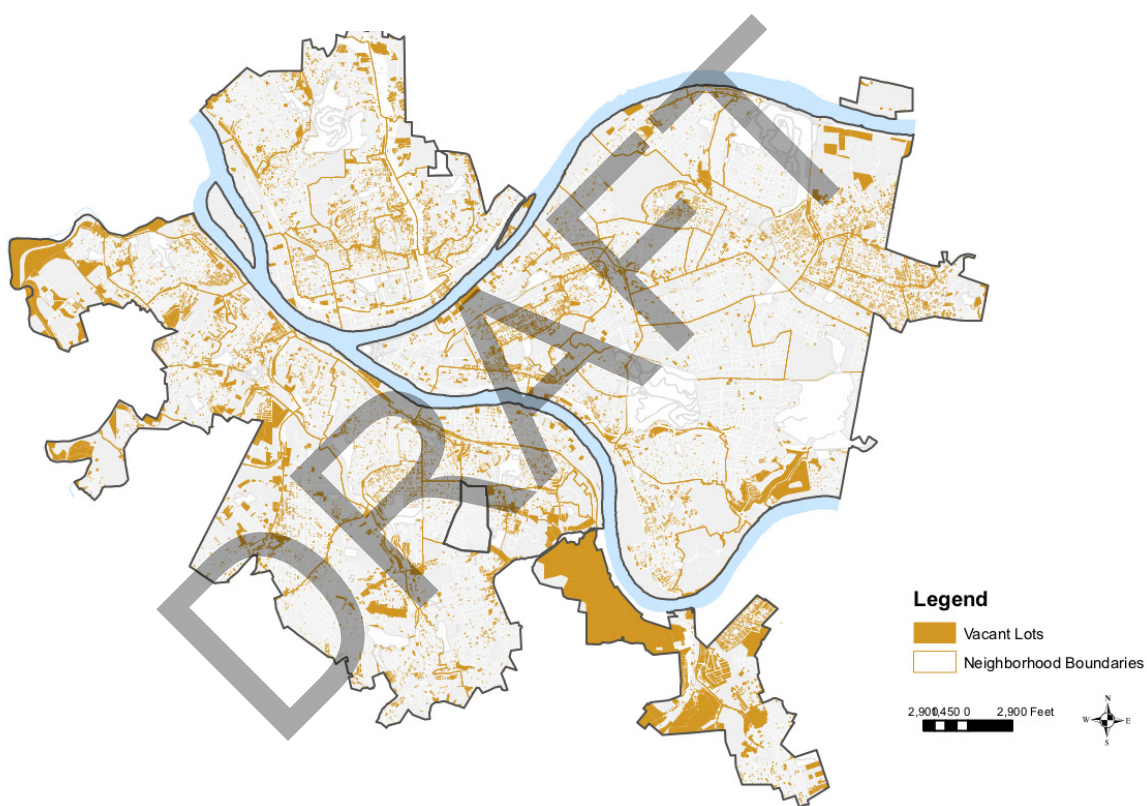


Vacant Land Management

Strategies for Equitable Vacant Property Management in the City of Pittsburgh



Source: City of Pittsburgh DCP, PASDA

White Paper

November 2018

Executive Summary

Grounded Strategies, formerly known as GTECH, works to strengthen the economic, social, and environmental health of communities by transforming land use liabilities into assets. We provide technical assistance on vacant property maintenance and greenspace design to residents, organizations, and municipalities. Grounded envisions empowered communities with access to the right tools and resources to turn challenging vacant lots into resilient greenspaces.

The City of Pittsburgh suffers from substantial blight due to the pressures exerted by macroeconomic forces of the last 75 years including deindustrialization, urban flight, and more recently, worsening income inequality. Vacant lots, a consequence of these socioeconomic changes, markedly compromise the quality of life for residents, negatively impact property values, and significantly weaken the City's tax base. However, Pittsburgh is undergoing notable change and the opportunity has never been better to address this issue. A primary example of this: in 2016, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) of Pittsburgh awarded a contract to Grounded Strategies to revamp the vacant lot maintenance process through community-based minority and women-owned businesses. This program is expected to create a social value benefit of \$2,059,532 from a \$316,500 investment by the URA. These figures are evidence of the economic development, environmental health, and social equity benefits of such investments.

