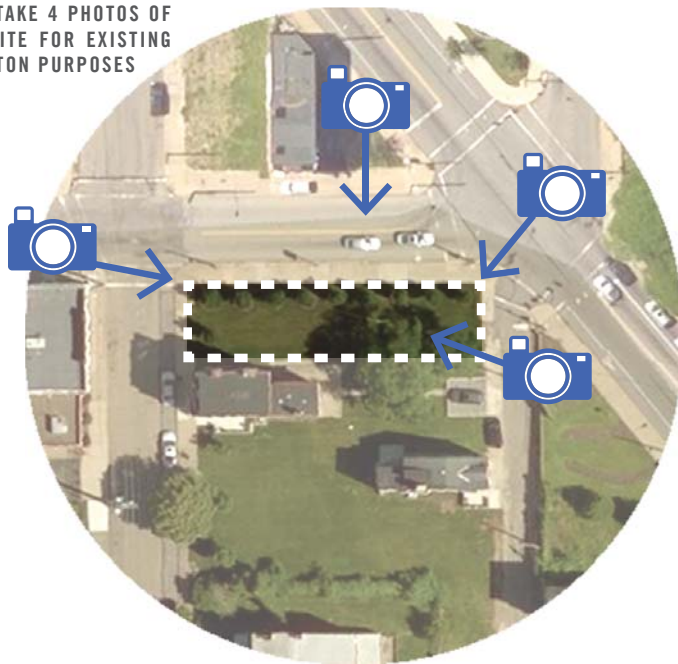
EXISTING CONDITIONS - SITE PHOTOS

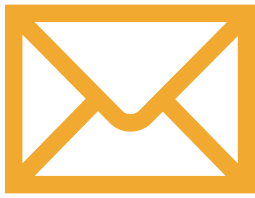
Your application should include photos taken from specific angles around the proposed vacant lot. Include additional photos of all utilities, sidewalks/steps, debris/trash, plants, or other noticeable elements if they exist on site. A minimum of four photos is required, (one from each side of your site) 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
CONDITON PURPOSES





COMMUNITY PROCESS

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE

ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

POSSIBLE PUBLIC MEETING

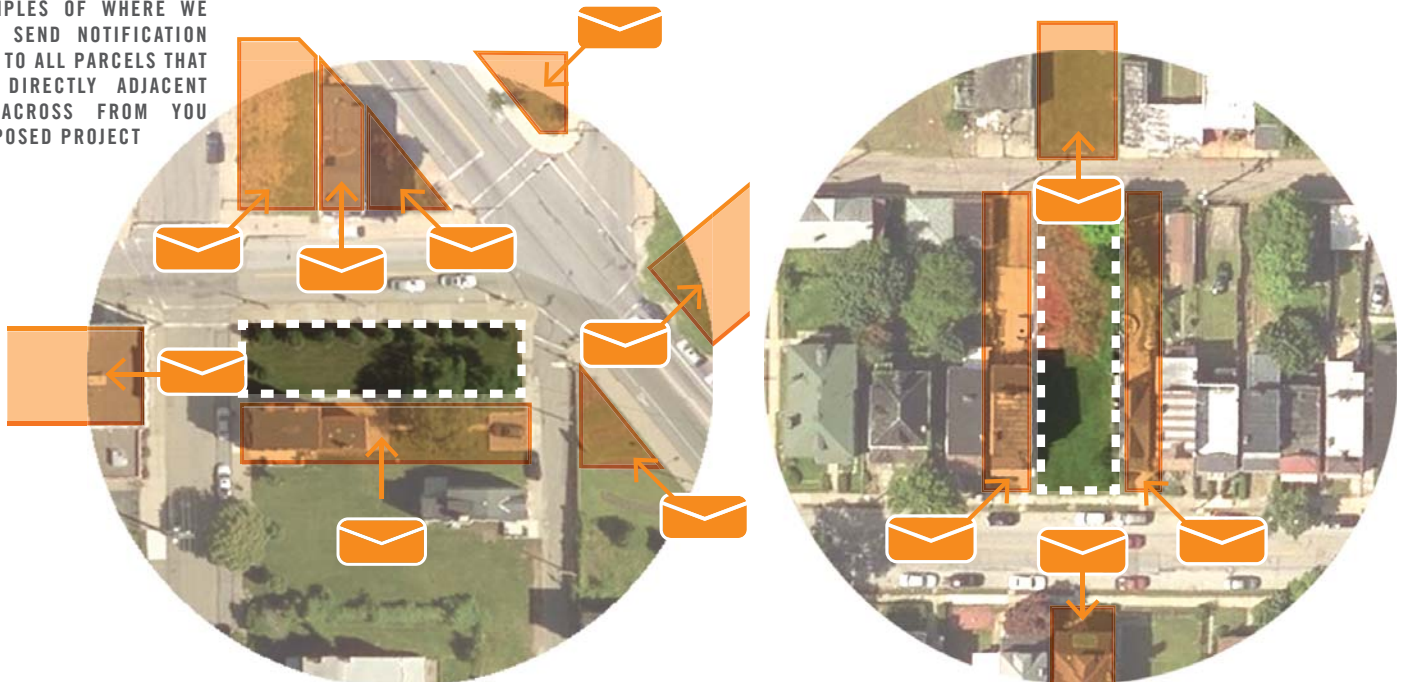
If the City receives objections to your project during the notification period, the OSS will require you hold a public meeting to present the project. After the meeting, the OSS will work with the applicant to refine the project or assist in finding a new site.

