FLINT PROPERTY PORTAL CASE STUDY

"Five years ago, the Flint Property Portal was simply an idea that I pitched for improving communication and coordination around properties in Flint. Today, after lots of hard work, it's widely used in Flint and has been internationally recognized as an innovative engagement strategy. The Portal is effective because it is used and valued by Flint residents who care about their neighborhoods - they are the ones who make it work."

- *Natalie Pruett, Independent Urban Strategist*

Flint Property Portal Overview

Flint, Michigan is a city of approximately 100,000 residents that has experienced sustained economic decline, population loss, and property condition deterioration over the last sixty years. Amidst this context, local institutions are at the front line of efforts to bolster the economy, improve neighborhood conditions, and increase the quality of life of Flint residents. In 2017, two units of local government, the Genesee County Land Bank Authority (Land Bank) and the City of Flint (City), released the Flint Property Portal – an online platform that gives and receives information regarding property conditions. The Portal was developed by Natalie Pruett and Loveland Technologies Inc., two vendors hired by the Land Bank, with support from Land Bank and City staff. Five local instructions provided grants necessary for funding the development of the Portal to the Land Bank – the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, Michigan Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Center for Community Progress, and the City of Flint.

The purpose of the Portal is to increase public access to property information in order to strengthen engagement, transparency, understanding, and trust between residents and local government in Flint. Who owns the vacant house across the street? What is the future vision for the building on the corner? When is the Land Bank going to demolish that house? How can I let local officials know that the house next door has deteriorated? The Portal responds to these questions by giving community members the ability to get and give information on properties in Flint.

The Portal is widely regarded as a success. Since its launch, more than 165,000 property messages have been submitted using the Portal. This includes both messages submitted by the public and messages submitted by Land Bank and City staff. Both agencies have increasingly used the Portal to inform planning and decision-making. Local partners direct Flint residents and agencies to use the Portal. The Flint Public Library has stations for accessing the Portal. The Ruth Mott Foundation, headquartered in Flint, directs its grantees to use the Portal for grant reporting purposes. In the fall of 2019, the Portal received international recognition as a recipient of the Engaged Cities prize awarded by Cities of Service.

Why was the Flint Property Portal created?

For many years, Flint community members expressed a need for greater access to property information. Residents called City Hall daily to try to identify the owners of vacant properties in their neighborhoods. Community groups requested neighborhood condition maps from the Land Bank. Local officials demanded current information on demolition activities. Local foundations asked for regular analyses of existing conditions. The Land Bank and the City responded to these requests as data access and staffing capacity allowed. But, in many cases, the volume of requests was overwhelming. In some cases, the data simply did not exist.

In 2012, two local institutions created a program to engage residents in generating property condition data. The City of Flint and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint (Community Foundation) created the *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* project. Natalie Pruett, who later developed the Portal, was a Program Manager at the Community Foundation at the time. The foundation had a small amount of excess mini-grant funds ($13,500) that were intended for community-based groups. Meanwhile, the City of Flint was just beginning the process of developing its first comprehensive master plan in over 50 years. The City had just hired urban planners for the first time in nearly two decades. This new staff needed to (1) generate property condition data and (2) build relationships with Flint residents. Pruett suggested a partnership to match the needs of the Community Foundation with the needs of the City. The *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* was launched in the fall of 2012. The project engaged 27 community-based groups that surveyed the condition of properties in their neighborhoods in exchange for $500 mini-grants. The Community Foundation spent its grant funds. The City of Flint obtained existing condition data for a large part of the city and built relationships with these groups, which laid the foundation for subsequent master plan community engagement. Additionally, during project feedback sessions, residents revealed a desire to not only obtain property condition data, but also to provide it.