This paper aims to provide a detailed outline of the history, context, and financial impact of vacant lots in Pittsburgh followed by specific recommendations for programmatic action.

DRAFT

Contents

The Status of Vacant Land in Pittsburgh.....	1
History.....	1
Current State.....	1
Financials	2
Philosophy	3
Programmatic Highlight: URA LandCare Program.....	4
Recommendations.....	5
Capacity Building Strategies.....	5
Programmatic Strategies.....	6
Conclusion.....	10

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The Status of Vacant Land in Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh is known for its resilience and grit in the face of adversity. The city has worked diligently to address the consequences of massive population loss and economic decline after the collapse of the region's steel industry. The rebuilding process has been relatively rapid for some neighborhoods, but others continue to experience socioeconomic disparities. Grounded has witnessed firsthand how land can be used to benefit neighborhoods, particularly when residents have access to well-cared-for greenspaces that improve community cohesion, restore ecological health, and support economic opportunity.

History

Before the 1960s, Allegheny County was an economic engine of the country as the epicenter of steel and coal production. However, the collapse of these industries led to an enormous contraction of the population from estimates of 676,806 in the 1950 census to today's approximation of 305,704.^{1,2} According to the 1960 and 2010 census, the City of Pittsburgh experienced a 50% drop in population. Allegheny County saw a peak of 1.62 million people in 1960 which declined to just 1.23 million in 2010. The overarching population decline in this region has led to numerous challenges for infrastructure, yet an important and often overlooked issue is the economic impact of distressed vacant land.

The steel industry laid off 153,000 people in the early 1980s, which caused a reverberation throughout the economic landscape of Allegheny. The evolution of blight follows a distinct pattern: 1) industry leaves 2) properties are abandoned as populations migrate out 3) the tax base declines 4) infrastructure and service costs exceed tax revenue and 5) disparate investments and strategies meant to improve the predicament emerge.³

As the population decreased, the city assumed ownership of

some vacant parcels. However, the municipality has neither the capacity nor the legal standing to completely address abandoned properties.^{4,5} The bigger issues lie with privately-owned lots; the city is responsible for all safety and security issues including trespassing, fire, and code enforcement.⁶ Macro trends (population and labor) and their consequences are challenging to predict. Yet, with population changes in Pittsburgh and Allegheny county of less than +/- 1% year-over-year, there is a substantial window of opportunity to make incremental changes against the issue of blight.

Current State

There are 26,743 vacant and distressed parcels without structures in the City of Pittsburgh. 8,337 (31.2%) of these parcels are city-owned vacant lots, while 16,518 (61.8%) are privately-owned vacant lots.⁷ The remaining parcels (1,888) are owned by the URA or other public entities. The majority of the City's distressed lands are under private ownership and a significant portion of the privately-owned parcels have been effectively abandoned by their owners. The unfortunate truth is that the city is not only responsible for its 8,337 vacant lots, but it is also legally required to respond to emergency requests on privately-owned lots for safety purposes.

26,743 is a staggering number. The way the current property maintenance system is structured does not allocate enough capacity to maintain all vacant lots. This results in overgrown vacant lots concentrated in our most vulnerable communities. These overgrown lots have numerous detrimental effects: they attract crime, lower property values, and lower the quality of life for residents who live and work near them.

Further complicating this issue is the fact that residents cannot legally access overgrown lots to remedy the situation. They are at the mercy of city authorities to maintain vacant lots as capacity allows it. Communities facing challenges with neighborhood stability and physical livability get stuck in a cycle of disinvestment.

