NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT:

A REPORT ON GREENING STRATEGIES IN BALTIMORE AND SIX OTHER CITIES

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This report was prepared by the Parks & People Foundation. Formed in 1984, the Parks & People Foundation is Baltimore's leading nonprofit organization for providing creative solutions to recreation and parks issues. In close partnership with communities, other nonprofit organizations, businesses, and all levels of government, Parks & People is an innovator and advocate for environmental education and experiential learning; recreation programs; park development, restoration and maintenance; and urban resources management. The Parks & People Foundation has three program divisions: Great Parks & Stream Valleys, Green Communities, and Motivating Youth Programs.

This report was researched, written, and compiled by a team of people each of whom contributed invaluable insight into open space management issues in Baltimore and other cities. Katherine McManus and Karen Steer researched and wrote the sections on community-managed open space issues in Baltimore. William Schockner conducted research on Baltimore City's open space management practices. Katherine Cooper conducted research and wrote the sections on Boston, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia. Kristen Humphrey updated the Baltimore City section of this report two years after the initial research was conducted, as well as researched and wrote the sections on Atlanta and Detroit, and helped pull the final document together.

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Parks & People Foundation Spring 2000

Neighborhood Open Space Management: A Report on Greening Strategies in Baltimore and Six Other Cities

By The Parks & People Foundation

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Executive Summary

Baltimore City, Maryland, covers approximately 80 square miles with an estimated population of 665,000 people in 1999, representing a major decline from the nearly 950,000 residents in the late 1950's. This decline in city population is the result of massive flight to the suburbs surrounding Baltimore. As a consequence, Baltimore City has had significant housing vacancies estimated at 12,000 units in 1999. As vacant houses fall into disrepair, they are often demolished, thereby becoming one of the city's vacant lots, already estimated at 14,000.

Well-maintained open space can provide Baltimore and other cities with a valuable opportunity for neighborhood revitalization. Yet, an effective management strategy cannot be implemented unless city officials change the approach to managing vacant lots and neighborhood redevelopment. Until the late 1950s, open space was a valuable public commodity, used to stimulate redevelopment of neighborhoods by creating new parks. Since then, Baltimore and other cities have been experiencing a major exodus of people, and open space management has slipped as a priority of local government.

Baltimore City struggles to manage its 6,000 acres of formally designated parkland. Vacant lots, pocket parks, and other small open spaces are difficult for the City to maintain. These open spaces are often trash strewn, overgrown eyesores, and nests for drugs. This neglect is a symbol of a neighborhood's decline. Fortunately, many community groups in Baltimore and other cities are committed to transforming vacant lots in their neighborhoods to attractive green spaces. For example, in Baltimore as of 1999, there were estimated to be about 200 vacant lots that community groups had adopted officially as "Adopt-a-Lot" properties and many more that have been adopted unofficially.

Neighborhood Open Space Management Project

As the Parks & People Foundation helped community groups transform vacant lots into green space, we recognized that a study of public policies and strategies for improving the management of vacant lots was also greatly needed. We sought and received a grant from the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (NUCFAC), which allowed us to undertake a research project to examine how vacant lots were managed in Baltimore and six similar cities. The study project provided an opportunity to change the way vacant lots are viewed, used, and cared for in Baltimore City. It stimulated the creation of a Vacant Lot Demonstration Project funded by the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, which has allowed us to apply some of the lessons learned to actual community-managed open space projects. This report summarizes the research effort, the study findings, and recommendations for next steps.

Barriers to Better Management of Vacant Lots and Neighborhood Open Space

Historically, Baltimore City's policy has been to avoid assuming title to abandoned or tax delinquent properties in the hope of encouraging re-use by private owners. However, as a matter of public necessity, the City has been required to assume responsibility for maintaining these

properties. This responsibility is distributed among nearly 30 City agencies, with the largest number of holdings in Public Works, Housing and Community Development, and Recreation and Parks. Two agencies (DPW and HCD) now have sole responsible for trash collection and mowing of vacant lots. Baltimore City HCD is working to develop a comprehensive strategy to address demolition of abandoned housing, and it is our expectation that this study will provide a foundation for development of a coordinated management plan and strategy for improved maintenance of existing vacant lots.

There are several factors currently impeding effective management of vacant lots and small open spaces in Baltimore. They include:

• Tracking and monitoring of vacant lots and small neighborhood open space is difficult due to the lack of a central database of City-held properties accessible by City agencies and citizens.

• Responsibility for maintaining specific vacant lots is determined through an ad hoc process, rather than a rational, collaborative process involving agencies and citizens. Responsibility for specific properties is thereby unclear to both agencies and citizens.

• A lack of property maintenance standards and proactive schedule among any of the responsible agencies leads maintenance work to be driven by resident complaints. Agencies often become aware of new property assignments once these complaints about unmanaged properties are made.

• Promising strategies previously used by City agencies to address the problem of vacant lots under their care, i.e. Baltimore Clippers and Clean Sweep Program, and contracting of maintenance services to private contractors or community organizations have all been abandoned. The current approach of having two agencies, Public Works and Housing and Community Development, provide all maintenance services has not yet resulted in the desired outcome of improved maintenance.

• The City attempts to ensure private property-owner responsibility for maintenance of housing and vacant lots through the placement of maintenance and utility liens. This system has not worked effectively and often contributes to the problems of abandonment and the difficulty of redevelopment.

• There are several barriers to the transfer of property for private or public community use including:

- reluctance of City officials to approve lien releases or abatements;
- no proactive disposal programs of property for reasonable community use including side yard acquisitions by private owners;
- difficulty securing liability insurance for community use of City property;
- temporary nature of City transfer for community use;
- and generally, the overly bureaucratic approach taken to transfer of property for community or private use.

• The City's single program for transfer of management and maintenance responsibility to community groups, the Adopt-a-Lot Program managed by the Department of Public Works, is not currently a viable means of encouraging community stewardship. The program does not provide sufficient incentives for community groups to formally adopt lots, and leads them to assume informal responsibility.

• There is a lack of formal coordination among City agencies and non-profit organizations able to provide technical assistance and resources to community groups undertaking community greening of vacant lots, and of consistent support for these organizations.

Creating Opportunities for Neighborhood-Managed Open Space

While community management is not an appropriate strategy for every vacant lot, it can be an important component in an overall City strategy for managing vacant lots and neighborhood open spaces. In an effort to respond to the growing number of vacant lots in Baltimore and increased community interest in maintaining these spaces, the Parks & People Foundation established a Vacant Lot Restoration Program in 1998 funded by the City Department of Housing and Community Development. The Vacant Lot Restoration Program has provided training, technical assistance, and site improvement funding for 23 neighborhood-managed open spaces. These vacant lots are typically large, City-owned properties adopted by communities.

While the successes and failures of projects are in many ways unique to the sites themselves, they can also illustrate the challenges commonly experienced by communities everywhere. Adequate maintenance of community parks and gardens has emerged as the major issue facing many sites. Maintenance can improve once the responsible party is clear, whether an individual, family, or community group.

Based on the experience of the Parks & People Foundation, we found the following factors contribute to sustainable neighborhood-managed open space projects:

- A cohesive community.
- A well organized group with access to information, resources, and services, or
- A local person who acts as a catalyst to lead stewardship efforts and who can gain support from several City agencies.
- A community initiated and designed project that benefits the community.
- Appropriate site design in terms of community capacity to undertake maintenance.
- Clear delineation of and security for the space, usually in the form of fencing.
- Age diversity in the group managing and using the vacant lot.
- Adaptability of the space to the interests of users.

Providing Technical Assistance for Open Space Management

Several nonprofit organizations and government-supported initiatives work actively with community groups and Baltimore City agencies to improve the management of neighborhood open spaces, including:

The Parks & People Foundation provides technical assistance and training to community groups across Baltimore, helping them to turning vacant lots into community green spaces, e.g.,

parks, gardens, tree nurseries, urban wild lands, and school-yard habitats. The Foundation provides small grants to community groups for Neighborhood Greening projects and larger grants to organizations through Revitalizing Baltimore project, an urban forest management and watershed restoration project.

Center for Poverty Solutions has partnered with Parks & People since 1999 on Baltimore Grows, a USDA-funded initiative to alleviate food security issues through community gardening. Baltimore Grows is piloting market gardens on two large vacant lots to test the viability of agricultural production on these sites.

The Neighborhood Design Center (NDC) brings volunteer design professionals together with community groups committed to improving their neighborhoods. Through NDC, volunteer landscape architects design parks, playgrounds, and other open spaces for community groups across the city.

University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service (CES), a federal/state entity, helps a variety of community groups establish and maintain community vegetable gardens. The primary role of CES is to provide technical assistance and basic supplies (seeds and simple fencing) to start vegetable gardens. The CES also runs the Master Gardener certification program.

Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA) is a long-standing, nonprofit organization that works to identify urban problems and opportunities, mobilizes citizens to address critical city and regional issues, and holds government accountable for its performance in the areas of sanitation, transportation, housing, and planning.

Civic Works is the local arm of the federally funded AmeriCorps program that provides job skill training to young people ages 18 to 24. Teams of Civic Works youth frequently assist Baltimore community groups in turning abandoned lots into attractive, neighborhood green spaces.

Community Law Center (CLC) assists selected community groups in taking over the management of vacant properties owned by negligent private landlords.

Land Trusts and Land Banking—An urban land trust focusing on preserving community-managed open spaces does not exist in Baltimore City. The national Trust for Public Land has a project office in Baltimore, but it is not focused on neighborhood open space issues. Recent proposals have prompted local community greening activists to examine the possibility of forming a Community Land Trust. Baltimore also lacks a land bank, which could help consolidate vacant land for appropriate redevelopment and might encourage community management of open space as an interim use. Baltimore City's Department of Housing and Community Development has been exploring the establishment of a land bank.

Figure 1 provides a summary of management options for neighborhood open space.

Figure 1 - Neighborhood Open Space Management Ownership and Management Spectrum

I. Government determined	II. Land Bank	III. Land Trust	IV. Community determined
• Government owns and manages land for community use. • Government disposes of land for public or private use.	• Government or non-profit organization holds land for future private use. • Community may use and maintain land on an interim basis for public use. • Ultimate disposal goal is private development and use.	• Government or non-profit preserves land for public use. • Land is made available for community use and maintenance, often in perpetuity.	• Community formally or informally adopts or owns land. • Community maintains land for public use.

What We Learned From Other Cities

Extensive research was conducted in six cities with similarities to Baltimore—Atlanta, Detroit, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York—to determine how they manage their neighborhood open space. While no single formula for success was identified, several key factors emerged.

- The presence of a charismatic and tireless leader is important for success.
- Project initiation must come from community members.
- A coalition of greening groups that help in securing government and citizen support.
- Government cooperation is important in achieving sustainability of projects, specifically the adoption of a citywide open space/vacant lot plan or strategy.
- Strong partnership among non-profit providers and government agencies working together to implement the open space plan and community greening strategy.
- Governments or non-profits who organize community volunteers, provide technical assistance and plant materials, and long-term stability in property ownership.

While thoughts of owning green space commonly emerge in response to the threat of new development, it is often hard to secure sites once development pressure begins. Whether former industrial cities such as Baltimore will one day regain previous population loses and should therefore hold vacant property for anticipated future development is not the question. Rather, it is for public officials to recognize the opportunity available now to establish neighborhood open space for community use and enjoyment that can contribute to the quality of life of any neighborhood and allow people a sense of control and involvement in the destiny of their neighborhood.

The removal of uncertainty and signs of decline represented by vacant buildings and lots from weakened neighborhoods can help to revitalize these neighborhoods and create a new sense of hope for those people living in neighborhoods experiencing decline. Greening projects help stressed communities and attract redevelopment. Long-term leases or outright community ownership of vacant lots can be beneficial in these cases, as funds are more readily available for improving green spaces that have a degree of land security. Further, and of equal importance, a comprehensive system of open spaces - small and large - could restore ecological function to cities, and thereby, improve the quality of life for all residents.

Action Steps To Encourage Neighborhood-Managed Open Space

Despite struggling with a dwindling population and shrinking tax base, Baltimore has often been an innovator and leader among American cities. Large capital projects such as the Inner Harbor and Camden Yards are much envied and have been replicated elsewhere. The City's "dollar house" program in the 1970's transformed and preserved a number of historic neighborhoods fraught with the ills of abandonment and decay. But, to realize a better Baltimore, there is still much to be done.

Policies and procedures of City government must be adapted to current demographic and economic realities. A proactive approach to land use management that makes the connection between the economic, environmental, and social health of Baltimore is *essential* to meeting the challenges posed by a changing urban landscape.

An effective, citywide, open space (vacant land) management strategy is critically needed and should be based on the following principles:

- Natural resources and human communities are integrally linked, and the health and vitality of one affects the other, mandating equitable distribution of open space.
- Active participation by people who live in communities is vital to developing sustainable and equitable projects.
- Information sharing at all levels enhances the efficiency and adaptability of City agencies, organizations and communities.
- Strategies and management plans are not a final solution; they are the starting point.

With these principles in mind, the following specific recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1— Strengthen existing coalitions and partnerships working to support community greening, gardening, and urban forestry activities in Baltimore neighborhoods.

- Ensure the active participation of grass roots organizations, technical assistance providers, land managers, and policy-makers.
- Expand opportunities for public participation.

Recommendation 2—Promote greater public awareness of the benefits of well designed, maintained, and used open space to the quality of life.

- Conduct an information and education campaign.
- Elevate vacant lot and neighborhood open space issues as a public priority.
- Educate key decision-makers on the social, economic, and environmental benefits of safe, attractive open space.

Recommendation 3— Advocate and support development of a comprehensive, integrated open space management plan, specifically tackling the pressing concern and opportunity presented by the large number of vacant lots.

- Establish a vision and standards for open space management in Baltimore.
- Develop an effective, citywide open space management plan must be comprehensive and acknowledge both the occurrence and effect of large and small open spaces on the landscape.

Recommendation 4—Change current Baltimore City policies and procedures to create an efficient and effective program of mixed City and community managed open space and to support further community greening.

- Establish workable policies, procedures, and programs for disposal and reuse of vacant and abandoned properties.
- Improve the City's maintenance of the City-owned and privately owned vacant lots and small open spaces.
- Actively support community organizations working with neighborhood residents to turn vacant lots into "intentional" open space.

Recommendation 5—Establish as a priority an institutional means for preserving neighborhood open space, providing liability insurance, and securing guidance and monitoring of community managed open space.

Promising Actions Currently Underway

The Baltimore City Departments of Recreation and Parks, Housing and Community Development, and Public Works have begun to have a positive impact on the urban environment

by supporting neighborhood open space initiatives and partnering with organizations like the Parks & People Foundation to realize open space goals.

As a result of Parks & People Foundation's Neighborhood Open Space Management Project, there has been increased interest among community groups, nonprofit organizations, and City government agencies to improve the management of Baltimore's vacant lots and other neighborhood open space.

• In October 1999, the Baltimore City Planning Department announced its intention to develop a land use and open space plan and a neighborhood planning program for Baltimore in the near future as part of PlanBaltimore. Citizens have expressed hope that such a plan will result in a comprehensive strategy to address the City's vacant lot/open space issues.

• An Urban Parks Alliance has formed in Baltimore, which may play an active role in the development of the City's proposed open space plan and act as an advocate for all types of open space. This Alliance represents a variety of open space stakeholders.

• Several local organizations, including the Parks & People Foundation, Community Law Center, and University of Maryland School of Social Work, have begun discussions about forming a Community Land Trust that would help protect community greening projects. Such a land trust would be a separate organization that works collaboratively with open space policy groups, technical assistance providers, and community groups.

• The City government has been exploring options for creating a Baltimore Land Bank to acquire and dispose of vacant land. The land bank would operate differently than a Community Land Trust, by focusing on packaging vacant land for redevelopment.

All major players involved in improving the management and maintenance of Baltimore's many neighborhood open spaces are working to bring increased funding to this aspect of neighborhood revitalization. City officials have highlighted the need for additional funding of community greening efforts in the City's comprehensive PlanBaltimore.

Introduction

In an April 1997 *Baltimore Sun* article, former Mayor Kurt Schmoke was quoted as saying about Baltimore City's demolitions: "In too many cases we've replaced the eyesore of a vacant house with the eyesore of a vacant lot . . . [that] could be used for a garden or housing, or be turned over to community groups, churches or businesses." Baltimore's new Mayor Martin O'Malley and City agencies are increasingly looking toward city residents to become active participants in neighborhood open space management, to partner with the City in making unmanaged open space an asset.[1] Solving vacant lots problems offers an unprecedented opportunity to change the way the City and its citizens work together.

Well-maintained open space can provide Baltimore and other cities with a valuable opportunity for neighborhood revitalization. Yet, an effective management strategy cannot be implemented unless city officials are willing to change their approach to management of vacant lots and neighborhood redevelopment. Until the late 1950s, open space was a valuable commodity, used to stimulate redevelopment of neighborhoods by creation of new parks. However, at that time, Baltimore began experiencing a major exodus of population to the surrounding counties. Consequently, open space, parks, and recreation slipped as a priority of City government.

The realities of open space are much different today. Baltimore City owns almost 6,000 acres (11.7% of the land area) of formally designated parkland. Baltimore has at least 12,000 vacant houses and 14,000 vacant lots along with many other small open spaces that are poorly managed. Because these areas are not maintained, they often magnify many of the other issues being confronted in urban neighborhoods, such as crime, drug use, rat infestation and illegal dumping. And yet, despite their prevalence in the city landscape, open spaces are not treated as a priority or recognized as an entity in need of comprehensive management. They remain in the background, separate from other issues and handled in a fragmented and reactionary manner. While the majority of the small neighborhood open spaces are a liability to Baltimore, they have the potential to be tremendous assets. Many current city policies and procedures inhibit effective community management of open space in Baltimore. Despite the barriers, there is significant community, City agency, and nonprofit interest in helping community groups manage open space in Baltimore.

This report seeks to change the way open space, particularly community-managed open space, is viewed and used in the City. Vacant lots do not have to be a liability. They can be opportunities for a revitalized Baltimore. A comprehensive, open space management strategy that embraces and incorporates community-managed open spaces as a viable means of maintaining vacant land offers Baltimore the chance to lead the nation in empowering citizens and utilizing its human and natural resources to their fullest potential.

[1] Throughout this report the term "neighborhood open space" is used to refer to community gardens, small scale children play areas, pocket parks, small community green spaces and neglected vacant lots that lie within neighborhoods.

Goals and Objectives

The Neighborhood Open Space Management Project is an effort to develop short and long-term strategies for improving the management of the growing number of small neighborhood open spaces in Baltimore. Strategies are needed not only to more efficiently and effectively maintain these spaces, but also to transform these liabilities into potential assets and opportunities for communities, individuals and the city as a whole.

The Neighborhood Open Space Management Project has four over-arching goals:

- Determine the role that Baltimore City government plays in the management of open space, with an emphasis on vacant lots.

- Examine the many ways in which individual communities in Baltimore are managing open space in their neighborhoods.

- Investigate the nature and extent of open space management in cities with demographics and socioeconomic conditions similar to Baltimore.

- Draw conclusions from these studies that would assist Baltimore City in forming a comprehensive strategy for neighborhood open space management.

Research Methods

This report was compiled using the results of a number of separate research efforts conducted as part of the Parks & People Foundation's Neighborhood Open Space Management Project. The information from the research was then analyzed and used to develop specific recommendations for improving neighborhood open space management practices in Baltimore. The specific research methods used in each aspect of this project are detailed below.

City Management of Small Open Spaces in Baltimore

Baltimore City government has a major role in managing the many vacant lots and small open spaces in Baltimore. The City is obligated to manage City-owned open spaces and often must deal with privately owned lots that have been neglected by their owners. During the summer of 1997, William Schockner, a student from Johns Hopkins University, conducted interviews with nearly 20 City agency representatives who have responsibilities relating to the management of small open spaces. In 1999, Kristen Humphrey, a student from Morgan State University's Institute of Architecture and Planning, conducted follow-up interviews with many key people previously interviewed to update the City section of this report. (See Appendix A for a list of agencies and the names of people interviewed.)

