

Vacant Land Stewardship in Michigan

Improving Neighborhoods By Repurposing Vacant Lots

Vacant lots make up the majority—[over 75 percent](#)—of public vacant property inventories across the country, and in Michigan.

Without intervention, hundreds of thousands of lots across the state would be left in limbo, not adding value to their neighborhoods and actively detracting from residents' quality of life. Many Michigan communities from [Marquette](#) to [Muskegon](#) and from [Detroit](#) to [Kalamazoo](#) recognize the incredible opportunity presented by vacant land and are actively repurposing lots to improve their neighborhoods.

Land is one of our greatest assets, and most finite resources. Stewardship of vacant land can address some of our most pressing challenges:



Safe, Stable Neighborhoods

In **Flint**, the Genesee County Land Bank Authority's [Clean & Green](#) program has resulted in less violent crime near maintained lots.

Healthy Food Access

The [Garden Resource Program](#) in **Detroit** facilitates urban agriculture. Those urban gardeners [eat more fruits and vegetables](#) than non-gardeners.

Ecosystem Restoration

In **Saginaw**, the land bank partnered with [Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy](#) to seed 1,500 lots with a native, pollinator-friendly seed mix to improve environmental conditions of lots.

Environmental Remediation

In **Muskegon**, a phytoremediation project used [poplar trees](#) to remove contaminants and pollutants from a brownfield site.

Climate Resiliency

Grand Rapids invested in [green stormwater infrastructure](#), which lowered costs of infrastructure maintenance and provided environmental benefits.

Social Cohesion

Battle Creek residents are transforming lots into community and educational spaces, providing opportunities for [people to come together](#).

Community Wealth-Building

In **Detroit**, dozens of residents are establishing land-based businesses, such as [City Commons CSA](#), a cooperative of small farm businesses.

Learn More about vacant land stewardship at communityprogress.org/vacant-land

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PROGRESS POINTS

Neighborhoods with repurposed and maintained lots realize an **increase in property values, a reduction in crime, deepened resident engagement, and higher quality of life for residents.**



Vacant land stewardship is the comprehensive repurposing and maintenance of vacant lots in service to community needs, priorities, and goals. Lots can become everything from well-maintained side yards to vegetable farms to pollinator habitats to solar fields. As communities move towards stewardship, they reap direct benefits for residents. Neighborhoods with repurposed and maintained lots realize an increase in property values, a reduction in crime, deepened resident engagement, and higher quality of life for residents.

Fundamentals of Vacant Land Stewardship

Vacant land stewardship requires four fundamental elements: knowing your community's **context**, having clear goals and **plans**, committing to **collaboration**, and enacting facilitative **policies**. These four elements will look different in every community, but they are all critical components of implementing successful vacant land stewardship.

CONTEXT



Before a community can comprehensively tackle vacant land, it needs to see the whole picture. By understanding what lots you have, who owns them, where they are, and who is already furthering vacant land efforts, you can begin to connect around what's possible.

PLANS



When you know what you have and who's involved, you can begin to dream, plan, and articulate the purpose of your efforts on vacant land. Any plan must address the full scope of vacant lots in your geography and be regularly updated.

COLLABORATION



Everyone has a role to play in vacant land stewardship. Resident participation and leadership are critical, as they are most immediately impacted. Bringing together all stakeholders can ensure all the necessary skills and buy-in are present to bring ideas to life.

POLICY



Vacant land stewardship depends on policies that facilitate action and innovation. Organizational, local, and state policies must adapt over time to allow for new uses, ownership models, and programs that individuals and communities may create in their pursuit of equitable communities.

Examples

The [Flint Property Portal](#) inventories every parcel in the City of Flint and shares parcel specific information including a photo, condition score, occupancy, ownership, and zoning, and allows residents to submit updated condition information.

Several Michigan cities have moved towards a comprehensive look at their vacant lot inventories in their master plans, including the [City of Inkster](#) and the [City of Kalamazoo](#), both of which discuss multiple, strategic uses of currently vacant lots.

[Detroit Future City](#) convenes an Open Space Working Group to bring together “a diverse group of organizations and individuals interested in promoting an integrated open space system in Detroit.”

The Ingham County Land Bank owns hundreds of vacant lots, many of which are in floodplains and therefore unbuildable. To facilitate beneficial use of those lots, they launched their [Garden Program](#) to lease lots to residents for spaces for food production and beautification.

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