The Portal was created in response to the dual-interest of Flint residents – to access existing property condition data and to provide updates as conditions change. The property condition data generated by the 2012 *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* was employed extensively in developing Flint's first comprehensive master plan in over 50 years – the *Imagine Flint Master Plan for a Sustainable Flint*, which was unanimously adopted by the Flint City Council in October of 2013. The *Imagine Flint* plan highlighted the frustration expressed by community members with the prevalence of vacant and blighted properties in the city and recommended creating a five-year blight removal plan. In December of 2013, the City of Flint hired Natalie Pruett to author such a plan. *Beyond Blight: City of Flint Comprehensive Blight Elimination Framework* was released in March of 2014. In the plan, Pruett recommended creating a "Portal" that would, "give Flint community members the ability to get and give information on problem properties," as an immediate action step.

How was the Flint Property Portal created?

The Land Bank contracted Natalie Pruett and Loveland Technologies, Inc. (Loveland) to create the Portal. Pruett is an independent urban strategist and Flint native that has worked with an array of government and other non-profit organizations on urban planning and revitalization efforts. Pruett created the *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* project in collaboration with City of Flint staff and also authored the *Beyond Blight* framework, in which she initially introduced the Portal concept. Pruett designed the Portal and managed technical work conducted by Loveland Technologies. Loveland is a firm based in Delaware that specializes in mapping parcel data. Loveland supplied its data mapping system and modified it to the specifications of the Flint Property Portal. A project timeline is provided below. It is worth noting that the Portal was refined in response to community feedback before being launched through a community engagement process, as detailed in the timeline on page 4.

Funding

The Portal was made possible by grants from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, Michigan Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Center for Community Progress, and the City of Flint. This funding was secured and leveraged through a rigorous fundraising effort that spanned five years. The cost of developing the Portal totaled approximately $220,000.

Flint Property Portal Development Timeline

Fall 2012:   *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* is launched. Community groups complete property condition inventories for the first time.

Fall 2013:   *Imagine Flint Master Plan for a Sustainable Flint* is unanimously adopted as Flint's first comprehensive master plan in over 50 years. The plan extensively employs the 2012 *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* data. The plan also recommended creating a five-year blight removal plan.

Spring 2014:   *Beyond Blight: City of Flint Comprehensive Blight Elimination Framework,* authored by Natalie Pruett, is released. Again, the plan extensively employs the 2012 *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* data. The plan also recommends creating a "Portal" that would, "give Flint community members the ability to get and give information on problem properties," as an immediate action step.

Fall 2014 – Fall 2015:   The Land Bank hires Natalie Pruett. The Portal concept is developed more fully. This involves collaboration between Land Bank and City staff and identification of the structure of relevant data systems.

Summer 2016:   The Land Bank secures all funds necessary for developing the Portal website.
The Land Bank hires Loveland Technologies, Inc.

Winter 2016/2017:   The first version of the Portal website is completed.
The Land Bank secures all funds necessary for developing the Portal mobile app.

Winter/Spring 2017:   The beta version of the mobile app is completed for Android operating systems.
The 2017 *Flint Neighborhood Inventory* launches using the app beta version.
The Portal website is presented to the community for feedback. This includes presentations to:
- Land Bank and City of Flint staff
- Genesee County residents via the Land Bank's Citizens Advisory Council
- Local institutional partners, including philanthropic, community development, and educational institutions
- Community-group leaders via the Community Foundation of Greater Flint Neighborhoods Small Grants Committee
- Approximately 200 Flint residents via the 2017 Connect the Blocks Summit

Summer 2017:   The Portal website and the Android version of the app launch live.
The Land Bank and the City of Flint host training events for the public.

Fall 2017:   The iOS version of the app launches live.

Spring 2018:   The first phase of the Portal is completed.