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Financials

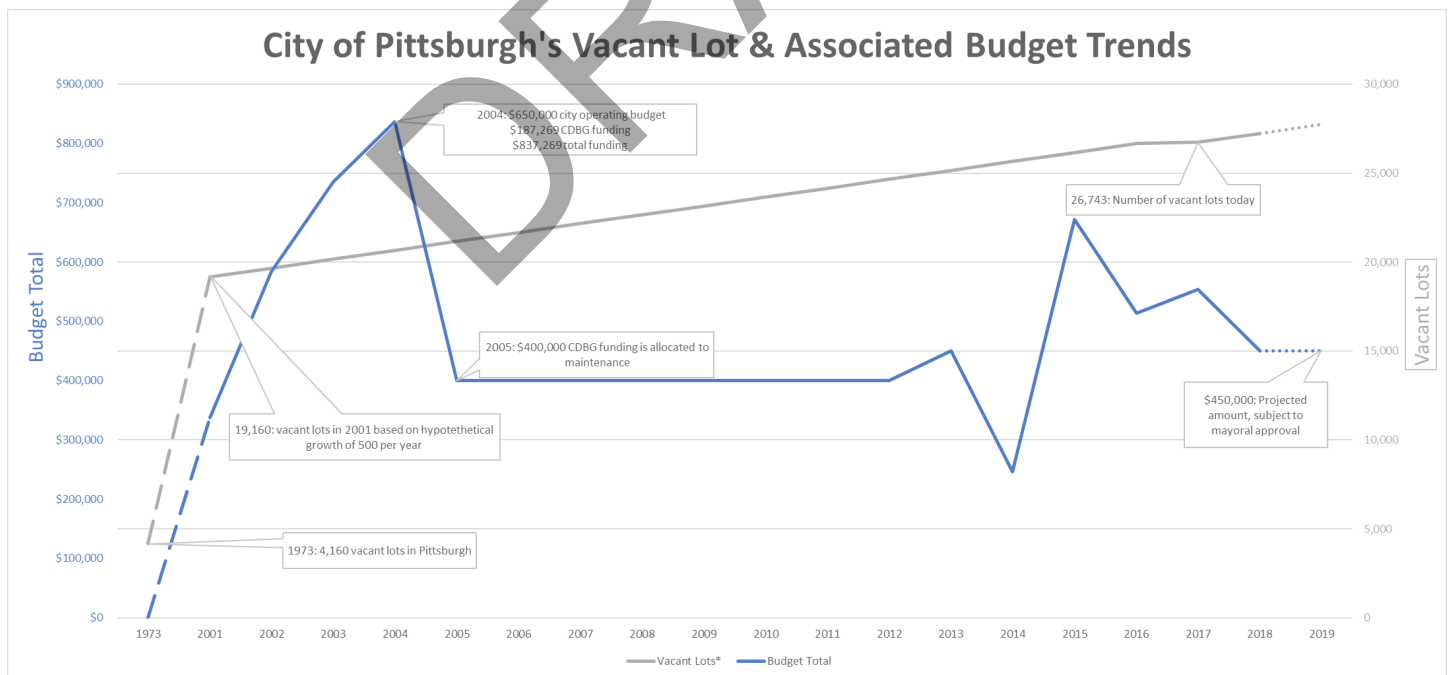
Vacant land costs the City millions of dollars annually. Meanwhile, the City allocates only \$450,000 in its operating budget per year.⁸ The direct costs to taxpayers include over \$2 million for public services like fire response, police surveillance, and code enforcement. The indirect costs result from tax delinquency, the resulting loss of tax revenue, and decreased property values. Privately -owned, tax-delinquent land accounts for a \$2.3 million annual loss in revenues.⁹ Additionally, there have been estimates of \$226 million in lost property value due to the negative impact vacant lots have on local real estate markets.¹⁰ Inadequately maintained vacant land exacerbates these indirect costs and illustrates why a \$450,000 a year is simply not a sufficient level of funding. For each additional dollar invested in improving the vacant land maintenance system financial benefits are generated that reduce direct costs while improving property values.

For over 35 years, the City of Pittsburgh has had one contractor to provide land maintenance services for its entire vacant property portfolio. Based on available City operating budgets dating back to 2001, the amount of dedicated resources, funding, and staff have varied but the available capacity has never matched the need. The budget and source for vacant land maintenance have fluctuated over time, illustrating a lack of clear and consistent priorities. In the last 20 years, the maximum amount the City has allocated to vacant land maintenance for one year has been \$837,269. Even at the highest amount allocated, this only provides

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approximately \$32 per vacant lot in Pittsburgh. That's equivalent to one grass cutting per year. The average contract amount has been closer to \$400,000, or \$15 per vacant lot. These estimates do not consider the work required by the City to stabilize private property, a figure double the amount of city-owned lots.

