

Dear Pittsburgh City Council,

There are more than 26,000 vacant lots across the city, nearly half of which are the direct responsibility of the City and its authorities (while the remaining linger under private ownership). Vacant land is often perceived as a burden in the city; an unwelcome result of our industrial past and the subsequent population loss that accompanied it. Instead of being invested in as an asset, most vacant lots become dumping grounds - collecting debris, hazardous waste, and negatively impacting the physical and mental health of residents and affecting the social fabric of communities. For too long, the City of Pittsburgh has seemingly prioritized planning around vacant land only when it attracts a multi-million dollar development. This value system neglects the needs and considerations of local communities. As taxpayers, we are the rightful owners of city-controlled and owned land. It is time that the City of Pittsburgh's protocols for maintaining, repurposing, and selling land reflect this fact.

Currently, the City of Pittsburgh does not adequately or proactively maintain vacant lots. This inaction contributes to a negative cycle, making it difficult to transition vacant land from a liability into an asset. In order for this to change, we believe the following must occur:

- The City of Pittsburgh must affirm that vacant land belongs to taxpayers. This includes considering:
 - Removing excessive barriers to resident-led vacant lot projects while providing some financial and institutional support to these efforts
 - Streamlining the purchasing process to encourage more land to become community-controlled
- The City of Pittsburgh must work with local communities to demonstrate a priority to addressing vacant land within a comprehensive and integrated land management system. This includes considering:
 - Vacant land maintenance as an opportunity for workforce development by allowing local businesses to maintain land in their community
 - Ensuring vacant land is not causing undue harm to residents due to environmental hazards and lack of care
 - Incorporation of vacant land reuse as part of larger community issues such as affordable housing, stormwater management, outdoor play and learning, education, and training

It is time the City of Pittsburgh creates a budget that accurately reflects the wants and needs of taxpayers. We estimate it costs \$6.2 million to fix the vacant land crisis in Pittsburgh, the City is currently **underfunding maintenance by 92%**. A 50% increase in the budget to maintain vacant land is a needed first step. The second step is to engage in a community forum to **develop a strategy to maintain publicly-controlled vacant lots**. This will ensure the City fulfills its commitment to improving public safety, investing in workforce development, and advancing the quality of life in all of our communities.

In solidarity,