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 YOU PROPOSED PROJECT



NARRATIVE + PROGRAMMING



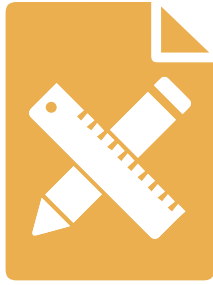
ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

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.*



SITE PLAN

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE**

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

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 non-profits can also provide design assistance. Remember to use a scale!

This guide will help to ease you through your site plan design process. Designing a site plan does not have to be the biggest stress in your Adopt-A-Lot Program process. The following steps should provide all of the information that the City needs to approve your application. As always, the OSS will be available to answer questions. Depending on the scope of your project one of two types of plans will be required:

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.

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE**

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE SITE PLAN

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**

ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE SITE PLAN

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/

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.

- 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/REALESTATE/SEARCH.ASPX

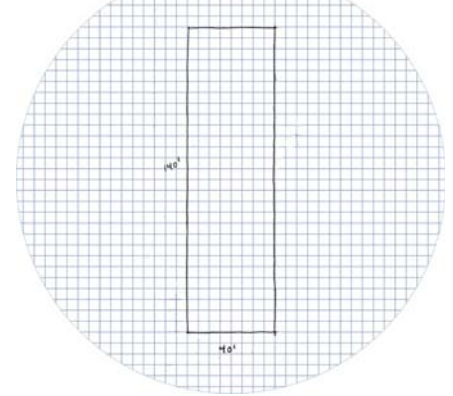
2. DETERMINE WHERE THE PROPERTY LINES ARE.

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.

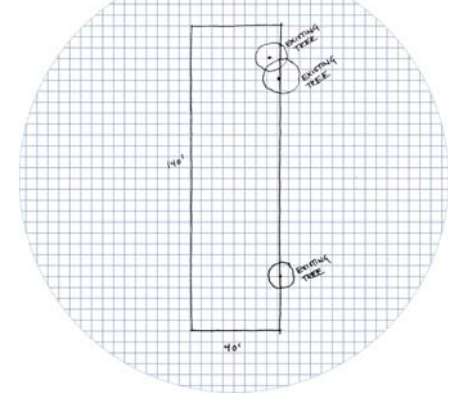
Lot boundaries/property lines



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

Use a tape measure of the appropriate size and at least two people 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.

Existing elements/planting



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 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.

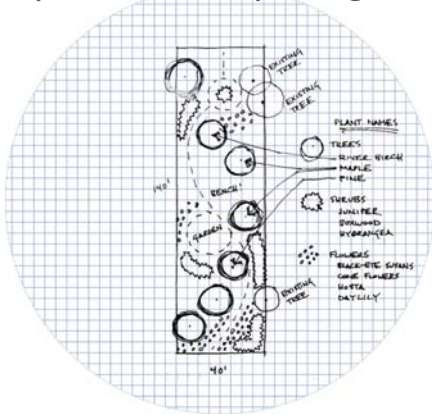
Recommended: draw the plan first in pencil in case of errors. Once the plan is completed, go back over it in pen. If you draw in pen and make an error, white out is acceptable.