Community-Managed Open Space in Baltimore

In order to understand the dynamics of community-managed open space in Baltimore, Katherine McManus and Karen Steer, student interns from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, conducted in-depth research (1997) on four community-managed open space sites. These case studies:

• Focus discussion of open space issues on a visible and tangible subject.

• Provide a focal point to observe the interactions between community resources and groups.

• Facilitate the analysis of City policies on a larger scale and through time.

• Assist in the formation of generalizations for broader, Citywide findings and strategies.

In addition to an in-depth analysis of these four sites, the students examined approximately 50 other former or current open space projects. Information from the case studies aided the analysis of dynamics in other such projects. The following methods and techniques were utilized in this research:

• Interviews were conducted with representatives of City agencies, groups providing assistance to community groups and individual community leaders to provide an opportunity to hear first-hand from people working at a variety of levels on community-managed open space projects. Through these informal interviews it was possible to ascertain:

- Who is involved in community-based open space management.
- How groups involved in community-based open space management interact.
- The goals, objectives and policies that affect these groups and individuals.
- The constraints and opportunities they face in working toward their objectives.
- The scale of analysis relevant for the development of a Citywide strategy.

• Physical mapping was conducted on two levels. Using existing maps, the relationship between vacant lots, parks, recreation centers, and schools was analyzed on a Citywide level. At the neighborhood level, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, open spaces, street trees, schools, churches, stores, and other neighborhood resources were mapped in areas surrounding the four case study sites.

• Observations of the study sites were conducted to confirm and amplify the information that was gathered in interviews and literature searches. This allowed for a more complete understanding of the activities occurring in the open space and the processes and linkages to surrounding areas.

• Literature reviews were used to gather valuable background information. References included reports involving open space issues in Baltimore and other cities, literature on the socioeconomic and political fabric of the City, and community profiles. (See Appendix B for a complete list of references.)

Open Space Management Practices in Other Cities

As input into the investigation of open space management, the neighborhood open space management practices of six other cities were studied. In 1998, Katherine Cooper, a student intern from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, investigated community greening practices in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and New York City, while Kristen Humphrey, a student at Morgan State University, researched greening practices in Atlanta and

Detroit. These six cities were chosen because they are facing the same high rate of vacancy and land abandonment as Baltimore, although perhaps to a different degree. The cities also share a similar history of industrialism and a long-standing trend toward greater suburban flight and urban blight.

Interviews with key people in these cities sought to:

- Determine the nature and extent of community management of open spaces.
- Examine the process by which various supporting, non-profit organizations and public programs became established, and determine their individual roles and missions.
- Identify the conditions that have allowed for successful open space management strategies, in general, and urban vacant land reclamation, in particular.
- Identify the primary barriers (e.g., institutional and economic) to community greening efforts faced by these cities and how these barriers were overcome.

Relevant organizations, agencies and individuals were located on the Internet. In addition, first-round contacts offered many referrals to other organizations. Most of the interviews were conducted via telephone, fax or e-mail. The interviewees were frequently self-selected, and not all organizations were responsive. Much of the resulting information consists of subjective interpretations of those involved in the programs. (A copy of the basic interview questions can be found in Appendix C.)

Development of Recommendations

A Neighborhood Open Space Advisory Committee was formed by the Parks & People Foundation to review the results of the studies of open space management in Baltimore and the six cities surveyed. Based on this information, the committee articulated the major challenges facing Baltimore and developed ideas for addressing those challenges. The committee presented this information at a public forum in March 1999 and solicited feedback from over 100 citizens who attended. This feedback was used to develop specific recommendations for Baltimore. The Neighborhood Open Space Advisory Committee then presented these recommendations to the City's Environmental Council.

Research in Baltimore

This section describes the roles of the key players involved in the management of neighborhood open space in Baltimore City and contains the findings of research efforts that examined City and community management of these spaces.

Background

Baltimore City covers approximately 80 square miles and is designated a separate county. The 1999 population was estimated at 665,000 representing a major decline from nearly 950,000 residents in the 1950's. This decline in city population is the result of massive flight to the suburbs surrounding Baltimore. Baltimore City now has significant housing vacancies estimated at 12,000 units in 1999. As vacant houses fall into disrepair, they are often demolished, becoming one of Baltimore's 14,000 vacant lots.[2] Vacant lots, pocket parks and the like are difficult for the City to take care of and can be a real drain on a neighborhood as they often become trash strewn, overgrown eyesores. Fortunately, many community groups in Baltimore are interested and active in restoring the vacant lots and pocket parks in their neighborhoods into attractive green spaces.

Small neighborhood open space is owned in Baltimore City by government agencies, private citizens and community groups. These groups, plus a variety of nonprofit organizations, play a major role in managing these spaces. The sections below describe the key players, some of the issues faced by each of these groups, and the various strategies that have been employed to address those issues.

City Management of Neighborhood Open Space

Historically, Baltimore City's policy has been to avoid assuming title to abandoned or tax delinquent properties in the hope of encouraging re-use by private owners. City government agencies are responsible for managing and maintaining all City-owned property as well as neglected, privately owned properties (for which the owners are charged). This responsibility is distributed among nearly 30 City entities with Public Works, Housing and Community Development, and Recreation and Parks having the largest number of holdings. (See Appendix D for a list of City agencies.) These agencies are responsible for trash collection and mowing of their properties as well as maintaining equipment such as on playgrounds. Management of vacant lots and other neighborhood open spaces has become a pressing issue for the City. As there is no comprehensive strategy for addressing the management of the small spaces, this study is intended to establish a foundation for such a strategy. [3]

[2] These are the official (City Department of Housing and Community Development) figures for vacant houses and vacant lots. Other researchers (including the authors of this report) have estimated the number of vacant houses and vacant lots to be as high as 40,000. Typically, older, formerly industrial American cities have from 10-15% land area in some state of underutilization or abandonement.

[3] In mid-1999, Baltimore's Planning Department proposed a comprehensive neighborhood planning process in its draft document *PlanBaltimore!*. The management of open spaces and vacant lots is proposed to be addressed as part of this process.

Management Responsibility

Given the wide array of City agencies responsible for managing and maintaining neighborhood open space, one objective of this research was to determine how responsibility for maintaining a particular property is assigned to a specific agency. The consensus among representatives of various agencies is that the approach follows a certain "logic." For example, "leftover" land from road construction remains the responsibility of the DPW Bureau of Transportation; vacant lots resulting from housing demolitions become the responsibility of the Department of Housing and Community Development; and sites of razed schools come under the authority of the Department of Education. However, some officials believe this logic is not always followed, i.e., that their agency maintains properties that should "belong" to another.

As a consequence of the ad hoc approach to assigning property, the procedure for assigning responsibility for properties and determining which agency will be responsible for its maintenance remains unclear. Several City representatives indicated that decisions are made by the Baltimore Office of Management Information Services (BOMIS). According to BOMIS, the assignment of property to City agencies is conducted by the City's Office of Property Location. According to this office, the responsibility is the duty of the City's Office of Real Estate. According to the City's Real Estate Officer, his office is responsible for the disposition of all City properties under the terms of the City Charter. However, in a 1997 interview, the Real Estate Officer stated that his office does not assign vacant lots to City agencies, and he is unaware of the process by which lots are assigned. He believes the Board of Estimates assigns maintenance responsibilities on a case-by-case basis.

Partly due to the confusion surrounding property assignment, many City agencies are not always aware of which properties are under their charge. Although two City officials report that no agency is given additional property without requesting it, several other officials state that their agency is frequently assigned new properties without their knowledge, much less at their request. Agencies often learn of their new holdings when residents complain to City Hall about unmanaged lots. The City attempts to clean the lot within 24 hours of receiving a complaint, though the reality is that multiple complaints are often necessary to get a property cleaned up. Thus, vacant lots are often managed on a reactive, complaint-driven basis. A City agency's lack of knowledge of its complete property holdings often results in inadequate planning and inefficient use of resources, time, and labor.

Management of Data and Information on Neighborhood Open Space

Reactive management practices make tracking and monitoring of neighborhood open space difficult, if not impossible. At present, there is no centralized database of City-held open space directly accessible by City agencies. Such a database exists and is managed BOMIS within DPW. However, the listing is not readily available to the agencies responsible for maintaining City properties. The Office of Real Estate is pursuing the development of a computerized network for City agencies that would allow shared access to the information.[4]

Baltimore City government has a continuing shortage of computers, expertise, and training in the area of database use and management. Lacking both hardware and a complete inventory of

[4] As of June 1999, a centrally accessible database was still not available, however, considerable strides had been made in that direction.

City-held small open space presents significant obstacles to managing these properties in a comprehensive fashion. As a result, various agencies have adopted piecemeal methods for tracking vacant lots. For example, as of mid-1997, DPW was using a 1995 book of property tax records or calling the City Office of Property Location; the Department of Education was consulting with the Department of Housing and Community Development about specific lots; and the Department of Recreation and Parks was inquiring directly to BOMIS.

Strategies to Address Neighborhood Open Space Management Issues

In the past several years, Baltimore City government has recognized that vacant lots and neighborhood open space management issues have grown beyond the capacity of the current management system. A variety of strategies have been used to help address some of the more pressing problems. Several of these strategies are described below.

The Clean Sweep Program

The Clean Sweep Program was initiated in 1997 as a joint effort involving the Department of Housing and Community Development, the DPW Bureaus of Sanitation and Solid Waste, and the Department of Recreation and Parks. Working together and with neighborhood groups, crews from these agencies cleaned neighborhood areas, including vacant lots and other open space, on a scheduled monthly basis.

The program, however, suffered from a lack of knowledge about which properties to include or exclude in maintenance efforts, because partner agencies had no comprehensive list of City properties. According to Reginald Scriber, Coordinator of Clean Sweep, and Assistant Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development, another problem was that not every community needed *all* services *every* time regular maintenance was scheduled. As a result, some crews, such as a rat-baiting team, discovered they had nothing to do when they arrived at a site.

While the Clean Sweep Program still exists, it has been modified to deal with its initial problems. Currently, City-run Neighborhood Service Centers (NSC) respond to issues related to unmanaged vacant lots and open space. Scriber reports that they rely heavily on community volunteers. DPW provides trash bags, rakes, shovels and brooms to the NSCs for community use. DPW also attempts to clean alleys, streets and vacant lots on a 30-day cycle. Yet, it is still unclear whether or not all City-owned, small open spaces are covered in the rotation. Despite continued confusion, Clean Sweep seems to demonstrate the potential for cooperative management of open spaces and vacant lots by City agencies.

On March 24-25, 2000, Mayor Martin O'Malley initiated a citywide neighborhood cleanup day called "Super Spring Sweep Thing." This effort, coordinated by the Mayor's office, solicited five lots in each neighborhood from community groups for coordinated cleanup using City equipment and staff in partnership with community volunteers.

The Baltimore Clippers

Prior to the formation of Clean Sweep, the Baltimore Clippers, a partnership among the Department of Public Works, Recreation and Parks, and Education took over responsibility for cutting grass on a variety of open spaces—large and small. Through a somewhat informal process initiated in 1985 by former Mayor William Donald Schaefer, participating agencies shared and

coordinated resources, crews and responsibilities for grass mowing. According to Raymond Short of the Department of Education, the Baltimore Clippers were at one time projected to become an independent agency of the City government, providing centralized mowing for all City-owned properties. Such an agency was never realized, because the Clippers lacked a single administrator and there was no separate, dedicated budget. There were also disputes among those involved about which department was enjoying disproportionate benefits from the program and which was bearing a disproportionate share of the costs. These "turf wars" contributed to the demise of the effort in April 1997.

In Short's opinion, the collapse of the program was a reflection of difficulties in cooperation among the "bosses." He felt that the ground crews worked well together and were the main reason for the longevity of the project. Indeed, Short believes the workers on the ground understand the issues best and appreciate the benefits of cooperative management of open spaces.

Organizational Shift in Park and Open Space Management

In 1997, the City government reorganized open space maintenance responsibilities and shifted the responsibility for maintaining City park property from the Department of Recreation and Parks to DPW. Three bureaus within DPW now perform tasks such as mowing grass, collecting trash, and trimming trees: the Bureau of Transportation, the Bureau of Solid Waste, and the Bureau of General Services. Recreation and Parks is still responsible for the overall management and programming of Baltimore's parks, although most staff members have been transferred to Public Works. Recreation and Parks staff typically receives the bulk of citizen comments and complaints and passes these requests on to DPW. Unfortunately, no maintenance standards exist to help guide this interagency effort.

DPW staff feel the responsibilities between DPW and Recreation and Parks are clearly defined and that there is a clear division of labor among bureaus. DPW staff state:

> The new system is working fine: things are being maintained at least as well as before. One advantage [to the new system] is that City crews are now performing all the work, whereas before a lot of it was done by private contractors. Under the new system, we are able to consolidate manpower and equipment, especially when it comes to mowing. [However], we still work closely with Rec and Parks, especially when there is a problem of any kind. In particular, when there is a history with a particular site, such as repeated problems with vandalism, we will contact Rec and Parks.

In terms of vacant lots, DPW is responsible for the "lion's share," taking care of approximately 2,500 of City-owned lots.

Department of Recreation and Parks staff, agree that roles are clearly defined among Departments. However, they point out that having the same tasks divided among three bureaus within DPW is confusing and difficult to coordinate. Further, for the public it has to be confusing to determine who to contact with a concern or complaint." There are programmatic inconsistencies, for example, Recreation and Parks still funds the planting of street trees, although DPW plants them. Moreover, many DPW workers, in the Transportation Maintenance Division

who are responsible for street tree and park maintenance have had no specific training in tree care techniques or other aspects of natural resource management.

The new system utilizes only City crews, rather than the former mix of City and contractor crews, which has advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that, in the past, contractors performed about half the mowing (approximately 1,000 acres), which enabled Recreation and Parks staff to do the detail work of trimming shrubbery, edge-trimming, weeding and spraying. According to Recreation and Parks staff, park maintenance is no longer being viewed in a comprehensive manner. Instead, they are seen in terms of grass, trash and repairs. Moreover, the Forestry Division no longer deals with trees in the parks unless a problem is brought to their attention. Their focus is now on street trees.

Maintaining a park is very different than maintaining a street median. A lot of things need to be done in a park that can be overlooked in a median. For example, the wood chips under play equipment need not only to be periodically replaced, they need to be cleaned regularly. It's not enough to simply pick up the large pieces of trash—the wood chips must be raked or sifted on a regular basis to remove potentially dangerous needles and glass. When Rec and Parks staffers maintained the parks, they systematically performed these tasks.

Perhaps the most important element missing in the current system is the sense of pride and ownership Recreation and Parks staff had in the parks they maintained. This often meant that the person who did the mowing also opened and cleaned the public bathrooms, picked up trash, trimmed hedges, weeded flower beds and at times provided information to park users. Under the new system, workers are too specialized. Those who mow, only mow; those who pick up trash, only pick up trash. Workers are unaware of a site's history or of a local community's concerns and desires concerning the park. This situation has resulted in community concern about the adequacy of maintenance efforts.

The long-term efficiency and effectiveness of the new organizational format remains to be tested. There are certainly potential weak points in the areas of inter- and intra-agency coordination. A better understanding of the programmatic biases of each agency (e.g., the Solid Waste Bureau is interested in trash, not the uses or user groups of open space) must be taken into account in determining the best ways to maintain parks and open spaces. This factor is nearly as important as attending to the management goals for any given open space.

Contracting Maintenance Services

Another strategy used by City agencies to address the multitude of vacant lots under their care is subcontracting maintenance services to community organizations or private contractors. In this scenario, the City pays local organizations to maintain existing neighborhood parks, medians or vacant lots in a given area. This practice has the potential to be more cost effective and reliable than direct City services. Neighborhoods benefit from the creation of jobs and from a sense of ownership and control over local vacant lots. Three City departments have used contracting as a means of managing their open space: Housing and Community Development, Education, and Recreation and Parks. All three have contracted with private firms, and Housing and Community Development and Recreation and Parks have contracted directly with neighborhood groups. These contracts are awarded to the lowest bid offered, however, in most instances involving

community groups there is no real competition. A community group is likely the only group seeking to take on the management responsibility and, consequently, is the most likely to have the greatest vested interest.

Several years ago, the Baltimore Clippers investigated the feasibility of instituting contracting for the maintenance of all City-owned open spaces, including vacant lots. Based on the results of their research, they decided not to pursue wide-scale contracting. The major obstacle appears to have been logistical in nature. Each property would have to be reviewed, bid, awarded, and monitored separately. It was determined that the administrative effort required to establish this program would not be cost-efficient. Another question involved which agency or bureau would actually implement and oversee this system. This became an important consideration, since there was no Baltimore Clippers Authority, but only a loose coalition of City agencies. Since the demise of the Baltimore Clippers, there does not seem to have been any additional research on resolving obstacles to broader use of contractors for maintaining City-owned properties. This strategy warrants further study.

Encouraging Community Management of Neighborhood Open Space

An increasing number of neighborhood open spaces are being maintained by community groups and individuals at their own expense, often creating productive uses of these sites. Baltimore City government can play a major role in encouraging and assisting residents in assuming the management responsibilities for local vacant lots and other neighborhood open spaces. From the City government perspective, community management of these spaces represents a productive use of otherwise unused land as well as reduced investment of money, time and labor that must be devoted to maintaining open spaces. The following are some of the programs and initiatives that facilitate or have the potential to facilitate community management of neighborhood open spaces.

Adopt-a-Lot Program—The Department of Public Works administers the Adopt-a-Lot Program, which is the only official mechanism to encourage, implement and sanction community management of City-owned vacant lots. By adopting the site the community group enters into a one-year contract to maintain the property. Once an adoption contract is signed, DPW clears the lot one time, after which all maintenance becomes the responsibility of the neighborhood group. As of mid-1999, there were estimated to be about 200 official Adopt-a-Lot properties in Baltimore City.

There are several shortcomings in the current Adopt-a-Lot Program. First, while there is a general database listing of adopted sites, they are listed only by lot number rather than street address, making it difficult for residents to determine which City-owned lots are Adopt-a-Lot sites. In addition, while contracts for lots should be renewed annually, many lot-adopters are not aware that renewal is required. Further, DPW does not monitor the actual use or status of the properties, so no one knows if communities still actively use the lots, if they are being used for the allowed purposes, or if the group using the property is the one with whom the City has contracted.

Other program policies inhibit community investment in the space. Adopt-a-Lot sites are viewed as temporary uses of land by City government. The City reserves the right to take back the

property for its own purposes at any time with 30-days notice. Concern about losing a site can put a significant damper on a community's sense of ownership of, or investment in, a vacant space. In addition, adopted sites are only supposed to be used as vegetable and flower gardens. Engaging in money-making activities, planting trees and erecting permanent structures such as gazebos, play equipment or tool sheds are all prohibited. The City government does not want permanent structures to be placed on adopted sites that may be developed later. These policies limit the usefulness of the Adopt-a-Lot program, may discourage community groups from adopting sites, and certainly inhibit community investment in sites that are adopted.

Liability insurance is another significant obstacle for community groups considering adopting a neighborhood open space. Under Adopt-a-Lot, the adopting group must provide its own liability coverage for the site. From the City's perspective, the group is leasing the property, and the City is not liable for any damages or claims. Many neighborhood groups lack sufficient resources to secure this coverage. Moreover, it is questionable how willing insurers may be to provide such insurance to an informal gardening group.

The Adopt-a-Lot program is given little attention within City government as an effective strategy to address neighborhood open space management issues. Indeed, a senior official at DPW is quoted as saying, "We *used to have* an Adopt-a-Lot program." As a result, the program receives little funding and is severely understaffed. Administration of this program is one of the many duties of DPW's Supervisor of Property Location, occupying approximately 10% to 15% of this person's time with additional time devoted to the program by an assistant. Although program staff members have the best intentions to publicize and monitor Adopt-a-Lot, time constraints make such attention difficult. In a 1999 interview, the Supervisor of Property Location indicated that he does recognize some of Adopt-a-Lot's shortcomings and is taking steps to address them. The program staff is working with DPW Sanitation Officers to conduct site inspections of adopted sites. Similarly, they are in the process of instituting an application renewal process, so they can readily track sites that are still active.

