



VACANT LOT GREENING STRATEGY

Caring for and gardening vacant land increases the value of surrounding properties. Given the high costs of eliminating blight, mowing, and maintaining its growing inventory of more than 3,000 properties, the Land Bank is challenged to find creative ways to convert property into neighborhood assets. The Land Bank's Greening Strategy includes both short and long-term activities to increase community involvement in caring for vacant properties to build healthy, livable, and safe neighborhoods.

1. GREENING VACANT LOTS

a) The **Clean and Green Program** enables neighborhood associations, churches, non-profits and others play an important role in maintaining, planting and caring for gardens and green spaces in their neighborhoods. The objective of the Land Bank's Clean and Green program is to support these innovative community-based efforts to convert vacant properties into neighborhood assets. The Clean and Green Program started as a pilot project during the summer of 2003 with two community groups maintaining 45 Land Bank owned properties on Flint's east side. During the summer of 2006, twelve community groups maintained over 600 Land Bank properties. This year, the Land Bank plans to further expand the program into new neighborhoods and provide additional resources to encourage creative and innovative gardening projects.

b) The **Adopt-a-Lot Program** empowers neighbors, businesses, individuals and groups to care for property in their neighborhood, which improves property values, reduces crime, and encourages others to care for their own property. With the Adopt-a-Lot Program, the Land Bank and any individual enter into a lease agreement for \$1 a year to garden and/or maintain the Land Bank owned property. Alternatively, groups or individuals can sponsor maintenance and gardening on lots by making a donation to the program. If there is a Land Bank property in your area that you would like to adopt, or you would like to support the program, give us a call or fill out an application on line.

2. HOMEOWNERS PURCHASE SIDE YARDS FOR \$1

Transferring vacant side yards to adjacent homeowners brings properties back onto the tax roll, improves the quality of neighborhoods, and reduces the public costs associated with property maintenance. The Land Bank encourages homeowners in the City of Flint to purchase vacant Land Bank property next to their home for \$1.00, plus the foreclosure year's taxes (if foreclosed in 2003 or before), a \$25.00 administration fee, and a \$14.00 filing fee. To date, the Land Bank has transferred more than 320 side yards to adjacent homeowners. If you are a homeowner interested in purchasing the vacant Land Bank property next door, contact the Land Bank today.

3. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO GREENING

With a growing inventory of abandoned properties, the Land Bank can no longer afford to mow and maintain all the lots not adopted or cared for through the programs described above. To maintain these lots and introduce creative greening efforts, the Land Bank is exploring

alternative strategies that a) minimize maintenance requirements, b) help improve soil conditions, c) provide plants and trees for neighborhood use, d) help prevent flooding in low-lying areas, e) provide a model for an intensive use garden, and, f) encourage urban agriculture. Each of these strategies is described below:

a) The goal of using **turf alternatives** is to find a different variety of turf that will grow well with minimum maintenance.

Using **cues of care** on vacant lots demonstrates that the site is maintained without costly interventions. Using these cues will enable the Land Bank to stretch limited funds to maintain several lots. Minimum care interventions include planting native wild flowers, mowing strips of grass along the property edges, mowed pathways, and using signage. This summer, the Land Bank will work on developing minimum care interventions and work towards implementing them during the spring of 2008.

b) The **phytoremediation** project will explore the possibility of using plants to reduce the level of lead in the soil.

c) The **tree nursery** will beautify a few lots in a neighborhood while providing trees for community groups, clean and green participants, and side lot owners.

d) The **rain garden** will employ native plantings in a low lying area of the city to minimize flooding. Likewise, it will also provide an example of an attractive design using native plants.

e) The **model garden** was designed by a master gardener as means of educating the community on how to design, plant, and maintain an attractive garden on vacant property.

f) Vacant lots are great for neighborhood **vegetable gardens**. Organizations have adopted Land Bank properties to grow vegetables and create opportunities for youth employment and empowerment. The Land Bank hopes to learn from these experiences to encourage **urban agriculture**, where appropriate.