5. ADD THE DETAILS TO YOUR PLAN

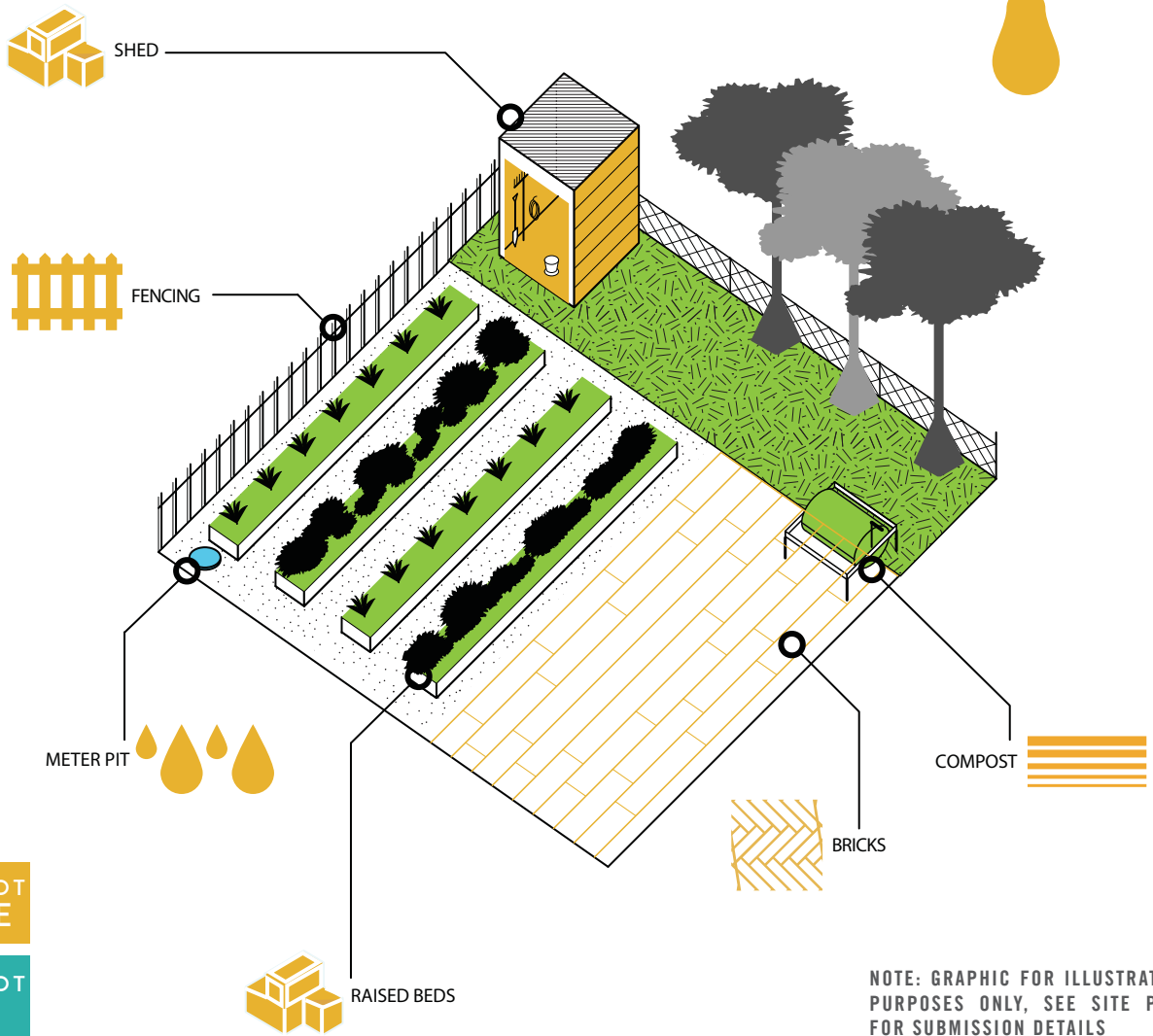
Once you have drawn the property line and proposed structures, trees and major plantings to scale, you will need to add the following items to your plan to make it complete:

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.

Proposed elements/planting



PROJECT TYPES: EDIBLE GARDENS



ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE

ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

NOTE: GRAPHIC FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES ONLY, SEE SITE PLAN FOR SUBMISSION DETAILS

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.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Grow Pittsburgh
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