Despite the intentions of program staff, Adopt-a-Lot remains underused and unmonitored and offers little incentive for community groups to formally adopt lots. As a result, many community groups decide to assume informal responsibility for managing vacant lots and other neighborhood open spaces, further reducing the group's security to use the site into the future. This situation gives the City little control over the use of its land. Improvements in the system could result in greater control for the City and greater security for community groups.

City Farm Gardens—The City Department of Recreation and Parks, Horticulture Division operates seven "City Farm Gardens" across Baltimore. These are large community gardens typically located within larger parks. Individuals rent garden plots on an annual basis. The City provides the gardens with wood chips, compost, water, trash removal, and a City Farms harvest supper for the gardeners. The areas are fenced, and the City weeds and maintains the fencing and water pipes around each garden. In addition, the Horticulture Division provides free mulch and leaf compost for community green spaces and will arrange to have these materials delivered to any garden site.

Other City Services—In some cases, the City provides fencing and water to community groups for their park or garden sites. However, these services are inconsistently available, and

there seems to be no formal means of obtaining them. Residents need to know where to go and whom to call to obtain assistance. The availability of services and materials is too often based more upon the resourcefulness of residents than on the strength of coordination of the programs or agencies offering them.

Discussion

The management of small open space, particularly vacant lots, is highly fragmented, decentralized, poorly planned, and inadequately monitored in Baltimore. The existing management structure was developed when Baltimore City had far fewer vacant lots, and the system no longer has the capacity to effectively manage and maintain the City's many vacant lots. Due to constraints in the existing system, neighborhood open space problems are often addressed on a lot-by-lot basis. The City clearly lacks a comprehensive strategy for addressing the management of these lots.

In addition to logistical and organizational hurdles, the management of open space faces political constraints. The demolition of buildings is fairly straightforward, a building that is beyond repair and uninhabited is marked for removal and razed. At least in the short-term, an eyesore ("attractive nuisance") is removed. Management of the newly created vacant lot is a more daunting task that involves long-term commitments in planning and maintenance. As a result, many politicians—and agencies—are reluctant to address the issue, given the complexity of the problem.

The scenario is exacerbated by the fact that there is federal funding available for housing demolitions, while little or no money is dedicated to managing the aftermath. As more houses are demolished, remaining properties become less desirable and marketable and, in turn, more people flee, leaving empty, abandoned houses. Thus, it is important to recognize the political and economic context surrounding this problem in developing a comprehensive strategy for management of small open spaces.

It is clear that the problems posed by vacant lots in Baltimore have outgrown the City's capacity for dealing with them. Many City officials have recognized the shortcomings of the current system and are slowly starting to address problematic issues. However, the problems are numerous and complex, which will necessitate comprehensive policy changes and restructuring of government responsibilities.

Private Ownership and Management of Open Space

Most privately owned vacant lots in Baltimore have resulted from City demolition of abandoned houses. Landowners are responsible for keeping their properties clean and mowing high grass and weeds, but many privately owned vacant lots are not maintained to this standard. The City cites negligent property owners, cleans up the site, and places a lien against the property for the cost of maintenance. However, care of privately owned vacant properties tends to be reactive and complaint-driven because of the scope of the problem and the fact that the sites do not stay clean for long.

Some vacant lots and other small open spaces are purchased or acquired by community members interested in using the land as gardens, community parks or extensions of their private

yards. Individual residents may purchase vacant or abandoned properties from private landowners or directly from the City. Through this approach, private homeowners can expand their properties, neighborhoods can create permanent green spaces, and the City can reduce its maintenance costs and begin to collect property taxes. New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, and several other cities around the country have successfully promoted the purchase of vacant lots by individuals and community organizations. Some Baltimore community organizations could purchase vacant lots so they can turn them into community green spaces. Purchasing the site provides security that the site will remain open space, an important issue given the considerable investment that goes into many community parks and gardens. Implementing this option depends on the value placed on the property, either by the City or the property owner.

However, in many Baltimore neighborhoods where vacant lots are prevalent, private ownership of small open spaces tends to mean neglect. Though the City ultimately has responsibility for attending to abandoned properties, and City condemnation or foreclosure due to delinquent, property tax payments can result in the City gaining ownership, in many cases the property remains privately owned even though the owner often can no longer be located. In order to recoup the cost of demolition, lot maintenance, and/or lost tax revenue, Baltimore City places liens on these properties. Until recently, in order to purchase such properties potential buyers had to assume the payment of these liens in addition to the cost of the land. Quite often, the cost of the lien far exceeds the assessed value of the property. In some cities, liens are routinely waived to encourage private ownership of vacant lots. Under Maryland law, tax liens cannot be waived; however, obtaining a waiver of vendor liens is now possible in Baltimore City.[5] Unfortunately, this fact has not been well publicized, and there is no clearly defined procedure, which makes obtaining a waiver difficult.

According to a ranking City official, the difficulty of obtaining a waiver may be partly due to a long-standing institutional attitude of the City government. The City has been reluctant to part with these properties because they are viewed as sites of potential economic development and future tax revenues. The belief is that if these vacant lots are sold to private owners they will not be available for rebuilding the City's economic base.

A creative solution to the problems posed by demolition/vendor liens on properties has been developed by the City Real Estate Officer. The approach allows the City to separate the assigned liens from the property and assess them against the original owner. The liens still exist, but they encumber the original debtor (i.e., property owner) and not the property itself. Vacant lots, then, become available for purchase without having liens included in the cost. Ambridge drafted a bill for this purpose and helped shepherd it through the state legislature. The bill was passed and the law allowing for the separation of liens took effect June 1, 1997.

There are currently three methods by which delinquent properties can be returned to productive use through the lien separation process.

[5] It is important to note that the Real Estate Office does not have the authority to forgive or abate any back taxes or water bills. However, Ambridge reports that on a lien of $36,000 a majority is interest on the vendor's liens as the interest imposed accrues at a rate of 24% per year. Thus, of the $36,000 total, approximately $400 would be taxes.

• Lien Releases—When liens are greater than the value of the property, the Real Estate Office has the ability to separate the liens from the property so that a new owner can purchase it. The original debtor is still held responsible for the liens, and the City still tries to collect the debt.

• Lien Abatements—Liens are completely forgiven.

• Conditional Sale of Tax Certificates—If a certificate is held by the City, the Real Estate Office can subjugate all the vendors liens (e.g., demolition liens, reinforcement liens) by placing conditions on the sale of the certificate. These conditions usually require that renovations be completed by a certain time. Once the new owner obtains an occupancy permit, the full amount of the vendor liens is converted to a grant. Thus the new owner, having completed the requirements imposed on the sale, is essentially released from the vendor liens.

To ensure that a property is being used for its intended purpose, sites that are renovated or rebuilt are inspected when the new owner seeks an occupancy permit. Any other inspection would be the responsibility of the agency or bureau that initiates the abatement or release process. Since the new law was passed, approximately 200 properties have been subjected to lien separation—the majority for redevelopment. To date, no property has been pursued or purchased by community gardeners or managers of other types of neighborhood open space. Nevertheless, Ambridge is encouraged by these numbers and would like to begin to actively advertise the program.

Providing Technical Assistance for Open Space Management

There are several nonprofit organizations and government supported initiatives that actively work with community groups and City agencies to improve the management of neighborhood open space in Baltimore.

The Parks & People Foundation provides assistance to community groups across Baltimore in turning vacant lots into community green spaces (e.g., parks, gardens, tree nurseries, urban wild lands, school-yard habitats). Parks & People provides technical assistance and training to community groups through its Community Forestry Program, which has been active since 1991. In addition, the organization has operated a Community Grants Program since 1996 that provides small grants (up to $1,000) to community groups for Neighborhood Greening projects. Approximately 50 community projects are funded each year, the majority being efforts to restore small community spaces.

In an effort to respond to the growing number of large vacant lots in Baltimore and increased community interest in maintaining these spaces, Parks & People established a Vacant Lot Restoration Program in 1998. This program is funded by the City Department of Housing and Community Development and includes other nonprofit partners. The Vacant Lot Restoration Program has provided training, technical assistance and funding to 25 community-managed open spaces to date. These spaces are typically large, City-owned lots adopted by the community.

In 1999, Parks & People began a partnership with the **Center for Poverty Solutions**, a nonprofit organization that works to alleviate poverty in Baltimore through direct service, education and advocacy. The resulting project, known as Baltimore Grows, is a USDA-funded initiative to alleviate some of Baltimore's food security issues through community gardening. Baltimore Grows is piloting market gardens on two large areas of vacant land in Baltimore in an effort to test the viability of agricultural production on some of Baltimore's vacant land. In addition to reclaiming vacant land and producing food, Baltimore Grows is providing gardening and nutrition education to children and adults in the areas surrounding these gardens. While the project relies heavily on federal funds and foundation grants, it is clear that vacant lots in Baltimore have the potential to be important sources of food production.

Another Parks & People initiative is the Revitalizing Baltimore (RB) project. Initiated in 1993, the project has evolved into an important partnership with funding from the U.S. Forest Service and support from the Maryland Forest Service. Working in Baltimore's watersheds - Gwynns Falls, Jones Falls, and Herring Run - RB provides grants and assistance through a coalition of organizations providing resources for community forestry and watershed restoration. The three watershed associations and 16 other organizations collaborating with RB, work to bring communities together to undertake tree plantings, stream cleanups, vacant lot cleanups, improve parks and natural areas, and deliver hand-on environmental education experiences. RB has piloted several methods for organizing neighborhood greening activities focused on vacant lots.

Since 1989, the Urban Resources Initiative (URI), also a project of Parks & People, has been working to create partnerships for parks, recreation, and natural resources in Baltimore. Through graduate student interns, URI conducts pilot research and development projects to aide in our collective learning. This report is in part the product of several URI research projects.

In 1999, the Baltimore Alliance for Great Urban Parks and the National Urban Parks Alliance emerged, in part from efforts by Parks & People, to encourage park advocates to come together around a common agenda that speaks to improving urban park systems. The Alliance has focused on preparing for a forum in 2000 that will explore what it will take to create 'great urban parks' in Baltimore, look at steps already taken by other cities and how they are succeeding, and examine capital improvement plans and innovative partnerships being formed in Baltimore and beyond to further improve parks.

The Neighborhood Design Center (NDC) brings volunteer design professionals together with community groups committed to improving their neighborhoods. Through NDC, volunteer landscape architects design parks and other open spaces for community groups across the city. NDC is a major partner in the Vacant Lot Restoration Program and often provides planning and design assistance to community greening projects funded by Parks & People Foundation's Community Grants Program. NDC's Design-for-Safety program helps community residents, volunteer professionals and City agency representatives work together to prevent crime through environmental design strategies. In 1999, NDC launched Playing Safe, a playground restoration initiative in response to the need for safe play spaces in many Baltimore neighborhoods and NeighborCare to organize community beautification efforts.

University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service (CES) is a federal-state program with an office in Baltimore City. CES helps a variety of community groups establish and maintain community vegetable gardens. Its primary role is to provide community organizations with technical assistance and basic supplies (seeds and simple fencing) to start vegetable gardens. The CES administers the local Master Gardener and Master Composter training programs as well as a variety of nutrition, health and 4-H programs.

Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA) is a long-standing nonprofit organization committed to using citizen action to improve the quality of life for the people of Baltimore. CPHA works to identify urban problems and opportunities, mobilizing citizens to address critical city issues and hold government accountable for its performance. CPHA has provided community organizing training and support to many community leaders addressing open space management problems in their neighborhood.

Civic Works is an AmeriCorps federally-funded program that provides job skill training to young people ages 18 to 24. Teams of Civic Works youth frequently assist Baltimore community groups in turning abandoned lots into attractive neighborhood green spaces. The organization can provide critical labor for the creation of larger scale community managed open space projects while training local youth in open space management techniques. Civic Works is another important partner in Parks & People's Vacant Lot Restoration Program.

Community Law Center (CLC) engages volunteers to provide services to small non-profit organizations addressing concerns of poor people and urban neighborhoods in Baltimore. CLC will assist community groups in taking over the management of vacant properties owned by negligent private landlords. CLC also offers general advice and direct representation involving tax issues and incorporation of non-profits.

Land Trusts and Land Banking

There are few urban land trusts or other groups seeking to preserve community-managed open spaces in Baltimore. Groups that do exist tend to focus on issues within a single neighborhood. The national Trust for Public Land has an office in Baltimore, but is not focused on issues of neighborhood open space preservation.[6] Some may say that land trusts are not needed in Baltimore, given the abundance of vacant land and relatively little development pressure. However, a few controversial development proposals have recently prompted local community greening activists to examine the possibility of forming an urban land trust.

Specifically, Baltimore City is beginning to experience a development boom in some of its more wealthy, suburban-like neighborhoods. There are several pieces of forested, City-owned land in such neighborhoods that are now being proposed for housing development. Many of these sites are on steep slopes, near stream valleys or parks and valued for their environmental, recreational and aesthetic benefits. However, it is difficult for the City to weigh environmental, recreational or aesthetic values over the potential economic gain. In addition to the pressures on unprotected forest land, there is growing concern in Baltimore that the community-managed

[6] The focus of TPL in Baltimore is land acquisition and related issues for two hiker-biker trails, the Gwynns Falls Trail and the Jones Falls Trail.

green spaces that have helped improve conditions in some Baltimore neighborhoods could become targets for development as property values increase.

Recognizing the above issues, a group at the University of Maryland School of Social Work initiated a dialogue on the development of a community land trust in Baltimore in the fall of 1999. The group began to develop specific options for a Citywide land trust based on a model employed by the Institute of Community Economics in Springfield, Mass. The model focuses primarily on housing issues; however, past models have recognized the importance of open space preservation and vacant lot restoration. Such models have been successful in Durham, N.C., Albuquerque, N. Mex., Camden, N.J. and Burlington, Vt. The model remains to be employed on a large scale in a major metropolitan area.

Baltimore also lacks any kind of land bank. The City Departments of Planning and Housing and Community Development have investigated options for establishing a land bank, which could help consolidate vacant land for appropriate redevelopment and might encourage community management of open space as an interim use of land. However, a land bank would not protect land from development.

Discussion

The organizations providing technical assistance to the greening projects of Baltimore community groups have made efforts to coordinate their efforts so that services would be complementary rather than overlapping. CES focuses on vegetable gardens, while Parks & People Foundation tends to work with community groups on other types of open space projects. NDC works mainly on planning and design issues, CPHA focuses on community organizing and leadership training, and Parks & People Foundation provides technical assistance and funding for the implementation and maintenance of greening projects. While these organizations communicate regularly and often refer community groups to each other, there is a continual need to improve coordination and enhance communication. Various committees involving the major players help in this respect, for example, forming the advisory committee for this project, but a more permanent mechanism with the express goal of enhancing communication and coordination on neighborhood open space issues would benefit Baltimore tremendously. Such a group could also undertake the task of increasing public awareness and appreciation of the benefits of well-maintained neighborhood open space.

Communities of people, as well as natural systems, do not function well if there is too much divisiveness and fragmentation. We need to connect culturally diverse communities as well as weave fragmented forests and other natural areas to form a healthier urban environment. We can work to improve the capacity of communities to provide stewardship of natural resources and to help people use these improved resources to revitalize their neighborhoods. We can form responsible networks among community groups, businesses, and governmental agencies to provide incentives and assistance in creating the type of institutional change in the Baltimore region that will lead to improved open space management.

Baltimore Case Studies: Community-Managed Open Space

Community-managed open space refers to instances in which community groups or individuals assume responsibility, formally or informally, for maintaining open spaces that are used as community gardens, neighborhood parks, tree nurseries, play areas, parking lots, etc. This land may be City-owned and officially adopted through the Adopt-a-Lot program; or it may be privately owned and used with permission of the owner or acquired by the community through legal processes. Just as often, communities and individuals claim vacant land in Baltimore without any legal formalities by simply planting a tree or a garden.

Community-managed open spaces are a "win-win" proposition for the City and its communities. Individuals take control of their environment as they improve the quality of life in their community. The City benefits because the burden of maintaining the vacant land in the city is now shared, saving time, resources and money. Visitors to the city see attractive and positive images of city life. Although community management is not an appropriate strategy for every small open space, it can be an important component in an overall strategy for managing neighborhood open spaces.

The following case studies describe different types of community-managed open space in Baltimore. These case studies were conducted at the outset of this research effort in 1997 as a way of better understanding the dynamics of community-managed open space projects. Each case study includes a basic description of the site (e.g., history, size, location, use), 1990 census statistics for the community and important community resources and technical support organizations involved in developing the site.

The "26ers" Park

The "26ers" Park is located at the corner of Barclay and 26th Streets in Baltimore's Harwood Neighborhood. Based on 1990 Census data, the neighborhood has a population of 2,759, median family income of $21, 080, and a 13% housing vacancy. The 26ers Park consists of a vacant lot the size of two row houses (approx. 30 x 100 feet). It is fenced and has an open gate. The ground is almost entirely bricked. A pavilion with three picnic benches is surrounded by a wildflower garden with trees.

Planning for the park began in 1994. It was built in 1995. It was created as a partnership between the community association, the local business association, and a neighborhood business. The goal was to provide a meeting space and informal gathering place for the community and to build trust between local businesses and the community.

The groups involved include Civic Works, Neighborhood Design Center, 25th St. Business Association, Charles Village Benefits District, and Harwood-26ers Community Association. Civic Works youth provided park maintenance in the first year. Since then, the Harwood-26ers Community Association has stepped in as needed. The site's infrastructure is difficult to maintain because there is no formal maintenance plan in place.

Discussion: In the beginning, the project had a large influx of outside technical support and funding. It is the most elaborate and expensive effort observed on a space of its size. The park contributes to community aesthetics and cohesion and is cost effective to the City. Although it is low maintenance, the park is now showing signs of wear and tear. Both the business association and the community recognize the need for an improved maintenance plan. However, the business association feels the community is not living up to its responsibility, while the neighbors who use the park think the City should maintain it, and they are unclear about who is managing the area.

Harlem Park Inner Block Park 102

Harlem Park Inner Block Park 102 is a City-owned park located between Calhoun and Carey Streets and Harlem and Lafayette Avenues in Harlem Park. According to 1990 census data, Harlem Park has a population of 7,436, median family income of $17,087, and a 22% housing vacancy. The park fills a large, inner block area. It has a single, fenced-in tennis court in a shady, protected area.

The tennis court is on the site of an earlier passive park that was created during Baltimore's first urban renewal project in 1959-1964. The court was installed in the 1970s. It was a City-initiated project and had input from the community during the planning process. The objective of the project was to provide a recreational opportunity for Harlem Park residents.

Groups involved in the park include the City Department of Recreation and Parks, the Harlem Park Neighborhood Council and residents surrounding the block. It was planned so that maintenance would be handled in a partnership between residents and the City. The residents would provide daily maintenance and control the key to the gate, and the City would provide major maintenance, such as lights, net, and fence. However, the decrease in home ownership and the growing number of abandoned properties around the park have led to increased incidents of vandalism and declining interest in tennis and facility maintenance.

Discussion: Park 102 is not in great condition, but it has fared better than many other inner block parks. Harlem Park residents occasionally use the court for tennis; they also use it for parties. There is a small group of long-time homeowners who clean up the park on an irregular basis, but they find it difficult to keep up with the constant littering and dumping by passersby. The fence protecting the tennis courts has been torn down in a number of places, the net is torn, and trash is accumulating in vacant houses surrounding the park. Part of the difficulty of maintaining the park stems from its design. Like most of Harlem Park's inner block parks, it is not visible from the street, so it has become a perfect place for dumping and illicit activities. While there is some interest in tennis in the area, the presence of only one tennis court and the lack of benches for spectators reduces the social opportunities for tennis players and discourages all but the most enthusiastic users.

Sandtown-Winchester Community Gardens

Sandtown-Winchester Community Gardens are located between Riggs and Winchester Streets and Mount Street and Gilmore Avenue in the neighborhood of Sandtown-Winchester. This area has a population of 10,944, a median family income of $13,888, and a 23% housing vacancy. (1990 census data.) Sandtown-Winchester has been the site of a large influx of funding from

government sources as well as private funds raised by the local Enterprise Foundation. In addition, it is part of Baltimore's empowerment zone.

The park fills two-thirds of an inner block area and is open to Riggs Avenue. It consists of three separate, fenced-in plots: two private vegetable gardens and a tree nursery. The original purpose of the park was beautify the neighborhood by converting a trash dump into a space that would provide gardening opportunities for residents, reduce the City's expenses for maintenance, and provide street trees at low cost.