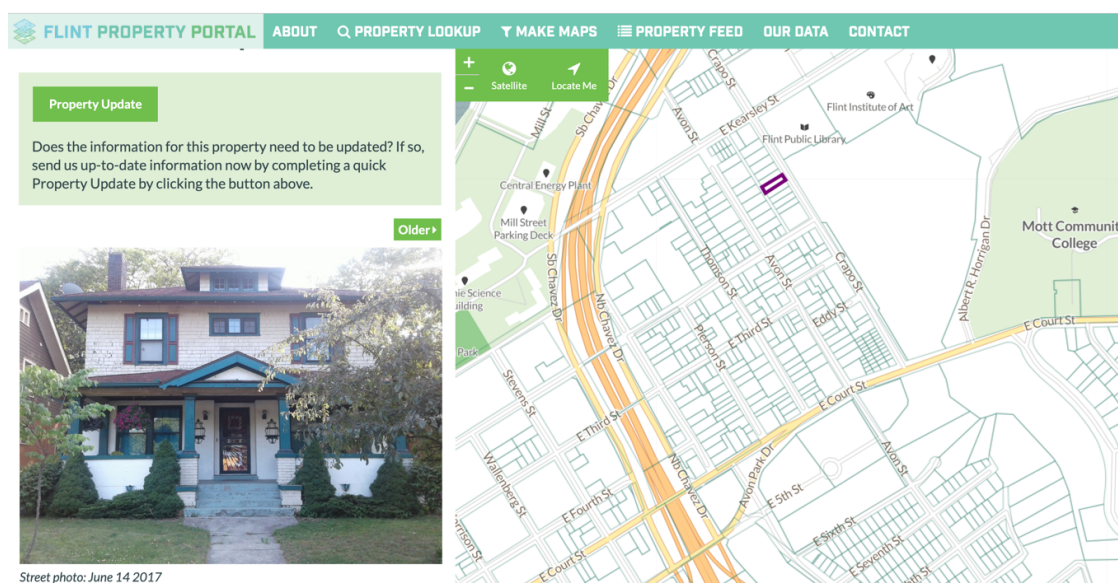**What is the Flint Property Portal and what does it do?**

The Flint Property Portal consists of a website and mobile applications (apps) for both Android and iOS operating systems. This system:

1. Employs a user-friendly format for property information displays and surveys.
2. Consists of graphic design that complements imagery used by the Land Bank, the *Beyond Blight* Framework, and the *Imagine Flint Master Plan*.
3. Displays more than 40 property attributes for properties in Flint through maps and individual property displays that can be accessed on personal computers and mobile devices.
4. Includes interactive mapping features that allow users to visualize information for any area within Flint, large or small.
5. Accepts parcel-specific property maintenance reports from the public.
6. Encourages the public to update property information through parcel-specific messages.
7. Maintains historical property-specific information, including information submitted by the public through surveys and messages.
8. Provides a combination of public and private user options to maximize the Portal's utility.
9. Allows the public to upload property-specific photographs and submit geographic location information.
10. Ensures user-friendly data management features for data exporting, importing, updating, tracking, and confirming by the Land Bank and City of Flint.

The Portal is organized around three key features, as described below.

Property Lookup

The Portal contains a profile for every property in Flint. Each property profile includes a photograph and up to 40 pieces of property specific information (see the attached Data Glossary on page 10). Users can look up the profile for any property in Flint by finding it on the Flint map or entering its address or parcel ID number in the search toolbar. The operation of the property lookup feature was meticulously designed so that only relevant data points appear on a property-to-property basis. This feature is available on the website and the app.

Above: Residential property identified using the Property Lookup feature on the Portal website.

Property Condition Updates

Property conditions in Flint change overnight. Meanwhile, the Land Bank and the City use the information that they have to make decisions every day. The Portal supports three general forms of property condition updating, as detailed below. This feature is available on the website and the app.

> *Property Condition Update Messages Submitted by the Public*
> Users can report property condition changes by submitting "Property Update" messages through the Portal. The Portal was designed to allow anonymity. Thus, users can access the Portal and submit messages without creating an account of any kind. All condition changes reported through publicly submitted messages are reviewed and verified by either the Land Bank or City of Flint staff.