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

CONSIDERATIONS

- Water



- Sun Exposure



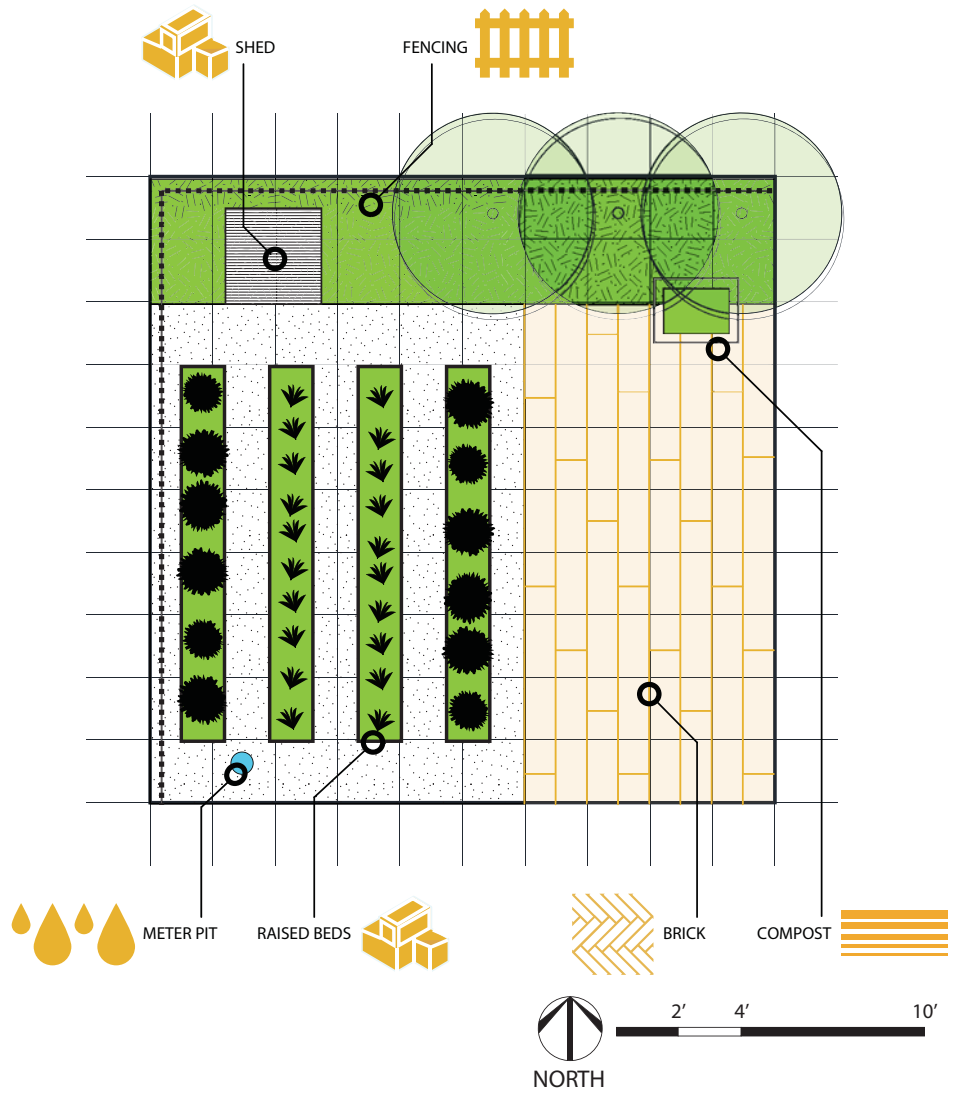
- Soil



- Size/Shape



SAMPLE SITE PLAN



LOCAL EXAMPLES

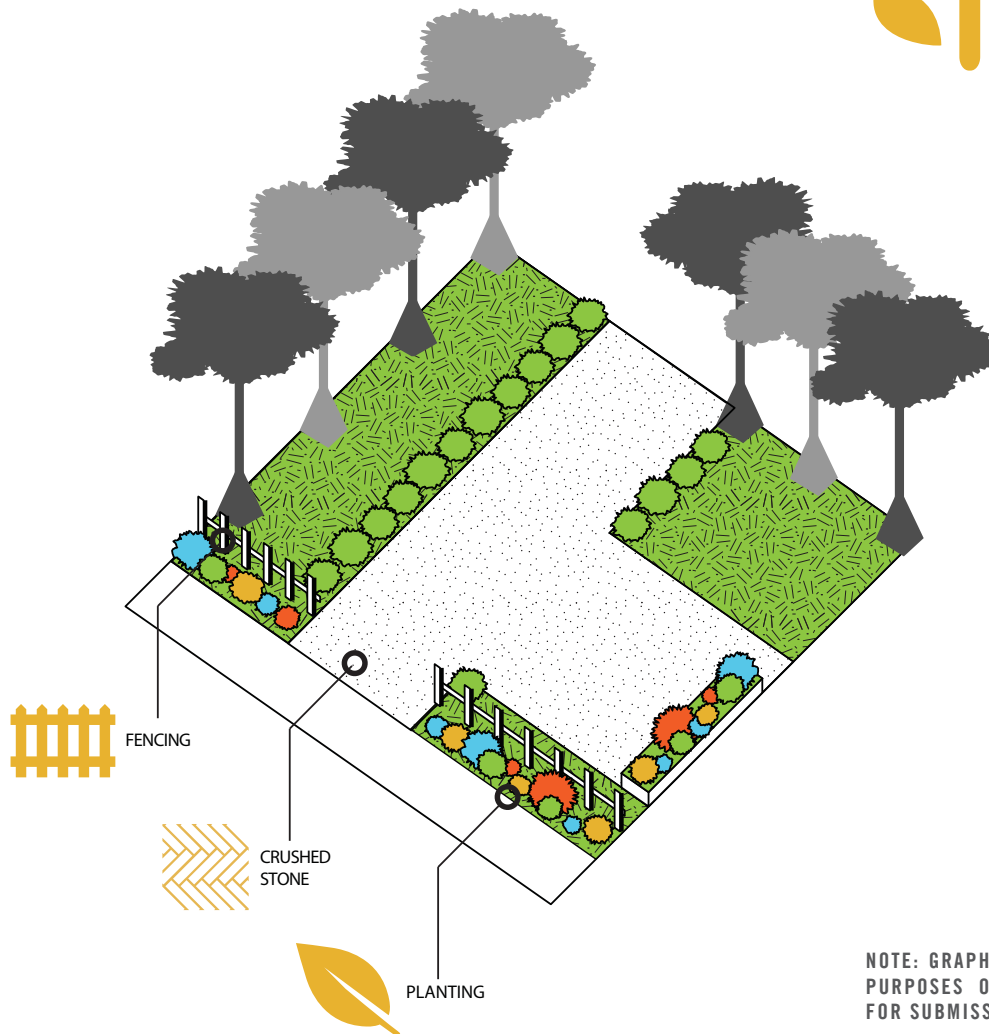


Eastfield Community Garden



Miss Mary's Garden

PROJECT TYPES: FLOWER GARDEN



ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE

ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

NOTE: GRAPHIC FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES ONLY, SEE SITE PLAN FOR SUBMISSION DETAILS

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_912.060URESASEACUS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Tree Pittsburgh
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- GTECH