Space for the park was first cleared and gardened in 1993. It was originally the site of a "garden raising" by Community Building in Partnership (a local Community Development Corporation) and Parks & People Foundation's Urban Resources Initiative. Those involved in the original plan for the community gardens included individuals in Sandtown-Winchester, an informal garden club, the Neighborhood Development Center, Community Building in Partnership, Parks & People Foundation, the Maryland Cooperative Extension Service and the Department of Recreation and Parks. The tree nursery remained under the control of Community Building in Partnership until the Neighborhood Development Center was designated as the open space manager for Sandtown-Winchester. Over time, the garden plots became neglected, and individuals in the neighborhood eventually adopted them. Individual gardeners now take care of maintenance of gardening plots, but there is no maintenance plan for the tree nursery, and the trees are not being used.

Discussion: Successful community management of open spaces requires a sense of ownership by either a community group or an individual in the community. Unfortunately few local community members in Sandtown-Winchester felt any ownership of the tree nursery, causing it to become dysfunctional. Indeed, the nature of the output of the open space may have some influence on the project's success, e.g., vegetable gardens produce very personal benefits in a short time. A tree nursery may be workable, but a well-defined management plan must be established, and those who maintain the site must receive some personal benefit.

Duncan Street Garden, Broadway East

Duncan Street Garden is located on the south side of North Avenue, between Collington and Chester Streets, in the neighborhood of Broadway East. This area has a population of 12,095, a median family income of $15,865, and a 13% housing vacancy. (1990 census data.) The garden fills an entire inner block and alley area. It contains a large vegetable and fruit garden that is divided into 35 plots. It is fenced in and has a gate with a lock. There is a water tap on the property.

The project began in 1989. It was community-initiated as its founders got the idea from seeing another garden. The original objective of the project was to beautify a previous dumping ground and to provide recreation for seniors. Maryland Cooperative Extension Service (CES) provided technical services and advice to get the project started. The project is managed by the Pharoah's Assentive Community Association (PACA) with support from CES, the Community Law Center, Parks & People Foundation and the Department of Recreation and Parks (providing mulch and leaf compost).

There are three informal garden managers who oversee maintenance of the space, and individual gardeners are responsible for maintaining their own plots. Each gardener pays dues of $1.00 a month, which is used to pay the water bill. PACA has monthly meetings to discuss the management of the garden and other community matters.

The primary constraint faced by the Duncan Street Garden is a lack of age diversity. Most of the gardeners are elderly and attempts to recruit youth into gardening activities have not been successful. However, the garden has brought many benefits to the community. Aesthetics of the area have been improved; gardeners enjoy better nutrition and an outlet for recreation; the City's expense for upkeep has been reduced; the community has gained a sense of cohesion; and the garden has served as a catalyst for the development of other gardens.

Discussion: Community residents are the major force behind all aspects of the Duncan Street Garden. While other organizations are involved and gardeners receive support from outside resources, the accomplishments of the project are due to the fact that PACA is strong and well-connected, that a partnership exists between it and other organizations, and that gardeners feel personal ownership of their garden plots. People from outside the neighborhood drive to garden at Duncan Street because of its attractiveness. Many of them say that there are plenty of vacant lots closer to their homes, but they "just don't look as good as this one." The garden's attractiveness has also acted as a catalyst for the creation of at least two other gardens in an adjacent neighborhood.

The Duncan Street Garden may be the longest-lived and best-kept, community-managed open space in Baltimore. It owes much of its present success to a core of retired men who migrated to Baltimore from the rural south after World War II. They are knowledgeable, interested in gardening, and have sufficient time to devote to the garden. It is the right project in the right place at the right time. The concern is that, as the gentlemen get older and are less able to garden, the use of the space will change.

Research in Other Cities

Atlanta, Georgia

The City of Atlanta covers 131.6 square miles and contains two counties. In 1994, its population was estimated at 396,052, ranking it #36 among the most populous U.S. cities. Like Baltimore, Atlanta is experiencing the widespread effects of "suburban flight" and has recently earned the dubious distinction of having the longest commute times in the country. Although the explosion in Atlanta's downtown business district and advent of the Olympics in 1996 seemed to promise unprecedented levels of urban renewal and community revitalization, the burned out shells of crack houses and countless vacant lots can still be seen in many neighborhoods. Unlike Baltimore, most houses in Atlanta are single family dwellings on generously sized lots. Thus, when buildings are abandoned and torn down, the size of the resulting open areas is staggering.

According to the Bureau of Planning, there are approximately 1,036 acres of vacant residential land within the City of Atlanta, 75% of which is privately owned. There are currently no specific policies that address the maintenance or use of vacant land. The governmental agencies having control and/or ownership of those vacant parcels that are not privately owned are the City of Atlanta, generally, and the Atlanta Development Authority and Georgia State Department of Transportation, specifically. The Department of Parks and Recreation is largely responsible for maintenance on City-owned lots, but maintenance is driven almost entirely by citizen complaint.

The City does not actively acquire vacant parcels, nor does it have a proactive policy or procedure for encouraging their resale. In addition, the City has no strategy for the temporary or permanent reuse of these spaces. Nonetheless, according to Dan Cohen, Principal Planner for the Planning Department, there is a modest and perhaps growing market for at least some of this land. He believes that lack of staff and inadequate resources are the main obstacles to addressing the problem and could be alleviated by increasing the City's tax base.

Government Supported Programs

There are currently no urban greening/community gardening programs run by the City of Atlanta, however, the **Atlanta Department of Public Works Recycling Program** provides community gardens throughout the city with mulch and compost free of charge. Atlanta uses a system of "complementary incentives" to encourage the recycling of organic materials. The City contracts out the pruning of trees and leaf pick-up to private contractors who must then provide the material free of charge to City agencies/properties that request it. At the end of a specified time, the contractors may sell on the open market any material not requested by the City. Thus, the contractors have an incentive to generate as much material as possible, and the City has an incentive to use as much of this material as possible. This system of competition for the same material ensures that the works gets done and the materials are not wasted. It represents a creative solution to what many cities view simply as a solid waste disposal issue, with the added bonus of benefiting community-managed open spaces

Atlanta had an adopt-a-lot program that was part of an array of ambitious urban revitalization plans that were explored around the time of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games.

However, it has fallen by the wayside as the publicity and attention brought by the Games has receded.

The state-run Georgia Cooperative Extension Service is actively promoting community management of open space through its Atlanta Urban Gardening Program (AUGP).

The Atlanta Urban Gardening Program—The mission of this program is to "provide technical assistance to the under-served and disadvantaged communities in the area [in order] to maintain green space and improve quality of life." As a result, AUGP's focus is largely one of community building and developing leadership skills among community members.

AUGP staff claim to support about 200 community gardens. Although many of the gardens are little more than containers on school grounds or gardens at rehab centers or shelters, the AUGP is credited with bringing increased public attention to the complex issues surrounding vacant land and urban open space in Atlanta and capitalizing on the community-building effects of gardens and greening projects.

Non-Profit/Technical Assistance Organizations

There is a powerful link between community gardening and food security in Atlanta. The Community Gardening Initiative of the Atlanta Community Food Bank (ACFB) is the leader in supporting community-managed open spaces. Founded in 1979, the Food Bank's mission is to "fight hunger by engaging, educating and empowering our community."

The Community Gardening Initiative—The Community Gardening Initiative is one of the Food Bank's many projects. Its mission is "to increase the quantity and quality of community gardens in metropolitan Atlanta." The Initiative was begun in 1996, with the Food Bank employing a full-time Community Garden Coordinator. In addition, the Initiative now has a Volunteer Coordinator who organizes volunteers from area churches, schools, and businesses for weekend work projects. With these resources, the Initiative currently provides technical assistance to 55 community gardens around metropolitan Atlanta, in partnership with approximately 35 Food Bank member agencies. (There are over 700 member agencies that distribute food to those in need within northwest Georgia alone.) They also work cooperatively with churches, recreation centers, schools, civic centers, senior communities, and planned housing developments, as well as with independent gardens.

Services provided through the Community Gardening Initiative include:

- Assisting new and existing groups with siting, planning and organizing community gardens.

- Facilitating volunteer hours, delivering gardening materials such as compost, mulch seeds and seedlings; organizing garden tours to help fledgling groups interact with gardeners at well-established gardens.

- Serving as a clearinghouse of information and materials.

In 1998, the Food Bank helped to start 11 new gardens and, as of March 1999, had helped to start four more. The Food Bank has also established a seed bank that distributed nearly 3,000 packets of seeds last year, free of charge to area residents.

The Community Gardening Initiative focuses its attention on the needs of Atlanta's children and senior citizens, understanding that these groups are often the most subject to the vagaries of poverty and hunger. However, despite its bias toward food production for the hungry, nearly all the community gardens in Atlanta are multi-use spaces, serving also as play areas, offering educational opportunities for school-aged children, or providing flower gardens and sitting parks for members of the community.

While they may approach the problems facing Atlanta's neighborhoods from somewhat different angles, AUGP and the Food Bank generally agree on the main obstacles to their community gardening/greening efforts: fragmented efforts by, and excessive bureaucracy in, area government agencies; lack of funding and the difficulty community groups face in obtaining funding; and the practical challenges of gaining access to water and other much needed services.

Despite these obstacles and the frustrations that arise from a lack of a comprehensive open space or vacant lot strategy, Fred Conrad, the Community Garden Coordinator for the Food Bank remains optimistic. He points out that many problems have been adequately addressed on a case-by-case basis. "Every garden start-up has been a collaborative effort that involved several partners, which has lent resources and flexibility to the process." He also acknowledges Atlanta's Department of Public Works as his greatest ally, in particular, the free mulch and compost provided through its Recycling Program.

Atlanta Community ToolBank—Another source of support for the Community Gardening Initiative is the Atlanta Community ToolBank. It is the only tool lending library in the Southeast. It functions as "a Georgia nonprofit corporation which warehouses and distributes tools and donated materials to nonprofit organizations . . . allow[ing] nonprofits to leverage their limited resources in order to increase their capacity and impact on the neighborhoods and constituencies they serve." Conrad notes that he relies heavily on its services, saving the Food Bank thousands of dollars in the cost of tools.

Liability insurance, while recommended by the Food Bank, is not required as part of any agreement between the City and gardening groups, because no formal agreement or contractual relationship exists. Conrad explains:

> Most vacant lots are used as garbage dumps and as shooting galleries for junkies. Usually [they are] abandoned by individuals or corporations [who are] far in arrears of tax assessments, but they are not pursued unless a neighborhood group goes after access to the lot. No one seems to be taking much ownership of vacant property. This means that neglected and abused vacant lots are affected by the "SEP" phenomenon—they become invisible to any one official because they are Somebody Else's Problem. [However], they do not become the City's property by default. Mostly it is up to the

people in low-income neighborhoods who have to deal with the consequences of vacant lots that have taken the initiative to remedy.

Given the lack of leases or other formal agreements for the use of City-owned or privately owned abandoned property, it is safe to generalize that community gardens and other types of community managed open spaces in Atlanta are viewed largely as an appropriate interim use of the land. Thus, a sense of permanence is decidedly lacking and, on occasion, gardens have been lost to development. The uncertainty of permanence is often of great concern to potential funding sources that want to see lasting results from their investments.

Land Trusts and Land Banking

No active land trusts currently address the preservation of community-managed open space within the City of Atlanta. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has been active in the area, spurred on in part by the 1996 Olympics, however, its focus has been the development of greenways and trails. There was, at one time, an urban land trust called the South Atlanta Land Trust (SALT), which apparently failed and ultimately closed its doors. Despite the lack of a functioning urban land trust, Atlanta does lay claim to an interesting hybrid organization that plays a key role in addressing the legal aspects of property rehabilitation in the city.

Land Bank Authority—The Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority (LBA) is a non-profit organization that plays a quasi-governmental role in addressing the problems of abandoned, tax-delinquent property. Although not a land bank in the strictest terms—the organization does not actually acquire property or disburse it—the LBA was established to return such properties to productive use. In 1991, the LBA was:

> created by an Interlocal Cooperation Agreement between Fulton County and the City of Atlanta, [and] has the power to forgive delinquent taxes for property located throughout Fulton County and the City of Atlanta. The LBA's power to forgive delinquent taxes enables developers to obtain clear and marketable title to property at an affordable price. As a result, the LBA is not only an effective tool in rebuilding communities, but helps generate future tax revenue by putting property back on the tax role.[7]

The LBA was created because, under existing legislation, it was an extremely cumbersome and lengthy process for local agencies to go after property owners for back taxes. In addition, these agencies did not have the authority to condemn or foreclose on property with any ease or speed, the process often taking several years from start to finish. Furthermore, the amount of back taxes and liens frequently exceeded the actual value of delinquent properties, serving as a tremendous disincentive to anyone interested in redeveloping them.

Since its inception, the LBA has forgiven back taxes on more than 500 properties out of approximately 700 applications that have come before it for review. The LBA does not provide financing but can provide potential developers with guidance in finding financing and, in some cases, bidding on a property at auction on the developer's behalf. It could be argued that the

[7] Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority, 1998. Informational brochure. Note: It is important to recognize that it required passing a law at the state level for this "interlocal" agreement to occur. In other words, it was the state legislature that had the power to give the LBA its authority to forgive city and county taxes, where previously it had none.

LBA is more of a reactive organization than a proactive one, as it responds to applications from developers when they already have a plan. However, it does maintains visibility at the community level by advertising the availability of its services through 24 Neighborhood Planning Units in Atlanta, as well as through churches and other nonprofit organizations.

From the perspective of the LBA, anyone can be a potential developer, whether the project seeks to:

- Renovate an existing residential property, or redevelop a property, i.e., build a new structure.

- Engage in commercial development of a property.

- Create some type of community enrichment project, such as a neighborhood recreation center or green space for a community park or garden.

The example provided by Atlanta's LBA is one that is well worth imitating. While many cities (including Baltimore) may have developed the legal means for forgiving back taxes and property liens, they have not yet created the necessary mechanisms or regulatory processes by which such an action can be achieved. Without such mechanisms and processes, the cost of rehabilitating a property is prohibitive. In addition, if such a process is overly complicated, it presents an insurmountable barrier to neighborhood or community organizations with modest budgets and no legal advice to rehabilitate delinquent properties as community green spaces.

Discussion

Baltimore can learn much from the deliberate link Atlanta has between its anti-hunger/poverty efforts and the community gardening movement. There seems to be little concern at the Atlanta Food Bank that every community greening project function *solely* for the purpose of addressing food issues. Such flexibility results in projects that better fulfill a variety of needs and ensures a broader base of support, which in turn increases their chances of long-term sustainability.

While most Atlanta agencies are not equipped to provide resources and services to community gardening/greening organizations, the City's Recycling Program is an outstanding example of how a thoughtful and creative system of dual incentives can dramatically reduce the cost and increase the quality and availability of materials.

Finally, the complicated process of determining property ownership and the expense of purchasing property saddled with back taxes, liens and even unpaid utility bills poses one of the greatest barriers to reclamation of vacant land. This obstacle alone can be enough to prevent communities from taking on the responsibility of managing vacant lots by converting them into open spaces. The creation of the Land Bank Authority in Atlanta demonstrates in the clearest terms how reducing bureaucracy and red tape associated with the lien release process, can have the net result of encouraging housing and commercial redevelopment, as well as the creation of new community-managed open spaces.

Detroit, Michigan

Detroit covers an area of 138.7 square miles and encompasses one county. The city's population was estimated at 1,000,272 in 1996, which ranked it #7 among the most populous U.S. cities. Perhaps no other American city has suffered such dramatic effects of post-industrialism over the past 30 years. At its peak, Detroit's population was nearly 2 million, and the degree to which this mass exodus has affected the physical landscape of Detroit is obvious to the most casual observer. The tremendous quantity of vacant land throughout that city simply cannot be overlooked. Sadly, it is not an overstatement to say that the parallel phenomena of "suburban flight and urban blight" have left large sections of the city looking fractured and war torn.

According to a 1997 report by the President's Council on Sustainable Development:

> [Between 1965 and 1990], the problem [of Detroit's declining population] became so severe that in 1989 the City instituted a widespread demolition program to remove the "dangerous and abandoned" buildings. Consequently, Detroit lost 60,385 housing units leaving 65,000 vacant lots in the city (*Detroit Free Press*, 1989). The vacant lots, often used as illegal trash and waste dumps, led many Detroit neighborhood groups to identify the vacant lots in their area as *among the top problems in their communities*.[8]

More recent estimates by the Detroit Planning Commission, indicate that there are currently closer to 55,000 vacant properties in Detroit. With an average lot size of 30' x 100' in older neighborhoods and approximately 40' x 100' in newer neighborhoods, estimates of the total quantity of vacant land run as high 7,400 acres. Of these vacant lots, 53,000 totaling about 5,900 acres are currently owned by the City. The majority of these sites are owned and managed by the Detroit Planning Department and maintained by the City's Department of Public Works (DPW). Maintenance consists of mowing one to two times a year. Cleanup of debris from illegal dumping is done sporadically and almost always on a complaint-driven basis.

All survey respondents strongly agreed that Detroit has a severe vacant lot problem, but the City does not currently have a policy or program for redeveloping these lots or for communities to manage them as open spaces. Thus, despite having a master plan for development in the city, the Planning Department does not address the vacant property issue in any comprehensive way. The Department neither actively acquires vacant land nor has an aggressive program to resell the land it has acquired, usually by default. According to Gregory Moots of the Detroit Planning Commission, "There is *some* market [for this land] but not for the *quantity* of vacant residential lots" in the city. He further states that other than encouraging the sale of vacant lots to the owner's of adjacent properties or the occasional transfer to the Economic Development Authority, the land is generally sold only upon request. Susan Stellar, Associate Forester, Department of Recreation and Parks, points out that obtaining ownership of City-owned vacant property is "usually only accomplished with great difficulty."

[8] President's Council on Sustainable Development, Fall 1997, p. 162. *Sustainable Communities, Task Force Report.* Emphasis added.

Government Supported Programs

Since the time of the above interviews, Detroit has stepped up its efforts to sell off City-owned vacant lots through its side-lot/abutter program. According to an article in the *Detroit Free Press*:

> The City's fire sale on vacant lots in residential neighborhoods is long overdue. The City plans first to offer the lots to neighboring homeowners, and then perhaps to nonprofit groups, for $50 a lot. It's an excellent idea. In many cases, neighbors and block clubs are already tending the lots to keep them from becoming midnight dumpsites. The City's offer should encourage even more people to turn them into gardens, play yards or picnic areas.
>
> The City should certainly extend the offer to community-based housing development groups such as Habitat for Humanity and Blight Busters. Those groups could do much more to revitalize neighborhoods if it weren't for the bureaucratic disarray and the strangling regulations that afflict so many City programs.
>
> If the plan to offer some 11,000 vacant lots for sale means the City has finally gotten a handle on what it owns and where, so much the better. The title mess surrounding City-owned land and buildings has for too long discouraged and frustrated residents and developers.
>
> The gain comes later in enhanced property tax revenues, in the greening and revitalizing of hundreds of city blocks, and the affordable housing built by community-based developers. The Archer administration has come up with a smart, creative idea. Carried out right, it will perk up and alleviate a property management problem that has dogged the city for years.[9]

Significantly, the article does not address the issue of whether or not Detroit's beleaguered communities can absorb all of these 11,000 properties, not to mention the cost of long-term maintenance. Nor does it address the fact that these properties represent only about one-fifth of the city's total "reserve" of vacant properties. Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly a first step in addressing the problem and permits the use of these properties as community-managed open spaces.

The Farm-A-Lot Program—Farm-a-Lot was started in 1975 to address the growing problem of vacant lots and to provide sources of fresh, inexpensive produce. The use of the terms "Farm-a-Lot" and "urban agriculture" expresses not only a Midwest, farm-belt point of view, but also speaks to the tremendous quantity and large size of most parcels.

To participate in the Farm-a-Lot program, applicants must seek the permission of neighboring property owners and obtain a permit from the Recreation Department, which manages the program. To date, permit holders include community groups, neighborhood organizations, churches and schools. The program provides spring tilling, mulch and/or topsoil,

[9] *Detroit Free Press*, January 28, 1999, p. C2. (No author indicated). "Lots of Potential: Vacant property sale can build a better city."