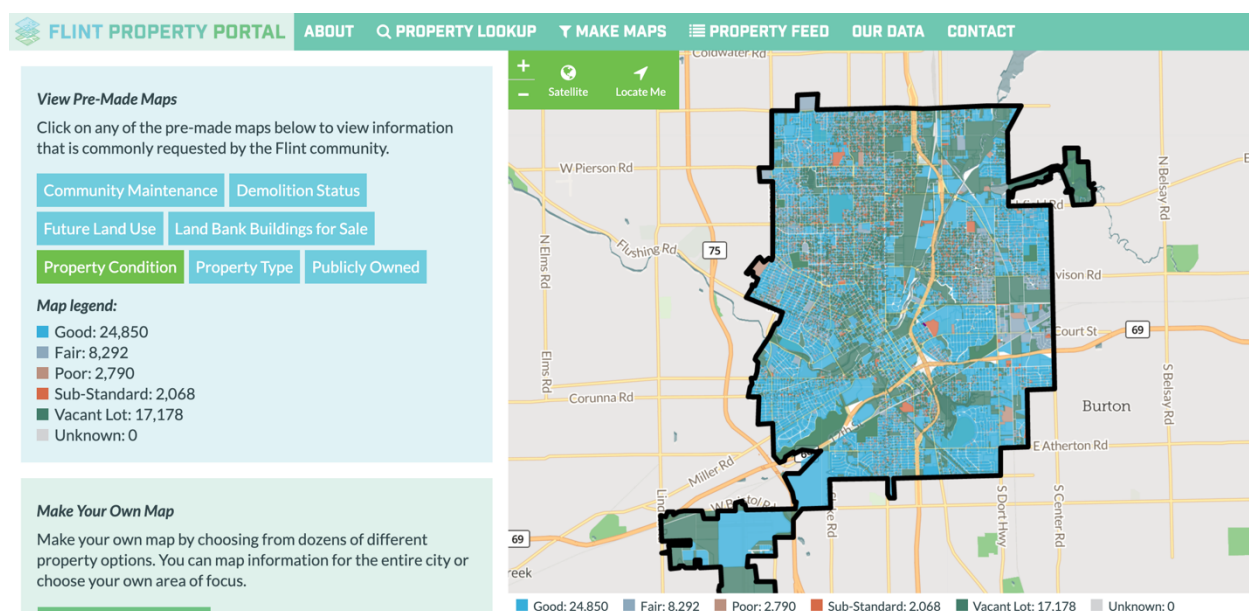> *Property Maintenance Reports Submitted by the Public*
> Flint community members can also report their community work, including boarding, trash removal, and mowing, by submitting "Maintenance Messages" through the Portal.

> *Property Reports Submitted Privately by Land Bank and City of Flint Staff*
> Land Bank and City of Flint staff use private features of the Portal to submit various property reports. These reports include tax-foreclosed property inspections conducted annually by Land Bank staff and multiple surveys conducted by City of Flint Neighborhood Safety Officers.

Map Making

The Portal gives users the ability to create their own maps. By drawing from the property attributes included in the Portal, users can create their own mapping criteria for any area within Flint, large or small. The Portal allows users to map information according to city ward, zip code, census tract, section, and/or a custom area. Once a map is generated, the site allows users to generate a property list for all mapped properties. The Portal also contains pre-made maps, summary statistics, and info graphics for seven topic areas that are believed to be of the greatest interest to Flint residents: demolition status, property condition, community maintenance, future land use, Land Bank buildings for sale, property type, and publicly owned properties.

Above: Property Condition pre-made map on the Portal website

About the Data

The Flint Property Portal is made up of City of Flint and Land Bank data. For the site, the City and the Land Bank have strategically collected and combined more than sixty data points for each of the 56,000 properties that comprise Flint, more than 4 million pieces of property information in total. The Land Bank and the City maintain this data and use it on a daily basis to make decisions.

Project Goals

Deliver user-friendly information to the public. The Portal is intentionally designed to be understood by the average Flint resident. Everything from the layout, to messaging, to functionality are crafted with the goal of effectively delivering information to the public.

Provide a tremendous amount of information at the parcel-specific level, something that the public has been requesting for years. The Portal displays more than 40 parcel-specific attributes (see the attached Data Glossary on page 10), including property condition, demolition status, and ownership. Anyone in the world is able to search for a property, either by entering its address or selecting it from the map, and view all of its information.