CONSIDERATIONS

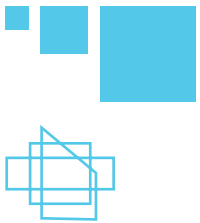
- Adjacent Properties



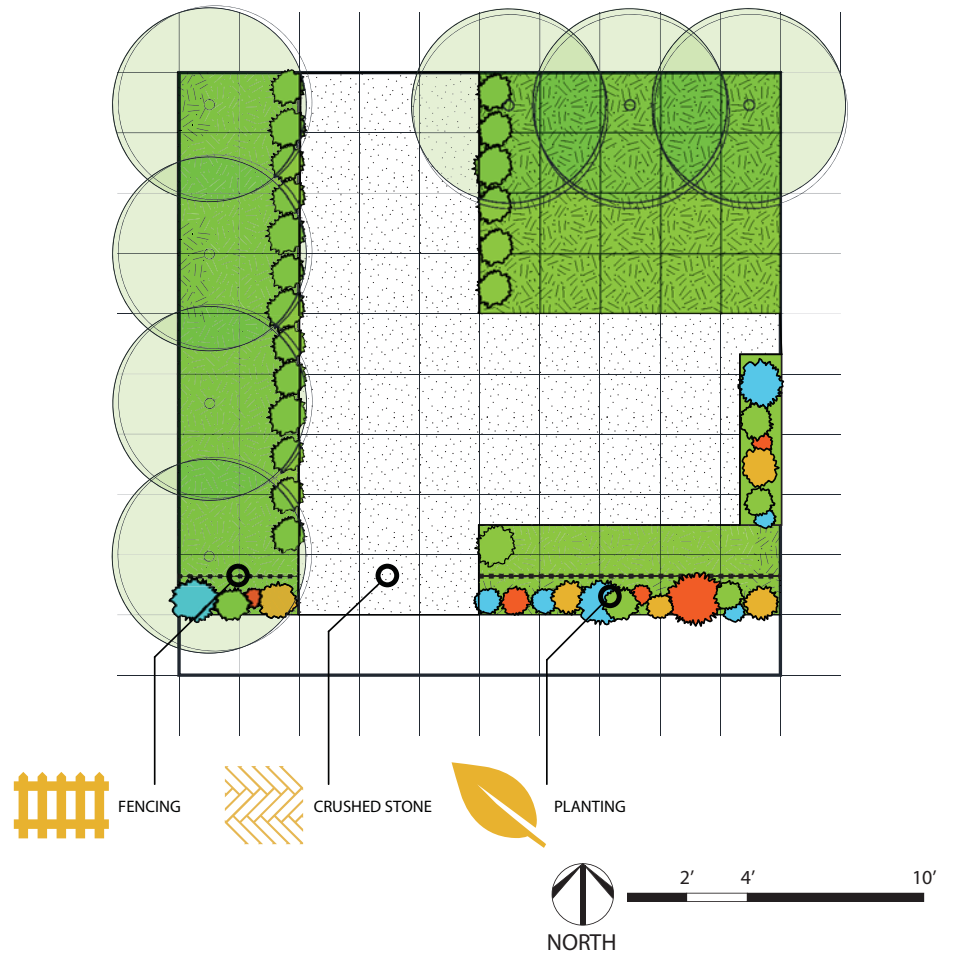
- Water



- Size/Shape



SAMPLE SITE PLAN



LOCAL EXAMPLES

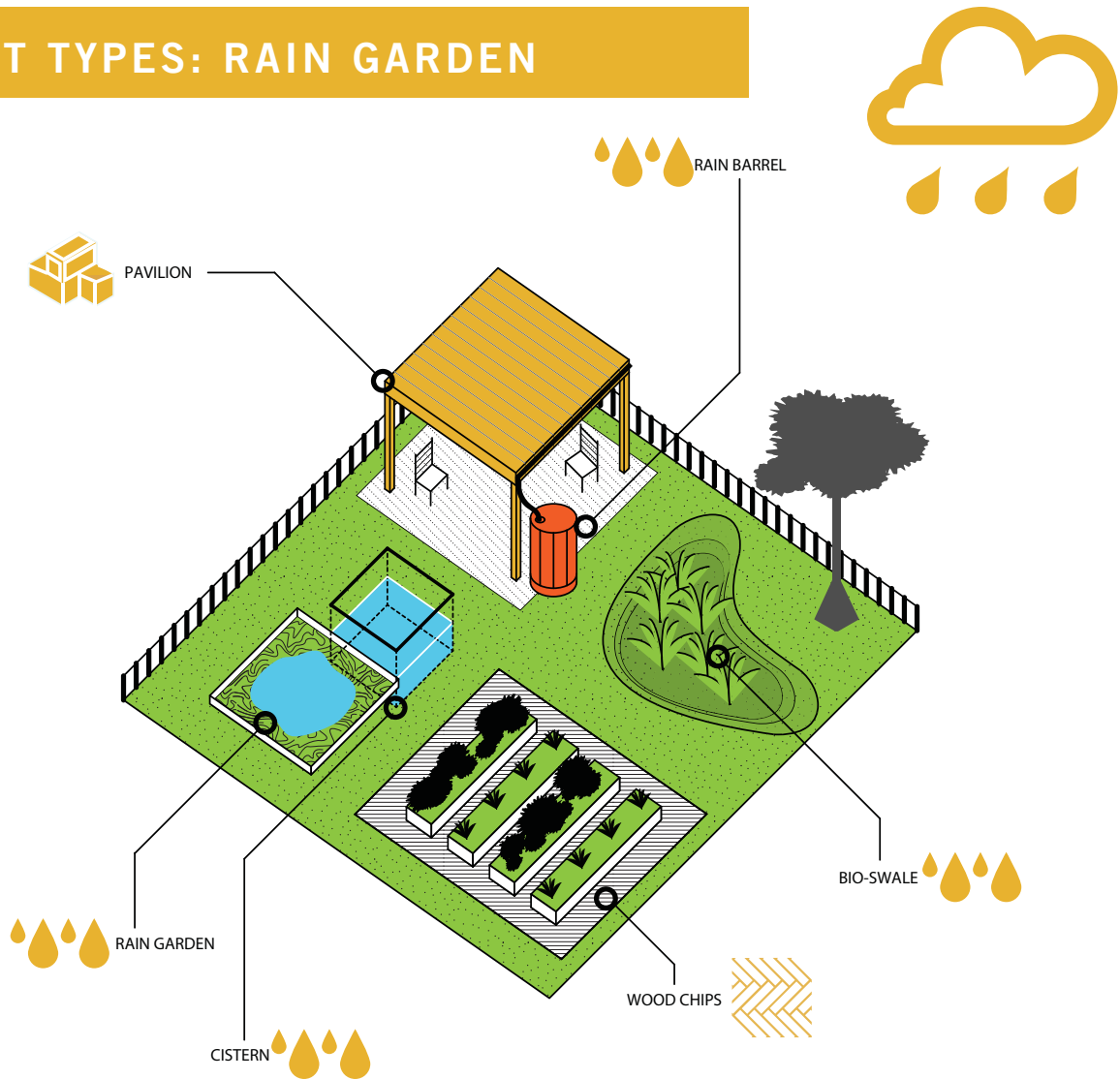


Boulevard of the Allies & Parkview:
Western PA Conservancy



Brighton Road & North Ave: Western PA Conservancy

PROJECT TYPES: RAIN GARDEN