4,000 to 5,000 packets of seeds and a large number of seedlings to participating groups each year. Currently, the Farm-a-Lot program tills 500 to 600 urban gardens, the vast majority of which are located on City-owned land. They range in size from single backyard plots to large, multi-lot community gardens. In addition, the program sponsors or co-sponsors a variety of special events, including an annual yard and garden fair in the spring and a harvest festival in the fall.

Many of Detroit's community gardens provide participating gardeners with individual plots, but some are organized solely for the purpose of supporting a particular charity or organization. One such example is the Wellness Garden located in southwest Detroit. It is run by volunteers who grow fruit and vegetables for Wellness House, a local AIDS hospice. They also raise funds for both the garden and the hospice in a number of ways including growing varieties of rare irises, which they sell at special events.

In one unusual case, a Farm-a-Lot garden is being run in a corner of an existing City park by a local church's summer day camp. Susan Stellar, Farm-a-Lot Coordinator and Associate Forester for the Recreation Department, stated that she allowed and encouraged this unusual arrangement because the park was large enough to accommodate the garden and, more importantly, because it had the organized and committed support of a sponsoring group.

There are no apparent restrictions on the sale of produce from Farm-a-Lot gardens, and many groups sell their produce at specially organized farmers' markets coordinated by groups such as the Detroit Farmers' Cooperative and the Hunger Action Coalition. There are, however, restrictions as to the construction of any type of permanent structure on these sites, including garden sheds, greenhouses or shade structures. These restrictions sometimes cause considerable controversy and disregard for the regulations. According to Stellar, these and other obstacles such as the difficulty of determining ownership of privately owned properties, much less actually acquiring property, results in the community management "occurring totally outside City control or processes"—what is frequently referred to as the "guerilla gardening" of vacant lots.

A drawback to the program is that while Farm-a-Lot gardens are widespread throughout the city, they are generally small in scale and comprise only a tiny fraction of the total number of vacant lots. In addition, gardeners are faced with a lack of long-term security, which is due at least in part to there being no formal leasing or purchasing arrangements between the City and the gardeners. Furthermore, the issues of liability and insurance are simply not addressed. The City requires neither the signing of a waiver or proof of liability insurance in order to garden on City-owned land. If liability were to become a problem, responsibility would most likely fall to the City by default.

Both Stellar and other survey respondents note that another drawback of the program is the lack commitment from the City. They also point to inadequate City resources and excessive bureaucracy as two of the greatest obstacles to conscientious land use and effective community management of open space.

The Adopt-A-Park Program—Started in the 1970's in response to City budget cuts, this program seeks to foster "cooperation between the City and individuals, businesses, and

community organizations to monitor, maintain and improve Detroit's 391 parks and playgrounds" that total nearly 6,000 acres. To date, nearly one-quarter of the of city's parkland has been adopted and is being maintained through this program.

Adopting organizations such as churches, schools, and neighborhood associations, are required to work with the Forestry District Supervisor in their area to set the terms of their participation and carry out routine maintenance. The program is centered on three main activities:

- Watching the park and reporting crimes, vandalism or illegal dumping.

- Cleaning the park of debris, weeds and undesirable tree growth.

- Improving the park by painting play equipment, pruning and cultivating trees and shrubs, planting and maintaining flower beds, or donating funds.

Although this program does not address the problems posed by vacant lots, Adopt-a-Park does address the problem of ever-shrinking City resources available for parks and open space management and seeks to foster improved levels of stewardship by people living in areas around city parks. Furthermore, by involving residents in the care of these spaces, the City succeeds in placing more "eyes on the parks," effectively making them less attractive places for illegal activities. Without a doubt, such programs represent creative solutions to these problems in the face of persistent and repeated budget cuts.

Non-Profit Organizations

There are many open space organizations in the Detroit area focusing on one or more aspect of the urban greening effort and the reclamation of vacant land. In addition, many members of these groups serve on more than one board of directors or steering committee and/or are employees of city, state or regional agencies. Among these groups are Healthy Detroit, the Detroit Agricultural Network, the Hunger Action Coalition, and The Greening of Detroit, all of which operate citywide and serve as umbrella organizations for, and provide liaisons among, many smaller groups. In addition, Detroit has developed a strong alliance between anti-hunger/food security groups and urban greening efforts.

Healthy Detroit—Healthy Detroit was founded in the mid-1990s based on the Healthy Cities model developed by the World Health Organization. One of the seven initiatives—the Green Zones Initiative—was aimed at promoting youth and community-based gardening efforts, local community markets and community-supported parks. Through Green Zones, people participating in a variety of gardening and greening programs such as Farm-a-Lot, Adopt-a-Park and the City's 4-H Center, began to work together and support each other's efforts. What started as a project initiative very quickly evolved into a networking organization called the Detroit Agricultural Network (DAN).

The Detroit Agricultural Network—DAN was established formally in 1996 when a small group of activists united around a shared vision for the potential of agriculture in Detroit. The organization now focuses primarily on cooperative and community-based "green businesses"

such as local farmers' markets. The title Green Zones now refers to the group's bimonthly newsletter, *Green Zones Grapevine*, which is the main publication on urban greening in the Detroit area.

According to Carol Osborne, a DAN organizer, the group is an "interesting coalition of hunger advocates, gardeners, socialists, religious groups and others, mostly food gardeners, but there are several groups interested in tree planting and park improvements." DAN is working to create partnerships with city and state agencies, forming links with technical schools, colleges and universities in order to promote both community organizing and improve food security for people living in the Detroit region. In April 1998, the network elected its first Council of Elders, which included representatives from the Hunger Action Coalition, the East Michigan Environmental Action Council, the Department of Recreation's Division of Forestry, and the 4-H Community Center, among others. Members are currently developing a community gardening database aimed at connecting gardening groups with much needed materials, resources, volunteers, mentors and funding sources.

The Hunger Action Coalition has been a principal supporter of DAN along with the Farm-a-Lot and Adopt-a-Park programs. In particular, it has provided financial support through a three-year grant it received from the Community Food Project program sponsored by the USDA.

There are many worthwhile community gardening/greening groups in Detroit, but they are too numerous to describe in this report. However, two additional groups merit attention: Gardening Angels and The Greening of Detroit. These groups are noteworthy because their efforts so well characterize the types and range of urban greening/community gardening efforts occurring in Detroit.

The Gardening Angels—The Gardening Angels is a group of senior citizens, many of whom emigrated from the South in the '50s and '60s to work in Detroit's automobile industry. They brought with them their agricultural heritage. Now retired, many of these seniors are seeking to pass this legacy on to the youth in their communities, simultaneously offering them a chance to participate in more productive activities.

The Greening of Detroit—The Greening of Detroit describes itself as a "non-profit organization devoted to the reforestation of Detroit's neighborhoods, boulevards and parks, and to the education of its citizens so future generations may come to know the beauty of nature." The Greening (as it is commonly referred to) focuses largely on tree planting and urban forestry education programs, but it also participates in the reclamation of urban vacant lots and park adoption. Since its founding in 1989, The Greening claims to have facilitated 73 vacant lot reclamation projects; transformed more than 422 city blocks with major plantings; greened six recreational play fields, 11 city parks, and three apartment complexes; and assisted in the creation of nine seedling nurseries.

Discussion

As in Atlanta, there is a link in Detroit between the anti-hunger/poverty movement and the urban greening/community gardening movements. However, in Detroit this link is somewhat more decentralized. Also like Atlanta, Detroit provides considerable material resources to

community gardeners through its Farm-a-Lot program. However, restrictions on permanent structures discourage not only a sense of permanence to sites but also the development of mixed-use spaces. The restrictions also encourage community groups to operate outside the auspices of City-supported programs.

Despite what could be argued as a reasonably cooperative relationship between some City agencies and area non-profits, it is really more a matter of the energy and participation of a few sympathetic individuals within City government rather than a commitment at the City or agency level. In addition, Detroit has no citywide open space policy or strategy. These factors ultimately hinder the ability of community groups to easily and effectively manage open spaces in their neighborhood.

There are currently no urban land trusts or other groups seeking to preserve community managed open spaces in Detroit. Some may say that such an organization is not needed, given that in Detroit, like Baltimore, there is so much vacant land and relatively little development. In such a situation one does not expect development to compete with land occupied by community gardens. However, two recent controversial issues facing Detroit have prompted members of the DAN to examine the possibility of forming an urban land trust. The first of these events was a decision by the City to give portions of local parkland to commercial development projects. DAN stepped in and was instrumental in preventing the City from apportioning part of McHarris Park to a private developer.

The second issue involved DAN's efforts to bring attention to the problem of competition between local gardeners and developers of new, large scale casinos for land occupied by existing urban gardens. As of August 1998, a casino developer had arranged to buy out and/or relocate at least one of the garden sites operated by a local church. Despite some urgency felt by area organizations such as DAN, as of the writing of this report the development of an urban land trust in Detroit is still in a developmental stage.

Even in a city with as great a surplus of vacant land as Detroit, there can still be competition for available open space. The importance of examining the issue of interim versus permanent use of vacant land and the need for a formal mechanism to preserve community-managed open spaces is highlighted by the case of a casino vying for the same property as a community garden, when only a short time before the property was considered of no value. Such cases provide persuasive evidence for the development of urban land trusts, even in cities where there is thought to be little or no competition for space.

Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned from Detroit is one that remains to be seen: The success or failure of the City's side-lot or "abutter" program. Only time will tell whether this program is truly effective at returning control of open spaces to communities or is simply a way of shifting responsibility for the care and maintenance of vacant lots from the City to private citizens who may not be able to shoulder the burden.

Boston, Massachusetts

The City of Boston covers 48 square miles. Its population totaled 574,000 in 1990. Urban gardening became an established, City-sponsored activity in during World War I when about 30,000 residents were involved in the War Gardens Program. The current urban gardening movement began in the 1970's when increasing numbers of vacant lots became available for cultivation, there was accepting political climate of community empowerment, and a large wave of immigrants from China, Puerto Rico, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the rural south came into Boston. Indeed, immigrants from many rural agricultural areas took advantage of the City's willingness to have gardens established on City-owned land. In 1975, Mayor Kevin White created the Revival Gardens program and began funneling Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds through the Public Facilities Department for the creation of gardens on vacant land in blighted areas of the city. This program lasted for two years and created 30 gardens. Some of the gardens that began as Revival Gardens continue to be cultivated.

By the late '70s, the high cost of the City's active involvement in gardening led to the demise of these public programs. In order to provide a means for the maintenance of existing Revival Gardens, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), which is the planning body for the City of Boston, contracted with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to establish some of the gardening groups as non-profit land trusts. Because of TPL's work, Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG), Boston Natural Areas Fund (BNAF), and the Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve and Development Corporation (DGP) were established in 1977. While the BRA continued to work with the land trusts to identify City-owned vacant lots suitable for gardens, this marked the end of active, City support of gardening. The City gave the remaining $40,000 of CDBG funds for the maintenance of the Revival Gardens to Boston Urban Gardeners. In addition to the funds, the City transferred title to a number of gardens and "urban wilds" to BUG and BNAF because of "widespread community interest in protecting [the gardens] permanently." The City of Boston revived its support of urban gardening in the early '80s, when development pressure had led to the demise of a former garden site in Chinatown. Reacting to the public outcry over this event, the City established the Grassroots Program in 1985.

Government Supported Programs

As of the summer of 1998, the City of Boston had about 150 permanent, community-managed green spaces. Eighty of these are owned by private non-profit land trusts, and 70 are owned by the public sector. The largest land trusts are BNAF, BUG, DGP, and the South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SELROSLT), together owning 70 gardens. Fifty gardens are on state or city parkland and are considered as protected from development as those on private land. Even the gardens on public land receive assistance from the non-profit groups in the city. The Parks Department does not assist in the maintenance of gardens.

Grassroots—This program, housed in the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) provides funds for non-profit groups to use the City-owned land. Now in its 12th year, Grassroots funds 10 projects a year, with two funding cycles per year. Grants are of two types: technical assistance grants that range from $4,000 to $20,000 and construction grants, which reimburse 80% of the cost of construction ranging from $50,000 to $100,000.

Grassroots funds are available only for the creation or large-scale improvement of a garden, not for day-to-day maintenance. In addition to doling out grant money, Grassroots provides two-year leases to gardeners interested in managing vacant City property. The terms of the lease require proof of liability insurance. Because most community groups do not have the means to meet this requirement, leases are typically granted only to groups affiliated with one of Boston's land trusts, which provide liability insurance for gardening on all leased or owned property. While Grassroots funds can be used to develop a garden on private land, most occur on City-owned land. Over the past 12 years, $7 million in public funds has gone into renovating gardens through the Grassroots program.

Nonprofit Organizations

Trust for Public Land—The Trust for Public Land (TPL) played a critical role in the establishment of a network of community-managed spaces in Boston. Stephen Coyle, then head of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, contracted with TPL in 1977 to help the existing gardening groups in the city become non-profit groups and take ownership of the Revival Gardens.

Boston Natural Areas Fund—The Boston Natural Areas Fund (BNAF) began with 16 victory gardens in 1977 and now owns 30 gardens and 44 wild areas throughout the city. BNAF is unique among the land trusts in that it owns both urban wilds and gardens. In the past, a group that had been gardening on a site for a number of years would contact BNAF staff with interest in pursuing long-term protection for its site. BNAF would then determine whether the site and the group met its criteria for purchase. Valerie Burns, the director of BNAF, explains that: "Our screening process was and is qualitative rather than quantitative. We look for commitment to the idea of a permanent garden, and a core of dedicated people."

Recently, BNAF has taken a more proactive approach to increasing green space in the city. Rather than just helping protect existing gardens, they are now focusing on creating new gardens on new spaces. The initiative still comes from the community groups, but now BNAF steers interested groups to sites that would be suitable for permanent open space. Once a site has been located, BNAF hires a landscape architect to design the garden, working with the gardeners to build a space that serves their interests. BNAF must OK all plans, but if a majority of the gardeners supports a plan, BNAF will approve. City authorization is required as the final step because BNAF hopes to be reimbursed for the cost of the project.

Boston Urban Gardeners—Since its incorporation in 1977, Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG) has acquired nine gardens, and although it is acquiring more, this is not its primary focus. BUG and BNAF are the only land trusts that operate citywide. BUG focuses on providing garden supplies, technical assistance in horticultural techniques and organizational skills, as well as community building and advocacy.

Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve and Development Corporation—DGP is Boston's first community land trust and now owns 17 sites ranging from 20' x 40' flower gardens to 1.75 acre community vegetable gardens. In total, the organization owns seven acres in Dorchester. DGP provides many services to the neighborhood. This breadth of programs and services is described in its promotional literature: "Broader than a land trust, DGP provides technical assistance,

community organizing, and advocacy to low-income residents. DGP is a membership organization composed of community gardeners and their supporters."

South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust—This land trust was founded in 1991, with help from the Trust for Public Land, to protect nine gardens in Boston's densely populated South End. Similar to DPG, it is a neighborhood-based land trust, focusing on community building, public outreach, and organizational skills. This small land trust focuses its efforts on raising funds for capital improvements to gardens. Its gardeners get horticultural assistance and gardening supplies from BUG and Garden Futures.

Garden Futures—In 1994, the four primary, non-profit land trusts in Boston (BUG, BNAF, DGP and SELROSLT) created Garden Futures, an umbrella group to organize the various land owning and gardening groups in the city. While not itself a land trust, Garden Futures works with the land trusts in the city to help prioritize tasks and administer public funds. Betsy Johnson, the director of Garden Futures, explains that the group was established to provide a unified voice for the gardens in the city. With the establishment of one central group, citizens and City officials alike would know where to go with questions about gardens. In addition, Garden Futures does a lot of fundraising on behalf on Boston's gardens. It receives corporate and foundation grants and determines which projects will receive the funds.

Summary

The above organizations perform a number of key functions and provide needed services to community gardens in Boston:

Land Security—Eighty gardens are owned by private non-profit land trusts; 70 are owned by the public sector. In addition, there are approximately 20 unofficial "guerilla gardens." The land trusts all came about due to widespread community support for gardens as well as a City government that saw the value of open space. The Grassroots program administers a two-year lease of City land for gardens, with a 90-day notice of termination. Boston's land trusts as well as the leasing option offered by the Grassroots Program are important services as there is significant development pressure in many areas of the city making community gardening difficult without land security.

• Insurance—Each of the land trusts insures its own property. Gardeners are also required to show proof of insurance in order to obtain a lease from the City. Boston's land trusts will include sites leased from the City on their insurance policies. In effect, Grassroots will only lease to groups that are affiliated with one of the trusts.

• Technical Assistance and Training—BUG provides gardening supplies and training in horticultural techniques to gardens throughout the city. Garden Futures runs the City Gardener certificate program, modeled after the Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener Program but geared specifically to the needs of urban gardeners.

• Organizational Assistance and Networking—All of the neighborhood land trusts train community members in organizational development and management skills. Of the organizations that operate at the city scale, BUG is the most focused on helping groups with organizational

development. In 1997, Garden Futures studied the gardens in the city and the various organizations that made up the gardening community. The study identified "a need for improved networking among garden coordinators, development of a resource clearinghouse and training in leadership and garden organizing." As a result, Garden Futures began to include community organizing in its City Gardener Certificate program.

• Advocacy—BNAF and Garden Futures are the groups most involved in advocacy of open space concerns in Boston. Garden Futures focuses on making the City see that gardens can be a viable part of the city's network of permanent open spaces.

Discussion

Initially, Boston did not intend to establish permanent gardens in the city. The intention was to use Community Development Block Grant funds to support a successful and popular means of staving off blight. The idea of permanency came about when it became clear that temporary plantings did not occupy the sites in the long dormant season. This led to the establishment of the Grassroots program, which allowed planning and construction funds to go directly into gardening. The drive for ownership of gardens reached critical mass in the mid- to late '80s when the city's inventory of vacant land began to diminish with the onset of a housing boom—not an ideal time to think about acquiring gardens.

While there is some variation in the services offered by Boston's many land trusts, they all provide liability insurance and funds for major improvements to the gardens and leave small-scale fundraising and coordination of routine maintenance up to the gardeners. Gardeners generally charge a plot fee of between $5 and $30 a year to cover cost of supplies. The land trusts raise funds to cover major capital improvements.

With the establishment of Garden Futures in 1994, the focus changed from establishing more gardens to bringing existing gardens up to a similar level of improvement in order to make them a recognizable part of a system. Garden Futures works hard to get gardeners to see that gardens that look good will be protected, and gardens that are protected need to remain in good shape to help the cause of other gardens waiting for protection. The four core land trusts that make up Garden Futures aim to acquire between three and five new gardens a year. These gardens have usually been running well for a few years, and the gardeners have approached a land trust with interest in permanently protection.

Finally, examples from Boston demonstrate the importance of both community and City government support to the success and survival of community gardens. Laura Petrucci of the Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve and Development Corporation notes that effective, localized community organizing is a common weak point in community greening. Increasing local interest in greening generates more votes in favor of greening-friendly policies. This idea is echoed by Ann Cherin, who found in her research of gardening in Boston that, "Without the support of the Mayor and City Council, gardens must fight an often losing battle to obtain land and the political support to survive."

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The City of Philadelphia covers 136 square miles. It has a population of 1.6 million (1990 data) which is down 19% since 1970. The city had 16,000 vacant lots and 27,000 abandoned homes in 1997.

Urban gardening and farming in Philadelphia traces back to 1897, when the Vacant Lot Cultivation Association encouraged citizens to use urban land to grow food crops. Since 1977, Penn State's Urban Gardening Program, funded through the USDA, has provided support to the many urban gardens and farms in the city. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) Philadelphia Green Program has been active in supporting the city's gardening and greening activities since 1974. PHS's history lies in neighborhood beautification rather than in urban agriculture. The program began as a garden club, working in many neighborhoods of the city to improve the appearance of streetscapes with window boxes and other plantings. By the late 1980s, PHS and the Penn State program had assisted community members in the creation of over 1,000 gardens on vacant lots in the city. Philadelphia has received much national attention for its network of community gardens. Currently there are about 2,000 gardens throughout the city, most of which do not have a formal gardening agreement with the landowner.