Engage the public with data and stay current by doing so. The Portal accepts property information from its users. If a house was occupied and in Good condition four months ago but was recently vacated and vandalized, users are able and encouraged to report the change. Users can also report their community work, including boarding, trash removal, and mowing. This acceptance of data is a game-changer as it captures updated information in a cost-effective way.

Increase transparency and accountability from the public sector, at a time when the public's trust in government is at an all-time low. The Portal displays the same information that the Land Bank and City use to make decisions. By making this information available through a user-friendly system, local government demonstrates that it is making data-driven decisions, as promised.

Develop a user-friendly digital data collection system for the Flint Neighborhood Inventory. This nationally-recognized initiative traditionally relied on pen and paper data collection. The Portal improved the initiative's data collection through its user-friendly data collection tools. The 2017 and 2019 *Flint Neighborhood Inventories* were completed using the Flint Property Portal.

Community Engagement

The Land Bank and the City of Flint presented the Portal to community members for feedback in the winter and spring of 2017, before the Portal was launched live. This included presentations to residents, community-based groups, and local institutions, as detailed on page 3. The Portal was revised in response to feedback given during these events. Then, the Land Bank and the City of Flint launched the Portal live in the summer of 2017 with a series of community launch events held throughout Flint. Land Bank and City of Flint staff continue to attend community meetings on an ongoing basis to share information on the Portal, distribute user guides, and help residents to download the app and use the website to support neighborhood improvement work.

Above: Connect the Blocks Neighborhood Summit
Photo Credit: Community Foundation of Greater Flint

FLINT PROPERTY PORTAL

flintpropertyportal.com is NOW LIVE!

Who owns that house?

How can I get a list of properties for sale by the Land Bank?

Can I report my vacant property cleanup work to the City?

When is that house going to be demolished?

Join us to learn about how to GET AND GIVE INFORMATION ON PROPERTIES in Flint like never before!

Attend one of three training events happening August 28 - 29. See reverse side for event details.
Contact Raynetta at rspeed@thelandbank.org or (810) 257-3088 x. 536 for more info and any special needs.

Above and left: Flyer/invitation for Flint Property Portal launch training events.

FLINT PROPERTY PORTAL

flintpropertyportal.com is NOW LIVE!

TRAINING EVENT DETAILS

Monday, August 28
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Berston Fieldhouse
3300 Saginaw St

Tuesday, August 29
1:00 – 3:00 p.m.
Flint Farmer's Market
300 E 1st St

Tuesday, August 29
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Brennan Community Center
1301 Pingree Ave

Attend any one of three training events. All events are free, open to the public, and will include refreshments. The first hour will consist of a step-by-step group demonstration on using the Flint Property Portal. The second hour will be a drop-in open house when you can connect with Land Bank and City staff one-on-one about using the Portal.

Have a SMART PHONE, TABLET, or LAPTOP?
BRING IT WITH YOU!

Staff from the Land Bank and City of Flint will walk you through downloading the Flint Property Portal and using it on your device. Don't have your own device? Don't worry. Demonstration devices will be available for your use at each event.

CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION   LISC   community foundation Greater Flint

Thank you to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint for your generous financial support that made the Flint Property Portal possible.

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Impact

The Portal is widely regarded as a success. Since its launch, more than 165,000 property messages have been submitted using the Portal. This includes both messages submitted by the public and messages submitted by Land Bank and City of Flint staff. Both agencies are increasingly using the Portal internally to inform planning and decision-making. The Land Bank uses the mobile app to complete property inspections on a daily basis. City of Flint Neighborhood Safety Officers also use the Portal daily to document site visits. Additionally, staff uses the Portal to easily collect information necessary for funding requests. In some cases, these requests would not be made without the Portal. Local partners also direct Flint residents and agencies to use the Portal. The Portal is now the data collection tool for the *Flint Neighborhood Inventory,* the project that partly inspired the creation of the Portal. The 2017 and 2019 inventories were completed using the mobile app. The Flint Public Library has stations for accessing the Portal. The Ruth Mott Foundation, headquartered in Flint, directs its grantees to use the Portal for grant reporting purposes. The Portal has been recognized outside of Flint as well. In the fall of 2019, the Portal received international recognition as a recipient of the Engaged Cities prize awarded by Cities of Service.

Beyond the metrics, the Portal is successful because it delivers not just data but information to the public. Public agencies across the country and around the globe are collecting and digitizing more data than ever before. This creates seemingly endless possibilities for using data to inform decision-making. It also creates great opportunities to inform the public. In recent years, dozens of local governments have publicized their data by creating open data systems. But, posting spreadsheets is not the same thing as delivering information. The Flint Property Portal does the latter. By intricately combining and translating complex data sets, the Portal translates Flint data into a language that everyday residents speak. This is not easy and is not without risk. Greater understanding can yield greater scrutiny. "That house isn't occupied. It's been vacant for almost a year!" "You tore-down this house but skipped the one right next to it. How does that make sense?" Upon the release of the Portal, some residents have not fewer but more pointed questions. This is a mark of the Portal's success. Property conditions in Flint change overnight. The data set will never be perfect. This is one of the assumptions driving of the Portal. The Land Bank and the City of Flint know that the data is imperfect. They also know that no one has more insight into the condition of Flint neighborhoods than Flint residents. Thus, the Flint Property Portal's ability to bridge not the technology but the knowledge gap between residents and local government is the source of its innovation and the measure of its success.

Written by Natalie Pruett, Independent Urban Strategist, nataliepruett.com

DATA GLOSSARY

The Flint Property Portal is made up of City of Flint and Genesee County Land Bank Authority (GCLBA) data. For the site, the City of Flint and the Land Bank have strategically collected and combined more than sixty data points for each of the 56,000 properties that comprise Flint, more than 4 million pieces of property information in total. The Land Bank and the City of Flint maintain this data and use it on a daily basis to make decisions.

Boarded by the Community
The month and year of vacant property boarding work (securing windows and/or doors with boards) reported by the community
- Data Source: City of Flint Blight Division Love Your Block Boarding Logs (2015 – 2016) and GCLBA Clean & Green Boarding Lists (2014 – 2016)
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Maintenance Messages, monthly via City of Flint Blight Division, and annually via GCLBA Clean & Green

Building Condition
The condition of structures according to the [City of Flint's four-point building condition scale](...)
- Data Source: City of Flint 2014 Housing Condition Assessment, City of Flint 2013 Commercial Property Condition Assessment, and GCLBA property inspections
- Updated: citywide every two years via Your Neighborhood Inventory initiative and ongoing via Flint Property Portal Property Update surveys, City of Flint inspections, and GCLBA inspections

Census Block Group
The smallest geographic unit used by the United States Census Bureau for tabulating all census information
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: every ten years

Census Tract
A geographic unit used by the United States Census Bureau, comprised of multiple census block groups, which generally encompasses between 2,500 and 8,000 people
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: every ten years

City Ward
One of nine local authority areas for electoral purposes
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: every ten years in conjunction with the United States Census

Cleaned-up by the Community
The month and year of vacant property cleanup work reported by the community
- Data Source: Flint Property Portal Maintenance Messages
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Maintenance Messages and monthly via City of Flint Blight Division

Community Maintenance Commitment
Vacant properties that are being cared for (grass mowing and trash removal at a minimum) by the community on an ongoing basis
- Data Source: GCLBA 2017 Lots Available
- Updated: ongoing via Maintenance Messages and monthly via GCLBA Lots Available updates and City of Flint Blight Division maintenance logs

Current Zoning District
Current zoning designations that permit development of varying natures throughout the city
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: Last updated in 1974

Demolition Status
Completed: structure(s) formerly on the property were demolished and all grading, seeding, and final inspections were completed
Funded: structure(s) on the property are planned for demolition and funding has been allocated to complete the work
Land Bank Listed – Not Funded: the Genesee County Land Bank Authority is seeking funding to demolish structure(s) on the property
City Listed – Not Funded: structure(s) on the property went through the City of Flint's standard motion process for demolition after being inspected by officials from the City of Flint Building & Safety Division
- Data Source: GCLBA database and City of Flint demolition data
- Updated: daily via GCLBA database updates and monthly via City of Flint demolition standard motion lists

Draft Zoning District
Proposed future zoning designations that permit development of varying natures throughout the city
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: as needed as changes are made to the draft zoning ordinance

Fire Damage
Properties that have visible exterior fire damage reported by the community
- Data Source: Flint Property Portal Property Updates
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Property Updates

Future Land Use
Future land-use designations that chart the community vision of the Imagine Flint Master Plan for a Sustainable Flint
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel file
- Updated: every five years in conjunction with updates to the City of Flint Master Plan

Land Bank Lots Available
Adopted: vacant lots owned by the Genesee County Land Bank that are adopted and cared for by community members annually
Leased: vacant lots owned by the Genesee County Land Bank that are leased and cared for by community members for 2 – 5 years
Side Lot: vacant lots formerly owned by the Genesee County Land Bank Authority that were purchased by adjacent homeowners
- Data Source: GCLBA database
- Updated: daily via GCLBA database updates

Listed for Sale by the Land Bank – Commercial
Improved properties listed for sale by the Land Bank for commercial use
- Data Source: GCLBA database
- Updated: daily via GCLBA database updates

Listed for Sale by the Land Bank – Residential
Improved properties listed for sale by the Land Bank for residential use
- Data Source: GCLBA database
- Updated: daily via GCLBA database updates

Mowed by the Community
The month and year of vacant property mowing reported by the community
- Data Source: GCLBA Clean & Green maintenance records
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Maintenance Messages and annually by GCLBA Clean & Green maintenance records

Occupancy Status
Occupied: individuals are residing in the house on the property (residential properties) or the property is in open for business (commercial properties)
Vacant: individuals are not currently residing in the house on the property (residential properties) or the property is not open for business (commercial properties)
Show: if Structure on Property is "Yes"
- Data Source: United States Post Office January 2017 occupancy data
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Property Condition Updates and citywide every two years via Your Neighborhood Inventory initiative

Owner Address
The full address of the property owner
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: monthly via City of Flint Assessor updates

Owner Name
The full name of the property owner
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: monthly via City of Flint Assessor updates

Parcel Number
The ten-digit number that identifies the property
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: annually via City of Flint parcel data update

Parcel Size
The size of the property in acres
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: annually via City of Flint parcel data update

Projected Demolition Date
The estimated date, month and year, for the demolition of one or more structures on the property
- Data Source: GCLBA database
- Updated: daily via GCLBA database updates

Publicly Owned
Properties owned by public agencies
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: monthly via City of Flint Assessor updates

State Equalized Value
The assessed value of the property, equal to roughly 50% of the market value
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: annually via City of Flint parcel data update

Street Address
The street address for the property
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: annually via City of Flint parcel data update

Structure on Property
Yes: improved properties – those that contain one or more structures
No: unimproved properties – those that do not contain a structure
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data and GCLBA database
- Updated: daily via GCLBA database updates and annually via City of Flint parcel data update

Suggested Demolition
Vacant properties that were suggested for demolition by the community
- Data Source: City of Flint 2016 Blight Survey
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Property Updates

Tall Grass
Vacant properties that were reported by the community to have tall grass
- Data Source: City of Flint 2016 Blight Survey
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Property Updates

Trash and/or Debris
Vacant properties that were reported by the community to have trash and/or debris
- Data Source: City of Flint 2016 Blight Survey
- Updated: ongoing via Flint Property Portal Property Updates

Use
The current use of the property
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: annually via City of Flint parcel data update

Zip Code
The zip code for the property
- Data Source: City of Flint 2017 parcel data
- Updated: annually via City of Flint parcel data update