**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

NOTE: GRAPHIC FOR ILLUSTRATION PURPOSES ONLY, SEE SITE PLAN FOR SUBMISSION DETAILS

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

- Slope



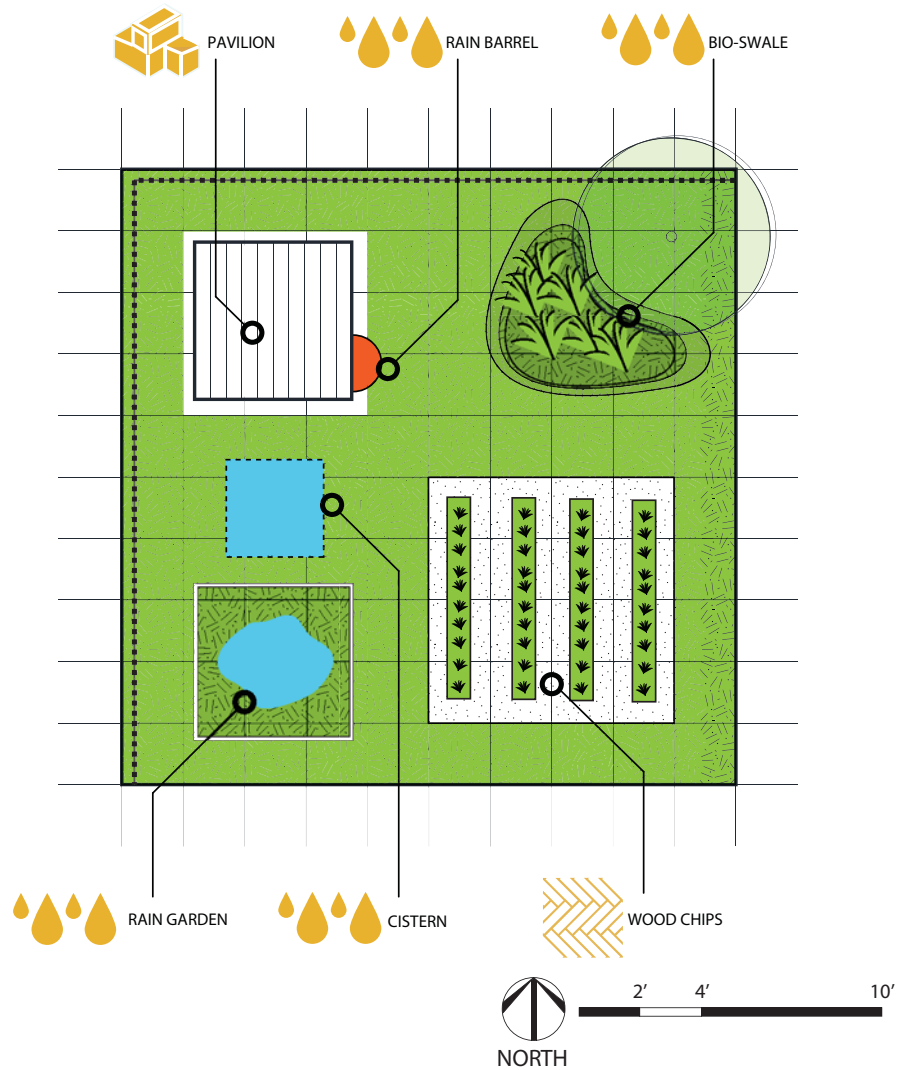
- Adjacent Properties



- Soil



SAMPLE SITE PLAN



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 you plan.