Government Sponsored Programs

Penn State Urban Gardening Program—Penn State's Urban Gardening Program was established in 1977 as a part of a six-city pilot project of the USDA's Cooperative Extension Program. While many of the original programs have been discontinued, the program in Philadelphia is still funded by the USDA. The program provides education and technical assistance to 500 food-producing gardens throughout the city. The Urban Gardening Program provides no financial assistance to gardeners, but functions primarily as an information clearinghouse. The program publishes a bimonthly newsletter, operates a garden hotline, and provides many free literature sheets. Most of the gardens Urban Gardening assists are "low-tech," using recycled and found materials, such as tires and beams from demolished buildings, to build raised beds and fences.

Vacant Property Review Board—A committee of agencies in the City form this board which reviews the decision whenever land will change hands or an urban gardening agreement is to be signed. Before a deed transfer of City land, an entry authorization allows the potential owner to begin work on the site. The City then inspects the site and determines whether to go through with the transfer. This process applies to all City-owned property, buildings as well as lots. Most of the time the land is given to the interested party without charge, but sometimes fair-market value is assessed. The City waives liens to the taker, so the land can be placed back on the tax rolls. There is no inventory of vacant lots by Philadelphia City government. Neighborhood Associations and Community Development Corporations maintain their own lists.

Non-Profit Organizations

Philadelphia Green—PHS's Philadelphia Green Program is the largest urban greening program in the country, with 40 full-time staff. Since 1974 the program has provided technical and educational assistance to more than 700 low-to-moderate income community groups for gardening projects in parks, abandoned lots, and along neighborhood streets. City partners include the Office of Housing and Community Development and the Redevelopment Authority.

Philadelphia Green's outreach program provides training and technical assistance with urban horticulture and community leadership. The program aims to build leadership in the community by focusing on vacant lot rehabilitation and street tree care. Project's such as Garden Tenders, provide community members with training as well as a basic set of gardening materials to start a project.

Throughout the 1980s, Philadelphia Green's Greene Countrie Towne program marked a departure from the scattered, citywide approach to greening that was practiced in the 1970s and introduced concentrated neighborhood-based greening efforts in eight low-income communities throughout the city. This approach revealed that greening was a highly effective tool to help revitalize neighborhoods. In the 1990s, Philadelphia Green began working with neighborhood-based community development corporations (CDCs) to incorporate the management of vacant land into their plans for new housing and commercial development. These initiatives are based on the premise that proper neighborhood planning can ensure the establishment and maintenance of many types of community open space while preserving land for the development needs of future generations. Community gardens serve as a basic tool for teaching CDCs and neighborhood residents an effective way of dealing with problem of vacant land.

West Philadelphia Landscape Project—The West Philadelphia Landscape Project was established in 1987. It is based in the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning. Faculty and students from the university work with community organizations, neighborhood groups, and teachers and students in West Philadelphia's public schools to design urban gardens and other community spaces.

Neighborhood Gardens Association: A Philadelphia Land Trust—In 1986, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and the Penn State Urban Gardening Program founded the Neighborhood Gardens Association/A Philadelphia Land Trust (NGA) to preserve some of the long-standing gardens in the city. In the summer of 1998, NGA owned 25 community gardens, 10 of which were transferred from the City with a restricted deed. Services provided by the trust are limited to ownership and liability insurance. While NGA does not assist in the maintenance of any of its sites, gardeners benefit from the help of Philadelphia Green and Penn State's Urban Gardening Program. NGA visits each site once a year to ensure that sites are adequately maintained. Abandonment has not been a problem, perhaps due to a strict screening process. The main criterion of the screening is the existence of a highly organized group of gardeners interested in the site's permanent protection. Philadelphia Green and NGA work together to identify potential sites to acquire. With the establishment of NGA, Philadelphia Green invests money and time only in projects with some degree of land security.

Summary

The greening organizations listed above perform a number of key functions and provide needed services to Philadelphia's many gardens and neighborhood open spaces.

Land Security—Most of the lots revitalized by Philadelphia Green and other groups are owned by City agencies. While the City is not willing to lease lots to community groups, it does have a formal gardening agreement. The abundance of vacant lots may explain why there has not

been much of a drive for permanent protection of open spaces. Furthermore, many City agencies are unwilling to give up control of their land for fear of missing out on economic gains from future development. Many of the Philadelphia Green sites have been managed under gardening agreements for years, and most groups have not been interested in protecting their sites permanently. The only sites that are protected in perpetuity are the 25 gardens owned by NGA.

Insurance—Insurance is not a requirement of the City's gardening agreement. The City is self-insured and maintains insurance on gardened properties. The only exception to this is the Housing Authority, which requires gardening groups to provide their own insurance. On private land, gardeners often sign a hold-harmless agreement with the landowner before establishing a garden. Through the Land Trust Alliance, NGA can purchase insurance coverage for up to 750 acres for a $1,000 membership fee and an annual payment of $250. Insurance coverage is then provided at no cost to the gardeners.

Technical Assistance—Penn State's Urban Gardening Program offers horticultural assistance and education to food gardens, whether private backyard gardens or community gardens. The Urban Gardening Program provides seeds and other planting supplies. Philadelphia Green provides tools, fencing and gardening supplies, and workshops covering basic gardening techniques. While the Urban Gardening Program and Philadelphia Green overlap to some extent, the two tend to coordinate their support.

Organizational Assistance—Philadelphia Green provides groups with assistance in community leadership skills and small-scale fundraising as part of its training workshops. The NGA helps community members find appropriate sites for gardening.

Advocacy—Philadelphia Green is a large and respected organization in the city. It uses this advantage in working with City agencies to promote the interests of community gardeners.

Discussion

As in Boston, the key to an effective system of community management of open space in Philadelphia has been education of City officials. As Claire Powers of NGA states "The key is to get officials to buy in to the idea that gardens are a community development tool." It is interesting to note that NGA, a non-profit, pays property taxes on its land. This may make the City less apprehensive about selling land to the organization, as they are putting the property back on the tax rolls.

Many people interviewed in Philadelphia stressed that green spaces improve communities and, therefore, often attract residential and commercial development. Claire Power stated, "When developers come, they often destroy the gardens and then wonder why the neighborhood is not as vibrant as they remember." Developers, as well as government officials, need to be continuously educated about the benefits of community-managed open spaces.

Chicago, Illinois

The City of Chicago covers 228 square miles. Its population is over 2.7 million, but according the HUD, it declined 7.3% during 1980s. Chicago has approximately 55,000 vacant parcels of land totaling 13, 769 acres—14% of the city's total area. Thirty percent of the vacant land is owned by local public agencies or non-profit agencies, and another 17% is tax delinquent.

Government Supported Programs and Initiatives

Since his election in 1989, Mayor Daley has focused on improving the quality of life in the city. A large-scale greening initiative, including programs for planting street trees and increasing public open space, is part of this quality of life focus. Programs and projects of the CitySpace Plan have augmented existing non-profit greening programs.

Chicago Wilderness is a regional biodiversity program of demonstration projects coordinated among over 100 organizations. (One reason for the interest in biodiversity is the realization that Chicago's metropolitan area is actually more diverse that many others parts of the state that are intensely farmed). This regional biodiversity initiative includes tall grass savanna and oak forest restoration. Chicago is fortunate that at the turn of the century, forest reserves were purchased to protect water supplies.

Thirty-four Chicago Wilderness partners pooled their resources and strengths to form the **Chicago Regional Biodiversity Council**, which now has more than 50 members. The Council is organized into several teams who work on science, land management, policy and strategy, and education and outreach. The Council has prepared an Atlas and Biodiversity Restoration Plan.

CitySpace Plan—The CitySpace is a comprehensive plan for creating and preserving open space in Chicago. It was initiated in 1993 as a partnership among three governing bodies: the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District, and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Many of the plan's recommendations are now being piloted. At the heart of the plan is the acknowledgment by the participating governments of a shortage of open space in the city. The plan states "Parks, trails, and aesthetics are critical variables in the quality of life equation . . . . More parkland is needed to provide all Chicagoans with safe and convenient access to outdoor recreation."

The drive behind the plan is to attract more businesses and economic development into the city by increasing open space. By 2010, the CitySpace Plan aims to bring all communities up to the Chicago Park District's standard of two acres of open space per 1,000 residents. While the citywide ratio of public open space to residents is currently more than four acres for every 1,000 residents, this space is not evenly distributed. In 1982, the public became aware of the severe inequity of Chicago's park resources when the U.S. Justice Department sued the Chicago Park District for racial discrimination because it failed to provide recreation resources equally to all residents. In struggling to rectify the situation, the Park District found that a major problem was the lack of parkland in many neighborhoods. The 1993 Parkland Needs Analysis found that close to 135,000 people lived in neighborhoods underserved by the Park system.

One of the three greatest opportunities for creating new open spaces identified in the CitySpace Plan is vacant lots. The plan acknowledges that the "process of transferring City-

owned lots and tax-delinquent parcels to community groups has been made easier over the past five years," but it also recognizes areas that could be improved. For example, the Chicago Tax Reactivation Program allows the City's Departments of Housing and Planning and Development to establish criteria, guidelines, and procedures for screening and recommending applicants interested in acquiring tax delinquent property for low- and moderate-income housing and commercial and industrial developments. The CitySpace Plan recommends that this program be expanded to include open space as a specific use, which would facilitate the creation of open spaces not associated with a development or institution.

To solve the problem of who would own land once it is acquired from the City, the CitySpace Plan recommends the establishment of a non-profit organization to own and insure "vacant lots destined to become parks, vegetable and flower gardens, sculpture gardens, natural areas, protected river edges, or scenic landscapes." This recommendation led to the development of NeighborSpace. In addition, CitySpace has created a citywide land inventory and mapping system to identify vacant land resources. This inventory includes both private and City-owned lots. The Department of Planning and Development can use this inventory to identify suitable areas for open space development.

Greencorps—In 1993, the City of Chicago established Greencorps to address the problem of a lack of open space in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. The Department of the Environment in partnership with the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service administers the program. Groups get assistance from Greencorps to set up gardens on City-owned land. Applications are accepted only if the group has permission to use the site for at least three years. Eligible properties include vacant lots, school grounds, public housing property, parkways, and library grounds. While Greencorps initially provided funds for gardens, it now assists gardeners by supplying materials, labor, and training. Basic assistance is usually worth between $300 and $500, and comprehensive assistance grants are worth $3,000. In addition, Greencorps distributes free gardening supplies four times each year for use in public landscapes and gardens. Greencorps has a staff of 25 people who work throughout the city. About 100 community groups receive comprehensive assistance for 171 sites, and as of 1997, approximately 300 sites have received either comprehensive or basic assistance. The number of Greencorps assistance applications has increased each year.

Other groups in the city, such as the Botanic Garden and the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension provided garden assistance in the past, but now that Greencorps has taken on that role, these groups are not as active.

Non-Profit Organizations

The Openlands Project—The Openlands Project is the oldest of the urban conservation organizations in Chicago. Since its establishment in 1963, it has helped to protect 43,000 acres of land in hundreds of projects for parks and public recreation. In 1997, Openlands Urban Greening Program established 30 new gardens and parks on formerly "debris-strewn vacant lots, school grounds, youth and neighborhood centers." The Urban Greening Program helps groups organize and provides technical assistance and training for gardeners. The Urban Greening Program's mission is to stabilize "edge communities" and empower area residents. According to Glenda Daniel, Director of Urban Greening, "The best scenario is to go into areas that do not have

[development] pressure" and start the process of setting up gardens and community parks in an effort to slow the decline of the neighborhood. She adds, "Openlands is really focused on social issues and community development." Its staff brings together residents who are interested in open space management to decide what types of spaces would be useful in what areas. The planning and design process alone can take about two years.

Groups who receive assistance from Openlands must have permission to use the land, and in most cases, it is easier to get a reliable gardening agreement from the City than from a private owner. While the City will not lease the land to community groups, it will establish a hold on the land, agreeing not to develop the site for three years. While the City of Chicago has been known to sell land regardless of the existence of an agreement, Openlands considers an arrangement with the City to be more secure than an agreement with a private owner.

Glenda Daniel believes that "ownership is ultimately the way to go" in establishing and guaranteeing land security. However, Ms. Daniel admits that the groups she works with are not usually interested in taking on the responsibility of ownership: "They are less concerned with ownership than in just fixing up their neighborhood for the time being." Owning permanent gardens is not one of Openlands' goals. Instead, it encourages groups that show an interest in permanently protecting their gardens to incorporate as non-profits and buy the land themselves. They also refer these groups to the city's one urban land trust, NeighborSpace.

NeighborSpace—One of the major programs emerging from the CitySpace Plan is NeighborSpace, a land trust established to purchase established green spaces in the city of Chicago. NeighborSpace targets City-owned and tax-delinquent property and is expected to fill the gap in the existing system by helping community groups create and sustain open space projects that, due to their size or location, would not be developed as City-managed parks. Relying on Openlands to provide technical assistance and support in open space creation, NeighborSpace owns and insures these spaces without providing any on-the-ground assistance. In creating NeighborSpace, the cooperating governments agreed to fund the new corporation for three years, and identified 35 initial projects that the organization would either purchase or lease from a public agency.

As of the summer of 1998, NeighborSpace owned eight sites, with 20 pending. Most NeighborSpace sites are acquired from the City. The Department of General Services, the Department of Planning, and the Department of Housing are all involved in selling land to the organization, usually for $1. Program staff visit sites about three times a year to ensure that they have not fallen into disrepair. One of the main concerns of the staff is that groups may lose interest in a site after it has been purchased from the City. NeighborSpace takes some steps to plan for such an event, for example, there is often a group that acts as co-manager of the garden. Gardening is gaining momentum in Chicago, so members of NeighborSpace staff are optimistic about their chances of finding another group of gardeners to manage a site in case of abandonment. Furthermore, if an interested group cannot be found, NeighborSpace could sell the space. "That's not what we are in business to do," assures Kathy Dickhut, director of NeighborSpace, "but it is possible. We could sell the land back to the City if we wanted to, but it is much more likely that we would sell to a private owner." If the land remains in

NeighborSpace's ownership and is not maintained, the unrestricted deed reverts to the City and could be sold for any use within zoning limitations.

To avoid this chain of events, staff at NeighborSpace is careful about what sites it purchases. NeighborSpace's main criteria in determining which sites to acquire is the existence of a dedicated gardening group. Most green spaces are acquired after they have been running well for a number of years, however, land that is not yet developed as a garden would be considered if a group is really committed to it. Community members agree to a strict maintenance agreement for their site before the land trust makes the purchase.

Summary

Chicago's many greening organizations perform a number of key functions and provide needed services to area gardens and other open spaces.

Land Security—NeighborSpace is the only organization in the city providing long-term land security for gardens, however, a three-year gardening agreement is available from the City.

Insurance—NeighborSpace provides insurance coverage for its gardeners free of charge. A policy through the Land Trust Alliance covers all of its sites for $5,000 a year. Many gardeners manage sites without purchasing insurance. While the City maintains insurance on its properties, gardeners are required to sign a waiver holding the City harmless in the case of accident.

Technical Assistance—Openlands provides education in horticultural techniques and garden design. The Chicago Botanic Garden and Greencorps Chicago are important resources for supplies and assistance.

Organizational Assistance and Networking—Openlands works with community groups to help them organize around an open space project. It helps groups determine what they want to do with a given space and helps them find the resources to do it.

Advocacy—Openlands is a powerful and well-known organization in the city, and it works to keep open space high on the city's list of priorities. This is not so much of an issue now, as Mayor Daley is clearly committed to the general goal of greening the city.

Discussion

NeighborSpace is an example of a City-initiated private organization that is successful in its ability to acquire spaces where gardens currently exist. The transferability of this model was established by a top-down decision from the Mayor and the City's Planning Department. NeighborSpace is a part of a larger system that includes Openlands and GreenSpace. If it were not for the assistance of these groups, a non-gardening land trust like NeighborSpace might face more maintenance and project sustainability problems.

Openlands played an important role in the establishment of NeighborSpace, and the two organizations share office space and administrative staff. However, the situation is not always one of cooperation among various groups and programs. A GreenNet of greening and horticultural groups was established in the early 1990s only to disband due to funding problems

and competition among member groups. While this network has recently been reestablished, inconsistency of missions remains a significant hurdle to effective cooperation among members.

One of the major struggles for Openlands is finding adequate funds for its primary goal of community organizing work. Open space creation is its secondary goal, but the organization has found it easier to raise money for developing spaces, because foundations are interested in producing a more tangible product.

Without exception, the groups contacted in Chicago stated that the initiative for the improvement of a vacant space should come from community members. Successful projects usually begin with a group of dedicated people who want to make a change in their neighborhoods. It is also clear that the strong support of Mayor Daley has been of tremendous benefit for Chicago's open space system and the people who use it.

New York, New York

New York City covers 322 square miles and has five administrative boroughs. In 1990, the total population was 7.3 million, a number that had increased by 3.5% in the previous decade. As of 1998, the city had 14,000 vacant lots. Community greening has a long history in New York. Each of the five boroughs contains at least one garden that is 20 years old. On average, the city's existing gardens are nine years old.

Since the 1970s more than 750 community gardens have been formed on vacant, City-owned lots across New York City. Most of these sites have operated under short-term licenses from the City Parks Department's GreenThumb Program and are subject to eviction with 30-days notice. The weak hold that gardeners had on these sites became very apparent in April 1998 when the gardening agreements on the 750 GreenThumb gardens were transferred from the Department of Parks and Recreation to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The economic growth in the city had led to a housing crunch, so the City opted to make many community garden sites available to developers. A total of 113 of the transferred community garden sites were slated for public auction in 1998.

In a city like New York where open space is limited, community gardens are critical social spaces for cultural events, outdoor classrooms, and informal interaction among neighbors. The immediate threat of losing so many community gardens in 1998 caused New Yorkers and gardening advocates from across the country to rally in support of New York City's community gardens. Four separate law suits were filed against the City by environmental justice groups, community gardening became a major political issue in New York, Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project and other groups raised substantial funds in support of community gardens, and the national Trust For Public Land was pressured into getting involved in saving the gardens.

In May 1999, 113 gardens were saved from destruction at the eleventh hour. The Trust for Public Land reached an agreement with the City to purchase 63 of the gardens that had been slated for auction for a price of $3 million. The remaining 50 gardens were purchased by the New York Restoration Project for $1.2 million. After the deals, Rose Harvey of the Trust for Public Land noted, "As a deal, it is a good one; but as public policy, it sets an unwelcome precedent. Today's agreement will be a good one only if it marks the end of private garden purchases and the start of a new public effort to protect additional open space in under-served communities."

Government Supported Programs

The GreenThumb Program—The City became involved in community gardening in 1978, when it set up the GreenThumb Program in the Parks Department to provide assistance to gardeners for rehabilitating city land. Until 1998, GreenThumb provided gardening agreements and assistance to citizens interested in gardening on City land. It licensed 1,000 properties to 700 community groups throughout the city, amounting to a total of 150 acres of garden land. GreenThumb continues to make City-owned, vacant land available to community groups for interim open space uses, pending future development. However, groups interested in using such a site must now apply to The Department of Housing, Planning and Development's Division of Commercial Leasing to enter into a license agreement.

GreenThumb uses Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds to provide lumber, tools, materials for fencing, picnic tables, plants, seeds, and bulbs to gardening groups once they have attended workshops in garden design, horticultural techniques, construction and planting. Usually groups that are interested in gardening contact GreenThumb and are steered toward a City-owned site, which is one reason why not many gardens are on private land. The agreement on these City-owned sites stipulates that gardens may not contain any permanent structures, cars, or moneymaking activities; they must be open for five daylight hours per week between May and October, and the hours must be posted. The agreement may be terminated (with reason) with 10-days notice. Groups are not required by GreenThumb to provide their own insurance, but they usually purchase insurance from the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition for about $250 a year.