From 2001-2013, the City funded the provision of vacant lot maintenance through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Then in 2014, CDBG funding was disallowed for vacant lot maintenance. According to the 2018 operating budget, the three taxing bodies (City, School District, and County) have \$450,000 allocated for land maintenance services. Over the past twenty years, the funding sources have been inconsistent and varied. The City itself did not allocate any money from



* In 1973, the National Tax Journal reported there were 3,200 tax delinquent properties in Pittsburgh; approximately 13% of these properties were vacant land and an additional 10% had unknown land use. The report stated the City of Pittsburgh acquired between 200 to 500 lots per year based on vacancy rates. Using these figures as a proxy for the growth of vacant lots in Pittsburgh, the above trendlines were produced. Assuming there were 4,160 vacant lots in 1973 with +500/year growth, this yields approximately 27,000 vacant lots in 2018.

2005 – 2013, instead opting to use CDBG funding for maintenance of vacant land owned by the city.

Philosophy

This paper outlines the challenges and opportunities related to the City of Pittsburgh's vacant property maintenance system. We hope to set expectations, align priorities, and establish a commitment to proactively address the limitations within the context of existing framework. Grounded Strategies is a local nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance to community members, organizations, and municipalities to fight against the detrimental economic, social, and environmental impacts of vacant lots. In some cases, this means working to transition vacant lots into thriving community spaces, in others, it results in designing interventions which assist those who are directly affected by the presence of vacant land.

Grounded recognizes how critical land is to a stable community - land is ever present, visible, yet in fixed supply. Its condition,

quality, and appearance have a documented correlation to the physical and mental wellbeing of surrounding residents. Grounded uses green and open space projects to encourage small, incremental actions that gain momentum and inform social, economic, and environmental efforts to improve community health.

Currently, the City's process works reactively, responding to property issues as they arise and rarely providing much-needed and beneficial routine maintenance. This reactive approach misses opportunities to stabilize vacant properties, disproportionately affects low- to moderate-income communities, decreases adjacent property values, and costs the City more and more money over time. Given the steady population and relative predictability of labor trends, the Pittsburgh Land Bank presents an enormous opportunity to take a proactive approach with the ability to hold land tax-free, revitalize it, then leverage market forces to lease it out. Grounded supports an active and functional Land Bank in Pittsburgh as a highly effective complement to other strategies.

When ignored, vacant lots become dumping grounds for debris and abandoned vehicles. Lack of city-wide coordination results in irregular maintenance patterns.

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Programmatic Highlight: URA LandCare Program

Vacant lots often contribute to images of blight, abandonment, and distress in Pittsburgh's most vulnerable neighborhoods. In 2016, the URA Board asserted its commitment to resolving this issue and hired Grounded Strategies to plan, develop, and implement a localized maintenance system. Grounded was contracted to redesign the property maintenance system for the URA's vacant property portfolio, this resulted in the creation of the LandCare program.

Due to the increased understanding of the relationship between economic development, land use, and social equity, LandCare overhauled current and long-standing processes. The program has enabled small, community-based and minority-led businesses to provide services in their communities in a transparent and accountable way while pursuing a mutually beneficial partnership with the URA. The increase in work opportunity and improved standards for property stewardship have transformed the URA's process for property maintenance. Currently, eight minority- and women-led contractors maintain roughly 400 vacant lots on a monthly basis.

The URA LandCare program has been operating for two years. It has had a profound impact on participating small businesses

and organizations. Residents also recognize the change; citing increased community stewardship resulting from the improvements to vacant land in their neighborhood. The economic and social opportunities for businesses and residents result in positive, long-term outcomes. Better earnings prospects for small businesses, more community beautification activities, and workforce development opportunities for local employees are all co-benefits which contribute to enhanced community engagement.