INDEX



Relative cost



Realistic maintenance



Zoning requirements



Building permit and/or Occupancy permit



Art Commission (only if element is not shown here or lot is over 10,890 square feet and/or sheds/pavilions over 120 square feet)

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE

As noted

ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

All

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



SPECIFICATIONS:

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

ADOPT-A-LOT LICENSE





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

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

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

CONSIDER:

- Incorporating rain water harvesting



PAVILION/SHADE STRUCTURE

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

OPTIONS:

- Metal
- Pre-fab
- Wood

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

CONSIDER:

- Incorporating rain water harvesting



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.

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.

STREET FACE FENCE

4 feet height this fence would be used along the street side to define the property while allowing views onto the lot, creating an appearance of being unfriendly to your neighbors.

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



ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE



PAVING/SURFACES



WOOD CHIPS

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

ADOPT-A-LOT
LICENSE



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 winterized through a process of draining.

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. The Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission maintains a list of acceptable trees at www.pittsburghpa.gov/trees/. Please note that, in most cases, existing trees will need to be protected. More information on plant selection and maintenance is available on pages 42 through 44.

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 seasonal, 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

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.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top Soil • Compost • Mushroom Manure • Composted Animal Manure • Peat Moss • Green Sand • Worm Castings Compost | <p>SPECIFICATIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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:



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



PROHIBITED ELEMENTS:

- **Signs/Placards/Naming of Vacant Lots**
- **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
- **Art** (anything designed by an artist---volunteer "decoration" does not count)
- **Memorials** of any kind (to persons, and/or ideals)
- **Fire Pits/Barbecue Grills/Pizza Ovens**
- **No Stages/Performance Platforms**
- **Concrete slabs** - exceeding 1 square feet



BUDGET



ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE

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.

INCOME	
Personal Contributions	
Start-up Grants/Loans	
Total	
EXPENSES	
Preparation	
Soil Test	
Soil Remediation (lime, cover crops, etc.)	
Printing (design package, agreements, fliers)	
Basic Items	
Water Bill	
Water System	
Tools	
Tool Storage	
Lease (if applicable)	
Liability Insurance (if applicable)	
Woodchips/Groundcover	
Bed Building Materials (wood, nails, bricks)	
Compost/Topsoil	
Plants (seeds or seedlings)	
Fencing	
Paving	
Food/Drink for Volunteers	
Total Expenses	
TOTAL BUDGET	
Total Income - Expenses	



INSURANCE

**ADOPT-A-LOT
LEASE**

An important consideration for all **ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE** projects is obtaining or being added to an existing insurance policy. This will insure that any volunteers that help create and maintain your vacant lot project are insured for life's little accidents. Although we hope these policies are not needed they are required for the execution of a lease for your vacant lot. If the lot cannot be added to your existing homeowners policy, you can explore obtaining your own insurance policy from an insurance company, or explore being added to your local community group's policy.

ACORD CERTIFICATE OF LIABILITY INSURANCE DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)
XX/XX/XXXX

THIS CERTIFICATE IS ISSUED AS A MATTER OF INFORMATION ONLY AND CONFERS 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.

IMPORTANT: If the certificate holder is an ADDITIONAL INSURED, the policy(ies) must be endorsed. IF SUBROGATION IS WAIVED, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy, certain policies may require an endorsement. A statement on this certificate does not confer rights to the certificate holder in lieu of such endorsement(s).

PRODUCER NAME ADDRESS		CONTACT NAME PHONE FAX E-MAIL ADDRESS	
INSURED NAME ADDRESS		INSURER A: INSURER B: INSURER C: INSURER D: INSURER E: INSURER F:	

COVERAGES CERTIFICATE NUMBER: XXXXXXXXXX REVISION NUMBER:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE POLICIES OF INSURANCE LISTED BELOW HAVE BEEN ISSUED TO THE INSURED NAMED ABOVE FOR THE POLICY PERIOD INDICATED. NOTWITHSTANDING ANY REQUIREMENT, TERM OR CONDITION OF ANY CONTRACT OR OTHER DOCUMENT WITH RESPECT TO WHICH THIS CERTIFICATE MAY BE ISSUED OR MAY PERTAIN, THE INSURANCE AFFORDED BY THE POLICIES DESCRIBED HEREIN IS SUBJECT TO ALL THE TERMS, EXCLUSIONS AND CONDITIONS OF SUCH POLICIES. LIMITS SHOWN MAY HAVE BEEN REDUCED BY PAID CLAIMS.