In addition to the purchase of 113 GreenThumb sites, the public outcry over the transfer and potential bulldozing of these spaces caused the City to transfer some of the older sites to the Parks Department. As of July 1998, 36 sites had been transferred. Although Parks owns the property, the City provides no maintenance—the transfer is at no cost to Parks. Jane Cleaver of Planning for Parklands explained that the most important determining factor in selecting sites for transfer to the Parks Department is "that the groups are organized and can assure a second generation of leaders in the future. We chose the gardens with the most continuous community leadership." Another criterion was the existence of good financial backing, as the Department is not receiving additional funds to maintain the new sites. In the past, many of the garden groups sought corporate and foundation grants to cover routine maintenance costs, and this will no doubt continue.

Non-Profit Organizations

While GreenThumb is a large and well-known program assisting gardens on public land, there are many non-profit greening groups in the city providing help to gardeners on private land as well. GreenThumb estimates that there are more than 20 organizations working to make the city a greener place. These groups are involved in creating community parks and gardens, planting and maintaining street trees, and beautifying the city's many parks.

Council on the Environment of New York City—The Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC), founded in 1970, is a privately funded, citizens' organization that promotes environmental awareness and solutions to environmental problems. CENYC operates the Open Space Greening Program that works closely with GreenThumb. The Open Space Greening Program's Plant-a-Lot initiative has provided technical and material assistance to about 50 sites since 1978. In addition, through Grow Truck, the program loans garden tools, provides technical assistance and distributes donated plants and garden materials to community gardening groups. CENYC's focus now is putting money into community garden sites that have a five- to ten-year expected longevity. Therefore, they work primarily with sites that are privately owned or City-owned and in a situation that guarantees that they will not be sold for development in the near future. For example, CENYC assists 13 gardens on City-owned land adjacent to daycare centers. This land, according to Gerard Lordahl, the director of the Open Space Greening Program, is considered nearly as protected as the sites that were recently transferred to the Parks Department. The organization also assists 13 gardens on private land. Plant-a-Lot completes two or three new garden sites each year.

Ten of the 36 sites that were transferred to the Parks Department as of July 1998 were Plant-a-Lot sites that had been assisted by CENYC for many years. The transfer to the Parks Department requires that gardeners adhere to certain maintenance standards. Parks is primarily concerned about community access and the posting of hours, a park-like environment with some permanent features, and community involvement in the site, e.g., a connection to a school or local community center. CENYC encourages its Plant-a-Lot gardeners to make their gardens more park-like so they have a better chance of being protected.

Neighborhood Open Space Coalition—Established in 1980, the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition (NOSC) works to increase open space in New York through research, planning, and advocacy. The coalition publishes a free monthly newsletter, *Urban Outdoors Bulletin*, reporting on gardening issues and advertising events.

Green Guerrillas—The Green Guerillas has been supporting community gardens since its establishment in 1973. The group began greening vacant lots in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and, in 1978, lobbied the City for more formal recognition of the gardens. The City reacted by establishing the GreenThumb Program. Green Guerillas no longer creates gardens, but its 200 volunteers and six staff members provide supplies (including many donated or collected items), technical support and volunteer assistance for some of the thousand or so New York City gardens that already exist.

The New York Restoration Project—This group was established in 1996 by Bette Midler. It uncovers, reclaims, and cleans neglected public spaces in New York, working with neighborhood residents trained as environmental specialists, AmeriCorps volunteers and government agency representatives. Through the fundraising efforts of Ms. Midler and other NYRP leaders, the group purchased 50 of the 113 community gardens up for public auction in May of 1999 thus saving the spaces from redevelopment.

The Trust for Public Land—TPL is a national nonprofit organization founded in 1972 that specializes in conservation of real estate to "protect land for people." Established in 1978, the New York City program is TPL's oldest and largest urban initiative. Over the past 20 years, the program has helped gain permanent protection for more than 300 acres of City land. TPL reluctantly became involved in the effort to save New York City's community gardens. The eventual purchase of 63 community gardens, according to a TPL senior vice president, was "a desperate measure to prevent destruction of the gardens." TPL is now working with community residents who operate these gardens to develop long-term stewardship plans for the properties. Within one or two years, TPL hopes that three new nonprofit land trusts will be established (one in Manhattan, one in the Bronx, one in the Brooklyn/ Queens area) to own the gardens under the principal management of the gardeners themselves.

Summary

The organizations described above perform a number of key functions and provide needed services to area gardens.

Land Security—GreenThumb provides one-year leases on City-owned lots through the Department of Housing, Planning and Development. These agreements clearly provide little

security for the gardeners. However, once a garden is transferred to the Parks Department, it is protected as open space in the public trust in perpetuity.

There are not many local land trusts in New York City, and the ones that do exist are usually single-garden cooperatives. This is partly due to the strength of the market for land. The Bergen Street community garden is one of the few land-trust owned sites, and it is the only site the trust owns. It was purchased from the City during an economic downturn for 10% of market value. The land trusts usually have purchased deed-restricted land at bargain prices. The Trust for Public Land is helping community groups form land trusts in New York both for the gardens now owned by TPL and other sites. According to Jane Cleaver of Planning for Parklands, "When the economy was worse, the City was willing to sell lots off at restricted auction. Now that there is a big real estate boom, they are not willing to do this." The land trusts that do exist usually have purchased deed-restricted land at a bargain price. Cleaver adds, "There are some people around with the idea of setting up a private land trust to purchase more property from the City."

• Insurance—While liability insurance is not required for a GreenThumb agreement, most gardens do purchase it. NOSC provides insurance for gardeners, at a rate of $250 a year. This is "the only game in town," according to Erika Svendsen of GreenThumb, and people who really care about their gardens will find a way to raise the money for insurance.

• Technical Assistance—Green Guerillas, GreenThumb, and the Council on the Environment all provide tools and assistance to gardeners.

• Organizational Assistance and Networking—The Trust for Public Land has helped with this in the past, and NOSC provides a resource-sharing forum for all of the city's gardeners.

• Advocacy—NOSC, the Council on the Environment, and Planning for Parklands all work to keep a greening agenda in the forefront of city issues. GreenThumb, as a part of the City government, plays an important role in providing an official voice for the gardeners.

Discussion

The strength of the community gardening system in New York is the existence of a large, active, and diverse coalition of greening groups. The coalition was initially convened by the Trust for Public Land. The existence of these groups is somewhat successful in keeping greening issues on the agenda of City government.

While the sophistication of its non-profit greening network sets New York apart from other cities, major barriers to setting up a sustainable obviously still exist. The most formidable of these is the fact that the City clearly sees gardening as an interim use of land. Fortunately, the Trust for Public Land has played an active role in advocating for the preservation of small open spaces in the city.

It should be noted that the initial research for this section of the report was conducted in the midst of New York's community garden crisis. It is not surprising that nearly everyone interviewed spoke of the importance of setting up a system for the long-term protection of gardens. Many people emphasized that it is better to plan ahead than try to protect gardens once

they are threatened. Indeed, thoughts of owning green spaces commonly emerge in response to the threat of development, but it is typically costly to purchase sites once there is development pressure. This lesson should be taken to heart by cities such as Baltimore where land prices remain affordable and community gardening is on the rise as a use for vacant open space.

Research Findings

Findings from Research in Other Cities

While there may be no single formula for success in promoting community management of open space, it is possible to identify those factors that appear to play a pivotal role in some of the most successful programs around the country. There are two equally important ingredients:

- One key ingredient is a citywide open space plan or strategy and local government support and leadership for community greening.

- Another key ingredient is a strong partnership among three types of service providers:

  • **Grass roots organizations**, most often community gardening groups that perform the physical labor and community organizing aspects of projects.

  • **Technical assistance groups**, usually non-profits, that provide support to the gardening groups through training sessions, start-up grants, grants for capital improvements, and a variety of other resources such as seeds, plants, mulch, compost and tools.

  • **Urban land trusts** that lend stability to projects by acquiring title to the properties, thus protecting them from the immediate pressures of development and in many cases preserving the sites in perpetuity.

Effective examples of this three-partner system were observed in Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago and, despite recent controversy, to some extent in New York City. The most outstanding example of a city having *both* of these ingredients is Chicago, with the twin forces of its CitySpace Plan and a land trust such as NeighborSpace. Chicago has the additional benefit of having one of the most elusive and enviable ingredients of a successful program—strong and vocal leadership at the mayoral level.

A crucial ingredient to an effective system of community-managed open space is a strong partnership between local government and the other groups (generally non-profits) participating in the process. This partnership can take many forms but provides both financial and organizational support. City government cooperation is especially important in the transfer of title and ownership of a vacant property to a land trust or a community organization. Cooperative relationships are critical between urban land trusts and the government agencies responsible for

dealing with vacant land. On-site services such as access to water, assistance in clearing and preparing open space sites, and a means of defending sites are important to the creation and maintenance of effective community-managed open space sites. The key is organization and cooperation among the various groups participating at different stages of the project and recognition of the strengths and talents each contributes to the outcome.

This does not imply that cities without this three-part system do not have highly active and effective urban greening/community gardening programs. It is fair to say, however, that without these three important ingredients, community greening efforts tend to be less broad-based, far-reaching, and sustainable, and do not have access to as many resources.

Atlanta and Detroit, for example, have highly active urban greening/community gardening movements that encompass a wide variety of community-managed open spaces. Nonetheless, their programs function largely outside of any city-supported system, and they suffer for it. Despite these constraints, the forces promoting open space in these cities have generated some very creative and noteworthy initiatives:

- Both cities have alliances between urban greening/community gardening organizations and anti-hunger campaigns. These alliances are not only natural they are highly compelling to potential funders**.** Furthermore, by having their objectives and goals intersect on food production, they can share organizational resources and talents that they may not be able to afford on their own.

- Atlanta's Land Bank Authority is another effort worth examining. While it is neither an actual land bank nor an open space program, it does pave the way for the redevelopment of abandoned, tax delinquent properties that can become community-managed open spaces. Baltimore could benefit greatly from having an agency like the LBA with the authority and resources necessary to unburden such properties and return them to productive use. Indeed Baltimore City is exploring several land banking options including a model similar to Atlanta's Land Bank Authority.

- Atlanta's system of complementary incentives for the creation of mulch and compost from its leaf-removal service demonstrates a creative and effective way of supporting community management of open space while solving a solid waste problem.

It is clear from the example of cities like Detroit and Atlanta, that it is possible to do much to revitalize communities via community management of open spaces, even with very modest resources. But it is also clear from the examples of Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia that it is possible to do much more when there are committed partnerships between the various government agencies and non-profit groups. Cities without comprehensive open space strategies and the benefit of working partnerships and are less likely to achieve high level results. In these cases, gardening groups frequently encounter more obstacles in getting the services they need, have lower quality materials to work with, and are less likely to have access to quality design and technical assistance with project installation. As a result, the cities have greater difficulty establishing a sense of permanence in their open spaces and, in turn, have difficulty sustaining

them. The end result is that open space functions less as an integrated, deliberate part of city fabric and is treated as a luxury rather than an essential part of a healthy, livable city.

Findings on Baltimore City Management of Open Space

Baltimore has a variety of institutional, bureaucratic, attitudinal, economic, political and legal barriers to effective management the City's neighborhood open spaces. Taken individually, these barriers are not insurmountable. Potential solutions have been proposed and piloted (some successfully) in Baltimore and other cities around the country. However, a fundamental obstacle that must be overcome with regard to City management of open space is the lack of recognition of vacant lots as a critical issue confronting the City. It is essential to begin to view vacant lots as an urgent problem having legal, economic, social and political dimensions and ramifications, rather than viewing them as an incidental and unavoidable characteristic of the City. Such a perspective is essential to the success of any comprehensive strategy for managing neighborhood open space in Baltimore. With such a strategy must come a recognition that well used and maintained open space makes a valuable contribution to a neighborhood that should be considered a permanent use of land rather than an interim use to ward off future blight. In addition, Baltimore needs a greater commitment from City government to properly maintain its open spaces and increased efforts to collaborate with community groups, nonprofits and private entities interested in managing and maintaining additional neighborhood open spaces.

Findings on Community-Managed Open Space in Baltimore

Based on the four Baltimore case studies in community-managed open space and the many other community greening sites examined, a number of conclusions can be drawn concerning the nature of community-managed open spaces in Baltimore. Four broad themes summarize these conclusions: the characteristics for success, the importance of participation, the dynamic nature of open space, and access to information and knowledge.

Characteristics for Success—The ultimate goal of most community-managed open space sites is to turn under-utilized, and perhaps blighted areas, into assets. No one type of open space project is preferred. The most important aspect of a site is that it fits the needs, resources and objectives of the individual, community, or organization using or maintaining the site. Community-managed open space cannot and should not be simply classified as successes or failures on appearance alone. These spaces can provide a variety of benefits on many different levels, and many of the benefits may not be readily apparent to the outside observer. Nonetheless, sustainable and viable community-managed open spaces share a number of common characteristics:

- Presence of a person who acts as a catalyst.
- Community interest.
- Community involvement from the onset of the project.
- A community-originated project design that is consistent with the needs and resources of the area and is appropriate for the site in terms of defensible space, budget and maintenance.

- Adequate funding.
- Age diversity among project participants.
- An organized and well-connected principle group with knowledge of available resources.
- A clear understanding of each person's role and responsibility.
- Support from City agencies or other service providers in terms of water, mulch, fencing, garbage collection, and other services.
- Presence of clear delineation of the open space, fenced in areas of high disturbance.
- Presence of a community-based or community-assisting organization to support the project and offer resources when necessary.
- Adaptability to changing interests over time.

Just as the specific objectives for creating and managing open space will vary so will the individual benefits and outcomes. Some of the most important benefits of community managed open space include:

- Aesthetic improvement.
- Ecological benefits.
- Recreational opportunities.
- Income generation.
- Positive activity for youth.
- Improved community nutrition.
- Community cohesion.
- Training of participants in gardening.
- Cost-effective to the City or property owner.
- Increased community organizing capacity.
- Ripple effect to other open spaces.
- Asset to individual/group.
- Transfer of knowledge and experience, e.g., between generations.

The Importance of Participation—Community-managed open space assumes that there is a sense of ownership of the open space—a sort of "privatization" of the space by either a group or an individual in order to improve the quality of life for the community as a whole. While, it does not require that the entire community be involved in managing the space, some community participation in each phase of the project (planning, design, implementation, maintenance) is essential. In most cases, there is a direct connection between the depth of community participation and the sustainability of the project.

Indeed, factors such as community cohesion, community interest/involvement, the existence of strong organizations, and access to information and resources seem to be the most likely indicators of whether or not a project will work. Information such as aggregated census data, crime statistics or numbers of abandoned property in a neighborhood are helpful in providing a "big picture" of the area, but do not appear to be of great importance in planning for community-managed open space.

On-going maintenance of a community-managed open space frequently requires efforts greater than that expended in the initial implementation of a project. Unfortunately, most project planning emphasizes implementation and gives little thought to how roles and responsibilities can be coordinated to maintain the site for the length of its existence. Depth in community participation and making participants aware of the maintenance needs of a given open space site during the planning and design phases are critical to the long term survival of community-managed open space sites.

Dynamic Nature of Open Space—As a community's needs change, the functional objectives and benefits of a community-managed open space may also change. The design of an existing open space may change over time, or open spaces may be incorporated into the redesign of an entire community as sections of the City undergo redevelopment.

In some instances, community-managed open space may be used as a short-term strategy to upgrade a vacant lot and stabilize a community before efforts to redesign or redevelop are implemented. In other cases, however, a well-tended, community-managed open space may serve as the catalyst for community revitalization. Thus, although it may not be practical or possible for every site to be permanent, careful attention must be paid during redevelopment not to remove the very thing that prompted reinvestment in a given neighborhood.

Access to Information and Knowledge—The interaction, cooperation and information sharing between Baltimore agencies and other organizations need to be improved if increased community management of vacant open spaces is to be encouraged. Agencies and individuals tend to interact informally and on a case-by-case basis. City agencies are often not sure who is in charge of vacant lots and open spaces; community groups and individuals frequently do not know what resources are available to them or which agency to contact for specific needs. Links are seldom made between urban revitalization issues, such as economic development or drug abatement and the potential for community improvement through open space management. As a result, communities do not receive the support necessary to maintain vacant lots and other open spaces. Baltimore could do much to improve the availability of City resources, such as water on a site and access to good quality soil, compost, edging materials and fencing.

A partnership must exist between City agencies and community members if the communities are expected to manage at least some of their vacant lots and open spaces. One aspect of such a partnership would be the City's notification to the community association of an intended demolition, followed by cleaning the lot of debris, fencing and seeding the area, and posting relevant information on the property. Many organizations, such as churches and schools, are community resources that go unrecognized and under-utilized. If the City had a plan for notifying various groups about the availability of vacant lots, then open spaces could be created near City schools, used as outdoor education centers, or maintained by church beautification committees.

Neighborhood Service Centers (NSCs) are intended to be the City's "fingers" into the neighborhoods, yet they are largely uninvolved in open space issues. NSCs are designed to house a variety of City resources and staff contacts from key agencies. However, due to lack of funding, personnel, and/or training, they spend most of their time boarding up houses and reacting to crises, such as fires, rats, and crime. This leaves little or no time for any strategic planning or maintenance of vacant lots/open space.

Summary of Project Findings

• **Local government support is critical to the long-term sustainability of open space projects.** Partnerships and divisions of labor among community groups, non-profit organizations and local government agencies will likely yield spaces that meet community requirements as well as City goals.

• **Community participation and support is also critical to the short-term and long-term sustainability of open space projects.** Technical assistance organizations can help ensure successful open space projects. With strong community support driving the process, technical assistance providers can: provide materials and resources during the planning and installation phases; and help community members develop/improve their organizational and leadership capacity.

• **Cities with strong, effective open space programs often have a three-partner structure consisting of organizer (grassroots groups), greener (technical assistance organizations), and property owner (typically land trusts).** Nonetheless, cities that lack this structure may also have innovative programs supporting community management of open space. Baltimore can learn from both examples.

• **Cities with organized, proactive umbrella organizations of greening groups are better equipped to solicit and benefit from the support of local governments. (Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia are inspiring examples).** Cities with smaller, more decentralized greening programs are generally less able to garner significant governmental support.

• **A fundamental obstacle in Baltimore is the lack of recognition of vacant lots and other small open spaces as a critical issue confronting the City.** It is essential to begin to see vacant lots as an urgent problem having legal, economic, social and political dimensions and ramifications, rather than viewing them as an incidental and unavoidable character of the City.

• **Well-tended gardens and other types of community-managed open space demonstrate care and participation by communities and foster a greater sense of pride and security among residents and visitors.** Such visible signs of care can attract additional development, which can, in some cases, compete with the very spaces that fostered it. Therefore, cities and local communities should develop a means of protecting these spaces while development pressures are low.

• **Community-managed open space provides community benefits in numerous (direct and indirect) ways and must fit the needs, resources, and objectives of the group using and/or maintaining the site. Such sites should not be classified as successes or failures based on appearance alone.**

Recommendations

Following the research phase of this project, a committed group of people representing public agencies, community groups and nonprofit organizations came together to suggest specific recommendations for improving the management of Baltimore's many neighborhood open spaces. The following recommendations were created by reviewing research findings, discussing issues at a public forum, and discussions with City officials and other advisory committee members. Along with the recommendations, a series of action steps have been proposed that will require collaboration among community, government, and nonprofit organizations.

Recommendation 1— Strengthen existing coalitions and partnerships working to support community greening, gardening, and urban forestry activities in Baltimore neighborhoods.

A. Ensure the active participation of grass roots organizations, technical assistance providers, land managers, policy-makers, and other types of organizations found by this report to be essential for sustaining healthy community managed open space partnerships.

Action Steps

- Build on PlanBaltimore's formal recognition of the Parks & People Foundation's Community Greening, Urban Forestry, Vacant Lot Restoration, Community Gardening, and Revitalizing Baltimore programs to advocate and support City development and implementation of effective plans, policies, and programs for open space and community greening.
- Pursue opportunities to further strengthen and enhance existing community greening and parks and open space partnerships in collaboration with community organizations and government agencies to provide leadership and assistance in implementing the report's recommendations.

B. Expand opportunities for public participation through forums, dialog, community organizing, and advocacy to support and encourage implementation of effective plans, policies, and programs for open space management and community greening.

Action Steps

- Organize a series of community forums to further explore opportunities for community action.
- Develop educational materials, including an open space management manual being prepared by Parks & People, to help community groups to undertake successful projects.
- Expand public recognition of volunteers active in improving neighborhood open space and greening their neighborhoods.

Recommendation 2—Promote greater public awareness of the benefits of well designed, maintained, and used open space to the quality of life in Baltimore.

A. Conduct an information and education campaign to improve public understanding of vacant lot issues and potential for turning vacant lots into useful open space that can stimulate neighborhood revitalization.

Action Steps

- Develop a process and materials for increasing media coverage of vacant lot/open space issues.
- Conduct a series of well-publicized demonstration projects to stimulate stewardship and community action.
- Create a neighborhood education and volunteer recruitment initiative to effectively promote open space programs, ideas, resources and benefits.

B. Elevate vacant lot and neighborhood open space issues as a priority on the public agenda of elected officials and key non-profit organizations.

Action Steps

- Improve coordinated action among various advocacy groups, including the Parks & People Foundation, Neighborhood Design Center, Citizens Planning and Housing Association, and the Baltimore Alliance for Great Urban Parks.
- Encourage political candidates to make vacant lots/open space issues a priority for action.
- Ensure the City's Neighborhood Planning Program incorporates vacant lots/open space issues as an element in neighborhood plans.

C. Educate key decision-makers and the general public about the social, economic, and environmental benefits of safe, attractive open space and the role it can play in comprehensive neighborhood redevelopment.

Action Steps

- Engage developers, government officials, and potential funders on the issue of the City's vacant lot problem and the need to create and manage neighborhood open spaces.
- Work with the development community (e.g., Baltimore Development Corporation) to assist in demonstrating, documenting, and marketing the economic value that can be captured by neighborhood open space.

Recommendation 3— Advocate and support development of a comprehensive, integrated open space plan, policies and programs as an element of PlanBaltimore, which can provide guidance for the Neighborhood Planning Program. While a new Open Space Plan would address a wide-range of issues, it should specifically tackle the pressing concern and opportunity presented by the large number of vacant lots in many Baltimore neighborhoods.

A. Establish a vision and standards for open space management in Baltimore. Fully utilize existing networks, coalitions, and partnerships of involved constituencies to participate in developing effective open space policies and programs.

Action Steps

- Work with City officials to convene an initial meeting of interested groups to determine the scope of the plan and the role and structure of community participation.

• Review information on effective models from other cities, particularly the Chicago CitySpace Plan.

B. An effective, citywide, open space management plan must be comprehensive and acknowledge both the occurrence and effect of large and small open spaces on the landscape. The strategy should be based on the following guiding principles:

Action Steps

- Natural resources and human communities are integrally linked, and the health and vitality of one affects the other.
- Active participation by people who live in communities is vital to developing sustainable and equitable open space projects.
- Information sharing at all levels enhances the efficiency and efficacy of City agencies, organizations and communities.
- Strategies and management plans are not a final solution; they are the starting point.
- Monitoring and evaluation are important steps toward continuous improvement.

Recommendation 4—Change current Baltimore City policies and procedures to create an efficient and effective program of mixed City and community managed open space and to further support community greening.

A. Establish workable policies, procedures, and programs for disposal and reuse of vacant and abandoned properties.

Action Steps

• Create a central inventory of City-owned vacant lots and other properties available for disposal for private or community use, which the public can access through library computer systems.

• Prepare user-friendly informational brochures for a proactive City's vacant lot acquisition program.

• Establish a City interagency Vacant Lot Review Committee to recommend future and interim uses for vacant lots, provide oversight for agency maintenance assignments and performance, prepare community property use agreements (leases, conservation easements, etc.), make property disposition recommendations, and prepare an annual report on conditions and progress.

• Revise property and tax laws to encourage productive private and community uses for vacant lots.

• Eliminate the "red tape" and monetary penalty for reclaiming City-owned vacant lots, particularly for community uses.

• Improve efficacy of the City's lien release process and adopt a process of forgiving or releasing back taxes, maintenance, and water bills, perhaps in exchange for property improvements.

• Streamline the City's Neighborhood Incentive Program to encourage increased use of this funding source for community greening projects.

• Overhaul the City's Adopt-A-Lot Program to correct deficiencies and provide sufficient resources to ensure its viability and support by community groups.

• Accelerate public acquisition of particularly troublesome derelict properties for priority transfer to responsible private or community groups for reuse and maintenance.

• Conduct neighborhood-based auctions of surplus public property and accelerate the disposition of vacant lots through a vigorous side yard sale program, having no effect on property assessments if the side yard is incorporated into an existing developed lot.

• Explore innovative solutions to maintaining privately owned vacant land beyond current policies, as they are not workable. Alternative solutions might include cooperation with State authorities to assess financial penalties against negligent owners using some method other than property liens.

B. Improve the City's maintenance of the City-owned and privately owned vacant lots and small open spaces.

Action Steps

• Improve the quality and accessibility of data on vacant lots with information on City agency assigned for maintenance.

• Post signs on vacant lots indicating who is responsible for maintenance and a telephone number to report problems.

• Department of Public Works should establish a dedicated Vacant Lot Hotline and rapid intervention unit to deal with vacant lot maintenance problems to implement the City's current policy of responding within 24-hours of receiving a complaint.

• Increase police surveillance of notorious vacant lots used as dumping sites and drug nests.

• City Planning Department should develop urban design guidelines to communicate principles for restructuring distressed neighborhoods with large numbers of vacant lots that can be used as part of the Neighborhood Planning Program.

• Department of Public Works should establish property maintenance standards for City-owned vacant lots and make these standards available to community groups to assist with their monitoring efforts.

•Rebuild and strengthen the City's Department of Recreation and Parks to help citizens maintain small open space and parks.

C. Actively support community organizations working with neighborhood residents to turn vacant lots into "intentional" open space by supporting community acquisition efforts, community greening and gardening programs, and low-maintenance uses of vacant lots.

Action Steps

• Provide additional funding and support for groups involved in community management of open spaces through CDBG funds and other public and private sources.

• Explore use of the Maryland Forest Conservation Act fees in lieu of improvements to fund community-managed open space.

• Explore opportunities to create a State funded Urban Green Space Program related to the Maryland Smart Growth Policies and Program Open Space, similar to Wisconsin State's Stewardship Program.

• Pass City legislation to implement a program of support for community greening and gardening and to provide for legal protection and rights for community-owned open space. This legislation

should recognize the benefits of community greening to include community building, food production, open space maintenance, recreation, education, and job development.

- Explore contracting with community groups interested in assuming maintenance responsibilities or bid out the maintenance work to other private entities.
- Implement and promote a long-term lease or "lot-steading" program for City-owned properties.
- Coordinate management responsibilities for vacant lots among interested and capable non-profit organizations.
- Work through the Board of Education to encourage making community open space projects on school property and other community sites a part of the school curriculum and after-school projects meriting community service learning credits and entrepreneurial landscaping activities for summer employment and job training opportunities.
- Encourage community groups to act as the City's eyes and ears by monitoring the conditions of and activity around, vacant lots and establish a means for reporting performance.
- Provide ongoing support for neighborhood clean-ups of vacant lots by establishing a tool bank for gardening and greening at Neighborhood Service Centers, arranging for pick-up of trash collected, and providing water to the vacant lot.
- Explore opportunities to conduct small-area property surveys that can be quickly mapped on the City's Geographic Information System as a planning and management tool for public agencies and community groups.

Recommendation 5—Establish as a priority an institutional means for preserving neighborhood open space, providing liability insurance, and securing guidance and monitoring of community managed open space.

Action Steps

- Establish a Community Land Trust to provide land tenure security to for small open spaces and greening investments and to work collaboratively with government and non-profits involved in providing policy guidance, technical assistance, and community organizing.
- Identify and secure long-term funding to establish and sustain the Community Land Trust.
- Provide liability insurance against personnel injury for community groups providing property maintenance through group policies with favorable rates.
- Provide through the Community Land Trust a mechanism for monitoring maintenance standards and performance and making any corrections as necessary.
- Establish a stewardship fund for maintenance and capital improvements to land trust properties.

Action Steps Underway in Baltimore

As a result of the Parks & People Foundation's Neighborhood Open Space Management Project, there has been increased interest among community groups, nonprofit organizations and City government agencies in improving the management of Baltimore's vacant lots and other neighborhood open space. The City is undertaking the following actions to address problems with neighborhood open space management and capitalize on the opportunities that vacant lot presents. Research conducted during this project has helped to determine what strategies Baltimore should pursue.

In October 1999, the Baltimore City Planning Department announced its intention to develop a land use and open space plan to include all types of open space, including vacant lots, pocket parks, street trees, and stream valleys. This activity would build on the City's soon to be completed comprehensive plan (PlanBaltimore!) and should address many of the issues related to City management of neighborhood open space raised in this report. Greening activists are hopeful that such a plan will result in a comprehensive strategy to address open space issues. The involvement of representatives of the City Planning Department in the Neighborhood Open Space Management Project helped push a land use and open space plan to the top of the Planning Department's next steps following the final draft of the City's comprehensive plan process.

This project has also highlighted the need for more coordinated management of neighborhood open space and has recommended strengthening community greening and open space coalitions to address these issues.

Given the importance of land trusts to open space management in other cities and the beginnings of development pressure being felt in Baltimore, several local organizations including the Parks & People Foundation and the University of Maryland School of Social work have begun discussions about forming a community land trust that would help protect community greening projects. Such a land trust would be a separate organization that works collaboratively with open space policy groups, technical assistance providers, and community groups. A land trust is needed to give community groups interested or involved in improving open space areas security that their site will remain open space in the future. Such security tends to encourage investment in open space sites. The experience of other cities in establishing land trusts and other mechanisms to ensure site control for community groups has been particularly helpful in addressing this issue.

Recognizing the enormity of the vacant land problem in Baltimore, the City government has been exploring options for creating a Baltimore City Land Bank to coordinate the use of vacant land. The land bank would operate separately from the land trust and would likely be focused on packaging vacant land for redevelopment.

Finally, all the major players involved in improving the management and maintenance of Baltimore's many neighborhood open spaces are working to bring increased funding to this aspect of neighborhood revitalization. City officials highlighted the need for more funding of community greening efforts in the City's comprehensive plan with recommendations for increased funding.

The initiation of detailed planning for Neighborhood Planning Program should aide in undertaking open space planning and projects within the context of a neighborhood plan.

As a result of preliminary findings in this project, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development provided funding to the Parks & People Foundation to establish a Vacant Lot Restoration Program that has provided assistance to 25 community groups. Baltimore is also fortunate to have a new local foundation, the TKF Foundation, interested in community greening activities.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report are based on a brief but intensive study of selected community-managed open space in Baltimore and a review of greening programs in six other cities. While the successes and failures identified are in many ways unique to the sites themselves, they also illustrate the challenges commonly experienced by communities everywhere in managing open space. The breadth of these challenges suggests a variety of possible solutions, including some common sense measures that Baltimore should incorporate into its open space management practices. However, just because these ideas seem straightforward does not imply that the institutional obstacles are not substantial. The most urgent need is a comprehensive policy for open space management that addresses the ever-pressing issues of vacancy and land abandonment and supports an array of open space management schemes. To implement such a policy means a thorough re-examination of current practices.

Supporting research and generating new options for open space management is an important first step. But the problems of vacancy and land abandonment have grown too great for the City to delay any longer, and it is time for action. Policies and procedures at all levels of City government must be adapted to current demographic and economic realities. Community-managed open space must be recognized as one part of a larger, Citywide strategy for open space. Communities that are already struggling simply cannot support the vast quantities of vacant lots on their own, nor should they be expected to. A proactive approach to land use management that makes the connection between the economic, environmental and social health of Baltimore is *essential* to meeting the challenges posed by the changing urban landscape.

Despite its struggles with a dwindling population and shrinking tax base, Baltimore has often been an innovator and leader among American cities. Large capital projects such as those at the Inner Harbor and Camden Yards are much envied and have been replicated elsewhere. The City's "dollar house" program in the 1970s transformed and preserved a number of historic

neighborhoods fraught with the common ills of abandonment and decay by encouraging private investment, mixing renovation efforts with new housing stock, and incorporating thoughtfully placed and carefully designed neighborhood open spaces. Thus, neighborhoods like Otterbien have held their value and become some of the most popular and desirable locations in Baltimore. In addition, the Departments of Recreation and Parks, Public Works, and Housing and Community Development have begun to meet the challenges and make a positive impact on the urban environment by supporting neighborhood open space initiatives and partnering with organizations like the Parks & People Foundation to realize open space goals.

However, Baltimore still has much work to do. In creating viable neighborhood open space, Baltimore lags behind other cities such as Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia. It will take considerable energy, motivation, and commitment to develop and implement a sound, strategic plan for open space management. It will require a substantial initial investment of capital for everything from improving City databases to the physical improvements of the vacant lots themselves. It will also involve a significant, on-going investment for future maintenance.

Most importantly, it will take the participation of many partners, both public and private. A comprehensive strategy that is based on public/private partnerships and community-managed open spaces poses enormous challenges, but offers tremendous opportunities. Such a plan would give Baltimore the chance to once again lead the nation in reinventing itself. Moreover, it affords the City an opportunity to be a leader in empowering its citizens by utilizing its human and natural resources to their fullest potential.

Appendix A

Interviews

City Management of Small Open Spaces in Baltimore

Department of Recreation and Parks
Gennady Schwartz
Mary Porter
Fran Spero

Department of Planning
Jim French
Peter Conrad
Myra Brosius

Department of Housing and Community Development
Dennis Taylor
Denise Duvall

Department of Education
Raymond Short
Albert Harris

Department of Public Works
Warren Williams
Kurt Kocher
Christy Guadnagna
William Beatty

Department of Law
Leslie Winner

Office of Real Estate
Anthony Ambridge

Bureau of Management Information Systems
Jim Huculak

Office of City Council President
Jody Landers

Community-Managed Open Space in Baltimore

The Duncan Street Gardeners, in particular Francis Brown, Earl Fields, Alan Thorton, Mr. Howard and Mr. Lewis
The Harwood-26ers Community Association and the 25th St. Business Association, in particular Betty Palmer-Gregg, Nathaniel Gregg, Betty Wilson, Hillary Mettsinger and Alan Klug.
The Sandtown-Winchester Community Gardeners: Joe Morris, Dorothy Snead, Elizabeth Rollins, and John Alvez
Jasmine Gunthorpe and Nicole Doye from the St. Pius V Housing Council, Inc.
Robert Ford from the Harlem Park Neighborhood Council.
Elroy Christopher from the Covenant Community Association
Gennady Schwartz and Mary Porter from the Department of Recreation and Parks.
Gary Letteron, Bryant Smith, and Alisa Oyler of the Parks & People Foundation.

Other Cities

Atlanta
Daniel Cohen, Atlanta Planning Department, City Planner
Fred Conrad, Atlanta Community Food Bank, Community Garden Coordinator.
Kelly Cooney, Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority, Redevelopment Specialist

Malcolm Jefferson, Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority, Redevelopment Specialist. Telephone
Bobby Wilson, Georgia State Area Extension Agent, Atlanta Urban Gardening Program

Boston
John Berg, Boston Department of Neighborhood Development, Grassroots Program Director
Valerie Burns, Boston Natural Areas Fund Director
Betsy Johnson, Garden Futures Director
N. Kafka, Trust for Public Land Urban Projects Manager
Receptionist, Boston Natural Areas Fund
G. Triant, Boston Redevelopment Authority Office of Property Management, Head of Land Sales

Chicago
S. Armstrong, City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development Coordinator of Special Projects
Glenda Daniel, Openlands Project, Director of Urban Greening
Kathy Dickhut, NeighborSpace Director
Patricia Gallagher, Chicago Department of Planning
J. Martin, City of Chicago Bureau of Real Estate Management
Julie Samuels, Openlands Project Community Outreach Coordinator

Detroit
Gregory Moots, City of Detroit Planning Commission, Planner.
Susan Stellar, City of Detroit Department of Recreation and Parks, Associate forester, Farm-A-Lot and Adopt-A-Park Program Coordinator

New York
Jane Cleaver, New York City Parks Department Planning for Parklands Director
P. Evans, New York Botanical Garden, Bronx Green-Up Program
B. Feldt, Pier 84 Garden head gardener
P. Hewett, Trust for Public Land New York Office
Gerard Lordahl, Council on the Environment of New York City, Open Space Greening Program Director
Erika Svendsen, New York City Parks Department Green Thumb Program Director

Philadelphia
Claire Powers, Director of the Neighborhood Gardens Association
Sally McCabe Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Philadelphia Green Program Outreach Coordinator

Appendix B

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Appendix C

Vacant Lot to Green Space Survey: How Do Other U.S. Cities Manage Their Vacant Land and Encourage Development of Green Space?

The following questions were asked via telephone interviews as well as some written responses. All questions were not relevant to all informants. Interviewees were instructed to ignore those they could not answer, but to try to provide other contacts where possible.

What is the mission/purpose of your agency or organization?

- What is your position there?
- What are your primary responsibilities?
- What are the main obstacles to achieving your agency/organizations goals?
- How are these obstacles overcome?
- Other responsibilities/affiliations include:

Are there vacant lots in your city/would you say there is a vacant lot problem in your city?

What is the estimated quantity of vacant land in your city? (acres/ no. of lots + average lot size) How much of this total is city/privately owned?

How are vacant lots used in the city?

What agencies control vacant lots/vacant buildings in your city? (ownership, future use – i.e., do individual agencies actually *own* the land or are they just responsible for managing it?)

What agencies/and or organizations manage sites? (mowing and maintenance) How is the City management administered?

Does the City actively acquire open/vacant spaces? How does the City sell/disburse this land? Is there a market for land in the city? If not, how does the City manage this problem? Does the City encourage use of these spaces? (See land trust questions.)

What programs (public and private) exist in the city to address the use of vacant lots and greening in general? What programs are effective? Ineffective? In particular: community gardening programs, local land trusts, lot adoption.

Do groups have to commit to some level of maintenance upon adoption of purchase as open space? Is this monitored by the City? (How and how often?) Does the City have any authority in cases where sites are not being maintained as per agreement?

Community Management Questions:

What incentives does the City offer community members for participating in its vacant lot programs?

- Guarantee of security?
- Long term leases?
- What do you think community groups want from the City?

To what extent is community management happening?

- How widespread is it in the city?
- What types of uses occur on community managed lots?

Where does community management of open space occur?

- What neighborhoods and why?
- Why not other neighborhoods?

What was the process that led to establishment of these community-managed sites?

- Who owns these lots?
- How does the owner acquire the property?
- How is the issue of liability/liability insurance handled?

Questions for City employees :

What agency plants and cares for street trees?

- Who removes concrete to create tree pits?
- Are any non-governmental organizations that are active in tree planting?
- Who would a homeowner call if he/she wanted a tree planted in front of their house?

Other Contacts (in your city or others):

Land Trust Questions:

What is the need for urban land trust/s in your city?

What land trust/s exist in your city? When were they formed, why and by whom?

What is the purpose of the land trust/s (if more than one type, are their functions/purposes different?) – preservation of open space, gaining control of properties for future use, pooling insurance needs, technical/legal assistance in getting access to properties?

What scale does/do the urban land trust/s operate on (number and size of properties in your city?

How does/do the land trust/s deal with maintenance on the spaces they own?

What is the screening process for land trust member groups?

What services does the trust provide (to member groups)?

Does the trust operate on City owned or private land or both?

Appendix D

City Departments, Bureaus, and Agencies Involved in the Management of Open Spaces

1. Baltimore City Hospital
2. Department of Public Works - Bureau of General Services
3. Department of Public Works - Bureau of Solid Waste
4. Department of Public Works - Bureau of Water and Waste Water
5. Department of Public Works - Bureau of Transportation
6. Dockmaster
7. Department of Education
8. Baltimore City Libraries
9. Fire Department
10. Mayor's Office
11. Department of Health
12. Baltimore City Jail
13. Markets and Comfort Stations
14. Museums and Art Galleries
15. Department of Recreation and Parks
16. Supervisors of Elections
17. Police Department
18. Community College of Baltimore
19. Urban Services
20. War Memorial Commission
21. Aquarium
22. Tax Sales
23. Surplus Property
24. Off-street Parking
25. Department of Housing and Community Development
26. Department of Social Services
27. Civic and Convention Centers
28. Department of Finance
29. Commission on Aging and Retirement Education
30. Board of Estimates

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