There are many lessons learned, best practices, and strategies from the LandCare program that can be used to inform a strategic approach at the City-level. During the process of benchmarking and early investigation, many parallel comparisons were made to the City of Pittsburgh system as well as other cities across the country. There are numerous opportunities to expand the program and build out the capacity of vacant lot maintenance services both inside and outside City government. The exact property maintenance model cannot be applied but with more time to study the issue and understand the complexity of vacant property maintenance, an approach can be created that reaches the City's goals for providing high-quality services to its residents. Before the property system refresh, the URA managed the maintenance of over 1,400 vacant lots and over 50 vacant structures. URA-owned vacant lots are distributed across the City of Pittsburgh but the highest concentrations occur in five communities: Manchester, Hill District, Hazelwood, Larimer, and Homewood.



Recommendations

Grounded's recommendations for vacant property maintenance are based on our work with residents, community groups, and small businesses eager to see vacant properties routinely maintained. Beyond citing the need for upkeep, there is also a clear interest among stakeholders to directly participate in the work of maintaining vacant properties in their communities.

Regardless of what steps are taken moving forward, there are numerous all-encompassing needs associated with vacant land. Building on the work started by the URA, City Planning, and the Pittsburgh Land Bank, we recommend layering a variety of approaches to increase maintenance of publicly-owned vacant property. Maintaining all public land and returning it to a healthy state that restores neighborhood cohesion and pride should be the primary goal. The following recommendations include organizational systems improvements and evidence-based programmatic opportunities. The next section is a snapshot of the universal needs for capacity building of vacant land care in Pittsburgh. The following section details programmatic opportunities, which are proven methods to increase equity, opportunity, and community impact through intentional vacant land maintenance and activation.

Capacity Building Strategies

The City's current system demonstrates a lack of capacity to address vacant property challenges. Currently, the City does not have the resources to maintain all of its vacant property. Our recommendations are based on the guiding principle that all land must be maintained in an economically beneficial, environmentally minded, and equitably distributed way. At a minimum, Pittsburgh must establish a stable revenue source to proactively maintain all vacant land and increase transparency for the maintenance process.

1. Increase Funding

The City of Pittsburgh does not allocate sufficient funding for vacant land maintenance in its operating budget. By not being proactive about this issue, citizens are paying millions in tax dollars annually to abate unsafe vacant property. In effect, the City is perpetuating the status quo. The City needs to adopt a budget that can provide the resources necessary to maintain vacant land.

Based on how vacant lot maintenance is currently structured, where there is minimal maintenance provided by one contractor the approximate cost is \$500 a year per lot to maintain a vacant parcel. For the city's privately-held inventory, this would require

a budget of \$4,168,500. We recognize that this is a significant request and urge the City to consider how this budget impacts more than just land. Vacant land maintenance has numerous co-benefits for proximal community members: whether it be a young adult seeking a job opportunity, a CDC showcasing their community, or a social group seeking a meeting place. All of these needs can be met with vacant parcels. Investments in vacant land maintenance are proven to have a significant impact on mental health, crime, and property values. Maintenance is the first step to reclaiming neglected space and stabilizing a community.

2. Standardized Inventory Management

Improvements made to the vacant land maintenance system must be data-driven and strategic. The URA and City Planning have started sorting through the property inventory at a high level to understand which properties can be held, developed, and pushed to green. Another phase of this planning is to identify vacant lots that are favorable for the transition of care to resident stewards who are willing and interested in maintaining them. This will create cost savings for the City by transferring the responsibility of maintenance to a resident. In addition to identifying potential lots for community-level property maintenance, lots that are suited for higher impact greenspace projects (such as parklets or community gardens) through the Adopt-A-Lot process would be identified and some of the ground-level work started in order to prepare them for community ownership.

3. Establish a Single Point of Contact

Many of the challenges related to the vacant property maintenance process stem from the lack of concentrated oversight by one single authority. There should be a single point of contact that streamlines questions, tests and adjusts programs, evaluates policy change, and oversees the comprehensive approach to vacant land stewardship. While land maintenance does require coordination among multiple departments and organizations, one entity should be charged with updating and overseeing a proactive system of maintenance. Furthermore, this single municipal entity should be responsible for organizing a publicly-available database, responding to maintenance-related inquiries, evaluating programmatic changes, and continually developing a comprehensive approach to vacant land stewardship. These cross-functional priorities within the city should be aligned with the goals of striving to be proactive, people-centric, and policy-driven.

Programmatic Strategies

The next section outlines strategies for a comprehensive approach to tackling vacant land management. Vacant land represents a challenge and an opportunity. The following ideas share approaches that capitalize on the unique position of small businesses, residents, and community groups to work with the City to reclaim and stabilize vacant and abandoned property. A graphic table accompanies each recommendation, summarizing its resource needs, partnership potential, and other features.

Mow to Own: Returning Vacant Parcels to Tax Rolls

Overview:

Mow to Own programs offer residents an opportunity to take possession of publicly-held or tax delinquent land at a low cost. This program is preferable for Pittsburgh because it decreases the burden of property maintenance for the City while codifying a system for returning delinquent lots to the City’s tax rolls. In practice, Mow to Own connects residents with properties in their neighborhood. Predetermined criteria specify the types of eligible lots. There is a precedent for criteria for these spaces to be adjacent to, part of, and beyond the applicant’s property. These criteria would also specify minimum and maximum lot values and sizes; including privately-held property.

Residents apply to the program to maintain the vacant property for as long as three years with regular lawn mowing to receive a credit towards the purchase. Applicants would receive a \$25.00 credit towards the purchase for each mowing or leaf removal over a three-year period, with a maximum credit of \$1,350.00. If the value of the property exceeds the maximum credit amount, the participant will pay the difference. Mow to Own has the advantage of working in conjunction with other programs and funding sources, such as Adopt-a-Lot, the city’s taxing bodies, and the land authority.








Implementation:

City Council would need to approve a new ordinance that would create the Mow to Own program and allow tax-delinquent properties to be “sold” to neighbors who want the property and are willing to take care of it. Department of Public Works or another contractor will provide a free cut before the applicant takes over maintenance. A Mow to Own program would require coordination among the tax department, Department of Public Works, and Financial Department. A Mow to Own option offers the opportunity to develop an expedited and simplified process in contrast to the current Adopt-a-Lot procedure and would qualify maintenance as a land use project. This option would allow inspection concurrently with mowing to reduce revoked agreements or required reinspection within the Adopt-a-Lot process.

Impact:

Mow to Own programs reward residents for tending to neighboring properties while addressing city-wide blight. It increases ownership and pride in the community and provides uniform care to vacant lots. The Mow to Own program would provide an opportunity for residents who are not eligible for traditional side yard programs and provide an innovative means to increase individual wealth for

Scale	Investment	Implementation Difficulty	Economic Return	Partner
Household	Minimal	Minimal	Medium	Adopt-A-Lot
				

residents willing and interested in caring for a vacant lot. Mow to Own programs have improved neighborhood stability in cities like St. Louis, Columbus, and Memphis. In Baton Rouge, the Mow to Own program helps to expedite the property sales process and reward the efforts of those caring for a vacant property. Ultimately, transferring ownership from the city to a private entity reduces the negative impact of vacant land on distressed communities and renews tax revenue.

Small Business Contractors for High-Level Maintenance

Overview:

To ensure all vacant land is maintained consistently, the pool of qualified service providers must be expanded to include the opportunity for small business and community groups to participate. Across the city, small businesses are eager and interested in helping the City maintain and steward vacant lots. The LandCare program, designed by Grounded and operated by the URA, awards contracts to community-based organizations in order to maintain over 400 URA-owned properties on a monthly basis.

To scale a similar framework to the rest of the City, Pittsburgh would be geographically divided to create numerous bundles of vacant land that contractors would bid to maintain. Maintenance would occur on a 4-week cycle year-round. This community engagement model utilizes a cloud-based software to increase transparency and accountability.



Implementation:

Proactive maintenance of publicly and privately held lots would require an increase to the City’s maintenance budget and dedicated technical assistance to small businesses participating in land maintenance. Reactive maintenance is the status quo, which has resulted in substantial public expenditure for municipal services as outlined below. Incentivizing competition among small-scale minority and women-owned contractors is an actionable step toward promoting equity. Furthermore, a competitive contracting process for small businesses is a stimulating market-based approach to high-quality maintenance.

Impact:

The current costs of reactive maintenance have been covered exhaustively and are undoubtedly imposing. In 2012, combined estimated costs of police, fire, and code enforcement calls was \$10.7 million. Police enforcement was \$6.4 million alone, a troublesome figure for the city’s taxpayers considering that the programmatic capacity exists to prevent such expenses. Compounding that, there was also \$8.6 million in lost tax revenue due to delinquency. These figures are before incorporating impact on property values in the real-estate market.

Scale	Investment	Implementation Difficulty	Economic Return	Partner
Municipal	Significant	Moderate	High	URA

As a response to this crisis, Grounded investigated the impact of the URA LandCare Program in May 2018. Grounded found that for every \$1 invested in greening and cleaning vacant lots, there is a \$6.51 return on investment. By embedding the work in communities where small businesses are seeking opportunities for growth and opportunity, the program has a co-benefit of supporting small business development and increasing accountability among service providers. These co-benefits are realized in local economic development, labor force development, and social engagement indicators.

Community Stewardship for the Maintenance of Existing/Abandoned Greenspace

Overview:

One approach that has been piloted in Homewood is an incentive-based model that provides safety net resources in exchange for the maintenance of green and open space. This solution stimulates a market-based approach within the community, sustaining public stewardship by providing incentives as recognition of residents’ investments in their neighborhoods and contributions to community health. Residents can earn credits that can be redeemed for safety net resources, such as utility payments, bus passes, and meal kits. In addition to the incentive structure, participants are connected to a network of active neighbors invested in their community. This approach provides training opportunities and equipment necessary to carry out the work. The co-benefits include increased civic engagement, an expanded resource network, and supported environmental sustainability.








While it is always our intention to build community capacity for long-term stewardship of activated greenspace, there are many unforeseen circumstances that can inhibit a community’s ability to steward existing greenspace. However, sometimes community groups lose individual organizing forces, leaving behind needed stewardship. Due to this uncertainty, a flexible framework of reward mechanisms for community upkeep needs to be implemented and sustained.

Implementation:

This program is currently being piloted through the CommunityCare program at Grounded. The model has been successful at engaging residents in over 400 hours of green and open space stewardship. We would love to explore its expansion to the rest of the City. Programmatically, there is a program manager that oversees maintenance and time banking, a training partner, and a period of resident-input prior to implementation to identify priority sites in need of an active steward. A position should be created to focus on blight elimination work, dedicated to recruiting stewards, developing further incentives, managing the timebank payroll, and establishing and expanding maintenance partnerships with the City.

Impact:

This program engages residents within communities impacted by the lack of green investment and/or maintenance, and equips them with the skills necessary to respond. Reducing barriers to participation via incentivisation encourages residents to increase their level of community involvement, furthering their ability to be a part of a system of change and increase self-sufficiency all within their neighborhood. Building the capacity of this program would demonstrate a long-term commitment to current and future stewards who have invested their time in the long-term sustainability their communities.

Scale	Investment	Implementation Difficulty	Economic Return	Partner
Neighborhood 	Moderate 	Minimal 	Medium 	City  + Foundation Partner

Technical Assistance for Resident-Driven Vacant Land Implementation

Overview:

In 2015, Pittsburgh’s policies and processes were refined to provide interim reuse of city-owned vacant lots through the Adopt-A-Lot program. While this clarified the pathway that community groups and residents had to take in order to reclaim vacant land, it also created many barriers to participation. In some ways, the process became less accessible by increasing standards for residents. However, that increase in expectations was not met with any kind of assistance from the City to ensure that residents would engage in new greenspace projects on vacant lots. For the Adopt-A-Lot program to live up to its full potential, funding and technical assistance must be provided to those participating in the process. Grounded recommends that the City match residents’ commitment to beautifying their neighborhood by providing resident vacant lot “Ambassadors” with resources and materials to carry out their vision.

The inventory of vacant lots across the city can be used to determine appropriate sites for green investments. Then community development and volunteer groups can work in cooperation with city officials to turn vacant lots into green sites. Based on community request, the vacant sites have transformed into parks, memorial gardens to commemorate victims of violence, community gardens, public art, and more.

Under this model, building from the City’s previous Green Up Program, the city purchases the materials and offers training to residents so that they can be stewards of the land. This effort is overseen by an independent contractor of the city - providing technical assistance and opportunities for learning at each stage of the process. With an increase in the number of targeted demolitions, there must be an intentional and holistic approach to address the vacant parcels left behind and activate them before they become a liability. Under this model, residents get to decide and drive the process while receiving technical support from the City, encouraging higher levels of engagement.



Support would include site selection, soil sampling, community-inclusive design, coordination of heavy site work, oversight of material selection and procurement, volunteer day events and implementation oversight.

Implementation:






A portion of the City budget would need to allocate funds for the support and management of this program. A predetermined number of projects per district annually would help identify the level of funding. This would require interdepartmental cooperation between the Department of Public Works, Real Estate and Finance department, and would need a dedicated Technical Assistance consultant.

Impact:

Transitioning vacant lots from eyesores into carefully planned greenspaces for use by the community has a documented effect on residents’ health and wellbeing. The process of transitioning a vacant lot brings a community closer and the finished site is a product of hard work, dedication, collaboration, and pride. In an evaluation of Grounded’s Ambassador Model, which recruits residents to reclaim vacant property, 74% of community members who responded to our survey felt more pride in the area’s appearance as a result of the newly designed greenspaces. Nearly half of community residents surveyed were more encouraged to walk around the neighborhood and 38% of residents surveyed say they talk to their neighbors more as a result of vacant land activation.

Scale	Investment	Implementation Difficulty	Economic Return	Partner
Municipal	Minimal	Moderate	Medium	Interdepartmental

Programmatic Strategies Summary Table

	Reduces Cost of Maintenance	Stabilizes Existing Vacant Lots	Community- Centered	Activates Vacant Lots	Training for Participants
					
Mow to Own Program	✓	✓			
Small Business Maintenance Contractors		✓	✓		✓
Community Stewardship for Existing/Abandoned Greenspace		✓	✓	✓	✓
Technical Assistance for Resident-Driven Vacant Land Implementation	✓		✓	✓	✓



Reduces Cost of Maintenance

Redistributes the burden of maintenance to residents interested and willing to participate.



Stabilizes Existing Vacant Lots

Provides routine care and oversight to vacant lots, preventing future occurrences of dumping.



Community-Centered

Prioritizes community-based participants and outcomes. Benefits are realized at a neighborhood scale.



Activates Vacant Lots

Project goes beyond maintenance to beautify and increase use of space, e.g. community garden or parklet.



Training for Participants

Participants build skills through the program via job training and technical knowledge.

Conclusion

There are more vacant lots in the City of Pittsburgh than one entity alone can maintain. A comprehensive solution will be iterative, innovative, and draw from the unique strengths of Pittsburgh's resilient communities. All adjustments and updates must produce equitable outcomes that increase social and economic opportunity for all residents. A solution that does not engage community members, stimulate the local economy, develop leaders, focus on small businesses, or target our most vulnerable communities to help tackle this problem is not up to the standards of Grounded, the City, or its residents. Each of the recommendations presented here are proven to significantly improve the collective well-being of residents in distressed communities. Simultaneously, no single recommendation is a one-size-fits-all solution. Coordinated implementation alongside complementary municipal resources is the ideal approach. However, the City has not provided the necessary resources to combat this crisis or attempted to implement modified strategies. Incremental change is the only way forward. The first step towards doing so is continued experimentation by designing and piloting programs with City support.

Grounded is embedded in the challenge of vacant lot maintenance and would welcome the opportunity to dive deeper. Implementation begins with conversations that seek to align priorities and establish complementary programs. Both unfortunately and fortunately, the challenges of blight are so vast that the opportunities for improvement are equally far-reaching. We would be interested in convening our partners, advocates, and critics to start this important conversation.

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