INSR / LTR	TYPE OF INSURANCE	INSR. SUBR	W/O/D	POLICY NUMBER	POLICY EFF (MM/DD/YYYY)	POLICY EXP (MM/DD/YYYY)	LIMITS
A	GENERAL LIABILITY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL GENERAL LIABILITY <input type="checkbox"/> CLAIMS-MADE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUR GEN'L AGGREGATE LIMIT APPLIES PER: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLICY <input type="checkbox"/> PRO-JECT <input type="checkbox"/> LOC			XXXXXXXXXX	XX/XX/XXXX	XX/XX/XXXX	EACH OCCURRENCE \$ 500,000 DAMAGE TO RENTED PREMISES (Per occurrence) \$ MED EXP (Any one person) \$ PERSONAL & ADV INJURY \$ GENERAL AGGREGATE \$ 1,000,000 PRODUCTS - COMP/OP AGG \$ \$
A	AUTOMOBILE LIABILITY <input type="checkbox"/> ANY AUTO <input type="checkbox"/> ALL OWNED AUTOS <input type="checkbox"/> HIRED AUTOS <input type="checkbox"/> SCHEDULED AUTOS <input type="checkbox"/> NON-OWNED AUTOS			XXXXXXXXXX	XX/XX/XXXX	XX/XX/XXXX	COMBINED SINGLE LIMIT (Per accident) \$ BODILY INJURY (Per person) \$ BODILY INJURY (Per accident) \$ 500,000 PROPERTY DAMAGE (Per accident) \$ 50,000 \$ \$ EACH OCCURRENCE \$ AGGREGATE \$ \$
B	WORKERS COMPENSATION AND EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY ANY PROPRIETOR/PARTNER/EXECUTIVE OFFICER/MEMBER EXCLUDED? <input type="checkbox"/> Y/N If yes, describe under DESCRIPTION OF OPERATIONS below			XXXXXXXXXX	XX/XX/XXXX	XX/XX/XXXX	W/ STATU-TORY LIMITS <input type="checkbox"/> OTH-ER <input type="checkbox"/> E.L. EACH ACCIDENT \$ E.L. DISEASE - EA EMPLOYEE \$ E.L. DISEASE - POLICY LIMIT \$ Each Claim \$1,000,000 Aggregate \$500,000

DESCRIPTION OF OPERATIONS / LOCATIONS / VEHICLES (Attach ACORD 101, Additional Remarks Schedule, if more space is required)

City of Pittsburgh as additional insured
Reference: Address(s) and/or (Block & Lot #'s)

CERTIFICATE HOLDER	CANCELLATION
shelly.dankoday@pittsburghpa.gov	SHOULD ANY OF THE ABOVE DESCRIBED POLICIES BE CANCELLED BEFORE THE EXPIRATION DATE THEREOF, NOTICE WILL BE DELIVERED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLICY PROVISIONS.
City of Pittsburgh Attn: Shelly Danko+Day 200 Ross Street Pittsburgh, PA 15219	AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

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 completed. 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 ADOPT-A-LOT LEASE

Having a maintenance plan is critical for the long-term success for 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 a 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

- **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 news papers can help keep weeds down when you use it in your flower or plant beds

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 pest. Some plants can attract 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/INVASIVEPLANTSINPITTSBURGH.PDF](https://pittsburghparks.org/userdocs/invasiveplantsinpittsburgh.pdf)

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.

- **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.
- **Vegetation** - remember to water weekly or once plants are established. In the fall and spring, be sure to remove any dead materials.
- **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/](https://pittsburghpa.gov/animalcontrol/)
- **Leaf/debris cleanup** – Rake leaves and debris regularly; do not allow debris to build up at your vacant lot.
- **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
- **Plants:**
- **Material:** only if element is the same, is an alternate material option (See **ELEMENTS**) and Art Commission is not required

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.

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.)
- **Quantity:** any additional numbers of items added

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



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.



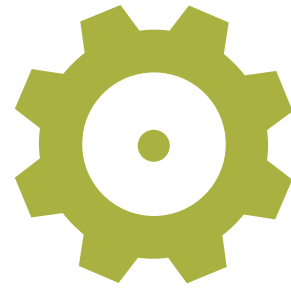


Community Greenspace Program: North Avenue and Brighton Road

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

the opportunity for existing community food gardens in Allegheny County to complete projects that contribute to their sustainability. 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. Applications are accepted annually in May.



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.

- **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



image: Pitt Serves

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



YOU/APPLICANT



OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST



VACANT LOT



VACANT LOT TOOLKIT



IDEA



EXISTING PHOTOS



NARRATIVE



SITE PLAN



BUDGET



MAINTENANCE



INSURANCE



EDIBLE GARDEN



FLOWER GARDEN



RAIN GARDEN



ZONING



BUILDING/OCCUPANCY PERMITS



ART COMMISSION



SOIL TEST



REMOVE OR RENEW GARDEN



PA ONE CALL



INSPECTION



PLANTING



FORM



LICENSE OR LEASE



CITY REVIEW TIME



EDITS



REVISION PLAN



COMMUNITY PROCESS

- DCP DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
- DPW DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
- GIS GEOPGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS
- OSS OPEN SPACE SPECIALIST
- PLI PERMITS, LICENSE, & INSPECTIONS
- PWSA PITTSBURGH WATER & SEWER AUTHORITY
- URA URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY